

Navigating Communication Breakdown in Modern Workplaces



Organizational Bullshit

Based on the research of Jonathan H. Westover, PhD
Featuring data from the Organizational Bullshit Perception Scale (OBPS)

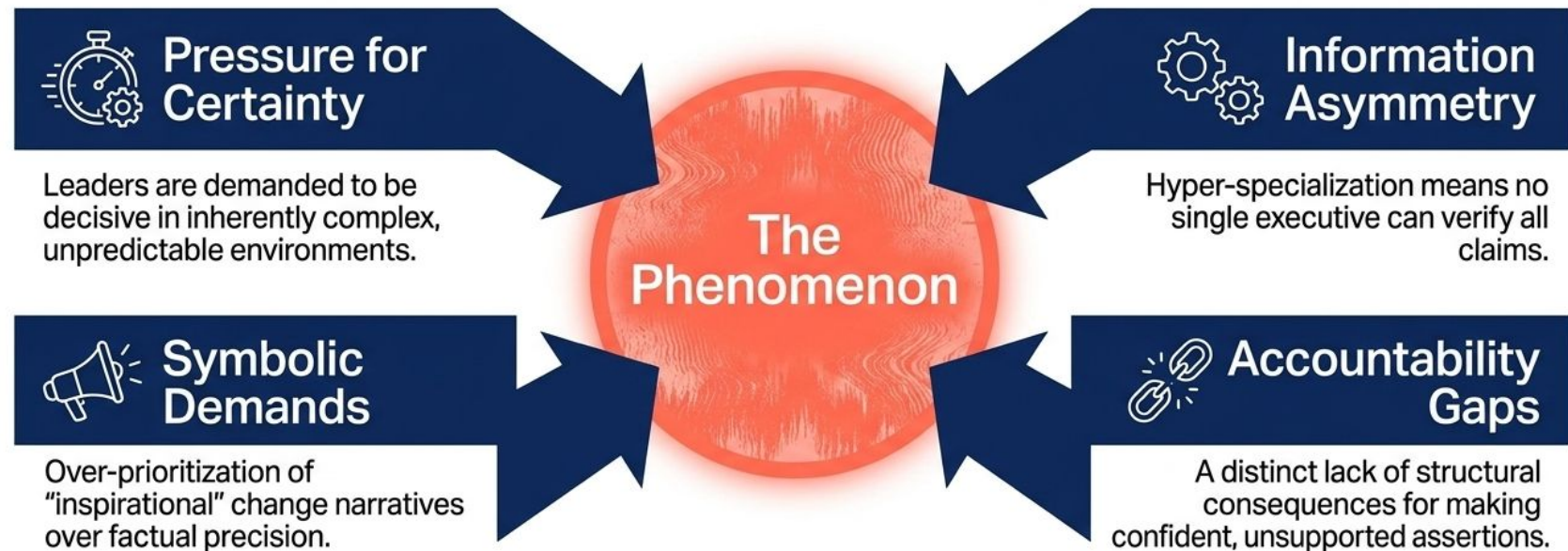
It is not lying. It is a fundamental indifference to the truth.



The Epistemology of Workplace Deception

	 The Ignorant	 The Liar	 The Bullshitter
Relationship to Truth	Lacks knowledge	Knows the truth, subverts it	Completely indifferent to what is true
Intent	Neutral	To deceive strategically	To project competence and hide their indifference
Organizational Danger Level	Low - easily corrected	Moderate - localized damage	Severe - corrupts the entire information ecosystem

Modern organizational architecture incentivizes truth-indifference



The behavioral footprint of organizational bullshit



Jargon Camouflage

Using heavy technical buzzwords to obscure a fundamental lack of underlying knowledge.



Unsupported Assertion

Making definitive strategic claims without any accompanying data or analysis.



Strategic Vagueness

Issuing abstract stakeholder messaging that sounds deeply meaningful but commits to zero specifics.



Narrative Shifting

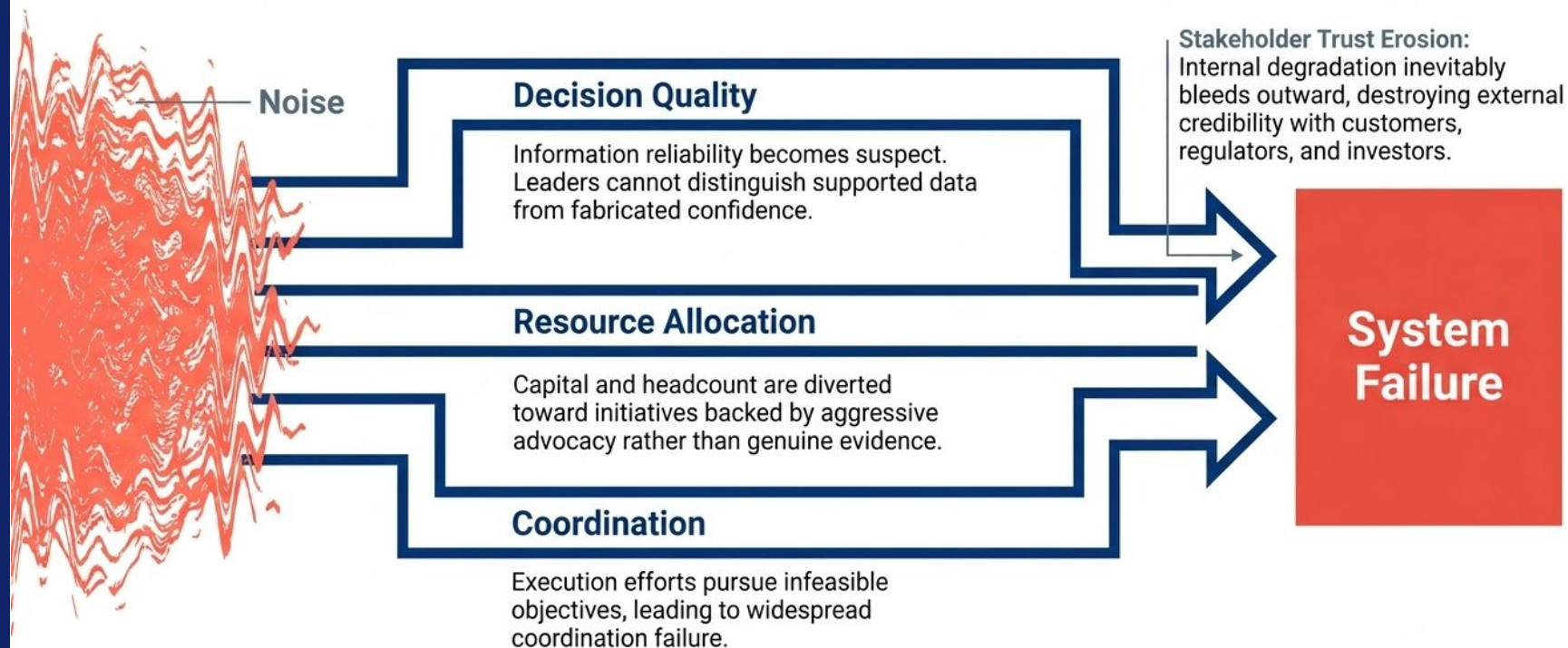
Quietly changing previous predictions or positions without acknowledging the shift when realities change.



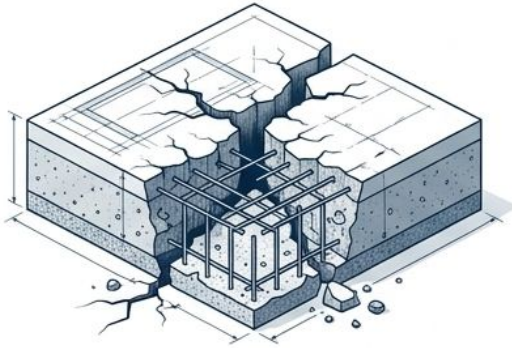
Manufactured Certainty

Projecting absolute confidence regarding outcomes that are mathematically unpredictable.

The systemic degradation of operational capability



The psychological toll of navigating constant noise



Structural Breaches

Procedural Justice Violations: When decisions are driven by confident assertions rather than evidence, employees perceive the entire system as fundamentally unfair (Colquitt, 2001).

Psychological Contract Breach: Violates the implicit expectation of basic organizational honesty and good-faith communication (Conway & Briner, 2009).

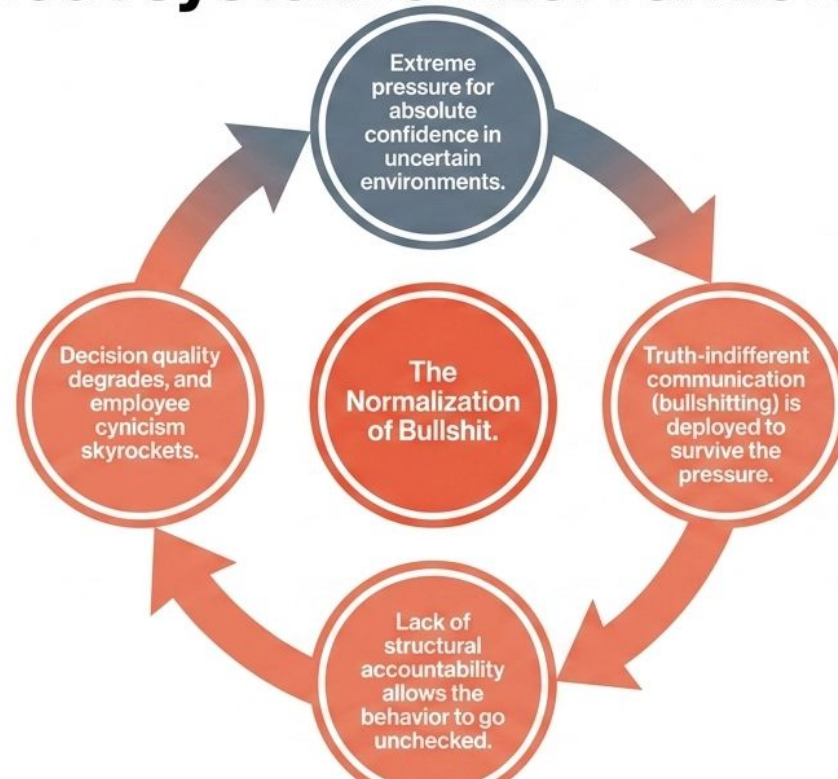


Emotional Exhaustion

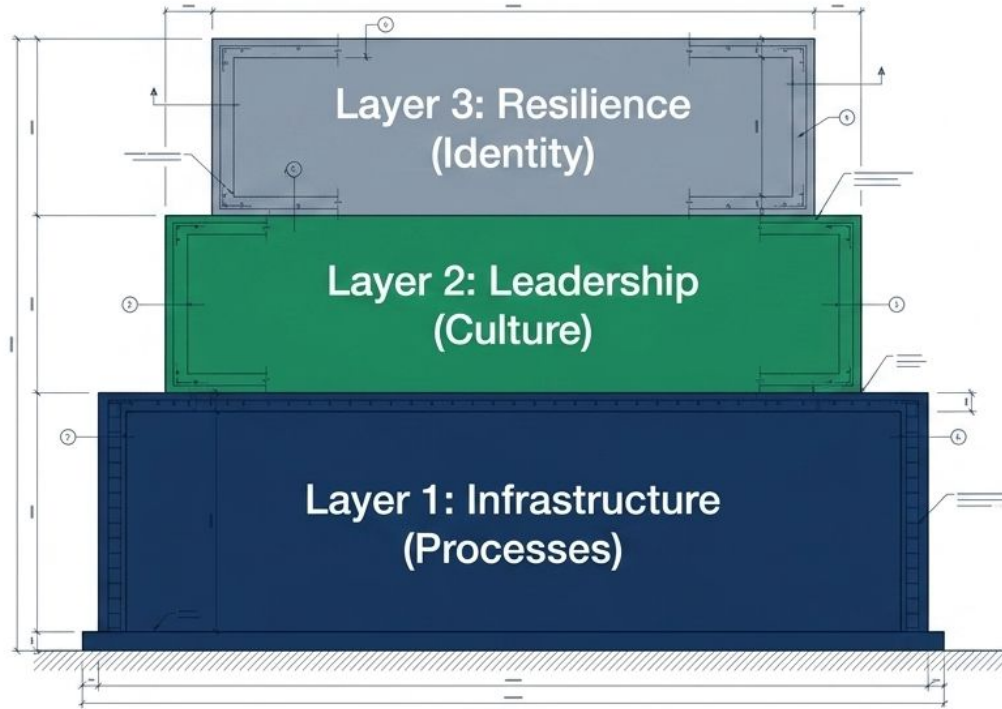
Role Ambiguity: Employees suffer severe strain when they cannot confidently determine actual expectations versus what is merely being bullshitted (Rizzo et al., 1970).

Organizational Cynicism: Repeated exposure breeds a defensive cynicism that crushes organizational citizenship behaviors and escalates counterproductive actions (Wilmore et al., 2024; Stein et al., in press).

The Amplification Loop: Why tactical fixes fail without systemic intervention



The Intervention Architecture

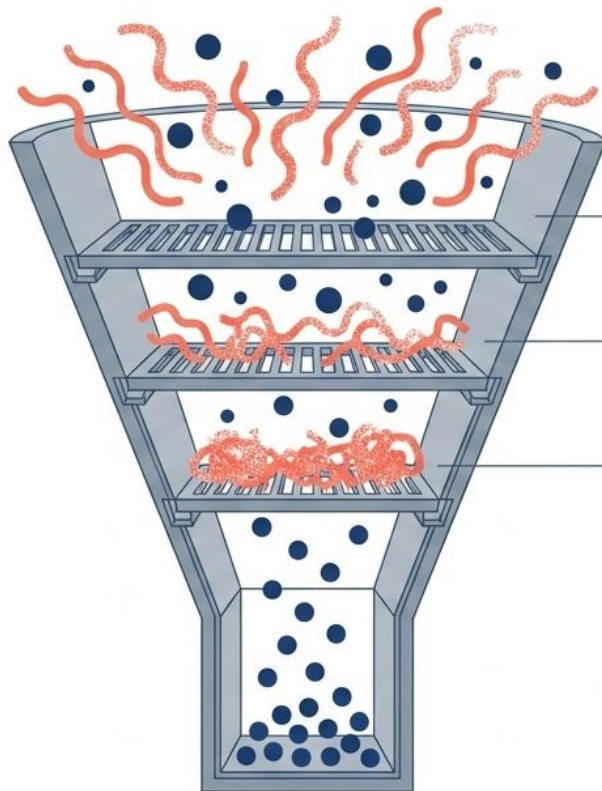


Distributing accountability and permanently recalibrating the psychological contract.

Cultivating psychological safety and reframing competence away from unyielding certainty.

Building evidence-based verification into the structural workflows of the organization.

Layer 1: Installing evidence-based infrastructure



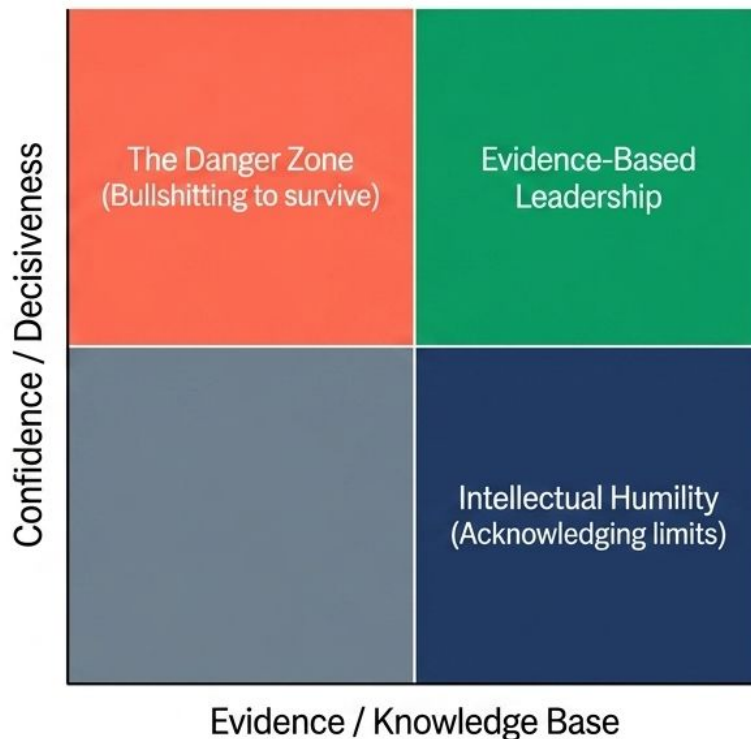
Data Democratization: Eradicating information asymmetry by ensuring universal access to operational data, making unsupported claims immediately challengeable.

Pre-Mortems & Assumption Testing: Structured forums designed specifically to force the explicit examination of underlying evidentiary foundations.

Decision Documentation: Requiring recorded rationales, assumptions, and acknowledged uncertainties for all major strategic commitments.

Case in point: McKinsey & Co. utilizes strict knowledge management systems requiring client recommendations to reference specific datasets, making unsupported "best practice" claims professionally risky. USAA utilizes structured decision-review panels emphasizing evidentiary support over persuasive advocacy.

Layer 2: Reframing leadership competence



Organizations must sever the implicit equation that “Confidence = Competence.”

Case in point: Intel’s culture of “Constructive Confrontation” normalizes challenging unsupported assertions regardless of rank. Virginia Mason’s Safety Alerts decoupled reporting from punishment, destroying the need to bullshit operational realities.

Layer 3: Rebuilding procedural justice through fair process

Communication Integrity

Decision Transparency

Exposing the "behind closed doors" processes to broader evaluation constraints.

Meaningful Voice

Providing structural checkpoints where assertions by decision-makers can be challenged by employees with actual operational ground-truth.

Required Justification

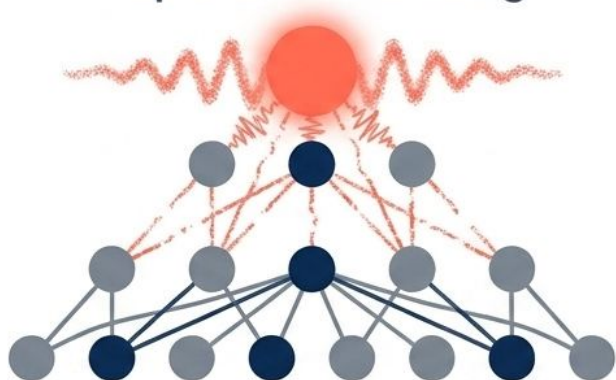
Forcing leaders to articulate the evidentiary basis for choices, inherently weakening bullshitted rationales.

Absolute Consistency

Applying evidentiary standards universally, suppressing bias and the favoritism that allows noise to flourish.

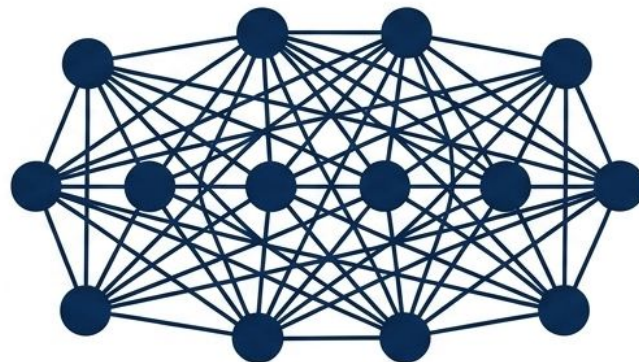
Fortification: Transitioning to distributed accountability networks

Top-Down Policing



Centralized accountability concentrates excessive burden on limited oversight mechanisms. It is slow and easily bypassed.

Crowdsourced Error-Correction



Creating cultural expectations where any colleague questioning unsupported claims reflects professional diligence, not insubordination.

Case in point: GitLab's radical transparency model. Virtually all strategic discussions exist in open digital repositories. Distributed transparency creates distributed accountability—any node can flag unsupported assertions.

Recalibrating the Psychological Contract

The Old Contract

- Competence means projecting **absolute certainty**.
- Hide your **knowledge limits** and **complexities**.
- Prioritize **impression management** and **compliance**.
- Challenge is viewed as **insubordination**.

The New Contract

- Competence means **appropriate communication integrity**.
- Explicitly acknowledge **uncertainties** and **missing data**.
- Prioritize **accuracy** and **evidentiary foundations**.
- Challenge is viewed as **professional diligence**.

Case in point: Boeing's post-crisis engineering reform explicitly positioned **honest acknowledgment of uncertainty as career-critical**. Mayo Clinic anchors this via professional identity, treating truth-indifference as a violation of medical and scientific ethics.

The Practitioner's Diagnostic & Action Checklist

5 Questions to Assess Your Culture

- ✓ Are leaders rewarded for false confidence over honest uncertainty?
- ✓ Is there structural consequence for making unsupported assertions?
- ✓ Do our systems allow employees to challenge claims without career risk?
- ✓ Do we equate heavy jargon usage with actual operational expertise?
- ✓ Does our strategic planning process require explicit evidence?

5 Immediate Interventions

- ✓ Implement 'uncertainty acknowledgment' as a leadership competency.
- ✓ Mandate evidentiary minimums for all capital resource requests.
- ✓ Install formal pre-mortem processes for major strategic shifts.
- ✓ Decouple error-reporting from punitive action (Psychological Safety).
- ✓ Rewrite onboarding materials to explicitly value communication integrity.