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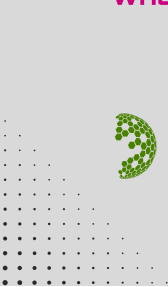
DESIGNING THE OUTCOME

**70 MICRO-SIGNALS A  
CONVERSATION IS  
LYING TO YOU**

what faces reveal before words collapse



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# purpose of the playbook

most hiring failures are not caused by a lack of competence. they occur because early signals of misalignment are noticed, felt, and then overridden. in high-stakes hiring, the most consequential information rarely appears in what candidates say. it appears in how they respond before their answers settle, through brief, involuntary reactions that surface when intent and language diverge. these are not traits or diagnoses. they are momentary leaks of internal state that appear under pressure.

standard interview processes prioritise verbal fluency and narrative coherence. what they systematically ignore is contradiction: confidence paired with hesitation, value alignment paired with resistance, certainty paired with micro-uncertainty. these moments are often rationalised away in favour of credentials, momentum, or consensus.

this playbook exists to interrupt that pattern.

its purpose is not to read people, but to make early misalignment visible while it is still inexpensive to address. hiring decisions are asymmetric: once authority is granted, correction becomes slow, political, and costly. signals that could have prompted a follow-up question in an interview later surface as performance issues or leadership failure.

the goal here is prevention, not precision. you do not need perfect accuracy. you need to recognise patterns that reliably precede expensive mistakes and act on them with discipline.

used correctly, this framework sharpens judgement. it turns vague discomfort into testable information and slows decisions that feel rushed for reasons no one can fully explain.



# how to use the playbook

this playbook is designed for use alongside real hiring conversations. its function is operational: to help you notice, record, and respond to early warning signals without overinterpreting them.

**observe selectively.** micro-signals are most informative at moments of pressure, when candidates are asked about values, failure, authority, uncertainty, accountability, or ethical trade-offs. do not monitor continuously; scrutiny without focus degrades signal quality.

**treat signals as prompts, not conclusions.** single reactions are meaningless. what matters are patterns: the same response recurring across related topics or decision thresholds.

**separate observation from interpretation.** record what you see before deciding what it might mean. signals without clear triggers are noise. signals consistently tied to the same trigger are data.

**use signals to guide questioning, not verdicts.** when a signal appears, respond by reframing, varying, or re-testing the topic. persistence under variation indicates risk; disappearance suggests context.

**document patterns, not impressions.** written observation protects against charisma, seniority, and group momentum; forces known to distort hiring judgement.

**this playbook does not replace due diligence.** it exists to cover a blind spot: early, quiet signals that are usually noticed and then ignored.

# the 10 misalignment signals

at the core of this playbook is a set of ten recurring misalignment signals that reliably surface before costly hiring mistakes.

these signals are not theoretical. they are observable patterns that appear when a candidate's internal positioning does not fully align with the role, the values stated, or the expectations implied.

a signal is not a verdict. it indicates that something relevant is happening beneath the verbal layer and should be tested before commitment is made.

the signals were selected because they:

- occur consistently across industries and seniority levels
- precede known hiring failure modes
- can be detected without specialist training

each signal is analysed using the same operational lens: what it looks like, when it appears, why it is missed, and how to respond through questioning rather than judgement.

their value lies in density, not drama. isolated cues are noise. repetition around the same theme - values, authority, risk, ambiguity - indicates elevated friction risk.

these signals are not primarily about deception. many reflect impression management, suppressed doubt, or internal conflict under pressure. for senior and influence-bearing roles, that internal management is itself material.

this system does not tell you who to hire. it tells you where certainty is being performed rather than held.



# recommended signal set

this playbook focuses on ten misalignment signals that consistently precede costly hiring failures. the signals are defined by function, not by emotional labels. each one highlights a specific way in which spoken alignment and internal positioning diverge during high-stakes interview moments.

the signal set is intentionally limited and role-agnostic. it applies across industries and seniority levels, with particular relevance for leadership, specialist, and influence-bearing positions.



the ten recommended signals are:

## 1. premature agreement

alignment expressed too quickly when values, constraints, or trade-offs are introduced. often appears as immediate verbal agreement paired with delayed or contradictory facial response.

## 2. value incongruence leakage

brief facial tension, asymmetry, or withdrawal when core organisational values or ethical standards are stated.

## 3. authority stress signals

micro-responses that surface when decision ownership, accountability, or reporting lines are clarified.

## 4. risk avoidance masked as confidence

confident language combined with facial indicators of uncertainty when downside, failure, or ambiguity is introduced.

## 5. cognitive overload under pressure

micro-freezes, blink-rate changes, or facial rigidity when complexity increases, or scenarios require trade-off reasoning.



#### 6. performative alignment

positive expressions that lack congruent eye engagement or decay quickly when "culture fit" or teamwork is discussed.

#### 7. moral flexibility signals

facial conflict when ethical dilemmas or boundary conditions are presented, especially where personal cost is implied.

#### 8. status sensitivity leakage

reactions that appear when hierarchy, visibility, or relative influence is mentioned, indicating sensitivity to positional power.

#### 9. ambiguity intolerance

tension or discomfort when questions do not have clearly correct answers or when information is intentionally incomplete.

#### 10. emotional flatlining

noticeable absence of micro-reactivity across topics that should elicit differentiated responses, suggesting disengagement or over-control.

these signals should be treated as early indicators, not disqualifiers. their purpose is to identify where further probing is necessary before a decision is made. individually, they may be benign. in combination, or when repeatedly triggered by the same themes, they point to structural misalignment that is likely to surface after appointment.

the chapters that follow examine each signal in operational detail, showing how it appears in real interviews, why it is missed, and how to respond without speculation or confrontation.



### pattern notes

record clusters, repetitions, or trigger themes. focus on where signals appeared, not on why you think they appeared.

### interpretation guide

- red: clear, repeated signal under similar triggers. requires targeted follow-up or decision pause.
- amber: inconsistent or situational signal. probe further under variation.
- green: no concerning signal observed under tested conditions. green does not imply suitability, only absence of early warning.

### usage reminder

the checklist is not a verdict tool. it is a risk lens.

multiple red signals clustered around the same dimension (values, authority, risk, ambiguity) indicate elevated probability of future friction. the correct response is not rejection by default, but deeper examination before commitment.

used consistently, this checklist prevents early discomfort from being overridden by confidence, fluency, or group momentum, and helps ensure that hiring decisions are made with eyes open rather than retrospectively explained.



# diagnostic checklist

this checklist is designed to translate observation into decision discipline. its purpose is not to score candidates, but to surface patterns of misalignment early enough to act on them while the cost of correction is still low.

use the checklist during or immediately after interviews, while observations are fresh. do not complete it from memory days later. the value lies in capturing signals before they are rationalised away by narrative, consensus, or time pressure.

each signal should be assessed based on direct observation, not inference. mark what appeared, when it appeared, and whether it recurred under variation. avoid filling the checklist mechanically; if a signal was not meaningfully tested, leave it unmarked.

## misalignment signals review

for each signal, mark the status and add brief contextual notes.

### premature agreement

observed when values, constraints, or trade-offs were introduced?

green  amber  red

### value incongruence leakage

reaction when organisational values or ethical standards were stated?

green  amber  red



# JOB INTERVIEW

## authority stress signals

response to decision ownership, accountability, or reporting lines?

green  amber  red

## risk avoidance masked as confidence

reaction when uncertainty, downside, or failure scenarios were discussed?

green  amber  red

## cognitive overload under pressure

behaviour under increased complexity or trade-off reasoning?

green  amber  red

## performative alignment

congruence between positive language and facial engagement?

green  amber  red

## moral flexibility signals

reaction to ethical dilemmas involving personal or organisational cost?

green  amber  red

## status sensitivity leakage

response to hierarchy, visibility, or positional influence?

green  amber  red

## ambiguity intolerance

comfort with incomplete information or open-ended problems?

green  amber  red

## emotional flatlining

presence or absence of differentiated micro-reactivity across topics?

green  amber  red

# scoring and risk interpretation

scoring exists to preserve decision awareness, not to manufacture certainty or rank candidates.

scoring follows observation. signals are weighted equally. concentration matters more than category.


## interpretation bands

- multiple red signals: elevated misalignment risk, especially when clustered. pause and conduct targeted follow-ups.
- single red with ambers: a defined pressure point. probe under variation before proceeding.
- multiple ambers: incomplete testing. introduce complexity or alternative framing.
- mostly green: no early warning observed under tested conditions. this is the absence of signal, not endorsement.

prioritise repetition over intensity and trigger-specific reactions over general behaviour.

scoring should lead to one of three actions: proceed, proceed with caution, or pause and reframe. its role is to slow momentum, not replace judgement.





interview

# what not to do

this framework increases sensitivity. without restraint, that sensitivity becomes distortion.

- do not diagnose or label candidates. signals reflect momentary states, not character.
- do not rely on single cues. treat isolated reactions as invalid by default.
- do not confront signals directly. test indirectly through variation, not accusation.
- do not over-observe. excess scrutiny creates false patterns.
- do not let charisma reduce scrutiny. fluency often masks misalignment.
- do not use this playbook alone. it complements, not replaces, standard assessment.
- do not seek certainty. its purpose is to reveal where risk is being minimised.
- do not ignore documented signals later. recording exists to protect decisions over time, not to be selectively forgotten.



# remember

most hiring mistakes occur not because information was missing, but because it was noticed and then dismissed.

the hesitation that contradicts the answer. the discomfort that cannot yet be explained. these are not mystical intuitions. they are early signals registered before language catches up.

organisations are skilled at overriding them through urgency, optimism, and justification. what disappears is the chance to test what was noticed.

this playbook exists to preserve that chance.

it does not promise better people. it enables better decisions, decisions that slow down when alignment is uncertain and move forward when risk has been examined rather than assumed away.

micro-signals matter because they appear early, when questions are cheap, and reversals are possible. ignored, they return later at far higher cost.

the purpose of this framework is simple: when misalignment signals appear, they are seen, recorded, and tested, while there is still time to act.



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