How Meaning Gets Lost

Semantic Fidelity Collapse — As compression increases, meaning thins

Human systems begin with lived experience: rich, embodied, contextual, and resistant to simplification. To coordinate at scale, this experience is compressed into language, then further reduced into metrics, signals, and indicators that can be tracked, compared, and optimized.

As compression deepens, fidelity declines. Language abstracts experience. Metrics abstract language. Optimized outputs abstract metrics. Each step increases efficiency and legibility while shedding context, consequence, and nuance. Meaning does not disappear all at once; it thins progressively.

When compression continues without sufficient constraint, grounding, or feedback, systems enter semantic fidelity collapse. Outputs remain coherent and actionable, but no longer reliably map back to lived reality. This produces compression without fidelity: systems that are technically correct, experientially hollow, and increasingly exhausting to engage with. Drift emerges not because systems fail, but because meaning is no longer replenished.

Part of a broader framework examining how modern systems degrade meaning before they visibly fail. Further material on this framework exists in long-form writing on Github.