

Horizon Theory v2 – Generative Cycle Working Note

A developmental extension of Horizon Theory

Framing Note

This note explores a structural question that emerged while developing Horizon Theory.

The existing Horizon Theory framework describes an ethical dependency chain explaining how sustainable responsibility becomes possible within constrained human systems.

However, examining real environments— institutions, services, relationships, and families — suggests that something both **precedes and surrounds** this ethical sequence.

Human systems appear to operate within a **generative cycle** that determines whether horizons replenish or degrade their own conditions over time.

This document sketches that cycle as a working model.

Rather than presenting a completed theory, the aim is to clarify a possible structural pattern and invite examination.

If the pattern holds, it suggests that sustainable responsibility is not primarily a moral achievement, but an emergent property of well-maintained horizons operating within generative cycles.

In this sense, Horizon Theory describes how systems navigate possibility under conditions of constraint.

Abstract

Horizon Theory proposes a generative model describing how individuals, institutions, and ecological systems navigate possibility under conditions of constraint. While existing frameworks often focus on responsibility, outcomes, or risk, they frequently lack language for the developmental processes that occur between initial conditions and final results.

This paper introduces the **Generative Horizon Cycle**, a systems framework describing the dynamic interaction between energy, presence, perception, development, action, responsibility, conditions, and outcomes. Within this cycle, development occurs primarily during the stage of becoming, where experience is integrated into capability and individuals gradually expand what they can responsibly carry within their horizon.

The model emphasises that responsibility emerges from maintained internal conditions rather than being imposed externally, and that outcomes arise from the interaction between individual action, structural environments, and natural constraints.

By clarifying the middle stages of development that institutions often fail to recognise, Horizon Theory offers a language for understanding how capability, contribution, and generativity emerge within real-world systems.

The Generative Horizon Cycle

The generative cycle described in this note can be summarised as a sequence of interacting stages:

Energy

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Being

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Experiencing

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Becoming

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Doing

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Responsibility

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Conditions

↓

Outcomes

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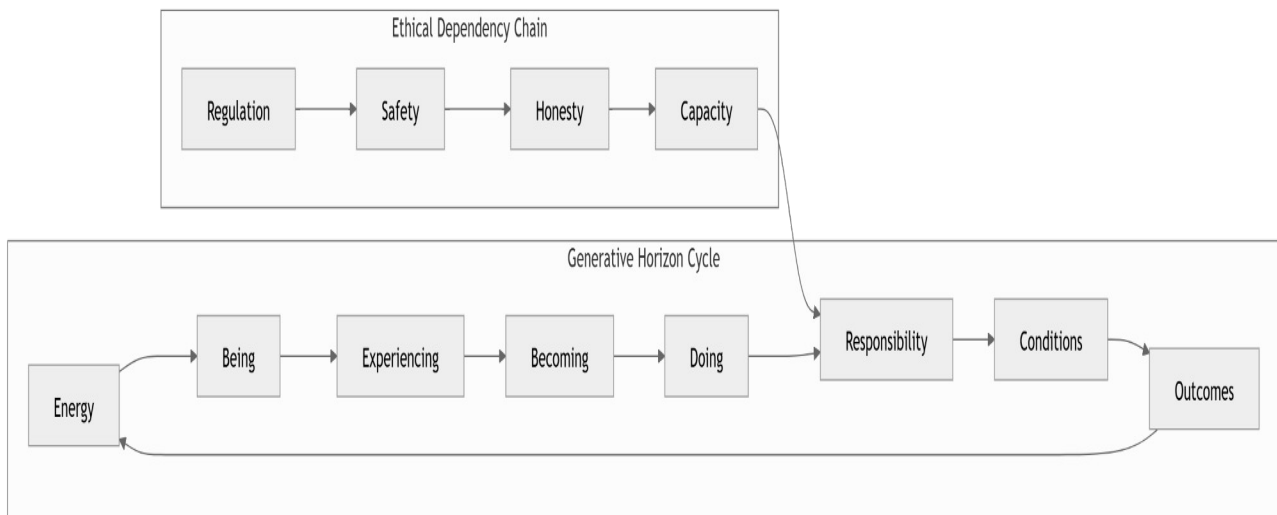
Energy

Each stage influences the next, while outcomes feed back into the energy available to the system in future cycles.

The generative horizon cycle describes how energy, perception, development, action, responsibility, and conditions interact to either sustain or degrade the possibilities available within a system.

The sections that follow describe each stage in greater detail.

Ethical Sequence and Generative Cycle



The ethical dependency chain describes the conditions under which responsibility becomes honestly and sustainably possible. The generative horizon cycle describes how horizons either replenish or degrade the conditions that make that responsibility viable over time.

The generative horizon cycle therefore describes the metabolic process through which horizons either restore or deplete the energy required for continued responsible functioning.

In human nervous systems the cycle forms a closed loop.

Energy generated through positive outcomes – or through action toward a recognised non-zero horizon possibility – feeds directly back into the organism’s regulatory system, restoring capacity and stabilising the horizon.

In external systems (institutions, ecosystems, and cultures), the feedback process tends to become spiral rather than purely cyclical. Over time, outcomes accumulate within the

conditions of the system, gradually increasing or degrading the energy available for future functioning.

When a previously closed horizon becomes perceptibly viable, the organism may rapidly reorganise attention, motivation, and regulatory energy.

Although the generative cycle can be described beginning with energy, the sequence often becomes visible to the individual at the stage of experiencing, when the horizon is first perceived as containing either possibility or threat.

Energy

Energy refers to the **finite regulatory and operational capacity available to a system within a horizon**.

In biological organisms this includes physiological regulation, cognitive bandwidth, emotional tolerance, and recovery potential. These processes determine the amount of attention, action, and adaptation the organism can sustain over time.

In human systems more broadly, energy also reflects the **available capacity for coordinated activity within the conditions of a horizon**. This may include organisational attention, relational trust, informational clarity, and material resources.

Energy functions as the operational currency of viable horizons.

It determines what actions are affordable and which responsibilities can be sustained without destabilising the system.

When energy is restored or generated through generative cycles, horizons stabilise and capacity expands. When energy is chronically depleted through extractive conditions, horizons contract and responsibility becomes increasingly performative rather than sustainable.

Energy in this model is therefore **not motivation or attitude**. It reflects the real regulatory and structural capacity available to the system at a given moment.

Energy within a horizon is therefore dynamic rather than fixed, fluctuating as conditions and perceived possibilities change.

Being

Being refers to the state of existing within a horizon before deliberate action occurs.

A system must first **be present within its conditions** before it can perceive, adapt, or act within them.

In biological organisms, being reflects the organism's regulated presence within its environment. Breathing, bodily awareness, and baseline nervous system regulation all contribute to this state.

Being therefore represents the **baseline mode of horizon participation** from which perception and experience arise.

Without sufficient regulatory stability at the level of being, subsequent stages of the generative cycle become unstable. Perception distorts, development narrows, and action becomes reactive rather than adaptive.

Being is therefore not inactivity. It is the **regulated presence that allows the horizon to become perceptible and navigable**.

In many contemporary environments characterised by chronic pressure, distraction, and energy deficit, this baseline state is frequently disrupted. When regulation is unstable, individuals may remain active and productive while experiencing only a **narrow or distorted perception of their horizon**.

Restoring conditions that support stable being therefore becomes a prerequisite for clearer experience, development, and responsible action.

Experiencing

Experiencing refers to the process through which a system perceives and interprets the horizon in which it exists.

Through perception, emotion, memory, and attention, the organism constructs a **lived map of the horizon**. This map determines what possibilities appear available and what constraints appear immovable.

Experience therefore does not simply reflect reality; it reflects the **relationship between the organism and its conditions**.

When regulatory stability at the level of being is sufficient, the horizon becomes more clearly perceptible. The organism can recognise patterns, signals, and potential pathways within its environment.

At this stage, horizons that previously appeared closed may become **perceptibly viable**. Even a small recognition of possibility – a non-zero horizon – can rapidly reorganise attention, motivation, and available energy.

This shift does not require the horizon to become fully open. The recognition that action may be meaningful or viable is often sufficient to alter the system's regulatory state.

Experiencing therefore functions as the stage in which the organism begins to detect **navigable structure within the horizon**.

Where experience is chronically distorted by unstable conditions, horizons appear narrower than they are, and possibility becomes difficult to perceive. Where regulatory stability is maintained, the organism can detect emerging pathways and adjust accordingly.

Experience is inseparable from perception. Without perception there can be no lived experience of the horizon.

Threat Detection and Horizon Contraction

Human perception is strongly influenced by threat detection systems. When individuals perceive signals of judgement, coercion, or authoritarian control within a horizon, the nervous system may shift into protective regulation.

In this state, attention narrows and behaviour becomes more oriented toward safety or performance than exploration or adaptation. Rather than freely perceiving the structure of the horizon, the individual begins managing how they are perceived within it.

As a result, the experienced horizon may contract even when structural possibilities remain unchanged. The organism allocates energy toward self-protection and impression management rather than horizon exploration.

Conditions that minimise unnecessary threat signals – such as psychological safety, respectful communication, and openness to uncertainty – therefore expand the range of experience available within a horizon.

Becoming

Becoming occurs in two related dimensions: **internal understanding** and **external capacity growth**.

Internal Becoming

Internally, becoming refers to the development of **understanding of one's own system**.

Through experience, individuals gradually learn how their regulatory system functions: how they respond to stress, safety, possibility, and constraint. They begin to recognise their own patterns of reaction, energy fluctuation, and recovery.

This internal understanding allows the individual to regulate themselves more effectively and to recognise the conditions under which they function well or poorly.

Internal becoming therefore represents the development of **self-system literacy**.

External Becoming

Externally, becoming refers to **growth in capacity and responsibility**.

As individuals understand their own systems more clearly, they are able to expand what they can reliably do within their horizons. Skills develop, judgement improves, and responsibility can be taken on in sustainable ways.

Capacity growth allows the individual to engage more effectively with the conditions of the horizon. Responsibility increases not as an imposed demand, but as an emergent outcome of developing capability.

External becoming therefore represents the **expansion of what the system can responsibly carry**.

Development

Development occurs primarily within the stage of becoming.

During becoming, individuals integrate experience into a growing understanding of their own system. Through this process, patterns are recognised, regulation improves, and capability gradually expands.

Development therefore refers to the process through which **experience becomes capability**.

While institutions often recognise starting conditions and final outcomes, development occurs primarily in the middle stages of the cycle, where individuals refine their understanding, expand their capacity, and begin testing action within the horizon.

Because development often produces incomplete or experimental forms of action, it can appear unstable or unpredictable when observed from outside the cycle. Without language that recognises development as a process, institutions frequently misclassify these stages as either vulnerability or success rather than recognising them as the generative middle where capability is constructed.

Development therefore represents the **active construction of future capability within a horizon**.

Development is the process through which horizons become navigable.

Doing

Doing refers to the point at which **decision-making is translated into action**.

After energy stabilises presence (Being), perception constructs the horizon (Experiencing), and understanding develops internally and externally (Becoming), the system is able to act deliberately within its environment.

Doing therefore represents **engagement with the horizon through action**.

At this stage, decisions move from internal consideration into behaviour that interacts with the surrounding conditions. The quality of doing depends heavily on the stages that precede it. When energy is depleted, perception distorted, or becoming underdeveloped, actions tend to be reactive, defensive, or short-term.

When earlier stages are stable, doing becomes **intentional and responsible engagement with the horizon**.

Through doing, individuals begin shaping the conditions of the environments they inhabit.

Responsibility

Responsibility begins with **care for one's own system**.

Before responsibility can be exercised toward others or toward external conditions, the individual must maintain the stability of their own internal horizon. This includes regulating energy, recognising personal limits, and maintaining the conditions that allow actions to remain deliberate rather than reactive.

Responsibility therefore first refers to **maintaining stable internal conditions**.

When individuals care for their own system effectively, their actions become more sustainable. Decisions are less likely to be driven by stress, pressure, or defensive reactions, and more likely to reflect deliberate engagement with the horizon.

From this foundation, responsibility naturally extends outward. Actions taken within the horizon begin to affect other people, environments, and systems. Ethical responsibility emerges through recognising these effects and responding to them appropriately.

Responsibility therefore represents the stage at which **self-regulation and ethical engagement meet**.

When internal stability is maintained, doing becomes sustainable and actions are more likely to remain ethical. When internal conditions deteriorate, responsibility becomes harder to sustain and behaviour tends to become reactive or short-term.

Conditions

Conditions refer to the environments within which a system operates. These conditions shape the stability, possibilities, and constraints of a horizon.

Conditions arise from multiple layers.

Internal Conditions

The first layer of conditions exists within the individual system itself. These include both **physical conditions** and **emotional regulation**.

Physical conditions include factors such as health, fatigue, stress load, and physiological regulation.

Emotional regulation refers to the stability of the organism's emotional system – the degree to which emotions can be experienced, processed, and stabilised without overwhelming the system.

Together, these regulatory conditions determine whether the system has sufficient stability to remain present within its horizon.

Responsibility at the previous stage of the cycle primarily refers to maintaining these internal conditions so that the system remains stable enough for sustainable action.

When internal conditions are stable, the horizon remains navigable and actions remain deliberate rather than reactive.

External Structural Conditions

Beyond the internal system, individuals operate within externally imposed conditions.

These include institutional structures, social expectations, relationships, economic realities, and environmental constraints. Such conditions shape the range of possibilities available within the horizon.

External conditions may either support generative engagement or impose pressures that destabilise regulation and narrow perceived possibilities.

Perceived Conditions

Conditions are not experienced purely as objective structures. They are also interpreted through the organism's perception.

Perception therefore plays a central role in determining how navigable a horizon appears.

Two common perceptual responses appear repeatedly within horizons: **non-zero recognition** and **threat recognition**.

Non-Zero Recognition

Non-zero recognition occurs when the system perceives that meaningful movement, development, or response remains possible within the horizon. The horizon may still be difficult, uncertain, or constrained, but it is no longer experienced as completely closed.

When this recognition appears, even slightly, the organism may rapidly reorganise attention, motivation, and regulatory energy. This often restores movement within the system and allows development to continue.

Threat Recognition

Threat recognition occurs when the system perceives that the horizon contains danger, judgement, coercion, or constraint.

This response narrows attention and shifts behaviour toward protection or performance rather than exploration.

Even the slightest perception of unease can restrict the system from normal functioning. Attention becomes focused on managing risk or impression rather than navigating possibility.

In some cases this contraction may offer short-term benefits. For example, it may temporarily reduce harmful behaviour in highly dysregulated individuals by limiting the range of available actions.

However, threat-based regulation does not contribute to the growth of capacity or responsibility over time. Within an ethically ordered system, sustainable development

occurs when stability, safety, and honest engagement allow individuals to expand their understanding and capability within the horizon.

Where threat perception dominates, systems tend to produce compliance or performance rather than genuine development.

Conditions and Horizon Navigation

The interaction between **internal conditions**, **external structures**, and **perceived possibilities** determines how navigable a horizon becomes.

When internal conditions are maintained, external structures are workable, and non-zero possibilities are perceptible, the horizon tends to remain open and generative.

When internal conditions deteriorate, external pressures increase, or threat recognition dominates perception, horizons tend to contract and become more difficult to navigate.

Outcomes

Outcomes refer to the observable results that emerge within the horizon following action.

These results are not determined solely by the actions of an individual system. Outcomes arise from the interaction between multiple forces operating within the horizon.

These forces include:

- the actions taken by the individual system
- the actions and responses of other people and systems
- the structural conditions of the environment
- the underlying constraints and laws of the natural world

Because of this interaction, outcomes cannot be fully controlled by any single actor. Actions increase or decrease the probability of certain outcomes, but the final result emerges from the combined dynamics of the horizon.

Outcomes therefore represent the **material expression of how a system interacts with its environment**.

Some outcomes improve conditions within the horizon, while others degrade them. These changes then feed back into the system by affecting the energy available for future cycles.

When outcomes improve conditions or reveal viable pathways forward, they tend to generate renewed energy within the system. When outcomes degrade conditions or close perceived possibilities, energy tends to decrease.

Outcomes therefore function as the **feedback mechanism that closes the generative cycle**.

Scope of the Model

Although this framework is presented primarily in relation to **human experience, institutional systems, and ecological environments**, the underlying structure may reflect a more general pattern of adaptive systems.

Across many domains of nature, systems appear to operate through cycles in which energy stabilises structure, perception or sensing detects available possibilities, internal organisation develops capacity, and actions interact with surrounding conditions to produce outcomes that feed back into the system.

At the human scale, this pattern appears as the cycle described throughout Horizon Theory: the relationship between energy, presence, perception, development, action, responsibility, conditions, and outcomes.

Similar structural patterns can be observed in ecological systems, where organisms interact with environments that continually reshape their available energy and possibilities. At much larger scales, stars and planetary systems form through cycles in which energy, matter, and structure repeatedly reorganise across time.

At much smaller scales, physical systems governed by quantum interactions also appear to operate through processes in which energy states, probability structures, and interaction outcomes continually reshape the conditions for future events.

Horizon Theory does not attempt to formally describe these physical processes. However, the recurrence of similar generative patterns across such different domains suggests that the cycle described here may reflect a **broader structural property of adaptive systems**.

The present work therefore focuses on the domains where the model can be most directly applied: **human development, institutional practice, and ecological relationships**.

The Lived Reality of Horizon Theory

Although Horizon Theory describes structural patterns across systems, its most immediate relevance remains within everyday human life.

The framework does not require specialised knowledge or institutional application to become meaningful. In practice, it often appears in small, ordinary moments: recognising

when energy has returned, noticing when a horizon has quietly opened, or understanding why pressure and threat can narrow perception and reduce capacity.

At this scale the theory becomes less about formal systems and more about learning to recognise the signals of one's own horizon.

Sometimes this simply means maintaining the conditions that allow stability and honest engagement with the environment. At other times it means recognising when a previously closed path has become slightly open, and allowing energy to move toward it without forcing or coercion.

Because of this, Horizon Theory is not intended to become a doctrine or a rigid framework for behaviour. It is better understood as a language for noticing patterns that already exist within human systems.

In many cases the most useful application of the theory may be surprisingly simple...

Feed unto the lentils, as they feed unto you.

Care for the small conditions that sustain energy, stability, and attention. Maintain the environments that allow horizons to remain navigable. Support the conditions that allow development to occur without coercion.

And notice what happens when the horizon begins to open.