Horizon Theory and Its Adjacent Fields

An updated field-positioning paper reflecting the ethical sequence, the generative horizon cycle, and the interpretive conditions of development

Document type	Conceptual field-positioning paper
Purpose	To clarify where Horizon Theory sits in relation to adjacent disciplines and what its present architecture contributes
Current scope	Updated to reflect the ethical dependency sequence, the generative horizon cycle, layered horizons, and the interpretive conditions of development

This paper is a working scientific document. It aims to clarify the structure and location of an emerging field without overstating finality. The framework should be read as open to refinement, testing, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Abstract

This paper positions Horizon Theory as an emerging interdisciplinary field concerned with how human capability becomes viable under real conditions. Recent development of the framework suggests that its distinctiveness lies not in replacing neighbouring disciplines, but in integrating problems they often treat separately: energy constraint, regulation, perception, development, responsibility, conditions, and sustainable generativity. The paper clarifies four elements of the theory's current architecture: (1) the ethical dependency sequence of regulation, safety, honesty, capacity, responsibility, and outcomes; (2) the wider generative horizon cycle through which energy, experience, development, action, conditions, and outcomes replenish or degrade one another over time; (3) the layered nature of horizons, including structural, perceived, and emotional horizons; and (4) the interpretive layer between signal and action, where naming, judgement, and institutional translation influence what becomes possible next. Against this background, the paper explains Horizon Theory's relationship to neuroscience, psychology, systems theory, sociology, sustainability science, and institutional design. It argues that Horizon Theory contributes a distinctive condition-centred, developmentally sequenced, and energy-literate approach to human viability in constrained systems. The paper concludes by outlining methodological commitments, research questions, and anti-co-option boundaries for future development of the field. It also clarifies that Horizon Theory cannot function adequately as a purely external diagnostic lens. Its distinctions must become experientially legible within the person using them; otherwise the framework risks being repeated as vocabulary without becoming method or practice.

Keywords: Horizon Theory; development; regulation; energy constraint; generative systems; institutional design; sustainable generativity

1. Introduction

Emerging fields often become legible only after they begin touching more established ones. That point has now been reached for Horizon Theory. What began as a framework for describing how human systems operate under pressure has developed into a more coherent interdisciplinary field concerned with viability under constraint, developmental sequencing, and the conditions that make responsibility sustainably possible.

The immediate task is therefore not to overstate novelty or to announce replacement of existing disciplines. It is to clarify where Horizon Theory sits, what problems it is trying to integrate, and what its present architecture allows it to say more clearly than adjacent fields usually do on their own.

At its core, Horizon Theory begins from a simple but often neglected claim: human beings and the institutions they inhabit are finite systems. Capacity is not infinitely summonable, honesty is not equally affordable under all conditions, and outcomes cannot be interpreted apart from the horizons in which they are produced. Many contemporary systems demand performance before maintaining the sequence of conditions that makes sustainable performance viable. Horizon Theory treats that as a structural problem before a personal one.

Recent development of the theory has sharpened this position in three important ways. First, the framework now distinguishes more clearly between an ethical dependency sequence and a wider generative cycle. Second, it describes horizons as layered, bounded fields whose possibilities are shaped both structurally and affectively. Third, it has begun to specify the interpretive conditions through which signals become descriptions, records, assessments, and institutional action.

2. Core Architecture of Horizon Theory

The current form of Horizon Theory is best understood as a structured architecture rather than a single slogan. Four components are especially important for field positioning.

Component	Sequence	Primary question
Ethical dependency sequence	Regulation -> Safety -> Honesty -> Capacity -> Responsibility -> Outcomes	What must be in place for sustainable responsibility to become honestly possible?
Generative horizon cycle	Energy -> Being -> Experiencing -> Becoming -> Doing -> Responsibility -> Conditions -> Outcomes -> Energy	How do horizons replenish or degrade the conditions required for future viability?

2.1 The ethical dependency sequence

The ethical dependency sequence states that sustainable ethical functioning follows a structural order: regulation -> safety -> honesty -> capacity -> responsibility -> outcomes. This is not a ladder of virtue, but a dependency chain. Without regulation, safety becomes fragile; without safety, honesty becomes costly; without honesty, capacity becomes distorted; without capacity, responsibility becomes performative; and without responsibility, outcomes become brittle or false. The sequence matters because many real systems invert it, demanding outcomes or responsibility before maintaining the conditions that make truthful, sustainable participation possible.

2.2 The generative horizon cycle

Alongside the ethical sequence, Horizon Theory now describes a wider generative horizon cycle: energy -> being -> experiencing -> becoming -> doing -> responsibility -> conditions -> outcomes -> energy. This cycle explains how horizons either replenish or degrade themselves over time. It captures the metabolic side of viability: how regulatory energy, perception, development, action, and environmental feedback either restore future possibility or gradually narrow it.

This distinction is crucial. The ethical sequence describes the order in which responsibility becomes honestly and sustainably available. The generative cycle describes the ongoing process through which the horizon itself either maintains or depletes the conditions required for that responsibility. Put differently, the ethical sequence identifies what must be in place; the generative cycle describes how systems either keep that in place or lose it.

2.3 Horizons as layered and affectively mediated

A horizon is a bounded lived field of operation within which regulation, action, and responsibility must be sustained over time. Horizons are not merely subjective outlooks. They are structured environments shaped by material limits, temporal realities, relational climates, institutional boundaries, and ecological conditions.

Current development of the theory distinguishes at least three analytically useful forms of horizon. Structural horizons refer to objective limits and conditions. Perceived horizons refer to what appears recognisably possible within those limits. Emotional horizons refer to the affective modulation of

perceivability and navigability. This matters because a horizon may remain structurally unchanged while becoming experientially narrower through fear, shame, overload, or chronic uncertainty.

The theory also treats horizons as layered. Biological realities, emotional states, relational environments, institutional structures, and ecological settings all function as constraint-bearing layers. The practical question is not simply whether a person or system could act in principle, but what range of action is actually affordable within the layered horizon presently available.

2.4 The interpretive layer between signal and action

A further recent development concerns the interpretive layer between signal and action. Much institutional and developmental work proceeds as if the main challenge begins after behaviour becomes visible. Horizon Theory now argues that an earlier problem often shapes everything downstream: signals are named through unstable, moralised, or collapsed language long before they enter supervision, notes, assessments, or intervention.

For this reason, the framework now treats definitional clarity as an interpretive support condition. Signals, states, perceptions, feelings, interpretations, judgements, and authorship are not interchangeable. Confusing them changes what people think is happening and therefore what becomes possible next. The interpretive layer is where sincere self-description can become unreliable, where honest reporting can be distorted by category error, and where institutions can begin acting on descriptions that carry more verdict than evidence.

Taken together, these four elements - ethical sequence, generative cycle, layered horizons, and interpretive conditions - give Horizon Theory a sharper and more scientifically legible architecture. They also clarify why the field belongs in conversation with several adjacent disciplines at once.

3. Horizon Theory and Its Adjacent Fields

Horizon Theory does not abolish neighbouring fields. It depends on them. But it also adds a specific organising question that none of them, on their own, consistently keep in view: what conditions make viable becoming, truthful participation, and sustainable contribution possible in the first place?

Field	What it tends to foreground	Horizon Theory interface	Distinctive contribution
Neuroscience	Regulation, stress, arousal, attention, and organism-level constraint	Uses neuroscience to ground claims about energy, regulation, threat response, and the biological affordability of action	Moves from mechanism to viability: asks what biological constraint means for development, honesty, and responsibility within real horizons
Psychology	Experience, emotion, cognition, identity, behaviour, and development	Connects psychological process to sequence, conditions, and capacity formation over time	Shifts attention from individual traits alone to the conditions and stages through which capability becomes sustainably available
Systems theory	Interdependence, feedback, emergence, complexity, and unintended effects	Treats persons and institutions as dynamic systems nested within larger horizons	Centres human developmental sequence and energy cost inside systems analysis, distinguishing generative from extractive system behaviour

Field	What it tends to foreground	Horizon Theory interface	Distinctive contribution
Sociology	Structure, power, recognition, classification, environment, and social reproduction	Uses sociological insight to examine how institutions organise possibility, misrecognition, and differential burden	Adds a condition-and-development lens: misclassification is not only symbolic, but can alter the pathways through which capacity and responsibility emerge
Sustainability science	Long-term viability of ecological, economic, and social systems	Extends sustainability inquiry to the maintenance or depletion of human capacity inside systems	Argues that no system is fully sustainable if it preserves outputs while degrading the people and conditions that generate them
Institutional design and governance	Structures, incentives, accountability, process design, and decision architecture	Applies Horizon Theory to transitions, sequencing errors, reporting burdens, and condition-setting power	Shows how institutions frequently invert development by demanding outcomes before maintaining regulation, safety, honesty, and capacity

4. The Distinctive Contribution of Horizon Theory

The distinctive contribution of Horizon Theory lies in integration with sequence. Many established disciplines provide strong accounts of mechanism, structure, behaviour, or ethics. Horizon Theory contributes an architecture for holding those together under the practical question of viability.

Its first contribution is condition primacy. Outcomes do not create conditions; conditions create outcomes. This does not deny agency, but it prevents systems from mistaking downstream performance for proof that upstream conditions were adequate.

Its second contribution is energy literacy. Energy is treated not as motivation, positivity, or vague morale, but as finite regulatory and operational capacity. This allows the field to describe why chronic deficit changes what becomes cognitively, emotionally, and ethically affordable.

Its third contribution is developmental sequencing. Horizon Theory restores the middle of development - being, experiencing, becoming - between initial conditions and visible outputs. In doing so, it gives language to the constructive processes through which experience becomes capability.

Its fourth contribution is interpretive precision. The field does not assume that reporting, assessment, or institutional language passively describe reality. They help shape the horizon. For that reason, category clarity becomes part of ethical design.

Its fifth contribution is asymmetrical reciprocity. Horizon Theory holds that responsibility is reciprocal but not equal in every direction. Individuals remain responsible for how they act within horizons, but those who design, govern, or classify horizons carry heightened responsibility for the conditions within their power.

4.1 Current core commitments

- Conditions create outcomes; outcomes do not create conditions.
- Energy is finite and chronic deficit reliably alters what is affordable.
- Responsibility emerges under viable conditions and scales asymmetrically with power over those conditions.
- Transitions are load-bearing sites where systems often create deficit rather than continuity.
- Sustainable generativity matters more than heroic output or endurance signalling.

5. Methodological and Epistemic Position

Horizon Theory is presently a conceptual and diagnostic field grounded in lived observation, practice-based reasoning, constraint analysis, reflective calibration, and iterative stress-testing across domains. It is not yet a mature empirical programme, but neither is it merely impressionistic. Its claims are structured, falsifiable in part, and increasingly specific about what kinds of observations would count for or against them.

Methodologically, the field works by tracing dependency relationships. It asks where load is coming from, what it is draining, what transitions or conditions are increasing cost, and how those pressures alter regulation, honesty affordability, capacity, and the shape of outcomes. This makes the framework especially suited to domains where metrics alone routinely hide mechanism.

Epistemically, the theory rejects both naive subjectivism and detached technocracy. Lived experience matters because horizons are inhabited, not merely observed from outside. At the same time, reflection is treated as calibration rather than private authority. The aim is not to universalise one person's experience, but to refine pattern recognition under constraint and test it carefully against other domains and observers.

5.1 Internal legibility and first-person application

Horizon Theory does not function adequately as a purely external lens applied to other people, services, or institutions. The framework becomes methodologically usable only when its distinctions begin organising perception within the person using it. Regulation, signal-reading, authorship, responsibility, and horizon conditions must become internally legible enough to alter how load, threat, possibility, and interpretation are read within one's own horizon.

Where this internal legibility is absent, Horizon Theory can still be repeated as language, but it is more likely to be used as diagnostic rhetoric. In that form, the theory risks reproducing the very distortions it criticises: premature judgement, external classification, and pressure-first interpretation. First-person calibration is therefore not an optional personal add-on. It is part of the conditions under which the framework can be applied accurately and ethically at all.

6. Research Agenda

If Horizon Theory is to develop as a recognised field, it needs a research agenda that follows from its own architecture rather than simply borrowing the priorities of adjacent disciplines.

- How can regulation, honesty affordability, and sustainable capacity be operationalised across different domains without collapsing them into crude performance proxies?

- What measurable load-to-recovery patterns best predict transition failure and downstream honesty distortion in services, workplaces, and care systems?

- How do structural, perceived, and emotional horizons interact during periods of contraction, recovery, and reopened non-zero possibility?

- What forms of institutional language most reliably preserve distinctions between signal, state, interpretation, judgement, and authorship?

- How can sustainable generativity be measured longitudinally in ways that distinguish real viability from short-term extraction masked by heroic output?

- What forms of leadership practice are associated with condition maintenance, transition repair, and lower rates of horizon inversion?

- How do developmentally sequenced systems differ from pressure-first systems in education, social care, mental health practice, public administration, and organisational governance?

7. Boundaries and Anti-Co-option Position

An emerging field is especially vulnerable to co-option at the point it becomes legible. Horizon Theory therefore needs clear boundaries. It is not a resilience training package, a wellbeing brand, or a productivity framework for helping people cope more efficiently inside harmful systems.

Nor does the theory erase individual responsibility. Its claim is more demanding than either total blame or total absolution. Responsibility remains real, but responsibility must be read within conditions, energy realities, and power-bearing asymmetries.

The field also does not promise easy reform. Some horizons can be repaired; others are structurally energy-negative and may require closure, redesign, or exit. A scientific treatment of viability must leave room for that possibility.

8. Conclusion

Horizon Theory has now developed enough internal structure to be positioned as an interdisciplinary field in its own right. Its current contribution is not the invention of wholly new subject matter, but the integration of questions that are too often separated: energy and ethics, regulation and responsibility, perception and development, language and institutional action, outcomes and the conditions that make them affordable.

In that sense, Horizon Theory belongs beside neuroscience, psychology, systems theory, sociology, sustainability science, and institutional design while remaining reducible to none of them. Its central question is practical and scientific at once: under what conditions do human beings and human systems remain viable enough for truthful, sustainable contribution to emerge?

Answering that question will require empirical work, conceptual refinement, and serious interdisciplinary dialogue. But the field now has a clearer architecture from which that work can proceed.

End of working paper