

— A PMTALES FIELD GUIDE —

# FLUENT IN NONSENSE

WE'RE ALIGNED.

TIMING IS CHALLENGING.

DELAY

NO OWNERSHIP

RISKS IGNORED

SCOPE CREEP

DECISIONS PENDING

How to **Decode** Project-Speak, **Survive** Meeting Theater, and Hear What People **Really** Mean

**D.B. TRENCH**

# Fluent in Nonsense

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**How to Decode Project-Speak, Survive  
Meeting Theater, and Hear What People  
Really Mean**

D.B. Trench  
PMTales

# Copyright

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**Fluent in Nonsense**

**How to Decode Project-Speak, Survive Meeting Theater, and Hear What People Really Mean**

**By D.B. Trench**

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This is a work of satire. Any resemblance to actual meetings, projects, status decks, steering committees, alignment sessions, or professionally managed disasters is entirely intentional.

Published by PMTales

# Dedication

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For everyone who has ever sat in a meeting, read the update, and thought:

**That is not what is happening.**

# Epigraph

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*There was once, in theory, a version of project work  
where people said what they meant.*

*That version is now mostly available through folklore.*

# About PMTales

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PMTales is a story-driven survival brand for people who manage work inside absurd systems.

It exists for the project managers, delivery leads, coordinators, analysts, and quiet realists who have learned that many organizations do not fail loudly. They fail politely, gradually, and with excellent formatting.

PMTales turns those patterns into stories, field guides, survival books, tools, and training—so readers feel recognized first, then better equipped.

This is not productivity theatre. It is operational recognition.

## What This Book Is

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This is the PMTales corporate translation manual.

It focuses on one core problem: organizations often do not speak plainly when truth becomes inconvenient. Instead, they generate phrases that sound collaborative, mature, and strategically aligned while quietly removing clarity, ownership, or consequence.

This book decodes that language and helps the reader hear what is actually being said.

Its role in the PMTales universe is practical utility.

# Start Here

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If you are new to PMTales, here is the easiest way in:

**For the worldview: Everything Is on Fire (But We're Proceeding)**

The flagship PMTales doctrine book on delivery theatre, professional calm, and surviving systems that remain publicly stable long after they stop being operationally honest.

**For the stories: Tales from the Trenches and Once Upon a Deliverable**

Narrative entries into the PMTales world—absurd, recognizable, and painfully close to real life.

**For stakeholder survival: PMTales Stakeholder Field Guide**

A field manual for identifying, understanding, and surviving the creatures, personalities, and political fauna of modern project work.

**For corporate translation: Fluent in Nonsense**

A practical decoder for the phrases, euphemisms, and polished evasions used to keep meetings moving while clarity quietly exits the room.

**For scope containment: Scope Creep: Anatomy of a Slow-Motion Disaster**

A focused survival guide for the most polite, socially accepted, and operationally destructive force in project delivery.

For field-ready tools, visit the PMTales Armory:

[PMTales.com/armory](https://PMTales.com/armory)

For deeper training, visit the PMTales Academy:

[PMTales.com/academy](https://PMTales.com/academy)

For weekly field notes from the trenches, join the newsletter at:

[PMTales.com/dispatch](https://PMTales.com/dispatch)

# Get the free Survival Sheet

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This book contains 67 phrases. The Survival Sheet is a one-page decoder — the 30 most dangerous phrases in the book, their real translations, and the five questions that usually save the room.

Print it. Tape it inside your notebook. Send it to the colleague you have been quietly trying to warn.

[PMTales.com/fluent](http://PMTales.com/fluent)

Enter your email and receive the Survival Sheet immediately.

You will also receive The Dispatch — weekly field notes from inside the same rooms this book describes.

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# Introduction

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## Welcome to the Dialect

This book exists because project language stopped being communication and became climate control for bad news.

There was once, in theory, a version of project work where people said what they meant.

A delay was a delay.

A decision had not been made because no one had made it.

A risk was dangerous because it threatened cost, schedule, scope, credibility, or the continued emotional stability of the people still trying to defend the plan in a steering meeting.

That version of project work is now mostly available through folklore.

In modern project life, almost nothing is described in its natural shape. It gets softened, staged, socialized, monitored, aligned, pressure-tested, tightened, elevated, and wrapped in language so professionally moisturized you can no longer tell whether the work is progressing or being gently prepared for bad news.

That is the dialect.

And if you work in projects long enough, you become fluent in it whether you wanted to or not.

You hear:

- “We’re aligned.”
- “It’s not a blocker.”
- “Timing is challenging.”
- “We are monitoring closely.”
- “No action required at this stage.”

- “We need more discussion.”
- “A revised timeline is being developed.”
- “The optics matter.”

These phrases are not meaningless.

That would almost be refreshing.

They are worse than meaningless. They are useful.

Useful for keeping the meeting calm.

Useful for preserving tone.

Useful for buying one more week.

Useful for staying adjacent to the truth without making direct contact with it.

That is why they survive.

Not because people are stupid.

Not because everyone is lying.

Not because organizations are run entirely by cowards, though some departments do occasionally audition.

They survive because polite ambiguity is one of the cheapest fuels in project life.

It keeps rooms moving.

It keeps leaders calm.

It lets teams continue functioning while standing on top of things too awkward, political, incomplete, or expensive to name all at once in their natural shape.

But the dialect has a cost.

A sentence softens the issue.

The room relaxes.

The issue remains.

A phrase creates confidence.

The timeline is still weak.

The confidence now has better shoes.

A narrative tightens.

The update improves.

The underlying work starts making noises in another room.

This is how projects drift.

Not only through weak governance, missing sponsorship, or bad sequencing.

They drift through phrasing.

Through the little polished sentences that lower concern before the work has earned it. Through the institutional habit of saying things in ways the room can absorb rather than ways the project can actually use.

That is what this book is about.

Not mocking people.

Not sneering at tired professionals trapped inside bizarre systems.

Not pretending every euphemism is villainy and every soft sentence is fraud.

This book is about translation.

Because once you hear the dialect, the room changes.

“We’re aligned” no longer sounds stable.

“It’s not a blocker” no longer sounds harmless.

“We are monitoring closely” no longer sounds like action.

“No action required at this stage” no longer sounds low-stakes.

“We need optionality” no longer sounds strategic until you ask who is paying to keep three futures alive.

That is the value of translation.

Not to become bitter.

Not to become the person muttering “this is upholstery” into a coffee cup while everyone else nods at a steering deck.

Just to hear more clearly.

To know when a phrase is doing useful social work and when it is quietly protecting the room from something the project can no longer afford to keep wrapped in tone.

Because that is the real craft in delivery.

Not just tracking.

Not just reporting.

Not just staying calm while the work enters one of its more interpretive seasons.

Translation.

The best project people do it constantly.

They take atmosphere and turn it into structure.

They hear “we’re in a good place” and ask what is newly true.

They hear “it’s not a blocker” and ask what happens in two weeks.

They hear “we need more discussion” and ask what decision is being deferred.

They hear “on track” and ask under what assumptions.

They hear “we need to tighten the narrative” and check the timeline immediately.

That is not negativity.

That is maintenance of reality.

So this book is a field guide. A decoder. A survival manual for people who have spent enough time in meetings to recognize that the sentence being used and

the thing actually happening are often acquaintances, not twins.

Inside, you will find the most common phrases of modern project life translated from:

- their official meaning
- to their field meaning

What they say.

What they usually mean.

How they behave in the wild.

Why they are dangerous.

And what to ask when the room starts sounding polished in ways the project has not earned.

The goal is not cynicism.

Cynicism shrugs and goes numb.

This is closer to vigilance.

The kind that hears the sentence behind the sentence.

The kind that knows a quick touchpoint is often a full meeting in a fake mustache. The kind that knows a revised timeline is rarely a fresh beginning and often a tasteful funeral. The kind that knows “for visibility” is sometimes just courtesy and sometimes the administrative equivalent of being quietly parked near a future explosion.

Once you hear these things, you do not really unhear them.

And that is useful.

Because in project environments, the sentence is often where the drift begins.

And sometimes, if you are lucky and reasonably caffeinated, it is also where the recovery begins.

So welcome.

The meeting is already running long.

The deck is polished.

The team is engaged.

The risks are being managed.

No action is required at this stage.

Let us begin.

## FIELD DOWNLOAD

If you already recognize three of these phrases from your last meeting, good. Unfortunately.

The printable Fluent in Nonsense Survival Sheet collects the most dangerous phrases, quick translations, and five questions that usually save the room before the language starts doing damage.

Download it at: [PMTales.com/fluent](https://PMTales.com/fluent)

PART I

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# EVERYDAY NONSENSE



## Everyday Nonsense

These are the gateway phrases.

The harmless-looking classics. The lines that show up so often, so casually, and in such neat business clothing that people stop hearing them as signals and start hearing them as weather.

That is the trick.

They do not sound dangerous.

They sound helpful.

Reasonable.

Constructive.

Mature.

Which is exactly why they work.

These are the phrases that soften the room before the real drift begins. The ones that create emotional stability faster than they create operational clarity. The ones that make things feel more under control than they are, which is often the point, at least until the quarter starts asking better questions.

So we begin here.

With the ordinary language.

The harmless-seeming stuff.

The verbal houseplants of project work.

The phrases people say right before the problem puts on shoes.

# 1. We're aligned.

## Official Meaning

A shared understanding has been reached across stakeholders, teams, or decision-makers.

## Field Translation

***“Nobody wanted to challenge the slide while the senior people were still in the room.”***

## Observed in the Wild

This phrase usually appears late in a meeting, often after forty-three minutes of context, fifteen minutes of careful nodding, and one brave but doomed attempt to ask what exactly is being approved.

The sponsor nods first, which is unfortunate.

The architect nods second, but with the face of a person who has just watched a bridge design get endorsed by people who only met it as a rectangle in a deck.

Operations nods because operations has learned that saying “this will absolutely fail in the real environment” too early only produces a workshop, two action items, and a follow-up where the same concern returns wearing the phrase **implementation detail** like a fake mustache.

Governance nods because governance recognizes visible harmony as a legitimate temporary substitute for actual clarity.

The PM, briefly overcome by the scent of apparent progress, writes **alignment achieved** into the notes and experiences the rare and dangerous emotion known as premature relief.

The meeting ends in good spirits.

By Tuesday, three teams are executing three different interpretations of the same decision.

One believes a path was approved.

One believes principles were approved.

One believes no approval happened at all and the meeting was “really just to level-set.”

All three will later say there was alignment.

Technically, they are correct.

Alignment did occur.

It simply occurred as a mood.

That is the brilliance of the phrase.

“We’re aligned” does not need to survive contact with specifics. It only needs to lower the room’s appetite for more questions. Once it succeeds, the meeting moves on, the notes look cleaner, and the project enters that beautiful and dangerous phase where everyone believes they are walking in formation while actually heading toward three different parking lots.

### **Damage Report**

“We’re aligned” is dangerous because it creates the illusion of order strong enough to delay the kind of clarification that might have saved the next two weeks.

It lets disagreement go underground.

It turns untested assumptions into socially protected material.

It creates a record-friendly version of the meeting in which harmony occurred, while implementation later discovers that harmony came without operating instructions.

Projects do not run on symbolic calm. They run on specifics.

What was decided?

Who owns it?

What changes now?

What survives after the deck is gone and the work has to stand up in daylight?

Without those answers, alignment is not structure.

It is décor.

### **Survival Advice**

Do not fight the phrase directly. That makes you sound like someone opposing teamwork itself.

Translate it into structure.

Ask:

- aligned on what, specifically?
- what decision was actually taken?
- what remains open?
- who owns the next move?
- when does this take effect?

A very useful question is:

**“Is there anything anyone here understands differently?”**

If the answers are vague, you do not have alignment.

You have a room that became tired in a coordinated way.

### **Related Phrases**

“We have a path forward.”

“Great discussion.”

“I think we’re converging.”

“This feels like a strong step forward.”

### **Danger Level**

**High** — rises to **Critical** when achieved suspiciously fast.

## Final Field Rule

If a phrase makes the room feel better faster than it makes the work clearer, do not trust it without asking one more question. That is usually the point where the sentence stops being communication and starts becoming furniture.

Want the printable version plus new phrases as they appear?

Get the free Survival Sheet at [PMTales.com/fluent](https://PMTales.com/fluent)

## WHERE TO GO NEXT

You can now hear the dialect. The next step is knowing what to do with it.

**Start with the free [Fluent in Nonsense Survival Sheet](#).**

One printable page. The most dangerous phrases, quick translations, and five questions that usually save the room before the language starts doing damage.

[PMTales.com/fluent](https://PMTales.com/fluent)

**Then use the [PMTales Armory](#) when the language needs to become action.**

The Armory turns vague language into decisions, owners, risks, meeting notes, status updates, and escalation language that does not collapse under pressure. Start with the free field tools. The deeper bundles live in the Armory.

[PMTales.com/armory](https://PMTales.com/armory)

**Move into the [PMTales Academy](#) when you want the full operating habit.**

The Academy builds the deeper skills behind this book: clearer meetings, stronger reporting, cleaner scope control, and better delivery judgment under pressure.

[PMTales.com/academy](https://PMTales.com/academy)

# Other Books in the PMTales Universe

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## **Everything Is on Fire (But We're Proceeding)**

The flagship PMTales doctrine book on surviving delivery systems that remain calm, formatted, and publicly confident while reality burns in controlled phases.

## **Tales from the Trenches**

A story-driven collection of project survival tales from inside the machinery.

## **Once Upon a Deliverable**

An accessible, giftable entry point into the PMTales world.

## **PMTales Stakeholder Field Guide**

A collectible field manual for identifying and surviving stakeholder wildlife.

## **Scope Creep: Anatomy of a Slow-Motion Disaster**

A focused manual on one of the most common and least interrupted forms of delivery damage.

# The PMTales Armory

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The PMTales Armory contains field-ready survival tools for people doing real work under pressure: starter bundles, templates, worksheets, trackers, and other practical gear built for life outside ideal conditions.

Start here: [PMTales.com/armory](https://PMTales.com/armory)

# The PMTales Academy

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The PMTales Academy offers deeper training for readers who want more than recognition. It turns trench instincts into clearer judgment, stronger communication, and more deliberate control under pressure.

Explore: [PMTales.com/academy](https://PMTales.com/academy)

# Join the PMTales Newsletter

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Weekly dispatches from the trenches: satirical field notes, new euphemisms, survival tactics, and occasional honest reporting from the rooms where tone keeps trying to outrun truth.

Sign up at: [PMTales.com/dispatch](https://PMTales.com/dispatch)

See you in the trenches,  
PMTales

# THE ROOM SOUNDS CONFIDENT. THE WORK IS LESS SURE.

Organizations rarely say exactly what they mean.

They say:

- 'We're aligned.'
- 'Timing is challenging.'
- 'Let's take this offline.'
- 'No action required at this stage.'

And somehow the meeting ends with less clarity than it started.

In **Fluent in Nonsense**, D.B. Trench decodes the polished phrases, strategic euphemisms, and meeting-room dialects that keep work moving while truth quietly exits the room.

Part field guide, part translator, part survival manual, this book helps project managers, delivery leads, coordinators, analysts, and PMO survivors hear what is actually being said — and ask better questions before the room drifts into theater.

## Inside you'll find:

- 67 project-speak phrases translated into plain English
- field interpretations, warning signs, and survival advice
- interludes, patterns, and an emergency translation sheet

For anyone who has ever sat through a polished update and thought: *that is not what is happening.*

More books, tools, and  
field resources:

**PMTales.com**