

FRICTION

SYSTEMIC

Build Human Buffer Zones

The Experiment: Making Space

Duration: One week

Time required: 30 minutes upfront, 5 minutes of observation per day

Goal: Identify where your team lacks the physical or temporal buffer space they need to process before performing, and design one deliberate change.

Step One: Map the Moments that Need Buffers (30 Minutes to Start)

Think about the high-pressure moments in your team's recent experience. Write your answers to these questions:

- When did you last deliver difficult news, announce a significant change, or ask people to navigate a hard situation? What happened immediately after?
- Where do people go when they need to think, process, or have a candid conversation? Is that space available to them?
- Are there conversations happening in your organization that should be private but aren't? Where are people being asked to perform before they have had a chance to process?

Now identify two or three specific moments or recurring situations where a buffer, physical, temporal, or both, is missing.

Step Two: Observe for One Week (Five Minutes Per Day)

Each day, note one observation about how people in your organization are navigating space and pressure. You are looking for the following:

- Moments when people seem to be suppressing rather than processing
- Conversations happening in the wrong environment for their content
- Times when the pace of the day leaves no room between a hard moment and the next demand

Step Three: Design One Buffer (15 Minutes at End of Week)

Based on what you observed, design one concrete change. It can be physical or temporal. Examples:

1. Designate a specific room or area as a default space for conversation and protect it from being booked for routine meetings.
2. Build a 15-minute buffer into the schedule after any all-hands or change announcement before people return to regular work.
3. Establish a norm that hard feedback conversations are always followed by an unstructured check-in the next day.
4. Create a standing option for team members to request a private space for calls or focused work without having to explain why.

Write down the change, who it affects, and how you will know if it is helping.

Reflection prompt:

Think about the last time you delivered difficult news or navigated a significant change with your team. What happened in the hour after? Did people have space to process, or were they expected to perform again immediately? What would you design differently now?