

FRICTION

SYSTEMIC
Premium Strategy, Regular Fuel

The Experiment: The People-System Alignment Audit

Duration: One 45-minute working session

Time required: 45 minutes, best done with your leadership team

Goal: Identify where your people system is quietly undermining your strategy, and redesign at least one organizational default to close the gap.

Set a timer for 45 minutes, and do this as an individual leader or, better yet, with your leadership team so you can see where your assumptions diverge.

Step One: Translate Your Business Strategy into Verbs (5 Minutes)

Write your top three strategic priorities as action statements, not nouns, because verbs expose what humans must do. Examples might be: reduce cycle time, expand enterprise growth, increase patient trust, integrate acquisitions, improve margin without quality loss.

Step Two: Name the Human Requirements (10 Minutes)

For each strategic verb, finish this sentence three to five times:

“For this to work, people must be able to consistently . . .”

Use plain language, and don't let yourself hide behind abstractions. You're looking for behaviors like: raise risks early, decide with incomplete data, share bad news without punishment, coordinate across functions without escalation, learn new tools quickly, recover after intense sprints, give direct feedback, ask for help sooner.

Step Three: Score Your Current Defaults (15 Minutes)

For each requirement, rate your system on a 1-5 scale where 1 means “the system fights this” and 5 means “the system makes this easy.” Use these five lenses as your prompts, because they map cleanly to what research suggests matters:

Clarity: Do people know what “good” looks like, and can they prioritize without guessing?

Capacity: Do workload and staffing make the behaviors possible without constant overreach?

Candor: Is it socially safe to surface uncertainty, mistakes, and risks early? (psychological safety)

Consistency: Do decisions feel consistent, explainable, and respectful even when outcomes aren’t ideal?

Coordination: Do cross-functional handoffs work without heroic effort and relationship roulette?

Circle your lowest lens across the page; that is likely where your people system is quietly undermining your strategy.

Step Four: Redesign One Default (10 Minutes)

Choose one recurring moment in the life of the organization where friction predictably appears, and write a new rule that will become the default. Use this template, and make it concrete:

“From now on, when _____ happens, we will _____, so that _____.” Examples:

- “When a project crosses teams, we will name a single decision owner and publish decision rights, so that speed doesn’t depend on escalation.”
- “When risks emerge, we will surface them in the same forum as progress updates, so that early honesty becomes normal rather than brave.”
- “When workload spikes for more than two weeks, we will explicitly trade off priorities, so that burnout stops being the hidden plan.”

Step Five: Pick Two Measures That Keep You Honest (5 Minutes)

Choose one leading indicator (something you can see weekly) and one lagging indicator (a downstream result). A leading indicator might be decision-cycle time, percent of projects with clear owners, frequency of early risk flags, a short psychological safety pulse item, or cross-functional service level agreement (SLA) adherence. A lagging indicator might be regrettable attrition, cycle time, customer impact metrics, error rates, rework, or burnout pulse trends.

Then ask one final reflection question, and answer it without defending yourself: Where are we asking for premium performance while supplying regular fuel?