

FRICTION

SYSTEMIC

Protect What AI Can't Replace

The Experiment: The Human Capability

Duration: Four to six weeks

Time required: 3 hours upfront, 1 hour per week during the experiment

Goal: Identify where distinctly human capabilities are being eroded or underused in your organization and redesign at least one work process to protect and develop them deliberately.

Step One: Name Your Human Capabilities (30 Minutes)

Start by getting specific about what you are trying to protect. Using the three capabilities below as a starting point, write a brief description of what each one looks like in practice in your organization:

- Judgment under ambiguity: When do people in your organization make consequential calls without complete information? What conditions support that, and what conditions undermine it?

- Relational attunement: Where does the quality of human connection in your organization produce outcomes that process or technology cannot? Where is that connection being thinned or replaced?

- Emotional intelligence: Where do you see emotional skill making a real difference in your organization's performance, culture, or relationships? Where is the friction of emotional suppression costing you something?

Add any additional human capabilities that feel distinctly important in your context.

Step Two: Map Where AI Is Expanding in Your Work (30 Minutes)

List the five to ten areas where AI tools are currently being used or actively considered in your organization. For each one, ask:

- What human activity is being replaced or accelerated here?
- Which of the three capabilities named above depended on that activity?
- What is the risk if that capability atrophies over the next two to three years?

You are not arguing against the tool. You are identifying what needs to be protected alongside it.

Step Three: Find the Erosion Points (One Hour, with Others if Possible)

Look for the places where human capability is already thinning. These are your design targets. Signs to look for:

- Decisions that used to require judgment are now being routed through automated systems without a human review step.
- Relationships that used to develop through shared work are now mediated entirely through asynchronous digital tools.
- Emotional or relational complexity is being avoided rather than navigated, because the friction of addressing it feels too high.
- People are completing tasks faster but understanding the work less deeply.

Write down your two most significant erosion points. Be specific about the role, the process, and the capability at risk.

Step Four: Design One Protection (One Hour)

For one of your erosion points, design a concrete change to how the work is structured that protects the human capability at risk. Keep it specific and implementable. Examples:

- Restore a human review step to a decision that has been fully automated, not to slow the process but to keep judgment in practice.
- Redesign a recurring meeting that has become a status update into a working session where people think together in real time.
- Create a standing space, a regular conversation, a peer group, a coaching relationship, where emotional and relational complexity can be named and worked through rather than suppressed.
- Establish a norm that AI-generated work product is always reviewed and meaningfully edited by a human before it goes out, not as a quality check but as a practice of engagement.

Write down what you will change, who it affects, and how you will know if it is working.

Step Five: Run it for Four Weeks and Evaluate

Implement the change and observe. Each week, note:

- Is the capability being exercised more than it was before?
- What resistance have you encountered, and where is it coming from?

- What would have been lost if you had not made this change?

At the end of four weeks, ask: what is one more protection worth adding? The goal is not a single intervention but a practice of asking, regularly and deliberately, what we are designing for when we

Reflection prompt:

Think about the people on your team who are most valued right now. What makes them irreplaceable? How much of that is technical, and how much of it is something else: the way they read a room, the quality of their judgment in hard moments, the trust they have built over time? Now ask: Is your organization designed to develop those qualities in the next generation of people coming up, or is it designed to extract technical output and hope the rest takes care of itself? What is one thing you