

FRICTION

SYSTEMIC Values That Do Something

The Experiment: The Values Stress Test

Duration: Two weeks

Time required: 45 minutes upfront, 10 minutes per week during the experiment, 15 minutes to evaluate at the end

Goal: Identify where your organization's stated values are backed by observable behavior and where they are not, and make one value more legible and real.

Step One: Map the Gap (30 Minutes to Start)

Take your organization's stated values or your team's and for each one write honest answers to these questions:

- Can you name a specific recent decision or trade-off where this value visibly shaped the outcome?

- Can you name a moment where this value was tested and the organization chose it over the easier path?

- If a new employee asked you what this value looks like in practice, what would you say?

Values with strong answers are alive. Values with thin or vague answers are ceremonial. Circle the ones with thin answers. Those are your candidates for the experiment.

Step Two: Choose One Value to Operationalize (15 Minutes)

Pick one ceremonial value and do two things with it.

First, rewrite it as a behavioral sentence. Not a word or a phrase, but a specific description of what it looks like when someone is living this value at work. Examples:

- “Integrity” becomes “We surface problems early, even when it is uncomfortable, rather than waiting until they are unavoidable.”
- “Innovation” becomes “We run small tests before committing large resources, and we treat a well-designed failure as useful information.”
- “People first” becomes “When we make a decision that affects someone’s role or workload, we tell them directly and early, not through rumor or organizational announcement.”

Second, find or create one story that illustrates the value in action: a real decision, a real trade-off, a real moment where someone chose the value and the organization recognized them for it. If you cannot find one, that is important information.

Step Three: Put it in Circulation (Two Weeks)

Find one natural opportunity per week to use the behavioral version of the value in a real context. In a team meeting, a one-on-one, a hiring conversation, or a performance discussion. You are not giving a speech about values. You are using the specific language in a specific moment. Note when you did it and how people responded.

Step Four: Evaluate (15 Minutes at End of Week Two)

Ask yourself:

- Did the behavioral framing make the value more useful in conversation?
- Did naming it in specific moments change anything about how the team talked about decisions?
- What would it take to make this the default language in your organization rather than the exception?

Reflection prompt:

Think about the last significant decision your organization made that was difficult or costly. Which of your stated values showed up in that decision, and which ones quietly stepped aside? What does that tell you about the actual hierarchy of values in your system, and what is one thing you could do this week to close the gap by even a small amount?