

FRICTION

SYSTEMIC

Your People System Is One Thing

The Experiment: The Connected System Audit

Duration: Four to six weeks

Time required: 2 hours 15 minutes upfront, one hour per week during the experiment, one hour to evaluate at the end

Goal: Identify where your organization's people functions are operating in isolation and design one integration that treats development, effectiveness, and talent as levers on the same system.

Step One: Map Your Current People System (45 Minutes)

Gather the leaders of your talent, L&D, OD, and HR business partner functions, or the equivalent in your organization. If you are working alone, do this as a thought exercise first and then validate with others.

Draw a simple map of your people functions and answer these questions for each one:

- What is this function trying to accomplish this year?

- What does success look like for this function, and how is it measured?

- Which other functions does this one depend on to succeed?

- Where does this function make decisions without input from the others?

Look for the gaps. Where are functions working in parallel without coordination? Where is one function solving a problem that another function created? Where are people in your organization experiencing the seams between these functions as friction, confusion, or inconsistency?

Step Two: Apply the Burke-Litwin Lens (30 Minutes)

Identify two or three organizational variables your people functions are currently touching. For each one, ask:

- What other variables does this one connect to in the model?
- Are those connected variables being actively considered in how we are designing this work?
- Where are we pulling on one string without accounting for what moves on the other end?

Write down the two most significant disconnections you find. These are your design targets.

Step Three: Design One Integration (One Hour, with the Right People in the Room)

Choose one decision, initiative, or planning process that currently happens inside a single function and redesign it as a cross-functional conversation. It does not need to be large. Examples:

- Bring talent acquisition and L&D into the same conversation about what capabilities the organization needs to hire for versus develop from within.
- Connect the OD culture work to the performance management cycle so that the behaviors being assessed in reviews reflect the culture being built.
- Create a shared intake process for major people initiatives so that no significant intervention gets designed without a brief systems check across functions.

For your chosen integration, write down: who needs to be in the room, what decision or process you are redesigning, and what coordination mechanism will keep it connected over time.

Step Four: Run the Integration for Four Weeks

Implement the cross-functional process you designed. Each week, note:

- What decisions were made differently because the right people were in the room?
- Where did integration create friction of its own — turf, process, or language differences?
- What would have happened to this decision if the functions had handled it separately?

Step Five: Evaluate and Expand (One Hour at End of Week Four)

Look back at your notes and ask:

- Did the integration produce better decisions, faster alignment, or fewer downstream surprises?
- What is the minimum ongoing structure needed to keep these functions coordinated without creating a new bureaucracy?
- Which of your two design targets still needs attention?

Decide on one permanent change to how your people functions coordinate, even a small one, and put it on the calendar.

Reflection prompt:

Think about a people initiative in your organization that did not land the way you expected. A development program that did not change behavior. A hiring push that created culture strain. A change effort that stalled. Looking at the Burke-Litwin model, which connected variables were not accounted for in the design? What would you do differently if you were starting today with the whole system in view?