

Leadership Worksheet - Safe-to-Fail Experiment Design Template

Use this simple template to design one “above the float line” test for your current challenge.

What Does “Above the Float Line” Mean?

The concept comes from a maritime metaphor: the float line is the waterline on a ship, holes above it may cause inconvenience but won’t sink the vessel. Holes below the float line? Catastrophic.

In organisational change, “above the float line” experiments are small, contained tests that won’t destabilise the system if they fail. They offer a safe space for innovation and learning, ideal for navigating complexity without triggering organisational fear or resistance.

Designing Experiments

1. Hypothesis (What do you want to learn?)

What’s your idea or assumption?

“If we [action], then we’ll see [result]...”

2. Purpose (Why does this matter?)

What problem are you trying to explore or address?

Keep it short and grounded in real outcomes.

3. Scope (How small and safe is this?)

- Where will you test it?
- Who will it affect (max)?
- How will you make sure it’s reversible?

4. Early Signals (How will you know it’s working?)

List 2–3 observable indicators or weak signals of success/failure.

e.g. Increased engagement, reduced errors, more voluntary participation



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5. Stakeholders (Who needs to be informed or involved?)

- Sponsor or approver
- Test team or pilot group
- Who might resist or influence outcomes?

6. Timeline (How long will you run it?)

Keep it short—between 1 and 4 weeks.

7. Reflection and Adaptation Plan

- When and how will you review what happened?
- Who will you involve in the review?
- What would make you decide to stop, pivot, or scale?

Ready to go further?

Would you like a second pair of eyes before launching?

👉 [Book](#) a 30-minute Safe-to-Fail Review Session. I'll help you sharpen your experiment and make sure it stays above the float line.



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