SOUTHPAC
international
group

GUIDE

Micro experiments

A practical guide to challenging the status quo and stepping towards better safety practices.

About this guide

Creating change in organisations that are set in their ways may seem impossible. Without influence, resources, or approval, meaningful improvements may feel out of reach.

Micro experiments offer a practical, low-risk way to **get started** with the change you want to see. They allow you to test new ideas within your control, gather insights, and build momentum—without waiting for approval or large-scale resources. Instead of striving for perfect solutions, you can start small, learn quickly, and amplify what works.

This guide helps you build your own micro experiments to challenge the status quo, step towards improvement, and unlock new pathways for safety innovation.

Let’s get creative.

What are micro experiments?

Unlike traditional, linear approaches to change which often have predefined outcomes, micro experiments thrive on adaptability and discovery. Their goal is to test new ways of working with minimal investment, allowing for wrong turns without major risk.

More than just small-scale changes, micro experiments help reveal system responses, challenge assumptions, and expand what's seen as possible. They serve as both a **learning tool** and an **intervention**—shaping change through exploration rather than rigid planning.

When should you use them?

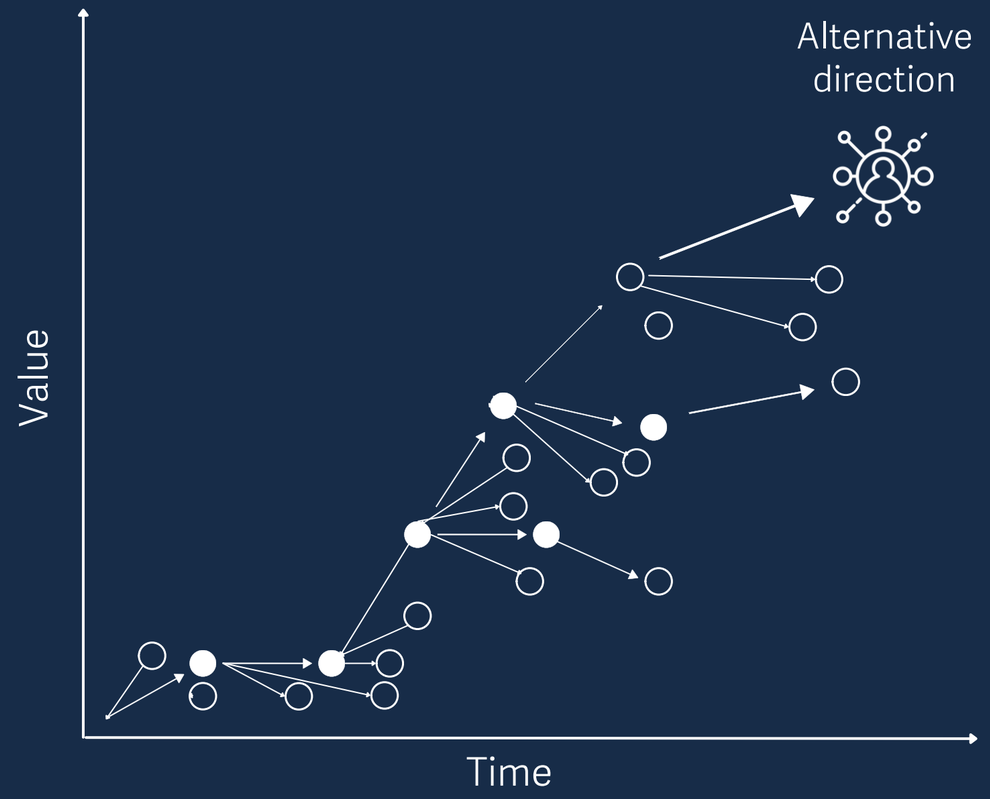
When you're not sure about what will work.
If you’re unsure of the best path forward, micro experiments provide a structured way to explore options.

When you have limited resources or authority.
If you operate in a setting with constrained resources or lack the authority to implement broad changes, micro experiments enable you to make progress within your sphere of influence.

To bypass resistance to change.
In organisations where established practices and entrenched mindsets dominate, micro experiments allow you to test ideas subtly, often bypassing resistance that might arise from proposing large-scale transformation. It's a way to show what's possible, without telling.

How are they different?

Here are a few ways in which micro experiments differ from traditional change methods.



They explore a direction, not a destination.
Think of them as tools for discovery rather than delivery. Each experiment provides valuable insights that shape your next steps, helping you refine your approach over time.

They stretch the solution space.
By creating small but noticeable differences, micro experiments help stretch traditional ways of thinking by introducing alternatives that challenge assumptions and spark curiosity.

They start at the edges.
Micro experiments work best at the edges, in areas with more flexibility and less resistance, where small shifts can happen without triggering immediate pushback. By working where there's room to experiment, you create faster, smarter, and more impactful pathways for change.

Designing your micro experiments

To design an effective micro experiment, follow this simple recipe:

① **Start with a direction or idea** -----> When designing a micro experiment in safety, begin with a broad, flexible direction that has the potential to address the challenges or opportunities in your workplace. Instead of trying to implement a rigid solution, think about what you want to explore. Maybe it's improving how safety conversations happen, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, or shifting from compliance-driven safety to a learning-focused approach.

↳ **Practical tip:** Sense check your idea with a few people for feedback on whether the idea could be useful or successful.

Here are some examples of starting directions.

Status quo		Direction to explore
Seeing people as the source of trouble	---->	Seeing people as problem solvers
Creating information overload	---->	Enabling people to focus on what matters
Acting on people	---->	Acting on the system
Providing proof for external approval	---->	Maintaining transparency for shared discovery
Assuming that ‘one size fits all’	---->	Designing around local demand, flow, value
Detecting and correcting deviations	---->	Creating double loop learning

Designing your micro experiments

② Design a test scenario -----→

Once you have a direction, the next step is to test it in a real-world context. Choose a specific setting where you can trial a small but meaningful change —something practical and achievable within your sphere of influence.

Define the scope clearly:

a. **Where will it happen?** (e.g. one team, one site, one shift)
b. **Who will be involved?** (e.g. frontline workers, supervisors)
c. **How long will it run?** (e.g. once, one week, until a specific milestone)
d. **What resources are needed?** (e.g. briefing materials, simple tracking tools, facilitator guidance)

↳ **Practical tip:** Remember to keep the changes within your span of control. If you're unable to run the experiment you've designed, you need to redesign the experiment to make it fit within what you can get done.

Designing your micro experiments

③ Assess potential outcomes ----->

Before launching your micro experiment, take a moment to consider the possible outcomes—both positive and negative. What are the best-case scenarios? What unexpected benefits might emerge? Just as importantly, what are the risks, and how might things go wrong?

Ensure that even the worst possible outcome is manageable and won't cause harm, operational disruption, or compliance issues. This keeps the experiment within a **safe-to-fail** zone, where setbacks become learning opportunities rather than critical failures.

↳ **We've included a template you can use on the next slide.**

A micro-experiment for:

Example: Pre-starts

What we will explore (direction)

If we make these changes...

Example: If we enable frontline employees to talk more about what matters in their work, our pre-start meetings will be more engaging.

Could this be useful?

How we will do it (design)

By...

Example: Running an alternative pre-start meeting in which one crew does a show and tell of their work for the day task. Safety messages are shared at the end of the meeting.

We will try this once, on site X, next week, when I'm visiting site.

Can you make this happen?

Things to monitor (assess)

This could lead to...

Example: Better understanding and connection between different trades. (Best outcome)

Example: Workers will be too cautious to share how they perform tasks. (Worst outcome)

Is it safe to fail?

Executing your micro experiments

Once your micro experiment is designed, execution is where learning happens. Here's how to ensure a smooth process:

Stay close to the action

- Be present where the experiment is happening to observe real-time responses.
- Seek informal feedback from those involved and adjust as needed.

Keep it quick and adaptable

- Avoid excessive approvals or paperwork. Micro experiments should be easy to implement.
- Be prepared to tweak the approach based on early feedback rather than waiting for the "perfect" solution.

Executing your micro experiments

Make it relevant and engaging

- Frame the experiment as an opportunity for improvement, or trying something new, not just another task.
- Keep the tone open and engaging to create space for exploration and curiosity.

Capture insights in the moment

- Don’t wait until the end—document observations as they happen.
- Pay attention to both expected and unexpected responses, including unintended consequences.

Involve the right people

- Ensure key stakeholders or decision-makers are aware of the experiment, even if they are not directly involved.
- Engage frontline workers early, as their experiences will provide the most valuable insights.

Analysis

After running a micro experiment, it's time to reflect on what you learnt.

Here's a simple learning analysis grid to group your insights.

Delights What worked well? What created value or engagement?	**Frustrations** What hindered progress? What caused resistance or inefficiency?
Surprises What unexpected outcomes emerged? Were there unintended consequences?	**Questions** What remains unresolved? What assumptions need further testing?

Taking action

Micro experiments are about continuously learning from what works, and what doesn't.

With the insights from your experiments, you can **amplify** what enhances workplace safety, increases engagement, or improves hazard awareness. Conversely, you may need to **dampen** what introduces confusion resistance, or unintended risks. This could mean adjusting messaging, refining an approach, or discontinuing a particular change.

Through refinement, safety teams can create more effective and sustainable improvements without forcing rigid solutions.

Ideas for micro experiments

These are all real examples from safety professionals who attended our Safety Re-crafted workshops.

- **Remove LTIFR** from company intranet to see if/when someone notices.
- **Give financial autonomy** to the Health & Safety committee in deciding how to invest $5,000 to improve their work environment.
- **Make PPE hard hats optional** within certain areas, and ask why people are wearing them or not.
- **Ask frontline workers** where they think the next incident is likely to happen.
- **Invite a leader** to spend two hours doing frontline work.

CASE STUDY

Re-crafting pre-starts through micro experimentation

A group of safety leaders designed a micro-experiment to shift pre-start meetings from static, top-down sessions to dynamic, worker-led discussions through the introduction of a walk-through talk-through approach.

Read what happened when the idea was tested on-site.

Final tips

- By testing multiple ideas simultaneously, you can identify promising directions while minimising risks.
- Small, actionable steps can inspire momentum and gradually build support for broader initiatives.
- Gather data and stories from the micro experiment to build a case for wider engagement.
- Keep it small, embrace iteration, and refine as you go.
- Set a time limit or end date to remind yourself that you are not designing a perfect solution.
- **Have fun.** The best fuel for a micro experiment is the energy you bring to it.

Acknowledgements

This guide has been produced by Southpac International Group, with inspiration from the following sources:

- Berger, J. G., & Johnston, K. (2015). Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders. Stanford Business Books.
- Flyvbjerg, B., & Gardner, D. (2023). How Big Things Get Done: The Surprising Factors That Determine the Fate of Every Project, from Home Renovations to Space Exploration and Everything In Between. Crown.
- Sims, P. (2011). Little Bets: How Breakthrough Ideas Emerge from Small Discoveries. Simon & Schuster.
- Snowden, D. (2022). The Cynefin Framework: An Introduction. Cognitive Edge.

Join others in creating micro experiments to address shared challenges in safety.

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