

Dao at Work

A 20-minute team check-in for flow

This short guide translates a few ideas from The Power of the Dao into practical team language: energy, patterns, simplicity, timing, and harmony. Use it to surface friction, improve flow, and agree one small experiment.

When to use it

At the start of a project, after a busy period, when the team feels overloaded, or when work has become more forced than fluid.

Also useful after recurring meeting frustration, avoidable rework, or tension around ownership and pace.

Ground rules

Keep it short. Hear every voice once. Ask before asserting. Choose one experiment, not five.

The goal is not philosophical agreement. The goal is better work, with less avoidable friction.

Quick team scan

Invite each person to mark one colour for each row: red = clear issue, amber = mixed, green = working well.

Lens	Prompt	Red	Amber	Green
Energy (yin-yang)	Are we overloading people, over-directing, or running too hot for too long?			
Patterns (li)	What recurring friction, delay, or confusion keeps repeating?			
Natural flow (ziran)	Where are we forcing something that does not fit the reality on the ground?			
Simplicity (pu)	What have we made too complex, noisy, or cluttered?			
Effortless action (wuwei)	What one change would make good work easier rather than harder?			
Harmony (he)	Do the right people have the right clarity, timing, and voice?			

The main friction point we will discuss

Pick one row only - ideally the one with the strongest shared signal.

What success would look like in two weeks

Make it observable, behavioural, and specific.

Suggested 20-minute agenda

- 2 minutes - Frame the conversation. Name the purpose and the ground rules.
- 4 minutes - Silent scan. Everyone reviews the six lenses and marks their view.
- 6 minutes - Compare signals. Where is there strongest agreement? Where are views most different?
- 5 minutes - Discuss one friction point only. Stay concrete: examples, not abstractions.
- 3 minutes - Choose one small experiment, one owner, and one review date.

Facilitator prompts

- Where are we using too much force and too little space?
- What keeps happening again and again - even though we keep treating it as a one-off?
- What are we trying to push through that may need a different sequence, setting, or pace?
- What can we stop, simplify, shorten, or make clearer this week?
- Where do we need more listening, more clarity, or better timing between people?
- What one small experiment would make the next seven days feel lighter and more effective?

Manager moves that improve the conversation

- Send the topic in advance if the issue is sensitive.
- Start by asking everyone the same opening question so every voice enters early.
- Ask before asserting; assume there may be another explanation.
- Invite quieter people in without putting them on the spot.
- If the discussion becomes abstract, ask for the last real example.
- End with one owner, one date, and one behavioural change the team will be able to notice.

Our one experiment

Owner and review date

What we will watch for

How will we know the experiment is helping? Think meeting quality, handoffs, energy, pace, ownership, or fewer recurring irritations.
