Spot the waste in office work

Page 1: what to look for

Follow one real item from arrival to done, or sit with someone while they do the work. Each time you see one of these, add a mark and a note. You are there to learn about the process, never to check on people.

What you followed

Team or process

Item followed
One real, recent item, not a typical one from memory.

Date

When work moves between people and tools

Is the work stuck, moving, piling up, or is a person hunting?

Kind of waste	In Lean	Signs in office work	Quick test	Seen *One mark each time.*	Where, and what exactly?
Waiting	waiting	An item stuck behind an approval, a reply or a system. People chasing for a status update.	Is one item or one person stuck behind something specific?		
Handoffs	transportation	Work forwarded from team to team. A file exported from one tool and loaded into another.	Does the work itself move between people, teams or tools?		
Backlog	inventory	A shared inbox or ticket queue that grows week on week. Drafts started and parked.	Are you describing the pile as a whole, not one stuck item?		
Searching and switching	motion	Hunting for the latest version or for who owns something. Switching between tabs to finish one task.	Does one person travel between places to do their own task?		

When effort goes into the wrong things

Everyone involved may be busy and working hard. Look at what the effort produces.

Kind of waste	In Lean	Signs in office work	Quick test	Seen *One mark each time.*	Where, and what exactly?
Errors and rework	defects	A request sent back for missing details. A report corrected after it went out.	Was something wrong or incomplete, so it has to be done again?		
Work nobody uses	overproduction	A weekly report nobody opens. Work prepared before anyone asked, then redone.	Does anyone use this output, now?		
Extra steps	extra-processing	The same data typed into a second system. A sign-off that has never changed a decision.	The output is used: does it take more effort than its purpose needs?		
Skills not used	non-utilised talent	Specialists keying data or resetting passwords. A problem raised every week with nowhere to take the idea.	Does the work need what this person knows, and can their ideas go anywhere?		

> **Describe the process, never a person. Ask before watching a screen, note the kind of information on it but never a customer's details, and do not fix or correct anything on the spot.**

Template by KaizenProof · CC BY 4.0

Spot the waste in office work

Page 2: what you saw

One row per thing you saw. Write what happened to the work, not who did it. Most real frictions show more than one waste: name the main one, and a second only if it is really there.

Seen where the work is done (in Lean: gemba)

No.	Which step, in which tool?	What happened to the work? *Stuck, moving, piling up, or a person hunting.*	Kind of waste *Use the names on page 1.*	How do you know? *Dates, counts, the screen you watched.*
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Afterwards

What did the people doing the work say was missing when you showed them your notes?

They are the experts on their step.

Which one thing you saw will you write up first as a problem?

Pick the one where the work waits or goes wrong most often, and start from where the problem begins, not where it is noticed.

Template by KaizenProof · CC BY 4.0