BROWN PAPER EXERCISE

SEE THE WORK. UNDERSTAND REALITY. FIND OPPORTUNITY.

A Brown Paper Exercise is a team-based method to visually map the current state of a process on the wall using sticky notes. It exposes how work really flows so we can improve what matters most.

GOLDEN RULE
Map what actually happens, not what should happen.

HOW TO DO IT – 12 SIMPLE STEPS

SETUP

1. **DEFINE SCOPE** – Clarify process boundaries, objectives, and outcomes.
2. **GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE** – Include frontline and cross-functional participants.
3. **SET UP THE WALL** – Use brown paper across the wall. Left to right flow. Use sticky notes.

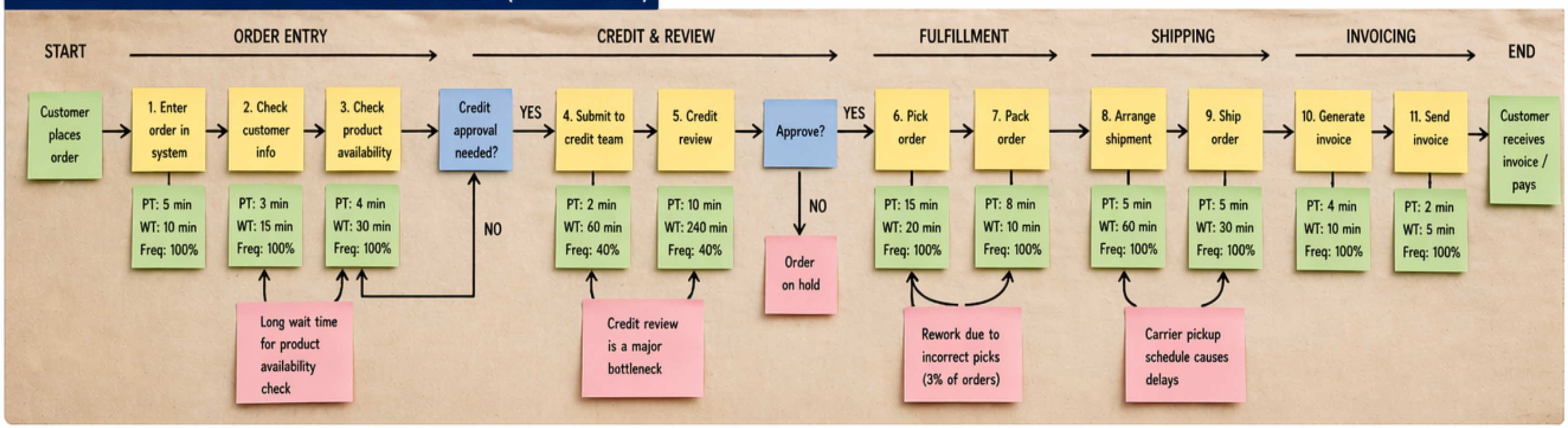
MAP REALITY (FOLLOW THE WORK)

4. **MAP CURRENT STATE** – Document every step as it actually happens – include hand-offs, decisions, and delays.
5. **BE THE THING** – Go see the work. Validate each step by observing real work (Gemba).
6. **CAPTURE DATA** – Record time, wait time, frequency, volume, error rates, and queue time.
7. **IDENTIFY PROBLEMS** – Mark bottlenecks, rework, delays, confusion, waste, and customer pain points.

SYNTHESIZE & UNDERSTAND

8. **CLASSIFY VALUE (VA / NVA / NVAR)** – Classify each step as Value Add (VA), Non-Value Add (NVA), or Necessary Non-Value Add (NVAR).
9. **IDENTIFY BOTTLENECKS** – Identify constraints and steps that limit flow or create the most delay.
10. **CAPTURE ISSUES (PARKING LOT)** – Capture open questions, missing data, constraints, policy and system limitations.
11. **VALIDATE THE MAP** – Walk the map end-to-end. Confirm accuracy and agree this is reality.
12. **SUMMARIZE INSIGHTS** – Identify key pain points, gaps, opportunities, and the biggest waste.

EXAMPLE BROWN PAPER MAP – ORDER TO CASH PROCESS (CURRENT STATE)



PARKING LOT – ISSUES

- Why do we have to re-key order in system?
- Can we automate credit checks for lower risk?
- Do we need 2 approvals for every order?
- System does not show real-time inventory

LEGEND (VALUE CLASSIFICATION)

VA	**VALUE ADD** The customer would be willing to pay for it.
NVA	**NON-VALUE ADD** Does not add value and can be eliminated.
NVAR	**NECESSARY NON-VALUE ADD** Required today but does not add value (reduce if possible).

- Process Step (yellow)
- Decision (blue)
- Data / Time (green)
- Problem / Pain Point (pink)

KEY OUTPUTS

- Shared understanding of the current state
- Visible problems, delays and waste
- Data-backed view of time, wait and flow
- Foundation for prioritization and improvement

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Stay in scope – do not map the entire company.
- One sticky note = one step.
- Keep it simple. Don't solve. Just understand.
- Engage everyone. Use the team's knowledge.
- Validate the map before moving to solutions.

LOOK FOR:

- Long waits
- High hand-offs
- Rework / loops
- Approvals
- Handoffs
- Complexity

BROWN PAPER EXPOSES REALITY. REALITY DRIVES BETTER DECISIONS. BETTER DECISIONS DRIVE RESULTS.