



Improvement Cymru Academy Toolkit Guide



Gemba

What is a Gemba?

The term “Gemba” comes from Japanese, meaning “the real place”. In Lean management, “Gemba” is the most important place for a team as it is **the place where the real work happens**. As an example, quite simple the “Gemba” for nurses working in a hospital are the wards or departments they work in.

Rationale

The Gemba walk is an essential part of the lean management philosophy. Its’ initial purpose is to allow managers and leaders to observe the actual work process, engage with employees, gain knowledge about the work process and explore opportunities for continuous improvement.

When to use Gemba?

There are 3 important elements of this tool:

1. **Go and see.** The main idea of the Gemba walk is for managers and leaders to take regular walks around the working environment and to be involved in finding wasteful activities, such as walking from one ward to another to print off essential information. (TIMWOODS is a useful tool to identify waste, please see Academy TIMWOODS toolkit guide)
2. **Ask why.** A Gemba walk's main objective is to explore the value stream, which is the set of actions that take place to add value to a customer from the initial request through realisation of value by the customer which is a set of actions that take place to add value for the patient / service user from the initial request through realisation of value by the patient / service user. The concept of value focusses on how much your product or service is valued as perceived by the patient/service user.

3. **Respect people.** Keep in mind that a Gemba walk is not a “boss walk”. Pointing fingers and blaming people is not the right thing to do. You are not there to judge and review results but to understand and engage with the people working on the process or task, to create opportunities for improvement. You are there to collaborate with the team and find problems together. Try to focus on finding the weak spots of the process, not on the people.

One of the tools that can be helpful to identify problematic parts of the process is ‘5 Whys’ which is a simple improvement tool which can help identify the source of an issue or the root cause of a problem, without statistical analysis. It is an iterative method that repeatedly asks the question ‘why?’, (please see Academy 5 WHY toolkit guide for further info).

How to use?

There are 7 helpful steps to use for the Gemba process

Pick a theme

1. When you use Gemba, you must choose a theme. This will help you focus all your efforts and be effective. There are different themes you may want to explore, such as productivity, cost efficiency, patient safety etc. To be as precise as possible, you will also need to prepare a list of questions you are going to ask. (Please see checklist in Figure 1)

Prepare your team

2. The team to be observed should be prepared in advance. All team members need to have a clear understanding that the Gemba walk is a common process where the final destination is continuous improvement. This way, employees or colleagues will feel much more comfortable and willing to collaborate.

Focus on the process not the people

3. You need to remember that a Gemba walk is not the right time to evaluate performance of the team. The main purpose is to observe, understand, and improve the process. If you focus on people’s personal abilities, you will only face resistance.

Be where the value stream is

4. Following the value chain will give you the best opportunities to identify areas with a high potential for wasteful activities. Eliminating those activities will help you improve the overall performance of the process.

Record your observations . Don't make suggestions during the walk.

5. Write down everything that grabs your attention or even record it with your smartphone or notepad. In some cases, you will probably be tempted to offer a solution immediately, but this would be wrong. Leave the analysis for later. You will be much more informed once you have all the information. Furthermore, the broad overview can offer you opportunities to use an effective testing change process such as the PDSA cycle (Please see Academy Testing Changes toolkit guide).

Add an extra pair of eyes

6. It may be a good idea to invite a colleague from another department or area. Someone with totally different daily tasks. Someone who is less familiar with the processes will usually have a fresh perspective and ask different questions that you may never ask. There is no such thing as a silly question!

Follow up

Even if you don't find anything significant during your Gemba walk, you need to share with the team what you have learned or seen. Otherwise, the team will have the feeling of being watched. If you are going to act after the walk, inform the team about the upcoming changes and why they are necessary and work with them to create opportunities for improvement.

What next?

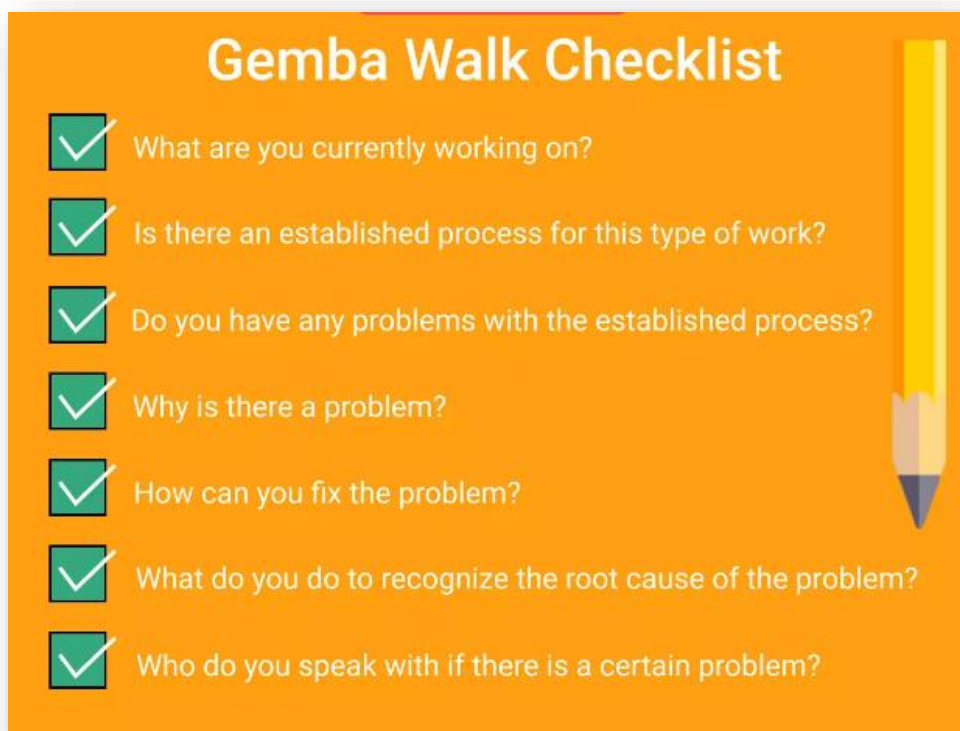
Other tools to support the Gemba such as a TIMWOODS waste methodology and Fishbone or even Process Mapping to help you map out the process from the start to the end, giving you an understanding of the “bigger picture”.

Helpful tips

By including the team who work in the respective area, you can raise awareness and ownership of the standards to continuously improve. Be respectful and empathetic when carrying out the Gemba walk and explain this is a process to improve, not an audit or checklist against a defined standard.

Please use the Gemba checklist to guide you on your Improvement journey in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 – Gemba checklist pre Gemba walk



Additional resources

If you would like to learn more about making improvement to your workplace take a look at our website for additional toolkit guides and training we offer you:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/improvement-cymru/improvement-cymru-academy/> or email us Improvement Cymru Academy (Public Health Wales) improvementcymruacademy@wales.nhs.uk to find about the improvement courses we can offer.

References

[Gemba Walk: Where the Real Work Happens \(kanbanize.com\)](https://kanbanize.com) Accessed 16 February 2023.

[What is GEMBA? The Lean and Kaizen Term, Defined and Introduced \(btoes.com\)](https://btoes.com) Accessed 16 February 2023.

[Gemba Walk - What Is and How to Conduct - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (Accessed 23 June 2023)

