

# 7 Time and Energy Leaks — and How to Fix Them

## Research-Backed for Small, Owner-Led Teams

*Updated October 16, 2025*

Tiny frictions that slow everything down — and simple fixes that make work feel lighter. Balance data and vibes; keep the tone calm, human, and practical.

### 1) Fuzzy ownership (role clarity)

**What it is:** People aren't sure who owns what; work stalls or boomerangs.

**Why it matters:** Role clarity is a strong predictor of engagement and burnout reduction; employees who strongly agree they know what's expected are **47% less likely** to experience frequent burnout (Gallup & Workhuman, 2024). [Source](#)

**Signals:** "I'm not sure who's on point," unclaimed tasks, double-work.

**Metric to track:** Percent of tasks with a single named owner (target  $\approx$  100%).

**Quick fix (today):** Add an **Owner** column to your task list; 1 person per task.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Draft lightweight **role cards** (purpose, top outcomes, decisions) and review them weekly.

### 2) Messy handoffs (lag time & dependencies)

**What it is:** Work finishes in one spot but doesn't reliably land with the next person.

**Why it matters:** Structured handoffs reduce errors and delays in complex environments; the I-PASS program cut adverse events by 23% in a large multicenter study (principle applies beyond healthcare). [Source](#)

**Signals:** "Where did that go?" status pings; orphaned deliverables.

**Metric to track:** Handoff lead time (finish  $\rightarrow$  received) and % of first-time-right handoffs.

**Quick fix (today):** Add to your task template: **"When done, it goes to → [person/place]"** and link where it landed.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Sketch a simple swimlane handoff map and add acceptance criteria at each handoff.

### 3) Duplicate work & "lost info" (no single source of truth)

**What it is:** People re-create or re-hunt information.

**Why it matters:** Knowledge workers historically spend huge time on email/search; McKinsey estimates ~28% on email and ~20% seeking info. [Source](#) Newer studies echo the burden of "work about work." [Asana 2025](#)

**Signals:** "Which doc is current?" multiple versions; copy/paste loops.

**Metric to track:** Time-to-find a canonical doc; number of duplicate docs retired.

**Quick fix (today):** Declare a single **Home** (Notion/Drive). Add a "Home" link on every project/page.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Define a light information architecture (names, owners, where things live) + mark canonical fields as "Official."

### 4) Tool sprawl (too many apps, scattered work)

**What it is:** Overlapping tools create extra places to look and decide.

**Why it matters:** Okta's 2025 *Businesses at Work*: the average number of apps per company reached **101** — the first time above 100. [Source](#) • [Report hub](#)

**Signals:** People ask "which tool do we use for...?"; multiple apps for the same job.

**Metric to track:** Apps per use-case; % of unused licenses.

**Quick fix (today):** Pick a default for each job (docs, chat, tickets) and archive one redundant app.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Quarterly "stack review": consolidate, de-license, and publish "how we use tools" rules.

### 5) No "Ready/Done" definitions (quality gates)

**What it is:** Work bounces for avoidable fixes because teams don't share the same bar.

**Why it matters:** A clear **Definition of Done** creates transparency about quality and reduces rework (Scrum Guide). [Source](#) • [Scrum.org explainer](#)

**Signals:** Frequent "almost there" feedback; unclear acceptance.

**Metric to track:** Rework rate (% items returned after handoff).

**Quick fix (today):** Add two fields to tasks: **Ready when...** / **Done when...**

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Tiny DoD per deliverable type (proposal, job aid, post) and pin it where work starts.

## 6) Rhythm gaps (meetings that drain vs. propel)

**What it is:** Decisions slip between weeks; meetings sprawl without purpose.

**Why it matters:** Executives spend nearly **23 hours/week** in meetings — more than double the 1960s; many are seen as unproductive (HBR). [Source](#)

**Signals:** "Could've been an email," repeat discussions, unclear owners.

**Metric to track:** Percent of meetings with agenda/outcomes; total meeting hours/week.

**Quick fix (today):** Add a 20-min weekly **Decisions-Only** block with owner + date for each decision.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** Standardize meeting types (cadence, inputs, outputs) and prune quarterly.

## 7) Uneven onboarding (slow ramp, repeat questions)

**What it is:** New teammates don't know what "good" looks like; ramp is inconsistent.

**Why it matters:** Effective onboarding shortens time-to-productivity and supports retention (SHRM). [Source](#) • [SHRM \(program impact\)](#)

**Signals:** Same questions from every new hire; missed early wins.

**Metric to track:** Time-to-first-win; 30/60/90 completion rate; manager check-ins held.

**Quick fix (today):** Publish a **Role Card** (purpose, outcomes, first win) + **Week-1 plan** with daily 15-min check-ins.

**Deeper fix (2–4 weeks):** 30/60/90 per role + buddy system + manager rhythm; capture FAQs into your Clarity Hub.

## How to pilot this (2 weeks)

1. Pick one workflow (highest pain).
2. Apply leaks #1–3 only this sprint (ownership, handoffs, single source).
3. Track the metrics above; write a 5-bullet “what changed” note.
4. Next sprint, add #5–7 (Definition of Done, rhythm, onboarding).
5. Publish your tiny before/after as a field note — inceptive marketing fuel.

Links above go to original sources: Gallup/Workhuman, I-PASS handoff study, McKinsey & Asana on knowledge-work time, Okta Businesses at Work (app sprawl), Scrum Guide (Definition of Done), HBR on meeting time, SHRM on onboarding.