WORKSHEET + WORKED EXAMPLE

# Find the Bottleneck

One constraint to test, a change around it, and a measure of the whole system.

30 minutes | Theory of Constraints · Five focusing steps

## Use it in three moves

1. Walk through the work with the people doing it. Look for evidence of the system limit.
2. Follow the five focusing steps in order; increasing capacity is not the first move.
3. Measure useful completed work and quality, then look again for a changed constraint.

### Define the flow and its useful output

Choose a start, an end, a customer or recipient, and one measure. A busy step is not necessarily the constraint.

### 1 · Identify the current constraint

Observe queues, completion rates, interruptions, policies, and demand. What supports this candidate? What would disprove it?

### 2 · Use the available capacity well

Before adding resources, remove avoidable interruptions, missing inputs, or rework around the constraint. Protect quality and rest.

# Find the Bottleneck

YOUR WORKING NOTES / CONTINUED

### 3 · Align the surrounding work

What should other steps stop starting, batch differently, or prepare to support the constraint? Do not optimize their activity counts in isolation.

### 4 · Increase capacity if still needed

If the earlier changes are insufficient, identify a supported investment, policy change, or additional capability. Who can decide?

### 5 · Recheck the whole flow

Name the owner, review date, output/quality measures, and signs that the constraint moved. Treat the result as learning.

# A question for me

Which local success measure could be making the whole flow worse?

# See one way through

FICTIONAL WORKED EXAMPLE / NOT THE ANSWER TO YOUR SITUATION

### Define the flow and its useful output

From a complete service request to a working fix accepted by the requester. Measure accepted fixes per week, with repeat failures as a quality check.

### 1 · Identify the current constraint

Review completes about six requests a week while twelve arrive. The queue grows there; release has spare capacity. Check whether rework or missing information explains the wait.

### 2 · Use the available capacity well

Prepare complete review packets and reserve two uninterrupted review windows. Stop sending half-ready requests into the queue.

### 3 · Align the surrounding work

Limit new drafting when the ready-for-review queue reaches six. Use spare drafting time to resolve missing evidence instead of producing more waiting work.

### 4 · Increase capacity if still needed

If review remains limiting after two weeks, propose cross-training one backup reviewer with protected practice time and a quality check.

### 5 · Recheck the whole flow

Service lead checks accepted fixes and repeat failures after two weeks. Observe the queues again; if review is no longer limiting, do not keep optimizing it by habit.

## The thinking behind it

Pressure on individuals can hide a limit created by a policy, missing information, or a shared resource. Give people room to show you how the work really moves.

Eliyahu M. Goldratt's Theory of Constraints uses five focusing steps: identify, exploit, subordinate, elevate, and repeat. The Goal, coauthored with Jeff Cox, helped popularize the approach in 1984. Here, "use available capacity well" and "align surrounding work" express the second and third steps in everyday language.

Lean Enterprise Institute · Theory of Constraints

Read You Have a Culture Problem by Nic Payne