Find Your Bottleneck

01 / YOUR WORKSHEET - fill in digitally or print

Choose one completed outcome. Use the same outcome unit and rate period for every step. Record effective capacity, not activity or utilization.

Completed outcome and rate period

Customer demand per period

Map the serial workflow

Step 1: name / effective capacity per period

Step 2: name / effective capacity per period

Step 3: name / effective capacity per period

Suspected limit and evidence (completed output / waiting work)

Small change to test / outcome measure / observation period

Ceiling = min(demand, each step capacity). Steady serial flow, one visit per step, no hidden shared resources. A capacity ceiling is not a forecast or profit estimate.

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02 / WORKED EXAMPLE - fictional cafe

Question: would another cashier increase completed drinks? One drink per order; rates are effective steady capacities per hour. All numbers are illustrative.

Step	Rate / hour	Role
Demand	100	Customer orders
Ordering	120	Order counter
Espresso	60	Current limit
Handoff	90	Finished-drink pickup

Compare the change

Current ceiling: min(100, 120, 60, 90) = 60 drinks/hour. Raising ordering to 160 leaves the ceiling at 60. Raising espresso to 80 lifts the ceiling to 80, if demand and the other capacities hold.

A useful small test

Protect preparation time at the espresso station, then measure correctly completed drinks per hour. Check whether queues, quality or downtime invalidate the capacity estimate. Do not purchase capacity based on this illustrative table alone.

What the model leaves out

Variable arrivals, parallel stations, shared staff, multiple drinks per order, product mix and rework can change actual results. Equal minimum rates create tied limits: raising only one may not help.

Framework: Theory of Constraints Institute, Five Focusing Steps. Original HBW example.

Open the framework source

Try it online: howbusinesseswin.com/resources/find-your-bottleneck/