



Invisible Inefficiencies

*The Business Process
Bottleneck Identifier*



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Most businesses have similar choke points, they just haven't spotted them yet.

That's what this guide is for.

Re-establish Efficiency by Finding Root Causes



A regional logistics company couldn't figure out why customer complaints had spiked. Orders were shipping late, and frontline staff were frustrated. After reviewing the issue, they found the root cause wasn't the product, the people, or even the software; it was a single step in a workflow. A form needed to be reviewed by one specific manager before the next stage could happen. If that person was away, distracted, or in meetings, the whole process stalled.

That bottleneck was costing the company an average of

three working days per order. Fixing it led to a 26% improvement in delivery times and freed up nearly two full-time salaries' worth of internal resources.

Most businesses have similar choke points, they just haven't spotted them yet.

That's what this guide is for. You'll map a process, spot hidden friction, and learn how people, tools, and approvals might be slowing things down more than you realise. Then we'll show you exactly what to do about it.

PART 1: MAP IT OUT IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Pick one recurring process that spans departments, approvals, or tools. Something that's often delayed, reworked, or misunderstood. Common examples include:

- Onboarding a new client
- Getting a proposal approved
- Launching a marketing campaign
- Processing payroll or expenses

Then walk through these questions:

1. What starts the process? (The trigger)
2. What steps happen next, and in what order?
3. Who touches the process at each stage?
4. What tools or documents are used along the way?
5. Where do things tend to get stuck?
6. Where is rework common, or work handed back for correction?

Writing this out forces clarity. Many teams assume they know how a process flows until they map it and realise each person had a slightly different understanding.

PART 2: WHERE THINGS BREAK DOWN: FOUR COMMON BOTTLENECK TYPES

Let's look at four key bottleneck categories with more depth. For each one, reflect on whether it exists in the process you just mapped.



People-Based Bottlenecks

What it is:

When one person (or one team) becomes the linchpin for multiple steps.

Why it happens:

Often due to knowledge hoarding, unclear delegation, or fear of mistakes. The organisation becomes dependent on a "go-to" person for progress.

Symptoms:

- Progress halts if someone is out sick or on leave
- Colleagues repeatedly ask "Have you checked with [person]?"
- Deadlines depend on one inbox

Fix it with:

- Shared documentation, not tribal knowledge
- Defined rules for delegation
- Cross-training within teams



Technology-Based Bottlenecks

What it is:

When systems don't talk to each other, and people bridge the gaps manually.

Why it happens:

Tools are added over time without a plan for integration or automation.

Symptoms:

- Staff copy/paste between platforms
- Reports are built by exporting and reformatting data
- Tools crash or slow down at key stages

Fix it with:

- Reviewing tool overlap and workflow compatibility
- Automating repetitive steps with low-code tools
- Replacing patchwork tools with scalable platforms



Approval-Based Bottlenecks

What it is:

When progress is blocked because someone needs to “sign off,” but approvals are inconsistent or slow.

Why it happens:

Risk aversion, lack of trust, or unclear authority boundaries.

Symptoms:

- Work waits days for approval with no updates
- Approvals are reversed or questioned late in the process
- There’s confusion over who is supposed to give final sign-off

Fix it with:

- Clear approval thresholds (e.g. “Escalate only if value > €X”)
- Transparent SLAs for reviewers (e.g. “Approve within 48 hours”)
- Delegated or conditional approvals where appropriate



Measurement-Based Bottlenecks

What it is:

When a lack of clear metrics leads to overprocessing, perfectionism, or misaligned expectations.

Why it happens:

Teams don’t know what “done” looks like or what speed is acceptable.

Symptoms:

- Endless tweaking of documents, assets, or decisions
- Projects that feel like they drag on forever
- No way to know how long things “should” take

Fix it with:

- Clear criteria for completion at each step
- Basic time-tracking or performance benchmarks
- Stakeholder alignment on purpose vs. polish

REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS (AND WHAT HELPED FIX THEM)

Scenario 1: Marketing Sign-Off Mayhem

A content agency found that every asset needed three levels of approval: creative, compliance, and legal. On paper, that was fine. In reality, no one knew who had the final say, and campaigns ran late. They solved it by assigning a single decision-maker and using a shared checklist before submission. Time-to-launch dropped by 40%.

Scenario 2: Finance Department Manual Hell

Payroll reporting involved exporting spreadsheets from four systems, manually reconciling them, then sending them for sign-off. They automated data collection using scripts and built a single dashboard, freeing up two days of work every pay cycle.

Scenario 3: Customer Service Stuck in Handoffs

Support tickets are passed between three teams depending on the category. But the categories were unclear. After mapping the process, they streamlined intake forms and trained the first-touch team better. The number of internal reassignments dropped by 70%.

WHAT GREAT LOOKS LIKE

Efficient processes aren't fast because they're rushed; they're fast because they're clear. In high-functioning teams:

- Each person knows what they're responsible for, and when
- Tools support work, not slow it down
- Approvals are streamlined and purposeful
- Progress is visible and measurable

And most importantly, the process isn't invisible. It's known, refined, and discussed, just like any other strategic asset.

BOTTLENECK IMPACT ESTIMATOR

Let's put numbers to the problem.

Pick one bottleneck you've identified and fill this in:

- How many times per week does this bottleneck occur? ____
- How much time is lost per instance? ____ minutes
- What's the average cost per hour of those involved? € ____

Formula:

Occurrences/week × Minutes lost ÷ 60 = Hours lost/week

Hours lost/week × Cost/hour = € ____ lost per week

Multiply this across multiple processes, and the cost adds up fast, not just in money, but in momentum.

SIMPLIFY, THEN STREAMLINE

Operational excellence doesn't require complexity. It starts with visibility. When you understand how work really flows (not how you hope it flows), you can spot unnecessary delays, clarify ownership, and scale without constant fire-fighting.

The best businesses fix bottlenecks before they break the business.

Want help turning your process map into a roadmap? Insodus helps organisations diagnose inefficiencies and redesign operations for speed, resilience, and human impact.

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