

Office pull: capacity, blocked work and aging

Count blocked work inside the declared active limit, choose the next action from capacity and age evidence, and retain explicit control of urgent exceptions.



A blocked request still occupies the system

Fictional administrative team: the agreed active-work limit is three requests, including blocked work. R1 and R2 are progressing, R3 awaits a required approval, and complete request R4 is ready to start. Coordinator Devon is asked to move R3 off the board so R4 can be admitted.

Your role and the reference condition

Office team coordinator with the approval owner.

Normal: Ready work is pulled when capacity is available; the team sees all accepted active work, its age and its blockers.

Gap: Moving the blocked card to an uncounted list would make the board appear to have capacity that the agreed rule does not provide.

Work within these conditions

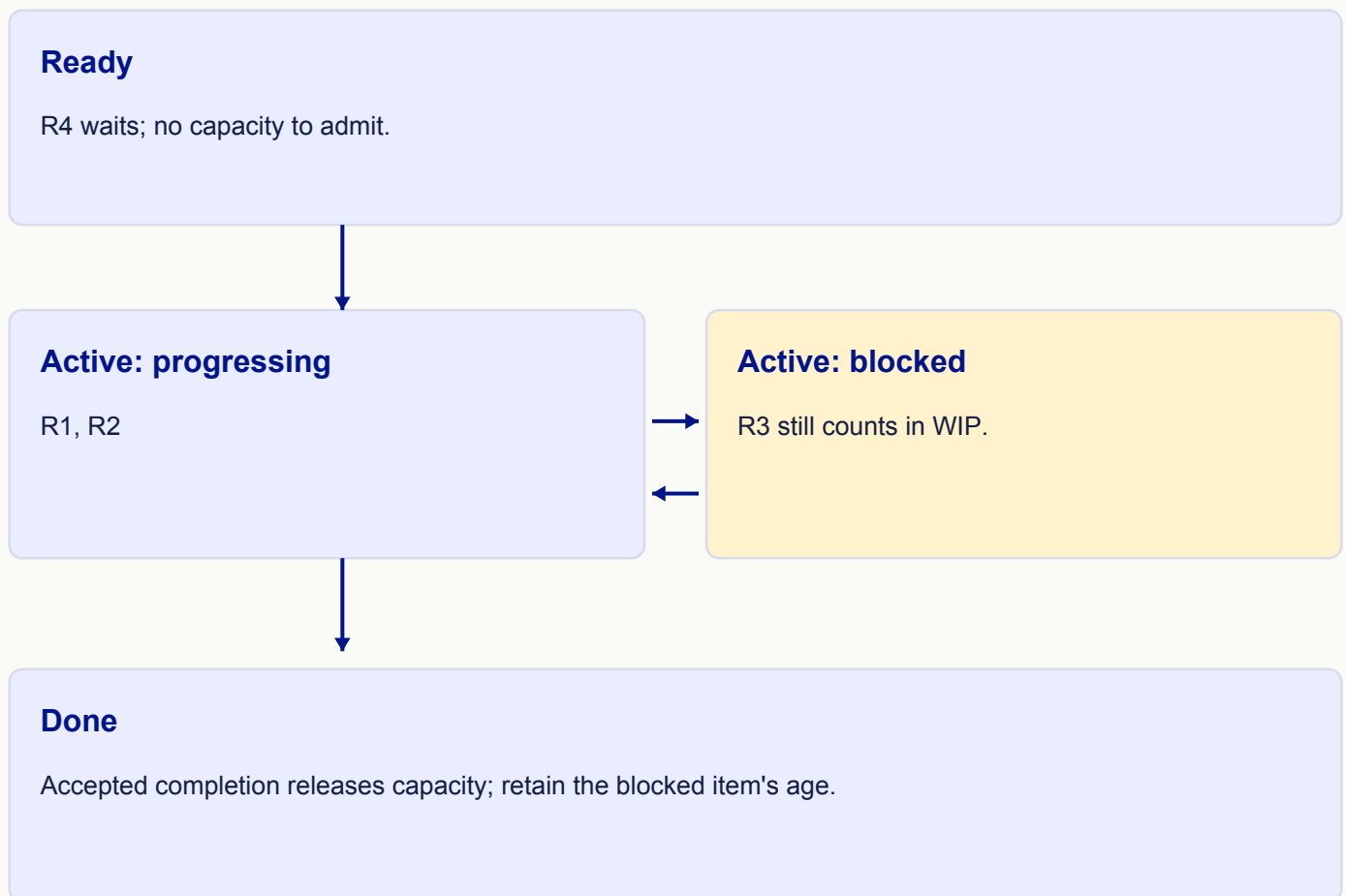
1. The limit of three is a local teaching policy, not a universal recommendation.
2. Blocked means accepted but unable to progress; it does not mean completed or canceled.

Fictional teaching case. Supplied observations support the exercise; proposed actions are not verified customer results.

See how the method works

A request board becomes useful when the team agrees what may enter active work, what completion means and what to do when progress stops. Begin with a provisional capacity limit, not a supposedly universal number. Keep blocked requests visible and counted so that the limit reflects real commitments. Review old work and remove obstacles before admitting more. A limit can expose a dependency that another team must help resolve. Judge the experiment by completed service, elapsed time and rework, not by how many tickets moved between columns. Urgent work needs an explicit exception policy.

Active WIP 2 + 1 blocked = 3 / limit 3



Ready > Active: Admit only with capacity
Active > Blocked: Blocked condition
Blocked > Active: Obstacle resolved
Active > Done: Verify done

A pull board keeps progressing and blocked work visible within the active limit. Labelled paths connect real completion to the next permitted start.

Follow the evidence and decisions

Inspect the supplied case inputs

Request	Status	Age / next evidence
R1	Progressing	1 working day; review due today
R2	Progressing	2 working days; calculation in progress
R3	Blocked	4 working days; approval owner contacted
R4	Ready, not active	Complete inputs; waiting for a slot
Policy	Active limit 3	Blocked work counts

01 / Count the declared boundary

Devon counts two progressing requests plus one blocked request. He records three active items against a limit of three and leaves R4 in Ready.

Why: A WIP limit is meaningful only when its entry, exit and blocked-work rules remain consistent. Relabeling work does not release capacity.

Evidence / check: 2 progressing + 1 blocked = 3 active; no ordinary slot for R4.

02 / Investigate age and the blocker

The team checks why R3 has waited four working days, whether the approval request was complete, and who can provide a decision. It records a next contact time rather than simply coloring the card red.

Why: Aging prompts a response to accepted work. The oldest item is not automatically the most urgent, but its wait needs an explanation.

Evidence / check: R3 has an approval owner, missing decision and next review time.

03 / Help finish or unblock before starting

Devon asks whether available colleagues can help R1 complete its review or assemble the missing approval evidence for R3. They retain each request's acceptance criteria.

Why: Starting more work can increase context switching while leaving completion unchanged. Helping finish must not bypass required checks.

Evidence / check: One named support action, with the request still counted until genuine completion.

04 / Admit the next eligible request visibly

When R1 is actually completed and its acceptance evidence recorded, the active count falls to two. The team then pulls R4 using its agreed ready-queue ordering rule.

Why: The release is linked to a real exit event, not to optimism that someone will finish later.

Evidence / check: R1 completed; R2 and R3 remain active; R4 admitted; count returns to three.

05 / Review the rule and recurring constraint

Record blocked age, completion rate and any exceptions over a representative period. If approval delays repeatedly occupy the limit, address that dependency with its owner.

Why: A board alone cannot remove a cross-team response failure. Changing the limit needs an explicit learning decision, not a hidden workaround.

Evidence / check: A review record names the recurring approval cause and a test of response reliability.

Completed admission and blocker record

Event	Active count	Decision
Initial review	3 of 3	R4 remains Ready
R3 blocker check	3 of 3	Owner and next contact visible
R1 accepted complete	2 of 3	One genuine slot opens
R4 pulled	3 of 3	R2/R3/R4 active
R3 moved off-screen only	Still 3 of 3	No new authorization

An urgent request cannot wait for the normal rule

An authorized service owner declares R5 urgent under the existing exception policy while all three slots remain occupied.

Decision

Use the documented exception: name its approver, identify which commitment changes, record the temporary count and set a review/exit condition.

Reasoning

Urgency may justify a controlled exception; hiding an extra start prevents the team from seeing its cost or restoring the normal limit.

What would change the decision?

Exception record identifies R5, approval, temporary WIP and displaced work.

Practise with a changed case

A larger limit with an apparent empty lane

Separate fictional case: active limit four, with S1 and S2 progressing and S3/S4 blocked. S5 is ready. S2 later completes with accepted output.

State	Evidence
Initial active work	2 progressing + 2 blocked
Limit	4, including blocked
Ready	S5
Later event	S2 accepted complete

Your task

1. Decide whether S5 may start at the initial review.
2. Show the count before and after S2 completes and S5 is pulled.
3. Name one useful blocker response and one unacceptable way to make a slot.

Use the next page to record your reasoning before reading the answer.

Your practice worksheet

A larger limit with an apparent empty lane

Counted states and limit

Admission decision

Real completion evidence

Blocker owner / next check

Exception, if any

Complete your reasoning before turning to the answer. Use the separate learner workbook for group practice.

Check your reasoning and transfer it

1. Initially $2 + 2 = 4$, so S5 does not enter under the ordinary rule.
2. S2 completion reduces WIP to 3; admitting S5 restores 4. Neither blocked item disappears from the count.
3. A useful response checks the missing input with its owner. Moving a blocked card to a private list or marking it done without acceptance evidence does not create legitimate capacity.

Suggested completed record

Event	Counted requests	Count / decision
Initial	S1/S2/S3/S4	4; do not start S5
S2 complete	S1/S3/S4	3; one slot
S5 admitted	S1/S3/S4/S5	4; limit restored

Plausible wrong turns

1. Blocked work is not spare capacity.
2. A WIP limit is not a promise that every item has equal effort or urgency.

Evidence of a sound answer

1. Count blocked work consistently.
2. Link admission to a real completion.
3. Expose exception and blocker ownership.

Take the learning back to work

Commitment	Agreed follow-through
Owner	Service team owner with cross-team approval counterpart
Record	Active-work history, blocker age, completion evidence and exception log
Review	At the daily work review and the agreed policy-learning review
Verification evidence	Honest WIP, improving completion/age and fulfilled acceptance criteria
If unresolved	Escalate repeated external waits; revise readiness, response or WIP policy with a visible hypothesis.

Help someone else apply the method

Prepare

1. Request cards and a three-slot board
2. Separate Ready area and blocker-response log

Minutes	Activity and coaching prompt
4	Define the active boundary Does changing a card's location change its commitment?
7	Work the three-slot case What can the team do before starting R4?
9	Run the four-slot and urgency variants Which evidence legitimately creates a slot?
5	Transfer the rule Who owns a blocker outside this team?

Debrief

1. Ask learners to describe an explicit exception without making it the normal route.
2. Check whether age is measured consistently and used without blaming the assignee.

Individual or remote practice

Count every accepted request on paper, then narrate the admission event and the unresolved blocker.

Connect the method and check its boundaries

Before application

1. Known request types
2. Team can alter admission rules

Outside this lesson

1. Moving blocked work off-board does not reduce WIP
2. A universal WIP number is not prescribed

LEI: Supplement to Learning to See

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FIFO work release and bounded queues in service workflows

Method reference; original OPEX scenario and diagram are synthetic teaching content, not source case results.

[Open this lesson and its visual aids](#)