

TOC five focusing steps

Apply the five focusing steps to a stated system outcome, distinguish using existing capacity from adding capacity, and return to identification when the limiting condition moves.



Improving the old constraint can become inertia

Fictional pump route: customer demand is 90 accepted units per shift. Comparable effective capacities are cutting 110, finishing 70 and final test 85. Manager Priya initially identifies finishing as the limiting stage. A controlled improvement later demonstrates finishing at 95, while final test remains 85.

Your role and the reference condition

System owner coordinating the affected process leaders.

Normal: Improvement increases reliable system delivery while maintaining quality and other necessary conditions.

Gap: The team plans another finishing investment even after final test has become the lower-capacity stage.

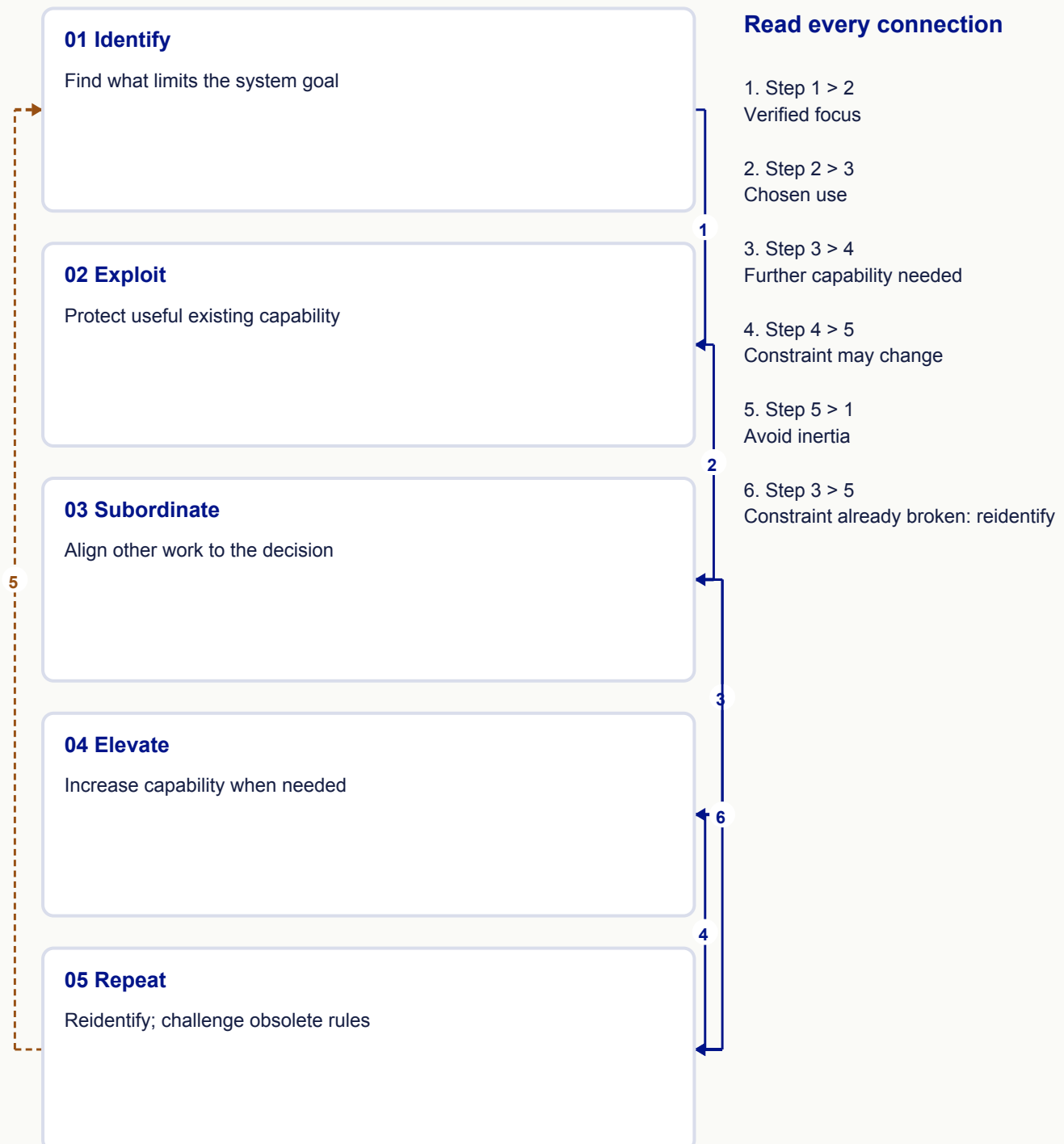
Work within these conditions

1. Capacities are supplied fictional effective rates for the same mix and period.
2. A capacity comparison is a working hypothesis; observed starvation, blocking, quality and policy effects still need review.

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

See how the method works

Define the system goal and identify what currently limits it. First examine how to use the existing constraint effectively, then align other work to support that decision. Add capacity or make a larger change when the evidence shows it is needed. After improvement, look again: the limiting factor may move, and old rules can become the next obstacle. The loop is about system performance, not making every resource equally busy. Exploiting a constraint means protecting useful capability, not overburdening people or bypassing maintenance and quality. Verify the result through the defined system outcome and repeat the learning cycle.



Connected method map: Identify, Exploit, Subordinate, Elevate, Repeat. Every authored connection is shown with a numbered arrow and named legend.

Follow the evidence and decisions

Inspect the supplied case inputs

Stage / demand	Before	After finishing trial
Cutting	110 units/shift	110
Finishing	70	95
Final test	85	85
Customer demand	90	90

01 / Identify the present limiting condition

Priya defines the delivery boundary and compares 110, 70 and 85 with demand 90. She treats finishing at 70 as the initial constraint hypothesis and checks actual operating evidence.

Why: The biggest department or queue is not automatically the system constraint. The comparison must use like-for-like effective capacity and real demand.

Evidence / check: Initial model limit: finishing 70 accepted units per shift.

02 / Decide how to exploit existing capacity

The finishing team investigates lost time from missing kits and avoidable rework, and protects the approved work sequence and quality readiness using current resources.

Why: Exploitation seeks better use of the existing limiting resource. It is not a demand to overburden people or skip controls.

Evidence / check: Existing-resource action plan names loss evidence, owner and expected system effect.

03 / Subordinate supporting decisions

Upstream release, material readiness and downstream response are aligned to the finishing plan. Local output targets are reviewed so cutting does not flood the route with unwanted WIP.

Why: Supporting stages must help the system's limiting decision rather than maximize their own activity independently.

Evidence / check: Release/support rules are explicit; idle nonconstraint capacity is not automatically a failure.

04 / Elevate only if still justified

If the verified limitation remains after appropriate exploitation and subordination, evaluate additional capability or capacity with cost, quality and demand evidence. Recheck the constraint after any improvement, including earlier steps.

Why: Elevation is not mandatory if the limiting condition has already moved. The five steps are not a purchasing checklist.

Evidence / check: Any additional-capacity proposal has a remaining system gap and evidence-based justification.

05 / Repeat when the limiting condition changes

After finishing demonstrates 95, compare again: cutting 110, finishing 95, test 85, demand 90. Final test is now the first internal constraint hypothesis; revise support rules and investigate its losses.

Why: Continuing to optimize finishing through habit would not remove the current modeled 85-unit delivery limit.

Evidence / check: Return to identification; modeled system gap is now 5 units against demand, not the old 20.

Completed focusing-step decision trail

Decision	Evidence	Result
Identify	110 / 70 / 85; demand 90	Finishing hypothesis
Exploit	Missing kits/rework to investigate	Use existing resources better
Subordinate	Release and support plan	Align local rules
Re-identify after trial	110 / 95 / 85	Final test hypothesis
Further finishing investment	Old constraint no longer lowest	Reassess before committing

Demand drops below all capacities

Confirmed demand falls to 60 while all stages retain the original 110, 70 and 85 capacities.

Decision

Reconsider the system boundary and market/demand limitation rather than declaring finishing a binding internal constraint against this demand.

Reasoning

The slowest resource can have spare capacity relative to current demand.

What would change the decision?

Demand basis and constraint hypothesis are revised together.

Practise with a changed case

A changed constraint in a service route

Separate fictional route: intake 50, technical review 32 and approval 40 requests per day; demand 45. A verified review improvement raises technical review to 46.

Stage	Before > after
Intake	50 > 50/day
Technical review	32 > 46/day
Approval	40 > 40/day
Demand	45/day

Your task

1. Identify the initial and new constraint hypotheses.
2. Calculate the modeled delivery gap before and after.
3. Name one supporting policy that should change and explain why more review capacity may no longer help.

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

Your practice worksheet

A changed constraint in a service route

System boundary and demand

Comparable capacities

Initial/current hypothesis

Supporting release/response rule

Next observation or investment decision

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

Check your reasoning and transfer it

1. Technical review at 32 is initially lowest against demand 45, a modeled gap of 13 per day.
2. After review reaches 46, approval at 40 is lowest, leaving a gap of 5 per day.
3. Align readiness and release with the current approval limitation and investigate its losses. More technical-review capacity alone does not remove the 40-per-day model limit.

Suggested completed record

Condition	Comparison	Decision
Before	32 versus demand 45	Review; gap 13/day
After	40 versus demand 45	Approval; gap 5/day
Next step	Return to identification	Revise support rules

Plausible wrong turns

1. Elevation is not required when earlier improvement breaks the constraint.
2. The slowest resource is not necessarily binding when demand is lower.

Evidence of a sound answer

1. Use the same period and mix.
2. Re-identify after changed evidence.
3. Distinguish system delivery from local utilization.

Take the learning back to work

Commitment	Agreed follow-through
Owner	System owner with current constraint and supporting-process leaders
Record	Constraint hypothesis, focusing decisions and system-output observations
Review	After each material improvement and at the ongoing system review
Verification evidence	Reliable accepted delivery, current constraint evidence and aligned support decisions
If unresolved	Reopen the boundary or hypothesis; do not preserve obsolete rules because the previous project was successful.

Help someone else apply the method

Prepare

1. Stage-capacity cards and a customer-demand card
2. Before/after change card and policy log

Minutes	Activity and coaching prompt
4	Define the goal What counts as accepted system output?
8	Choose the first actions Which actions use existing capacity and which add it?
8	Reveal the improved stage Why return to step one before buying more finishing capacity?
5	Apply the service variant Which local rule could undermine the new focus?

Debrief

1. Challenge a mandatory march through elevation.
2. Ask whether demand or an external policy changes the boundary of the hypothesis.

Individual or remote practice

Write the limiting comparison before and after, then connect each supporting rule to the current result.

Connect the method and check its boundaries

Before application

1. System goal and boundary
2. Evidence of limiting factor

Outside this lesson

1. Exploit means use wisely, not overwork people
2. Do not buy capacity before examining existing loss

TOCICO: Five Focusing Steps, 2013

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Identify, exploit, subordinate, elevate, repeat without inertia

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

TOCICO: The process of on-going improvement

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The focusing process underpins TOC applications and ongoing system improvement.

Current public presentation synopsis only; no restricted presentation content is claimed.

Open this lesson and its visual aids