Process Bottleneck Identification Checklist

A practical tool for finding delays, handoff problems, capacity limits, decision barriers, and process friction

Organization / Team:	
Workflow or Process Reviewed:	
Process Owner:	
Participants:	
Assessment Date:	

This checklist helps teams identify the process bottlenecks that slow execution, increase cost, reduce quality, create frustration, or limit scale. It can be used before process redesign, AI adoption, workflow automation, optimization engineering, commercialization planning, grant-funded growth, or operational improvement efforts.

- Use the checklist with people who perform the work, manage the work, and depend on the outputs.
- Score the severity of each bottleneck and capture specific evidence rather than relying only on impressions.
- Prioritize bottlenecks that affect growth, customer experience, funding milestones, compliance, data quality, or decision speed.
- Convert the highest-priority findings into a focused improvement plan.

How to Use This Checklist

Review one process at a time. For each indicator, mark Yes, No, or Unsure. Assign a severity score from 1 to 4 only where the issue appears present or likely. Use the notes column to record examples, data sources, affected teams, or follow-up questions.

Scoring Guide

Use this checklist to identify bottlenecks that slow execution, increase cost, reduce quality, weaken customer experience, or block AI, automation, or optimization opportunities. Mark each item as Yes, No, or Unsure, then score the severity and priority of the most important findings.

Score	Severity	Meaning	Suggested Response
1	Low	Minor inconvenience or isolated issue	Monitor or fix when convenient
2	Moderate	Creates recurring friction or avoidable delay	Assign owner and improvement path
3	High	Impacts cost, quality, timing, customers, or scaling	Prioritize in near-term improvement plan
4	Critical	Blocks growth, adoption, compliance, revenue, or delivery	Escalate and address immediately

1. Time, Flow, and Throughput Bottlenecks

Use this section to identify where work slows down, piles up, or waits unnecessarily.

Bottleneck Indicator	Yes	No	Unsure	Severity 1-4	Notes / Evidence
Work frequently waits in queues before the next step begins.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Cycle time is longer than customers, funders, partners, or internal teams expect.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Approvals or reviews create recurring delays.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Some steps are performed in batches when continuous flow would be more efficient.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Volume spikes quickly overwhelm the current process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The team lacks visibility into where work is waiting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The process depends on one person, role, or expert to keep work moving.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Late-stage rework causes missed deadlines or compressed timelines.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

2. Handoff, Ownership, and Decision Bottlenecks

Use this section to identify friction caused by unclear roles, fragmented communication, or slow decisions.

Bottleneck Indicator	Yes	No	Unsure	Severity 1-4	Notes / Evidence
Ownership of key steps is unclear or frequently disputed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Handoffs between teams or individuals are inconsistent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
People are unsure who has authority to make certain decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Important decisions require too many people or unclear approval paths.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Information is lost or re-explained during transitions between steps.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Different teams maintain separate versions of the same information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
External partners, customers, funders, or advisors do not receive timely updates.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Escalation paths are unclear when work gets stuck.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

3. Data, Technology, AI, and Automation Bottlenecks

Use this section to identify technology and data constraints that may block efficiency, AI adoption, or optimization.

Bottleneck Indicator	Yes	No	Unsure	Severity 1-4	Notes / Evidence
Required data is incomplete, inconsistent, outdated, or difficult to access.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The same information is entered manually into multiple systems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Reporting depends on spreadsheets or manual compilation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Current tools do not support the workflow users actually need.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The process lacks a reliable single source of truth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Data quality problems would limit AI, automation, forecasting, or optimization efforts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
System limitations force users to create workarounds outside the official process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Security, privacy, IP, or compliance requirements are not clearly built into the workflow.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

4. Capacity, Scaling, and Adoption Bottlenecks

Use this section to identify whether the process can scale as the organization grows or changes.

Bottleneck Indicator	Yes	No	Unsure	Severity 1-4	Notes / Evidence
The process works only because a small group understands informal steps.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
New employees or collaborators cannot easily learn the process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Training materials, SOPs, or documentation are incomplete or outdated.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The process becomes unreliable when volume, complexity, or urgency increases.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Staff are resistant to changing the current process because the rationale is unclear.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Leaders lack metrics to determine whether the process is improving.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The process does not yet support commercialization, market transition, or customer-facing growth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
There is no structured plan for adoption, feedback, and continuous improvement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

5. Bottleneck Log and Root Cause Review

Use this log to capture the highest-priority bottlenecks identified above. For each issue, distinguish symptoms from root causes. Many process problems appear to be staffing or technology issues but are actually caused by unclear ownership, poor handoffs, incomplete data, or decisions that take too long.

Bottleneck	Where It Occurs	Likely Root Cause	Impact	Owner	Priority	Next Step

6. Prioritization Worksheet

Prioritize bottlenecks that are frequent, costly, strategically important, and realistic to address. For AI or optimization projects, give additional attention to bottlenecks that affect data quality, decision speed, routing, scheduling, capacity, forecasting, or human adoption.

Candidate Improvement	Business Value	Implementation Difficulty	Data / Tool Needs	Adoption Risk	Decision

7. Action Plan

Translate the highest-priority findings into a practical improvement plan. Start with changes that can produce visible progress while also preparing for larger process redesign, AI implementation, or optimization work.

Action	Bottleneck Addressed	Owner	Start	Due	Success Metric	Status / Notes

Discussion Questions

- Which bottleneck is most visible to customers, funders, investors, partners, or internal users?
- Which bottleneck has become worse because of growth, AI adoption, market uncertainty, or operational complexity?
- Where does work wait for a decision, approval, data input, expert review, or handoff?
- Which bottleneck would create the greatest value if reduced by 25-50 percent?
- Which issue should be fixed before any major AI, automation, or optimization implementation?
- What evidence should be collected before redesigning the process?

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