

Managing Team Capacity:

Workload, Constraints, and Trade-Offs



Define the session's core purpose: making capacity visible and discussable through workload and constraint data



Move capacity planning from intuition to evidence, connecting it to predictable delivery and team health



Build stakeholder trust by grounding commitments in realistic operational capabilities



Preview three lenses: workload visualization, constraint identification, and professional trade-off negotiation

The Real Cost of Invisible Capacity



- Chronic overload, missed deadlines, scope creep, and burnout



- The 100% utilization fallacy creates fragile systems with no buffer



- Context switching can consume up to 40% of productive time



- Multitasking increases job stress and reduces workplace wellbeing



What Capacity Really Means



- **Availability:**
hours present $\neq$ ability to deliver



- **Throughput:**
completed work per unit time



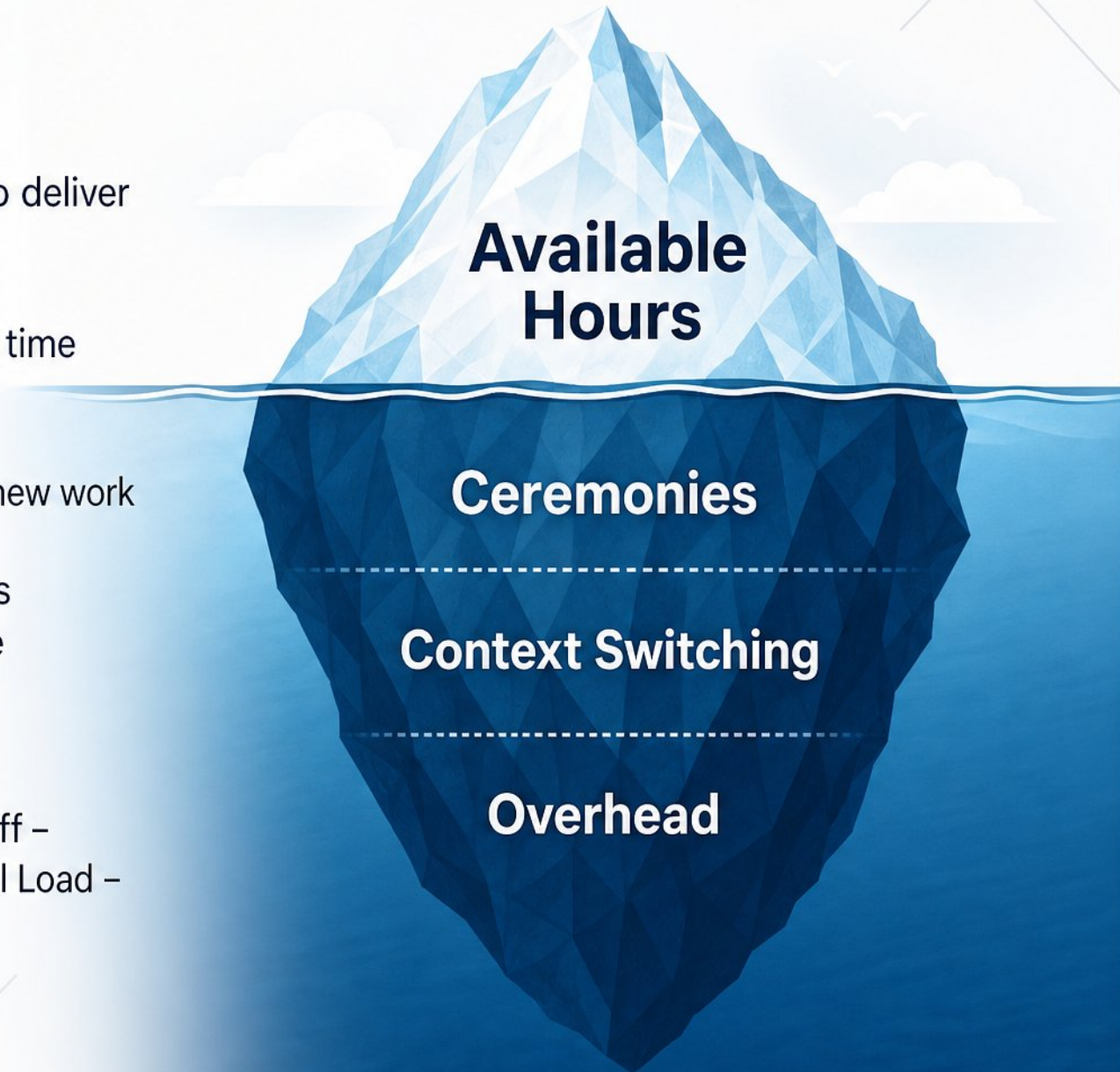
- **Capacity:**
realistic space to absorb new work



- Invisible work consumes
25–50% of a knowledge
worker's week



- **Real Roadmap Hours =**
Standard Hours – Time Off –
Ceremonies – Operational Load –
Shared Commitments



Making Workload Visible



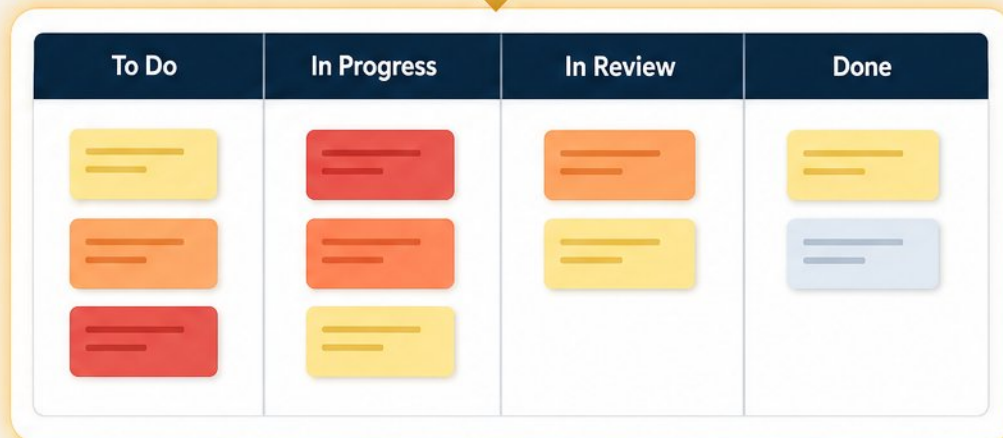
- **Visualize all demand:** roadmap, support, maintenance, and hidden 'phantom work'



- **Use Work In Progress (WIP) limits** per workflow stage to force focus and expose bottlenecks



- Turn a backlog into a daily-discussed workload heatmap or Ageing WIP chart



Kanban-Inspired Visibility Practices



- **WIP:** items started but not yet finished



- **Cycle Time:** elapsed time from start to completion



- **Throughput:** items completed per time period



- **Work Item Age:** current elapsed time of in-flight items



- Use **Cycle Time** scatterplots to define predictable delivery (SLE)



- Start standups with **Ageing WIP** chart vs. SLE



**Professional
Commitment**



Identifying Real Constraints

- Every system has one dominant constraint governing overall throughput
- Improving non-bottlenecks yields zero system benefit
- Constraints go beyond headcount: specialized skills, approval chains, tool access
- Information delays and decision latency are common in distributed teams
- Find the constraint: trace work to where items queue longest



Quantifying the Unquantifiable



- Use story points to compare effort, not predict calendar time



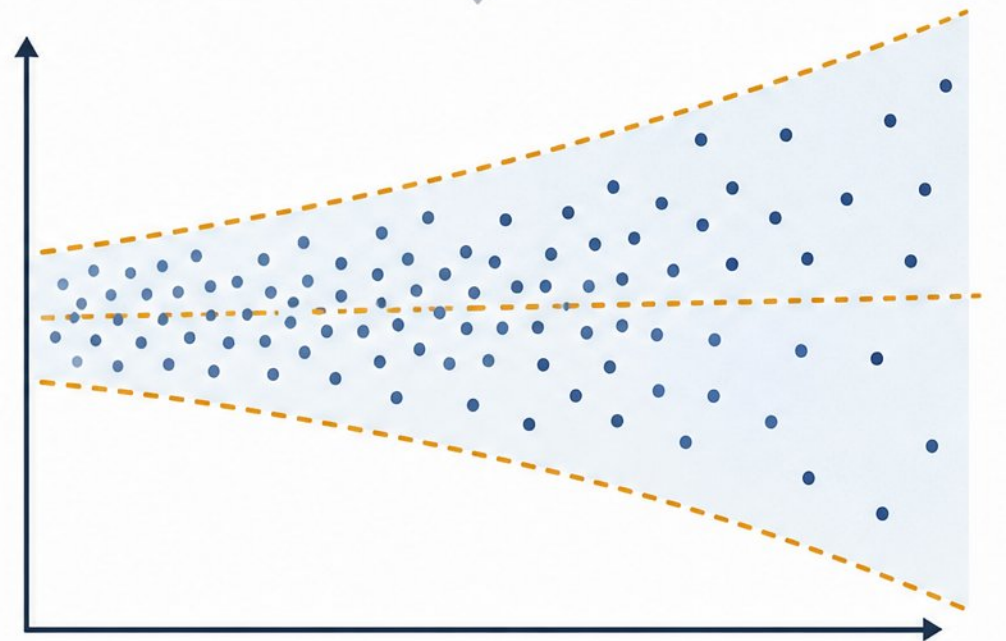
- Effort estimates suffer from optimism bias and unknown unknowns



- Historical data reveals how long similar work actually took



- Shift from guessing to probability: "85% chance of 8-12 items"



The Trade-Off Triangle: Scope, Time, Quality

- Classic triple constraint: scope, time, and cost/resources shape every delivery decision
- Quality sits at the center—any compromise to the three constraints directly erodes quality
- "Everything, now, perfect" forces quality to give; invisible technical debt is the hidden cost
- Ask sponsors at initiation: "Which constraint is genuinely immovable?"—that answer guides every future trade-off
- Treat change control as a service to the sponsor, not a barrier to collaboration



Framing 'No' as a Professional Trade-Off Discussion

- ▶ Scope negotiation is proposing alternatives, not refusing — make trade-offs explicit
- ▶ "If we add X, we'll need to drop Y or extend the timeline"
- ▶ "We can deliver on time by descope the reporting module — is that acceptable?"
- ▶ Present an Option Menu: Lean, Standard, Full paths with clear scope/time implications
- ▶ Let stakeholders choose with full awareness of consequences



The Power of Visible Trade-Offs

- Visible trade-offs protect the work and the relationship
- Stakeholder gains decision ownership; team gains realistic terms
- Use the 48-hour rule: buy time to assess impact before committing
- Frame change control as a service to the sponsor, not a barrier



Common Pitfalls and Anti-Patterns



- 100% utilization eliminates buffer, causing cascading missed deadlines; target 70-80%



- Multitasking is a false capacity multiplier: context-switching consumes up to 40% of productive time



- Optimizing a single resource starves team flow; a fully utilized specialist becomes the bottleneck



- Research confirms multitasking increases job stress and reduces wellbeing



Facilitating the Capacity Conversation



- **Weekly 15-30 min check-in:**
review WIP, Ageing items,
upcoming demand, and
constraint changes



- **Shift from opinion to evidence:**
use Cycle Time scatterplot
data against SLE



- **Frame 'no' as options:**
present Lean, Standard,
Full menus for stakeholder
decisions



- **Use data-driven language:**
"85% of items finish within
8 days; this feature needs 12"

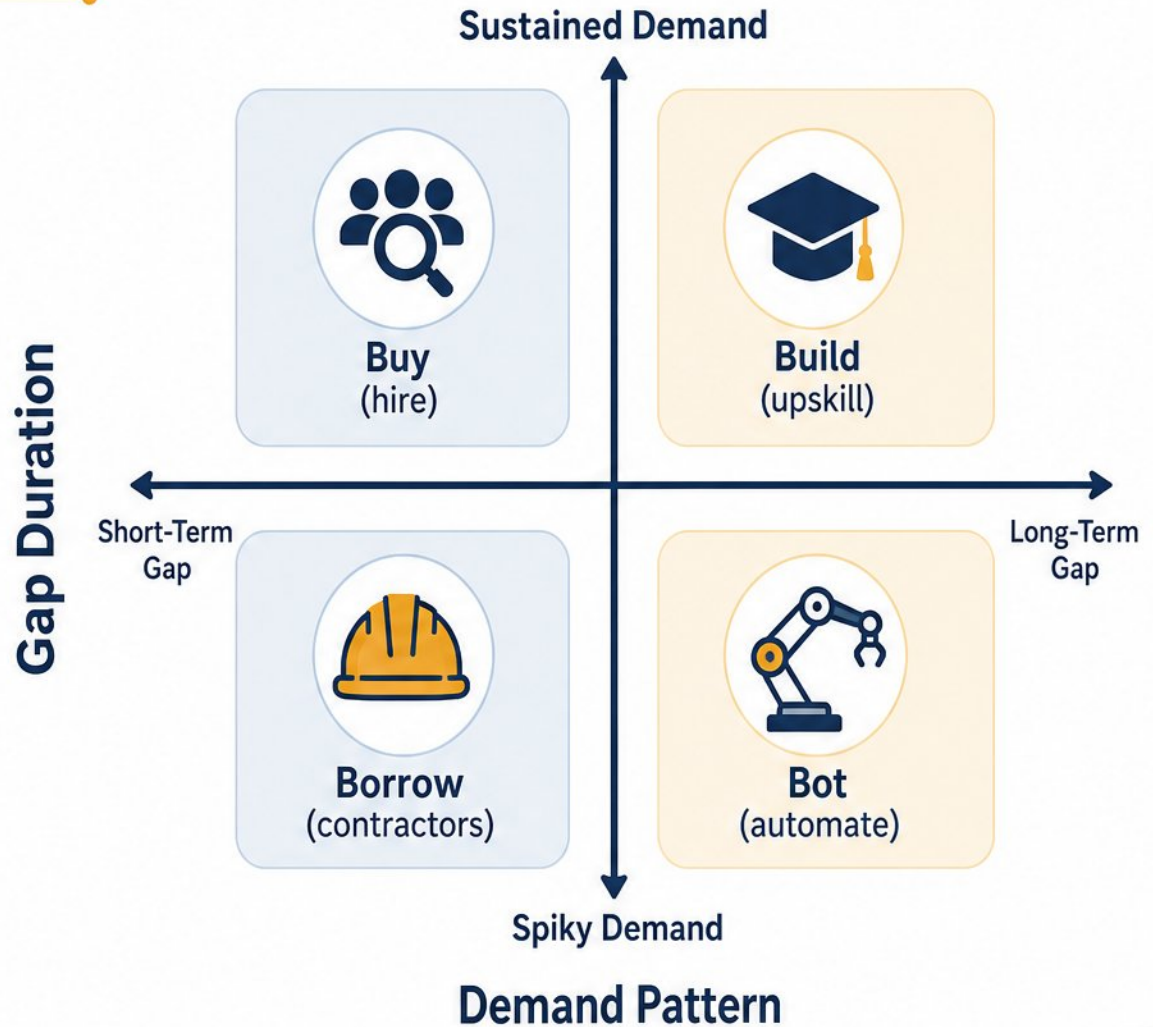


- **Practice the conversation:**
role-play presenting constraints
using Option Menu and
trade-off framing



Closing Capacity Gaps: Buy, Build, Borrow, Bot

- 4B Framework: Buy (hire), Build (upskill), Borrow (contractors), Bot (automate)
- Match strategy to gap type: sustained gaps → Buy/Build; spiky demand → Borrow
- Repetitive, high-volume tasks are prime targets for automation (Bot)
- Combining Build + Bot can close 40-60% of gaps without new headcount



From Insight to Action



- Document a team working agreement: WIP limits, SLE, buffer policy, and change control



- Decide what to stop, start, and continue based on constraints



- Commit to one practice for your next meeting (e.g., publish Ageing WIP chart)



- Combine Build and Bot to close 40-60% of gaps without new headcount



- Protect the work and the relationship with visible trade-offs



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