



Five teams, one bottleneck

How a delivery lead at a fintech scale-up used AI to diagnose a stalling five-team programme, and walked into a leadership review with **the root cause** and a **three-week fix**, all built from their own data in a single working session.

The situation

A fintech scale-up was running five delivery teams, which I'll call Atlas, Beacon, Cobalt, Delta and Echo. Everyone could feel that delivery was slipping, but no one could prove why. Releases kept moving, leadership kept asking "why is this late?", and the delivery lead was losing evenings pulling numbers together by hand.

We took a messy export of their delivery data and, working with AI, turned it into a clear diagnosis. Here is what it showed.

What the data revealed

Throughput is sliding

Three of the five teams were delivering less each sprint, not more.

Cycle time is climbing

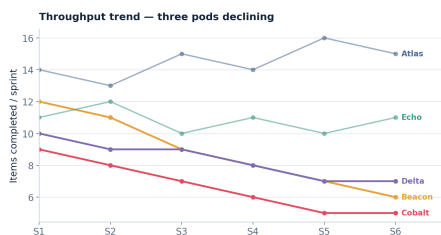
One team, Cobalt, had risen from 12 to 21 days and was dragging the others.

The cause becomes visible

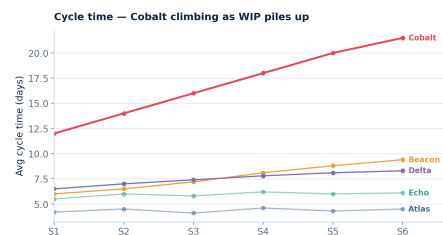
Cobalt was holding 27 items at once, three to four times a healthy limit.

And it was structural

Every critical path ran through Cobalt, so one team stalled the whole programme.



Throughput by team. Three of five declining across six sprints.



Cycle time. Cobalt climbing from 12 to 21 days as work in progress piles up.

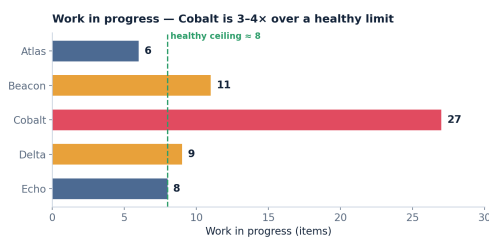
ROOT CAUSE

One unmanaged bottleneck, not a lack of effort or talent

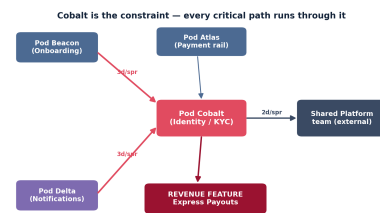
Cobalt (the Identity / KYC team) had quietly become the constraint: **far too much work in progress**, and a **hidden dependency** that every other team relied on. It was holding up a revenue feature, Express Payouts, without anyone having named it.



Seeing the constraint



Work in progress. Cobalt holding 27 items, three to four times a healthy limit.



Dependencies. Every critical path converging on a single team.

The three-week plan

WEEK 1

Contain

Cap Cobalt's work in progress and make the cross-team dependency visible to all five teams, so the queue stops growing.

WEEK 2

Unblock

Pull the shared Identity work into a single prioritised queue, so the other teams stop waiting on ad-hoc requests.

WEEK 3

Sustain

Re-measure flow, coach the teams on holding the new limits, and hand leadership a simple weekly view they can trust.

The point of the plan was not to work harder, it was to relieve one constraint. With Cobalt's load capped and the dependency managed, cycle time starts falling and throughput recovers, exactly the story leadership needed to see.

FREE

Want to do this on your own teams?

None of this needed a data team or weeks of analysis. It needed the right questions, a bit of judgement, and AI doing the heavy lifting. That is exactly what I teach in **AI for Project Managers, Scrum Masters & Agile Delivery Leads**, a live session where we take this exact situation apart, step by step, so you can do it on your own teams.

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Mickey Meaker

25+ years in senior management and Agile coaching, and more than 2,000 professionals trained across SAFe® and Scrum.org. I have run delivery across tangled, multi-team programmes myself, so this is the shortcut I wish I had: the AI skills that give you back your evenings and make you the person your teams cannot run without.

