

Where does the time go in your production?

A practical guide for leaders in manufacturing: six steps from enquiry to invoice, a checklist and a worksheet.

INDUSTRY AND MANUFACTURING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Why time disappears in the handovers

Most manufacturers have the production itself under control. The machines run, the people know their craft, and the quality is fine. Even so, many leaders feel that it takes too long from an enquiry comes in until the invoice is sent.

Time rarely disappears in the production itself. It disappears in the handovers: when a drawing has to be read and costed, when an order has to be keyed in again, when the plan lives on a whiteboard, and when the invoice is waiting for a timesheet. Each handover may only take a few minutes, but they are repeated hundreds of times a week.

This guide walks through the six steps an order typically follows. For each step we describe what happens, the signs to look for, what you can do yourselves, and where technology can help.

How to use this guide

- 1 Read the six steps and mark the ones that sound familiar.
- 2 Fill in the checklist with a colleague from another part of the process.
- 3 Use the worksheet to cost your three biggest time drains.
- 4 Choose one step to start with. Not six.

This guide is written for leaders. It requires no technical knowledge, and you can use it whether or not you work with BCT.

2. WHERE THE TIME GOES

The six steps

Here are the six steps the work typically follows. For each step: what happens, signs that time is disappearing, what you can do yourselves, and where technology can help.

01 Enquiry and quote

The customer sends an email with drawings or a bill of materials. An experienced employee reads it, looks up prices and materials and works out the quote. It often takes days, because the same person also has everything else to handle.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- Quotes sit and wait because only one or two people can cost them.
- You lose orders because a competitor answered first.
- It is hard to see which quotes became orders, and why.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- Create a fixed template so quotes are built the same way.
- Measure how many days pass from enquiry to answer.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

AI can read emails and drawings, find the right prices in your ERP and prepare a quote for approval. The employee checks and sends it instead of starting from scratch.

02 Order

When the customer says yes, the order has to go into the systems. It is often keyed into the ERP, into planning and perhaps into another spreadsheet. Every time, there is a risk that a number ends up wrong.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- The same order is keyed in two or three places.
- Errors in the order are only discovered in production or by the customer.
- Order confirmations go out late because someone has to find the time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- Count how many times an order is keyed in.
- Find out where most order errors occur.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

The order can be created automatically from the approved quote and the customer's confirmation, so it is only entered once.

03 Planning

Capacity, machines, materials and people have to fit together. In many companies the plan lives in a spreadsheet or on a whiteboard, and it is only up to date when the planner is at work.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- The plan exists in several places, and no one is quite sure which one applies.
- Materials are missing when the order is due to start.
- Delivery dates are guessed rather than calculated.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- Keep the plan in one place, even if it is a simple tool.
- Track how often the delivery date holds.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

One shared overview of orders, capacity and materials that everyone can see. The plan is based on real data instead of gut feeling.

04 Production

Employees have to find drawings, record time and material usage and fill in job sheets. Much of it happens on paper and is keyed in again afterwards.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- Employees search for the right drawing or version.
- Paper job sheets have to be keyed in by someone else.
- Management gets the numbers too late to act on them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- Ask employees what takes the most time apart from the work itself.
- Remove the registrations nobody uses.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

Digital job sheets and registration that take seconds. Drawings and instructions are always the latest version, and the numbers are ready for management straight away.

05

Quality and documentation

Customers and authorities demand more documentation: quality control, traceability and increasingly CO2 figures per order. It is often gathered by hand from several systems.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- It takes hours to gather documentation for one customer.
- You cannot answer quickly when a customer asks for CO2 figures.
- Quality data is not used to improve production.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- List the documentation customers ask for most often.
- Find out where the data already exists.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

Documentation is collected automatically as the order moves through production. The same data can be used for CO2 figures and to find waste.

06

Delivery and invoice

Once the order is delivered, it has to be invoiced. Often the invoice is waiting for timesheets, delivery notes or a statement of extra work.

SIGNS THAT TIME DISAPPEARS HERE

- Several days pass from delivery to invoice.
- Extra work is forgotten and never invoiced.
- Finance has to chase information from production.

WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELVES TOMORROW

- Measure the number of days from delivery to invoice.
- Set up a fixed routine for extra work.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

The invoice is ready when the order is finished, because all the information has already been gathered along the way.

3. FIND YOUR TIME DRAINS

Checklist

Tick the questions where the answer is “too long”, “too many times” or “we don’t know”. Each tick is a place where time and money are probably disappearing. Ideally, do it with a colleague from another part of the process.

01 Enquiry and quote

- ☐ How many hours pass from an enquiry comes in until the customer has a quote?
- ☐ How many quotes do you lose because the answer comes too late?
- ☐ Who can cost a quote if your most experienced person is away?

02 Order

- ☐ How many times is the same order keyed in?
- ☐ How often are order errors only discovered in production?

03 Planning

- ☐ Can you see capacity, machines and materials in one place?
- ☐ How much of the plan lives in spreadsheets or on a whiteboard?

04 Production

- ☐ How much time do employees spend on paperwork and registration every day?
- ☐ How long does it take to find the right drawing?

05 Quality and documentation

- ☐ How long does it take to gather documentation for a customer?
- ☐ Could you deliver CO2 figures per order if a customer asked tomorrow?

06 Delivery and invoice

- ☐ How many days pass from delivery to invoice?
- ☐ How often is the invoice waiting for paperwork or timesheets?

Three ticks or more? Then there is usually something to gain, and it is worth taking a closer look.

4. WHAT DOES IT COST YOU TODAY?

Do the maths

It is easier to prioritise when there is a number on it. Use the table to cost your three biggest time drains. The figures do not need to be precise. A good estimate is enough to see where there is most to gain.

Hours per week × number of people × hourly rate × 46 weeks = EUR per year

Task	Hours/week	People	Rate (EUR)	EUR/year
Example: Quotes costed by hand	4	2	60	22,080 EUR
1.				
2.				
3.				
Total				

The example is for illustration only. Use your own figures. Remember that time is not the only cost: lost orders, errors and delays often cost more than the hours.

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN YOU DO THE MATHS

- Who does the task, and how often?
- What would they spend the time on if the task disappeared?
- What does an error or a delay cost when it happens?
- What happens when the person who knows the task is ill or leaves?

5. NEXT STEPS

How to get started

Once you have found your time drains, it is tempting to fix them all at once. That is rarely the best approach. Here are five tips from the projects we have been part of.

1. Start with one step

Choose the step that costs the most and solve it first. It delivers results quickly and experience for the next ones.

2. Measure before you build

Write down how many hours, errors and days are involved today. Then you can see whether it works.

3. Talk to the people who do the work

They know where it hurts. Solutions built together with them get used.

4. Build on what you have

You rarely need a new system. Often it is about getting the systems you have to work together.

5. Agree price and extent up front

A fixed price and a clear plan make it easy to decide and easy to follow up.

A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE**ME AI – a large Nordic manufacturer**

The company wanted to make it easier for employees in Denmark, Mexico and China to find their way around, book rooms and find the right information. BCT built an internal AI assistant you can talk to. The company's data stays in its own infrastructure, and the solution is adapted to local requirements in each country.

Result: One AI assistant for employees in three countries.

6. NEXT STEP

Let's have a no-obligation chat

This guide gives you a good starting point. If you would like help taking the next step, the easiest way is to call or email us. It is free and without obligation, and you will get an honest answer about whether there is something to gain.

1 Call us for a chat

A conversation of about 20 minutes where we listen to where your time goes and share how others have approached it. No sales pitch.

2 Book a Shadow Walk

We follow the work at your company for ½–2 days and put numbers on where the time and money go.

3 Get a concrete plan

About a week later you receive a report of typically 50–75 pages with an action plan and a financial overview. Fixed price, and you own what we build.



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Book a Shadow Walk: blackcapitaltechnology.com/en/the-shadow-walk/booking/

You set the pace. Many start with a short chat and come back when the timing is right.