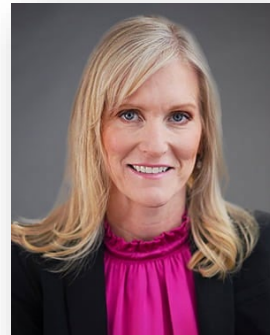


# Rewiring Leadership Around the Right Signal

For complex systems



Kristen Cox

Former Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Management and Budget for the State of Utah. Founder and former Executive Director of the David Eccles School of Business' Initiative on Government Improvement. Founder & CEO of Epiphany Associates, LLC. Board member. Author. International thought leader.

A word cloud featuring various Medicaid-related terms. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, with some terms appearing larger and more prominent than others. The colors used are primarily blue and orange, with some words in a lighter, yellowish-orange hue. The terms include:

- Day\_Services
- Incident\_Reports
- Billing\_Codes
- Rate\_Codes
- Medicaid\_Billing
- Prior\_Auth
- Level\_of\_Care
- Residential\_Habilitation
- Waiver\_Slots
- ICAP
- Fair\_Hearings
- HCBS
- EVV
- DSP\_Turnover
- Waitlists
- Budget\_Limits
- TCM
- Staff\_Credentialing
- Provider\_Enrollment
- Reimbursement\_Delays
- FMAP
- Person
- Transportation\_Coordination
- Training\_Requirements
- DSPs
- Background\_Checks
- Managed\_Care
- Natural\_Supports
- Service\_Authorizations
- Federal\_Match
- HIPAA
- Centered\_Planning
- Waitlists
- Budget\_Limits
- Service\_Gaps
- Funding\_Caps
- Service\_Plans
- Quarterly\_Reporting
- Electronic\_Documentation
- Data\_Integrity
- Crisis\_Response
- Appeals\_Process
- Interagency\_Coordination
- CMS\_Requirements
- State\_Surveys
- Guardianship
- Staffing\_Shortages
- Audit\_Trails
- QA\_Reviews
- Provider\_Network
- Licensing
- Provider\_Capacity









# Creating system-wide signals with five, simple questions

# The Five Question Framework

1. Who is your primary customer?
2. What is their primary need?
3. Why can't we satisfy that need today?
4. What's the problem in operations?
5. How do we know if the system is improving?

Q-1: Who is your primary customer?







# Q-1: Who is your primary customer?

**What it means:** The person or group the system is built to serve. If they don't succeed, the system doesn't succeed.

**Why it matters:** Anchors priorities, focus, and performance.

**Watch out for:** Confusing primary customers with stakeholders or strategic customers. Systems often shift toward the loudest voices, not the true customer.

Q-2: What is their primary need?







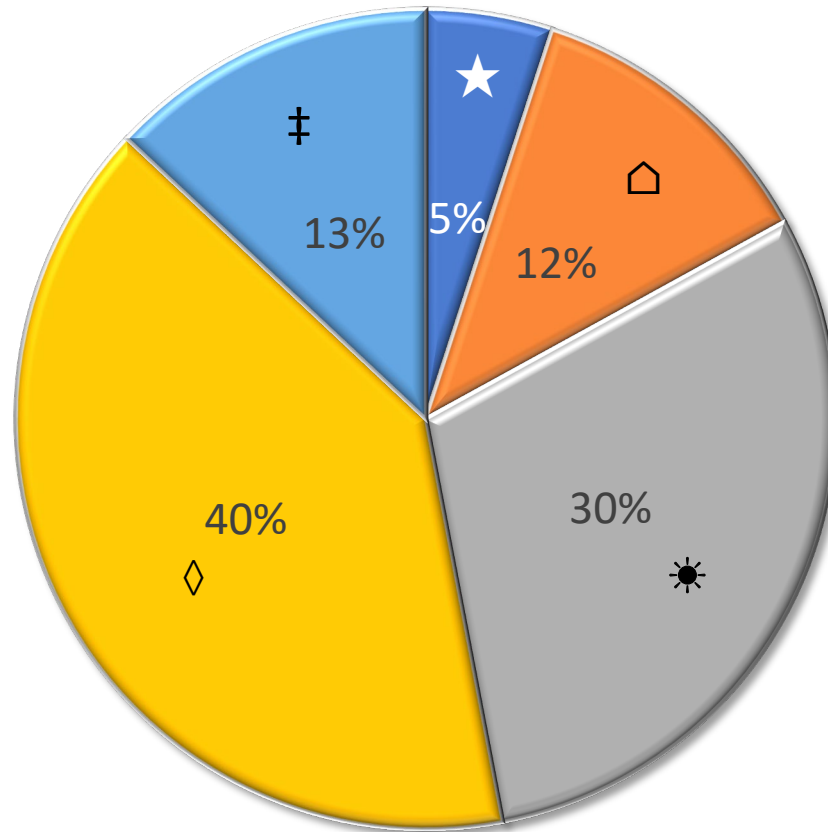
# What We Keep Doing

(that isn't working)

More Money	More Training
More Data	More Blame &
More Reorganization	Accountability
More Technology	Process Improvement
More Strategic Planning	

# Q-2: What is their primary need?

Typical Project Portfolio Distribution



Do you have  
organizational integrity?

Do your day-to-day  
actions match what you  
say you value?

★ ■ PCPN    □ ■ PCSN    ☀ ■ Internal needs    ◇ ■ Compliance    ‡ ■ Other



# Q-2: What is their primary need?

**What it means:** The most critical, non-negotiable need that must be met first—before anything else matters.

**Why it matters:** Keeps focus tight and avoids wasted effort on secondary issues or internal fixes.

**Watch out for:** Drifting to secondary needs and administrative fixes that distract from what matters most.

Q-3: Why can't we satisfy that need today?

## Q-3: Why can't the organization satisfy that today?

**What it means:** This is the strategy question. It defines the core dilemma blocking progress and points to the direction of the solution.

**Why it matters:** Enables breakthroughs by confronting the real tradeoffs—not just layering on new tactics.

**Watch out for:** Confusing new plans, innovations, or initiatives with strategy. A strategy is a path through a core conflict—not just a new idea.



# Classic Government Core Conflict

Meet demand and  
improve outcomes for  
services

VS.

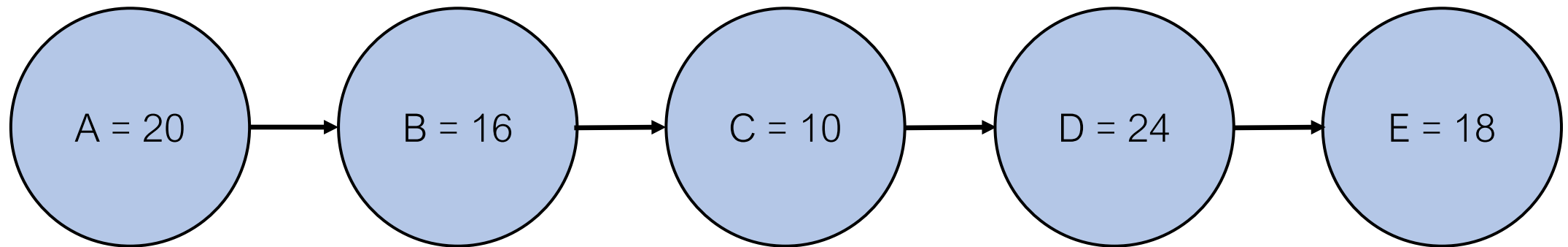
Reduce taxes and  
shrink government

Q-4: What's the problem in operations?



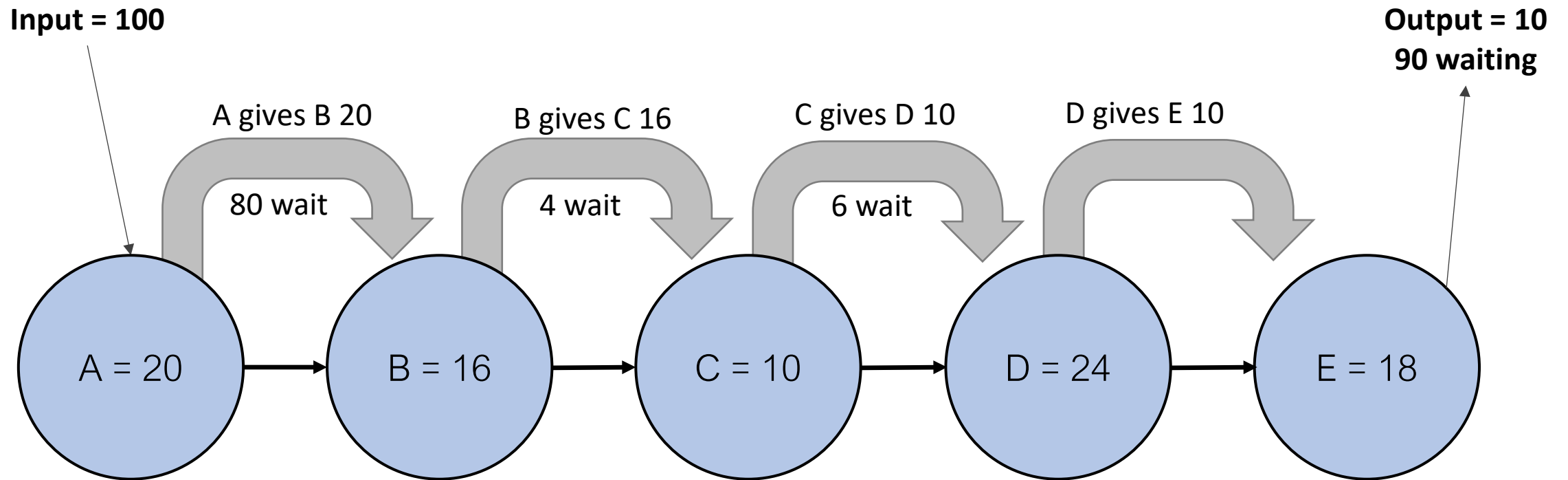






How many units can this system produce an hour?

What function is constraining the throughput of the entire system?



How many units can this system produce an hour?

What function is constraining the throughput of the entire system?

Citizens



Services



Citizens



S-1

S-3

S-4

Estimate = 2 months



S-2

S-5

Estimate = 3 weeks



S-3

S-1

S-5

S-2

Estimate = 6 months



S-1

S-4

S-3

Estimate = 8 months



S-4

Estimate = 1 week



Citizens



Estimate = 2 months



Estimate = 3 weeks



Estimate = 6 months



Estimate = 8 months

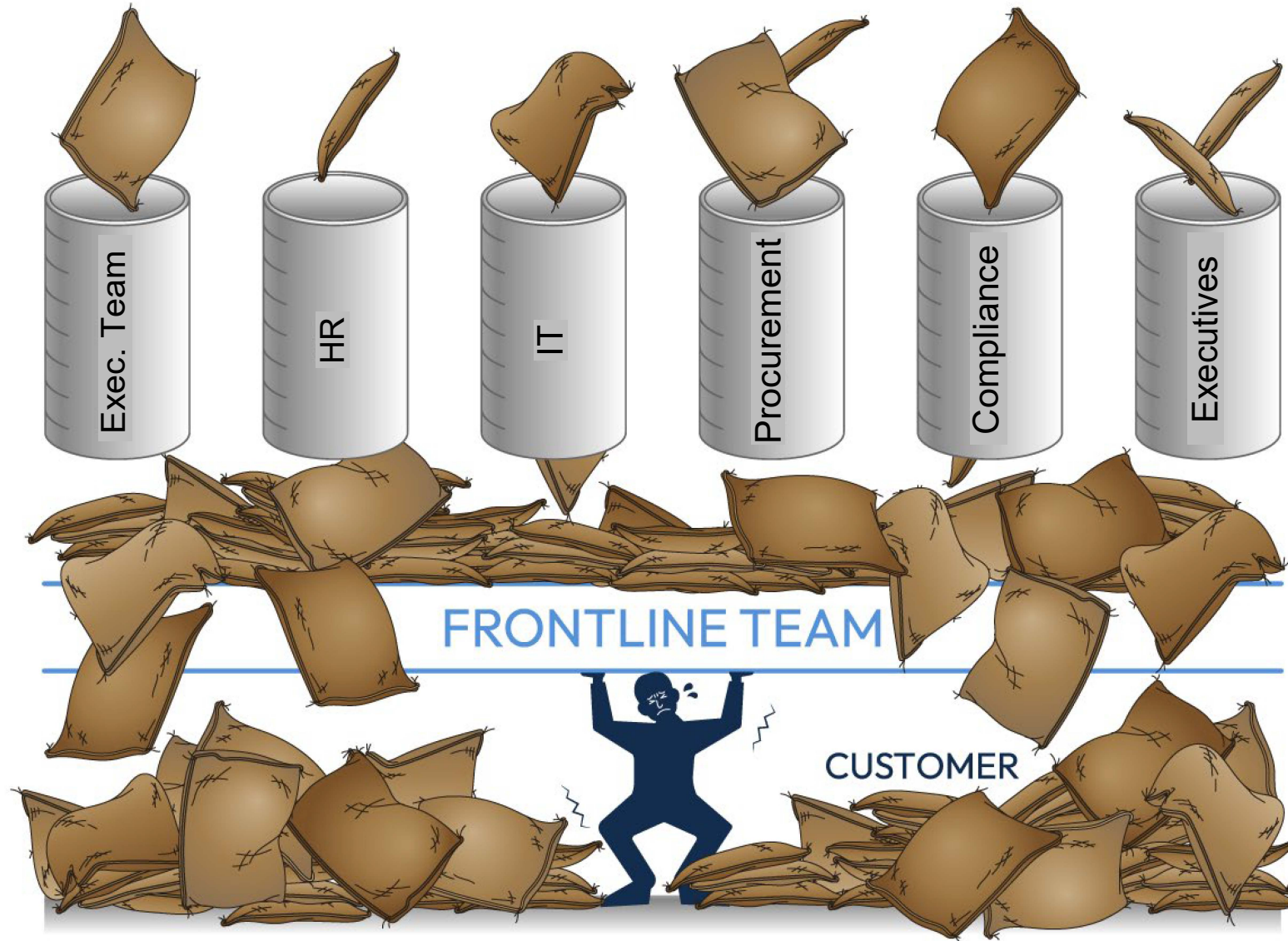


Estimate = 1 week

# Four Key Questions

1. What do they need?
2. In what order?
3. By when?
4. Did they get it in time? If not, why not?

New initiatives / projects / rules /  
training / policies & procedures / etc.



# Q-4: What is the problem in operations?

**What it means:** This is the constraint question—identifying where the system is getting stuck, so you can improve flow and ensure quality where it matters most.

**Why it matters:** The system can only perform as well as its constraint.

**Watch out for:** Trying to improve everything. Focus on throughput, not activity or isolated efficiency.



Q-5: How do we know if the system is improving?



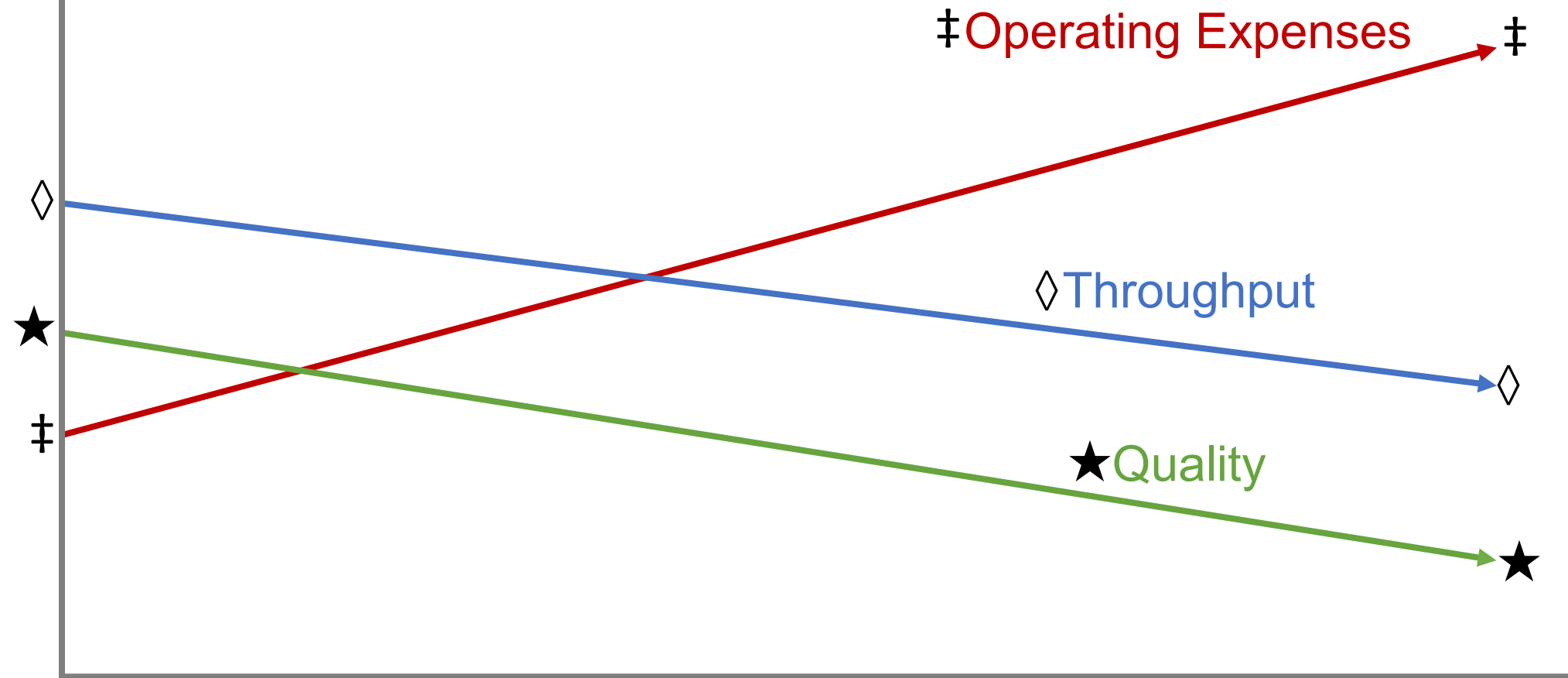
# Three Variables for Good Results

**Quality** describes effectiveness or the degree to which we are successful in producing a desired result. Often quality indicators are accuracy, reliability or intended outcomes.

**Throughput** is the demand or volume of work completed by the system (or people served) – it is the reason the system exists.

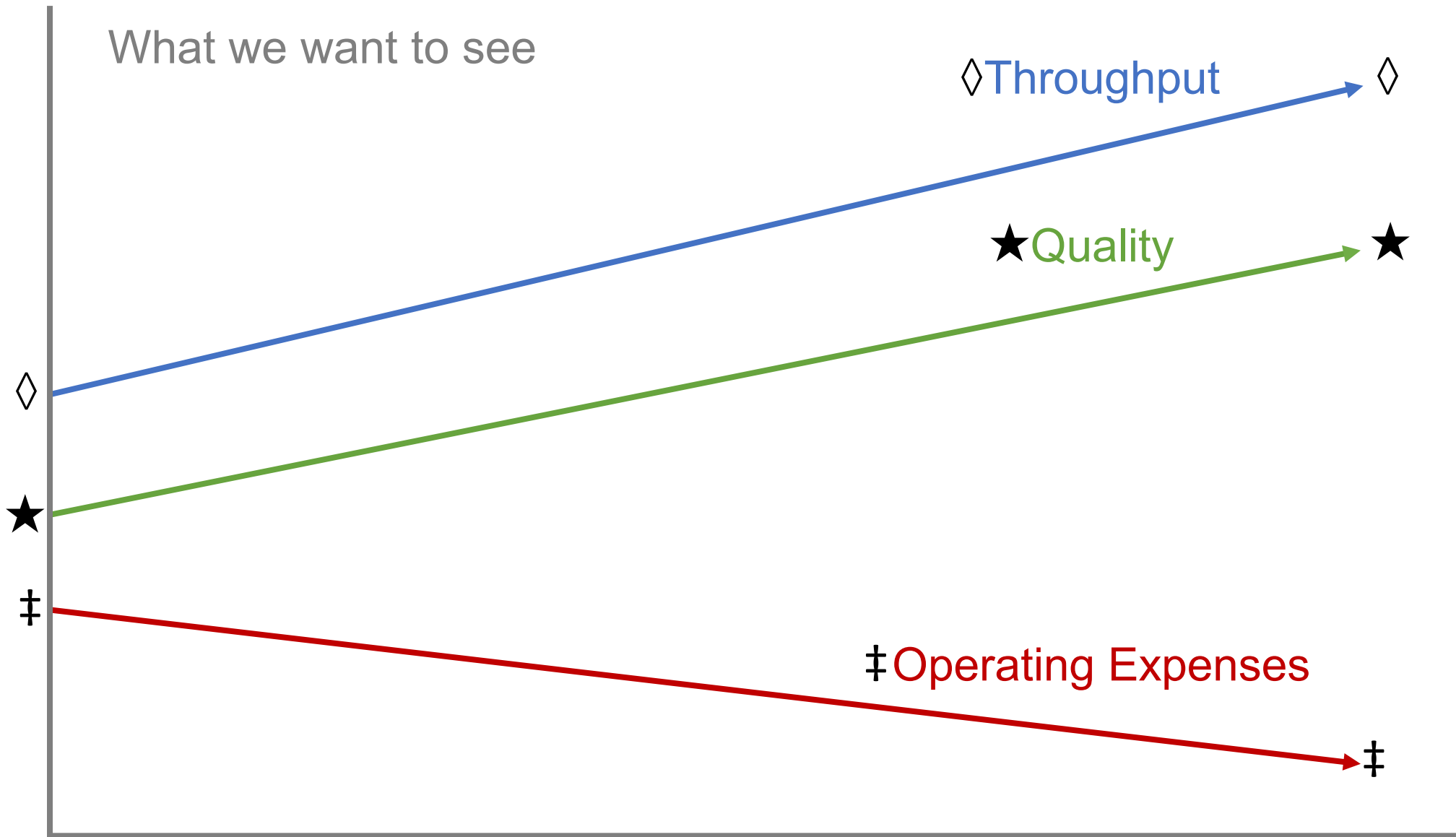
**Operating Expenses** are the sum of total costs associated with producing quality throughput.

What we often see





What we want to see



# Real State Government Example

Behavioral Health Hospital

Admission wait time	Down 51%
Length of stay	Down 20%
Successful discharges	Up 22%
Cost	Down 15%

## Q-5: How do we know if the system is improving?

**What it means:** All parts of the system should measure improvement the same way—by how long it takes and what it costs to produce a high-quality outcome.

**Why it matters:** Creates shared focus, accountability, and alignment.

**Watch out for:** Confusing change with improvement, relying on metrics that don't reflect system-wide outcomes, mistaking operational metrics for system performance, or thinking more KPIs means more clarity

# Conclusion

The biggest problem in every organization—every, single day—is that leaders are reacting to noise instead of seeing the signal. When your organization sees the signal, you can transform your results.



[www.Linkedin.com/in/Kristen-Cox](https://www.linkedin.com/in/Kristen-Cox)



Kristen Cox  
Yishai Ashlag

# THE WORLD OF DECORATING THE FISH

Putting the Seductive 7  
Framework in Action

Kristen Cox

Yishai Ashlag

# STOP DECORATING THE FISH

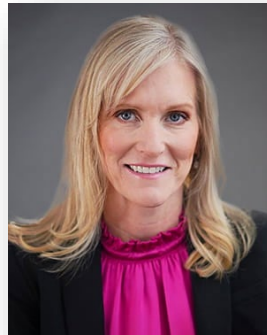


Which problems  
to ignore and which  
problems really matter



# Rewiring Leadership Around the Right Signal

For complex systems in developmental disabilities



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