

Introduction to Systems Thinking

# Lesson 2.2: Return to the Case of the Curtailed Supplies

Overview

Read the material on this page to learn more about the medical product company's problem and to see a BOT diagram that represents it.

The Case of the Curtailed Supplies, Part 2

After the frustration of having to put her highly qualified designers to work on cleaning, Tasha did a full inventory of the storage room, noted all the items that were needed, filled out all the purchase orders, and emailed them to Rodney. She was careful to order everything she thought her team might need.

However, after a week, there was no response and no deliveries. Finally, Tasha printed all the purchase orders and walked them upstairs. She found Rodney and his team in the breakroom, just chatting. She pulled Rodney aside and handed him the orders.

"Oh, you could have just called me, Tasha," he replied. "But now that I look at these, I can already tell you I'll have to reject most of them. Dr. Forrester really wants me to stay under budget."

"But we need these things, Rodney," Tasha replied. "This isn't a matter of just buying things to fill up the storage room."

"Well, are you going to go tell that to Dr. Forrester? Because I certainly am not. She'd be furious," he replied.

Tasha didn't say anything, even though she was upset, and went back to the lab.

Three months later, at Dr. Forrester's second quarterly staff meeting, she announced that the largest grant had been approved and additional funding would begin to flow immediately. She made all the usual announcements and updates, then dismissed everyone except for Tasha and Rodney.

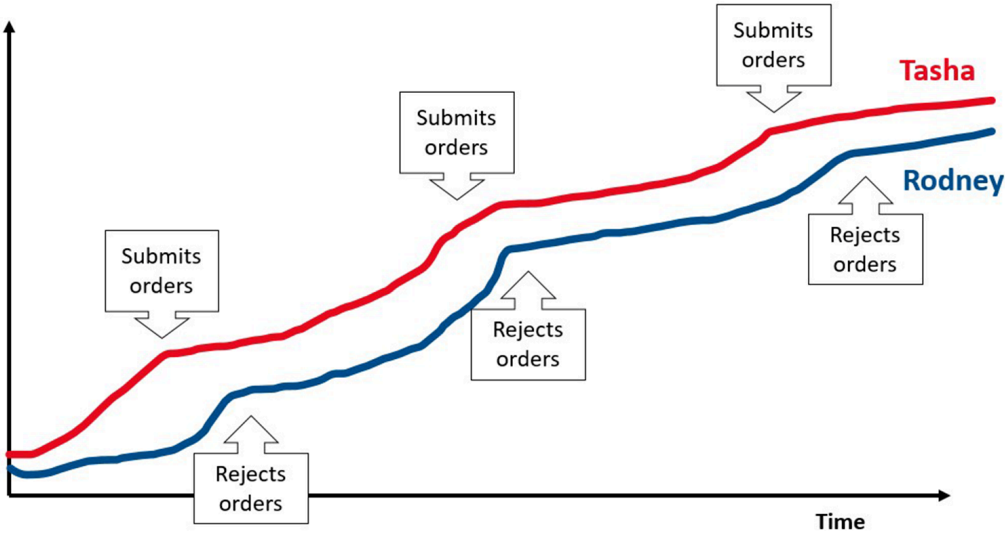
"I need to ask the two of you what's going on. I walked by the lab this morning, Tasha, and three of your designers were playing cards instead of working. You know I'm considering both of you for the new assistant director position, but when I see things like this, I just have to wonder what to do.

"And Rodney, you're delivering budget numbers that don't align at all with the last couple of years. I appreciate that you're trying to save the company money, but it isn't making sense to me."

BOT Diagram

This BOT diagram shows that both Tasha and Rodney are operating independently, so the problems have continued to build instead of being resolved. In fact, Tasha and Rodney have actually increased their counterproductive behavior. Tasha is ordering more and more, and Rodney is rejecting more and more.

If this case study were approached from a systemic, not linear, standpoint, the situation might be much better. As it is, the BOT diagram looks something like this:



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