

A balanced workload: say goodbye to production delays

13 May 2025, 14:14

Pascal Pollet

Workload control means smarter planning, avoiding peaks and delivering on time!

In settings where production processes are complex, variation is typical and deadlines are tight, planning is often a real challenge. Orders come in simultaneously, machinery is running all hours and planners are working their socks off. Workload control (WLC) takes the pressure off, matching work supply to capacity to prevent production log jams. If you want a bit of peace and quiet on the work floor, you can simply plan for it.

What is workload control (WLC)?

Workload control is a **planning method** that determines when a production order is released to the work floor. There's nothing magical about it: it's a carefully considered approach based on one simple question: 'Can the work floor handle this order right now?'

Conventional planning systems forward orders unthinkingly, whereas WLC first **checks whether**

there’s enough breathing space. Orders are only released when capacity is actually available. The result is less chaos, better flow and greater delivery reliability.

How does it work?

Workload control is based on three well-defined steps. It’s simple, effective and ready to put into practice immediately.

1. **Order pool: sometimes waiting is a good idea**
   All incoming orders first go to an order pool – a kind of waiting room for production-ready orders. They are kept on hold there for a while, until it’s clear that the work floor can process them without any stress. Don’t panic: this pause is both deliberate and temporary.

   ! Smart detail: the order pool prevents the work floor from being inundated. Less WIP, more control. !

2. **Workload monitoring: knowing what’s happening where**
   The workload at each work centre is measured daily (or more frequently). Not in numbers of orders, but in working hours. WLC also takes account of work that’s still on its way to a centre, using a weighting formula based on routing position. This way, you get a reliable picture of the actual and upcoming load per work centre. Each centre is assigned a workload standard – a limit above which the risk of delays increases.

   ! You can compare it with approaching trains: you know they’re coming, so you take them into account at the platform!

3. **Controlled order release: giving the green light at the right moment**
   The orders in the order pool are ranked by priority (e.g. earliest delivery date). The system – or the planner – then checks when each order can be released. This will only be done if all the relevant work centres are still below their workload limit.

   ! Order released? Then the workload for each work centre will be adjusted immediately. This preserves the balance between supply and capacity!

What are the benefits?

The results of WLC are not just theoretical – far from it! Businesses that use this method see major improvements in practice:

- **Shorter and more stable lead times**
  Regulating the inflow makes the waiting time at machinery shorter and more predictable. Less WIP = faster flow.

- **Greater delivery reliability**
  According to a simulation study, WLC halves the number of late deliveries. Better planning means satisfied customers – and less rescheduling stress.
  View the study

- **Lower inventory costs**
  WIP costs money, takes up space and requires coordination. Controlled releasing of orders keeps stock levels clear and manageable.

- **Less last-minute stress**
  Because work centres are no longer overloaded, the need for manual interventions and firefighting is reduced. Planners are given breathing space again – and so are operators.

Where does it really come into its own?

Workload control excels in settings where variation is a recurring feature. For example:

- Make-to-order and engineering-to-order
- Job shops with various product types and complex routing
- Settings characterised by frequent disruptions or capacity changes

In short, where conventional planning software falls short, WLC works really well.

What do you need to get started?

- Successful implementation requires some **preparation** – but no major investments.
- Choose the **right workload standard**
- Take a **broad approach** at first (e.g. define a standard for 3 days), then adjust based on practical experience. One workload standard per work centre usually works fine. If more than one piece of machinery is needed, simply add up the standards.
- Keep track of the **data**
- If necessary, **start** with a **simple** Excel spreadsheet based on your ERP or MES data. This will be enough to check which orders you can or cannot release.
- **Involve people** from day one
- Planners need to trust the system. Operators need to feel the benefits. **Communication** is therefore key.

Ready to improve efficiency in your manufacturing business?

Find out more about our expertise in Quick Response Manufacturing and how we can help you optimise production with less Work in Progress.

Visit our page on Quick Response Manufacturing Get in touch with our expert

Authors



Pascal Pollet