WHISKY, SUSHI, SYSTEMS & FLOW

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Whisky and flow parameters

On this chapter you will be exposed to my whisky bar and flow parameters.

This interesting correlation happened one winter night when I was writing a blog post about flow parameters [1] while drinking whisky. When pouring the last glass from a Macallan bottle (a nice single malt Scotch whisky) I decided to describe the flow parameters on the whisky bar terms.

[1] Paulo´s blog post using the whisky bar to introduce flow parameters http://www.caroli.org/lead-time-applying-littles-law-to-track-it/

The whisky bar

My whisky bar

As is apparent on the bar picture, I only drink whisky (the left side of the bar is my wife's). Whenever a bottle finishes, it is removed from the bar. Then a new one is opened and added to the bar. The number of whisky bottles at the bar is constant: 12 bottles. Only 12 bottles can fit. And per year, 6 whisky bottles are removed from the bar (empty).

Flow parameters

The whisky bar provides a great example for defining flow parameters. Here is a definition list.

- Lead time: The time between the bottles is added to the bar and the bottle comes out of the bar (empty).

- Work In Progress (WIP): The number of bottles in the bar. Bottles that have been opened, but are not yet empty.
- Throughput: The rate at which bottles are passing through the bar.
- Batch size: The size of the bottle.
- Cycle time: The time between two successive empty bottles leaving the bar.

The whisky bar metaphor provides a good visual and a simple way to remember and explain the flow parameters. Whenever you have to explain and write their definitions, consider thinking in terms of the whisky bar, and then replacing the terms accordingly:

- Bottle -> work item
- Bar -> system
- Empty -> work is completed
- Opened -> work started

With the proper replacement, the flow parameters definitions are:

- Lead time: The time between the work item is added to the system and the work item comes out of the bar (work completed).
- Work In Progress(WIP): The number of work items in the system. Items that the work has started, but is not yet complete.
- Throughput: The rate at which work items are passing through the system.
- Batch size: The size of the work item.
- Cycle time: The time between two successive complete work items leaving the system.