

BEFORE YOU FIX THE PROBLEM, UNDERSTAND WHAT IT TOUCHES

Executive Briefings

Key Takeaways

- **A constraint may be connected to processes, data, controls, and people far beyond the problem you can see.**
- **Understand the purpose of hidden manual work before eliminating it; inefficiency can sometimes contain an undocumented safeguard.**
- **Responsible change requires knowing what cannot be disrupted while improvement is underway.**

Estimated Reading Time: 4 minutes

A constraint rarely belongs to itself.

The process you want to improve may feed another process. The data you want to consolidate may support reporting somewhere else. The manual step you want to eliminate may contain an informal control nobody documented. The system you want to replace may exchange information with applications that were never part of the original discussion.

That is why an apparently straightforward improvement can become unexpectedly complicated.

The problem may be correctly identified.

The firm may simply not understand everything connected to it yet.

The Visible Process Is Only the Beginning

Processes tend to be described from beginning to end.

Firms don't always operate that neatly.

Information enters from somewhere. Decisions made within the process affect someone else. Data leaves for another purpose. Exceptions follow different routes. People compensate for gaps that may never appear in formal documentation.

Before changing a process, understand its surroundings.

Where does its information originate?

Who relies upon its output?

What controls occur along the way?

What happens when the normal path does not work?

And what knowledge exists only because someone has been doing the job long enough to know?

The answers reveal the operating environment around the problem — not merely the problem itself.

Invisible Work Still Matters

Some of the most important steps in a process may be the least visible.

An experienced employee notices when a number looks wrong.

Someone knows that information from one system must be checked against another before it can be trusted.

A team has developed an unofficial procedure for handling an exception because the documented process does not address it.

None of this may appear in a workflow diagram.

Remove the manual activity without understanding the judgment embedded within it, and an efficiency improvement can inadvertently remove a safeguard.

The goal should not be to preserve unnecessary manual work.

It should be to understand what that work is actually accomplishing before deciding how to replace it.

Follow the Data

If you want to understand how widely a change may reach, follow the information.

Where is it created?

Where is it stored?

Who changes it?

Which systems consume it?

Where is it duplicated?

Where is it reconciled?

Which reports, decisions, controls, and client interactions depend upon it?

Those questions can expose relationships that organizational charts and process descriptions miss.

They can also reveal why apparently isolated improvements sometimes produce unexpected consequences elsewhere.

Data crosses boundaries even when departments do not.

Know What Cannot Be Disrupted

Modernization involves change.

Asset and investment management also requires continuity.

Clients still need service. Reporting still needs to occur. Controls still need to operate. Regulatory obligations remain. Transactions cannot simply wait while an organization discovers that an overlooked dependency was more important than expected.

Preparation therefore includes identifying what must remain dependable while something around it changes.

What cannot stop?

What cannot become less accurate?

What cannot become less visible?

What cannot lose its control?

Those are not arguments against change.

They are conditions for changing responsibly.

Closing Thought

The purpose of preparation isn't to document an organization until every detail is known.

That point may never arrive.

It's to understand enough of the surrounding environment to make deliberate decisions about what changes, what remains, and what must be protected along the way.

Map the connections.

Find the hidden work.

Follow the data.

Identify what depends upon the process you intend to improve.

Then decide how to move.

A well-understood constraint is easier to change because leadership can see not only the problem — but the consequences of solving it.

Finishing strong means that before you remove what's holding the firm back, make sure you know what else it has been holding together.

Start the Conversation

- Every successful modernization initiative begins with a shared understanding of where you are today and where you want to go next.
- If your leadership team is evaluating modernization priorities, Anchor Bridge Innovations would welcome the opportunity to start that conversation.