

WHAT IMPROVEMENT WOULD MATTER MOST IN 2027?

Executive Briefings

Key Takeaways

- **Start with the operational result that matters most, then evaluate potential improvements against it.**
- **Follow constraints through the operation to understand their true impact before deciding where to invest.**
- **Give genuine priorities the attention, ownership, resources, and definition of success the word “priority” implies.**

Estimated Reading Time: 5 minutes

Once you know what needs to change, another question follows:

What matters most?

That sounds straightforward. In a contract manufacturing operation, it rarely is.

Production, quality, supply chain, workforce, customer requirements, equipment, systems, security, and cost all compete for attention. Each can make a legitimate case for improvement. Each may have projects waiting for resources.

But a list of important things is not a list of priorities.

Prioritization means deciding which improvement would make the greatest difference to the operation — and being willing to put other worthwhile improvements behind it.

Start With the Result

Technology planning can easily begin with capabilities.

What could we automate? What should we replace? Where could we integrate systems? What new tools could give us better information?

Those questions have their place.

But they come later.

Begin instead with the operational result you need to improve.

Do you need greater throughput without proportionately increasing labor? Better visibility into production status? Fewer quality problems or less rework? Faster response to customer changes? Greater resilience when a supplier, system, or process is disrupted?

The clearer the desired result, the easier it becomes to evaluate competing investments.

A project that sounds impressive but has little connection to an important operating result may not belong near the top of the list.

A less visible improvement that removes a recurring production constraint might.

Priority should follow impact, not novelty.

Follow the Constraint Through the Operation

The most consequential constraint is not always the most obvious one.

A delay on the production floor may begin with information that arrived late. Rework may trace back to inconsistent data or a manual handoff. Scheduling problems may reflect limited visibility somewhere upstream. Employees may appear to need more capacity when the underlying issue is the amount of time they spend compensating for inefficient processes.

That is why prioritization requires more than identifying where the problem appears.

Follow it.

Ask what causes it, who encounters it, what happens next, and what other parts of the operation it affects.

A constraint that crosses departments, creates downstream work, or repeatedly requires management intervention may have a larger business impact than its original symptom suggests.

Conversely, an issue that generates frequent complaints may prove relatively isolated once its effects are examined.

Understanding that difference helps leaders invest where improvement can travel furthest.

Measure the Value of Removing It

Manufacturers understand measurement.

Apply the same discipline to improvement priorities.

What changes if this constraint is removed or reduced?

Perhaps production time is recovered. Employees spend fewer hours on repetitive work. Quality becomes more consistent. Leaders receive information sooner. Customer commitments become easier to meet. Capacity increases without an equivalent increase in overhead.

Not every benefit will fit neatly into a financial calculation, and it does not need to.

But leadership should be able to describe what better looks like.

If a proposed improvement cannot be connected to a meaningful operational outcome, it may not yet be a priority. If it can, that outcome also provides something valuable later: a way to determine whether the change actually worked.

Consider What the Improvement Makes Possible

Some priorities matter because they solve today's problem.

Others matter because they remove a barrier to tomorrow's growth.

That distinction is particularly important in contract manufacturing.

An operation may be able to accommodate current volumes through manual effort but struggle if demand increases. Existing processes may satisfy today's customer requirements while limiting the ability to respond to greater complexity. A system may perform adequately at the current scale while making expansion increasingly

difficult.

In those cases, the value of an improvement isn't simply what it fixes.

It's what it enables.

The right priority may create capacity, improve flexibility, strengthen resilience, or give the organization room to pursue opportunities it could not confidently support before.

That makes prioritization more than an exercise in correcting problems.

It becomes a decision about where the business wants to be stronger.

Closing Thought

Organizations sometimes call several initiatives “top priorities” because choosing among them is difficult.

But if everything is first, nothing is.

A genuine priority receives more than a place on a planning document. It receives attention, ownership, resources, and a clear definition of success.

That does not mean only one improvement can move forward in 2027.

It means leaders should know which improvements matter most — and why — before projects begin competing for the same people, budget, and time.

The goal isn't to enter the new year with the longest modernization agenda.

It's to enter with the clearest one.

Finish strong by deciding where improvement will matter most. Start stronger by putting your resources behind the results that matter most to the operation.

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.