

WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO WORK AROUND THIS YEAR?

Executive Briefings

Key Takeaways

- **Successful workarounds can conceal operating limitations because the mission continues despite them.**
- **Look for recurring manual effort and dependence on individual knowledge to find constraints that ordinary reporting may miss.**
- **Use the patterns behind 2026's workarounds to identify where leadership should look before deciding what to change.**

Estimated Reading Time: 4 minutes

Government keeps operating.

Services must be delivered. Programs must continue. Information must remain available. Security and compliance obligations do not disappear because a system is aging, a process is cumbersome, or resources are stretched.

So people adapt.

They build another spreadsheet. They transfer information manually. They create an extra review step. They learn which system cannot provide what they need and find another way to get it.

The work gets done.

And that can make the workaround surprisingly difficult to see.

A Workaround Can Look Like Success

When employees solve an operating problem themselves, the immediate result is positive.

The mission continues.

But repeated success at compensating for a limitation can obscure the limitation itself.

A process requiring three manual steps instead of one may still produce the correct result. Information assembled from several sources may still reach the person who needs it. An experienced employee may know exactly what to do when a system cannot handle an exception.

From the outside, everything appears to work.

Inside the process, people may be spending significant time making it work.

That distinction matters.

A successful workaround is still evidence of something that did not work as intended.

Ask Where the Extra Work Lives

Some operating problems appear clearly in performance reports.

Others live inside people's days.

They appear in repeated data entry. Manual reconciliation. Emails sent because systems do not exchange information. Approvals that require someone to track down the right person. Reports assembled from sources that were never designed to work together.

Individually, these tasks may seem too small to become strategic concerns.

Collectively, they can consume capacity that government organizations rarely have to spare.

The useful question isn't simply, "***Did we deliver?***"

It's, "***What did it take to deliver?***"

The difference between those questions can reveal where improvement matters most.

Ingenuity Should Not Become Infrastructure

Government organizations depend upon people who know how to get things done.

That institutional knowledge is enormously valuable.

It can also become a vulnerability when a process works primarily because a particular person understands its exceptions, remembers its history, or knows which unofficial steps are necessary.

Eventually, the workaround and the employee can become inseparable.

That creates questions worth asking.

What happens when that person is unavailable?

Can someone else understand the process?

Is critical knowledge documented?

Would the process survive turnover?

People should make systems and processes better.

They shouldn't have to become part of the infrastructure that keeps them functioning.

Distinguish the Constraint From the Excuse

Government operates within constraints that private organizations may not share.

Procurement takes time. Funding has conditions. Security requirements matter. Regulations and policies shape what can change and how quickly. Legacy systems may support essential functions that cannot simply be interrupted.

Those realities deserve respect.

But a legitimate constraint can eventually become a reason not to examine the problem at all.

"We've always had to do it this way" may describe ***history***.

It does not necessarily describe ***necessity***.

Understanding the difference requires examining which constraints remain unavoidable, which can be managed differently, and which may no longer exist at all.

Closing Thought

Looking back at 2026 doesn't require compiling a list of everything that frustrated employees.

Look instead for patterns.

Where did people repeatedly compensate for the same limitation?

Where did manual effort keep a process moving?

Where did institutional knowledge substitute for accessible information?

Where did a workaround become so familiar that nobody called it a workaround anymore?

Those patterns don't automatically tell leadership what to replace, automate, or modernize.

They tell leadership where to look.

That's enough for a first step.

Because before deciding what should change, an organization needs to recognize what its people have already been quietly changing every day just to keep the mission moving.

Finish strong by understanding that if your people spent 2026 finding ways around the same problem, maybe 2027 will be a good time to stop asking them to go around it.

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.