

# Workforce Strategist Warns AI Automation of Broken Processes Creates Compliance Risk in 2026

*As tariffs and instability force hard budget decisions, an organizational strategist argues cutting people and automating the rest only masks the real problem.*

SAN ANTONIO, TX, UNITED STATES, April 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Most organizations are still treating margin pressure like a future risk. It's not. Tariffs since 2025 have already injected more than \$175 billion in cost into the system, and shipping disruptions tied to conflict in the Middle East are compounding it. The results are simultaneously placing pressure on pricing, supply chains, and labor models.

And after all of that pressure, the response still collapses to the same two moves: cut headcount and automate what's left.

Both moves are wrong because most organizations are applying tools and solutions to processes they have never actually mapped.

"Before you eliminate a position, you have to know what that position is actually doing," says Dr. Thomas W. Faulkner, founder of Faulkner HR Solutions. "Most organizations think they understand a role because they can point to a title on an org chart, but ask them to trace how that role actually moves work and creates value and the answer gets vague fast."

Faulkner spent years partnering with municipal governments, where zero-sum budgets served as baselines, and watching organizations survive genuine resource emergencies through redesign and not shrinkage. That experience shapes how he advises private sector clients today.



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*Dr. Thomas W. Faulkner*

"You can't survive a supply chain crisis by cutting the very people holding your operations together," he says, "and the mistake right behind it is assuming you already know where the waste is. You probably don't."

Map the flow before touching the org chart

[Value stream mapping](#) — a discipline borrowed from lean manufacturing and long overdue in most service-sector organizations — traces every step a unit of work takes from input to output, identifying where value is actually created and where it disappears into waiting, rework, redundant approvals, and unnecessary handoffs. In manufacturing, this practice drove decades of margin improvement; however, in most white-collar organizations, it has barely been applied.

When work runs through four people that a well-designed process could handle with two, the issue isn't with headcount where cutting one of the four fixes it, but rather how handoffs flow.

The uncomfortable part

Some positions are genuinely redundant and not because the people filling them are underperforming, but because the process was a product of accumulation and not design. A reorg added an approval layer that never got removed. A handoff built to manage a risk that no longer exists is still running, still consuming time, still showing up on nobody's priority list because it has always just been there. Nobody set out to build something wasteful. It just got that way.

A value stream analysis will find that. A round of layoffs guided by budget targets and org charts likely will not. Budget-driven cuts tend to preserve bureaucratic layers — because the people with budget authority protect what surrounds them — while eliminating producers closest to the actual work. When positions need to go, the case for removing them should come from a flow analysis, not a spreadsheet. The difference matters both operationally and when someone files a grievance.

The automation argument deserves more scrutiny than it's getting

Replacing a human operator with an automated process does not redesign the process. It removes the human from it.

If the underlying workflow has redundant steps, unclear accountability, and unnecessary handoffs, automating it produces a faster, cheaper version of the same dysfunction — now with less human judgment available to catch what the system misses. In regulated environments — healthcare, municipal services, financial services — that is not a cost savings. It is a [compliance exposure](#) that will not show up until it does.

Automation applied to a broken process locks in the break. A redesign should come first before you decide what to automate after you understand what the work actually is.

The problem with calling HR "infrastructure" and stopping there

Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends research found that organizations continuously reconfiguring capabilities around actual outcomes are more likely to outperform financially. That reconfiguration requires a function that treats the organization itself as the thing to be designed and maintained.

"We say HR is infrastructure, not just an administrative function," Faulkner says. "Then we go right back to processing offer letters like that's the job. Admin work matters, but it's not the system. Infrastructure means someone owns how work moves and not just the people moving through the system itself. Most organizations never hire for that role. They relabel the admin function, call it strategic, and keep pushing the same boulder only to have it roll back downhill."

The difference between structuring people and structuring the system people work within is not a matter of framing. One produces colorful charts and graphs. The other produces an organization that can absorb pressure without collapsing under fifteen years of layered decisions no one ever stopped to redesign.

Companies that come through this economic cycle in better shape than they entered will not have gotten there by cutting faster or automating more aggressively, but in how they built a leaner system that didn't have to be invented in the middle of a crisis.

Most organizations won't fix this in time because admitting the system is the problem that requires a level of ownership that most leadership teams still aren't willing to take.

Faulkner is available for media commentary, executive briefings, and [keynote engagements](#) on workforce strategy, lean organizational design, and the operational cost of treating HR as an administrative function.

About Dr. Thomas W. Faulkner

Dr. Thomas W. Faulkner (DBA, SPHR, LSSBB) is the founder and principal of Faulkner HR Solutions, a Texas-based consultancy that builds durable HR infrastructure for municipalities, nonprofits, and small to mid-sized businesses. A U.S. Army veteran with doctoral-level training in business administration, Faulkner specializes in HR remediation, workforce systems design, and organizational compliance. His work focuses on converting structural HR failures into operating systems that hold.

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