

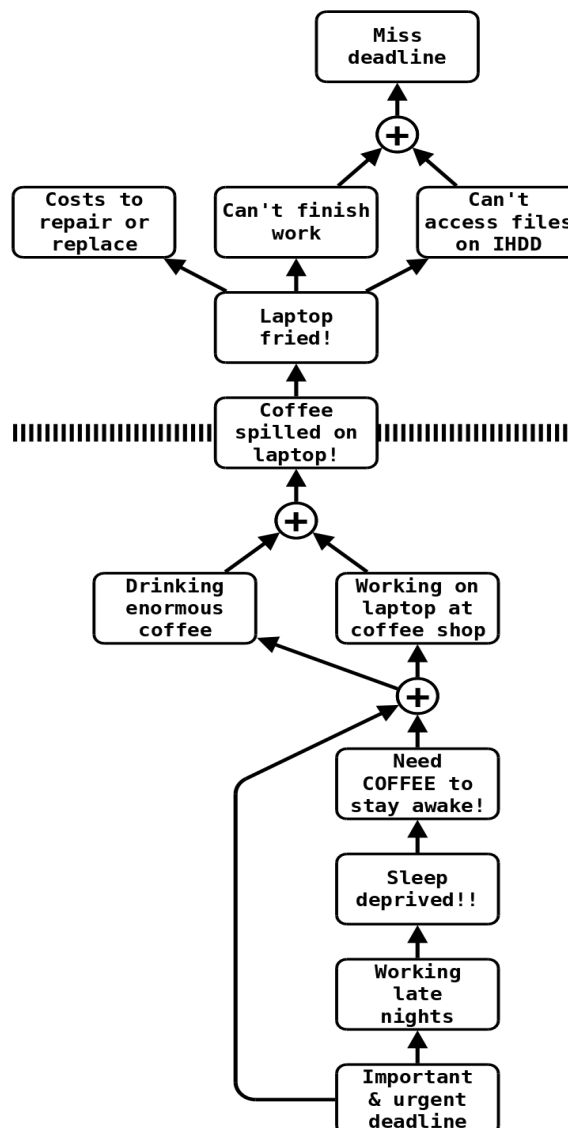


Anticipating The Consequences Of A Course Of Action

Often we hear about a person or an organisation embarking on a course of action which turns out badly and we wonder what were they thinking? And that was the problem, they weren't thinking. They didn't consider how the course of action might play out. There are advantages to anticipating possible consequences:

- It may reveal additional steps or stages that have been overlooked.
- It may reveal actions that would need to be modified or replaced in order to steer the process in the direction that is desired.
- And in some cases, it might even reveal that the whole thing was just a *bad idea* from the beginning and should be thrown in the bin!

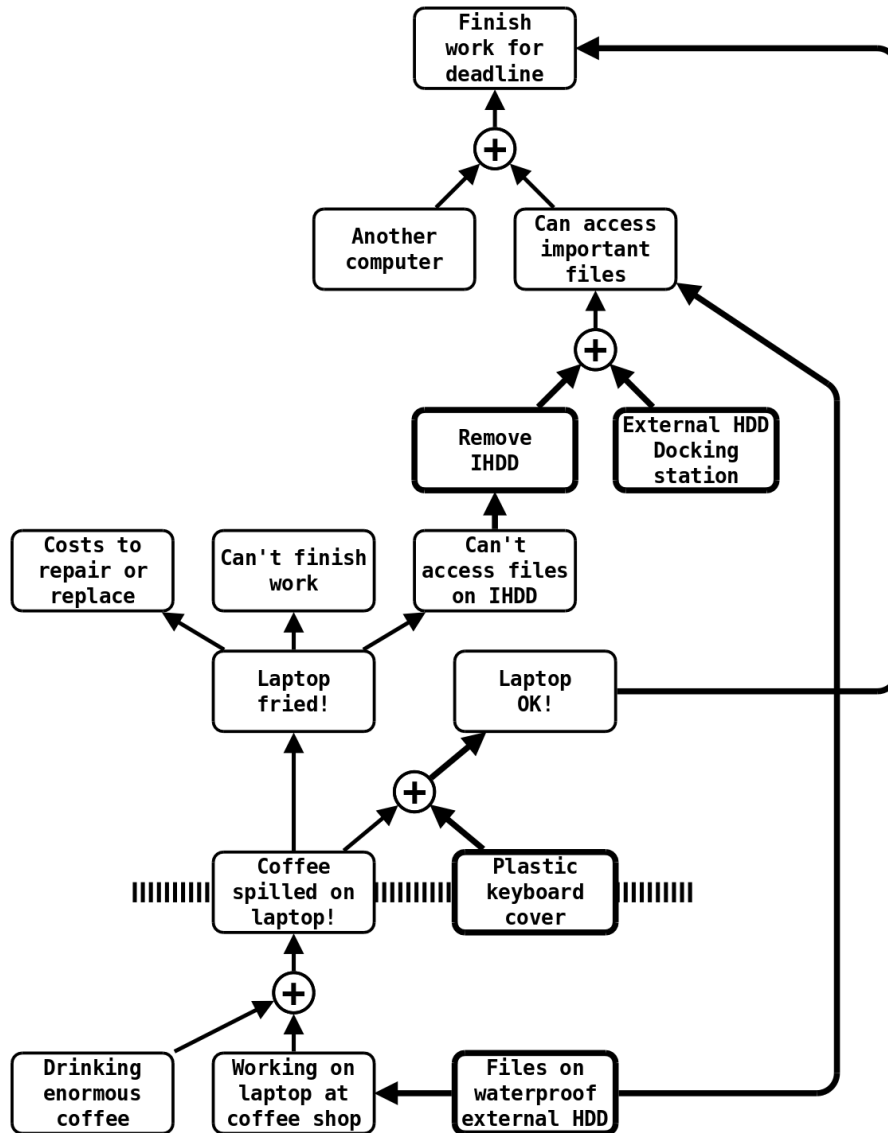
Let's look at a simple example which begins at the bottom of the diagram with our hero/heroine, an important deadline, a lack of sleep, a laptop and a huge cup of coffee ...



There are two items to note in the diagram:

- The \oplus symbol is used whenever you must have a combination of conditions or actions to produce the effect(s) at the head of the arrow that leaves the \oplus symbol.
- The dashed horizontal line indicates the catastrophic "caffeinated beverage displacement event"! (Now you know why the IT people are always banging on about backing up important files!)

So, having anticipated the possibility of our hero's/heroine's future employability going down the drain, which steps can s/he take? In the diagram below, I have reproduced only the top part of the map since the bottom part would be identical.



This diagram indicates three possible actions (heavier lines) among others that could avoid or minimise the impact of spilling coffee, namely:

- keep the important files on an external USB drive of some kind, preferably waterproof;
- put a plastic cover over the keyboard of the laptop;
- purchase a USB docking station, so that if necessary, the Internal Hard Disk Drive could be removed and the files accessed using the docking station.

When you anticipate what could go wrong you can then:

- *modify* or *substitute* an action beforehand in order to avoid or minimise the negative consequence;

- *add* another action before the negative consequence happens in order to avoid or minimise its effects.

And if the worst happens despite your best efforts, can you *add* another action after the event to mitigate the severity of its effects?

Note: In Goldratt's *Theory of Constraints – Thinking Processes* there are two mapping techniques that concern anticipating consequences (*Future Reality Tree*) and how to avoid, minimise or mitigate negative consequences (*Negative Branch Reservation*).

This material has been adapted from the book:

Reading Your Own Watch

by Ted VanderNoot Ph.D.

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