



SMARTER GROWTH CONSULTING

From Complexity to Competitiveness with The Hive Foundations

Facing rising costs from wages, utilities and food inflation, a multi-billion-pound UK food retailer needed to simplify its labour model, cut bottlenecks and stay competitive against discounters. Within 4 months, we helped uncover inefficiencies, identify quick wins and design a roadmap for a new leaner food operating model – balancing efficiency with better customer service.

The Challenge They Faced

The retailer's in-store labour model was complex and costly, with:

- Rising costs from NI, NMW, utilities, food inflation and suppliers
- Pressure to keep prices competitive against discounters
- Complicated routines that frustrated colleagues and slowed service
- Bottlenecks and variation between “what should happen” and “what really happens”
- A need to find both quick efficiency wins and longer-term transformational enablers

Our Solution

The Hive Foundations created clarity and momentum through a structured approach:

- Mapped out all operating models to visualise how work was meant to run
- Interviewed colleagues to compare reality vs labour model expectations
- Installed engagement boards so all shifts could share pain points and ideas
- Analysed data to categorise tasks into simple vs complex, spotting hidden bottlenecks
- Ran rapid improvement events with SMEs to test new ideas and build buy-in
- Built two pathways:
 - Continuous Improvement list – quick wins to deliver immediate savings
 - Transformational list – tech enablers and cross-functional changes for longer-term efficiency

Hurdles We Worked Through

- Variations in how tasks were really done vs how they were “meant” to be done
- Colleague frustrations and scepticism about yet another “initiative”
- Complexity of cross-functional bottlenecks requiring senior support and investment.

By engaging colleagues directly, making pain points visible, and showing leadership tangible options, we built credibility and momentum for change.

The Difference It Made

- Clear visibility of inefficiencies across the operating model
- A prioritised list of quick wins for immediate impact in the 0-1 year plan
- A transformational roadmap for 1-3 years, including tech and cross-functional enablers
- Stronger colleague engagement and idea generation through feedback boards
- A clear pathway to a new leaner food operating model post-year 3

Keeping the Momentum

The Hive Foundations gave leadership both immediate actions and a strategic roadmap. Quick fixes started to free up time and reduce costs, while transformational enablers were built into medium-term plans. By involving colleagues and cross-functional leaders, the retailer is now set up to deliver a simpler, scalable lean operating model that balances cost, service and growth.

Client Details - Multi-billion-pound UK food retailer, supermarket format. Project focused on in-store labour model and food operating processes.