FOUNDATIONS ADVISORY

AFTER ACTION REVIEW

Cedar Vale Foods

Delivery scheduling improvement

COMPANY AND INITIATIVE

Cedar Vale Foods supplies chilled food to local restaurants. The initiative introduced a scheduling procedure and customer delivery messages across four depots. It aimed to improve punctuality and reduce the time dispatchers spent preparing routes.

SPONSOR'S FOCUS

The sponsor wants to understand how staff raised practical problems, how leaders explained changes, and whether training and staffing gave people enough time to prepare.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Deliveries became more punctual and schedules took less time to prepare. The initiative missed its original date, budget and full automation scope. Staff helped identify a testing gap, and leaders acted on it. Earlier testing, clearer communication and protected practice time would strengthen future initiatives.

SPONSOR

Morgan Ellis

Operations lead

REVIEW PERIOD

1 May - 31 July 2026

Three participant accounts covering operations, finance and depot dispatch.

PURPOSE OF THIS REVIEW

This review uses the initiative's experience to identify useful working practices and improvements to how future initiatives are scoped, communicated, staffed and reviewed.

Key Takeaways

94%
On-time deliveries; 96% target

14 days
After the original launch date

0.6%
Instruction errors; below 1% limit

Results against expectations

Cedar Vale improved delivery punctuality from 88% in April to 94% in July, falling two percentage points short of its target. Dispatchers also prepared schedules more quickly, averaging eleven minutes against a ten-minute target. The team met its revised launch date and budget after accepting a fourteen-day delay and an additional £6,000 in supplier and equipment commitments. East depot continued to send customer messages manually.

Behaviors and processes

Staff raised a delivery exception that the original tests had missed, and the operations lead arranged additional checks. Assigning a person to each issue helped staff follow up. Preparation was less effective: East dispatch received the revised plan seven days after approval, and practice sessions were postponed when experienced staff returned to normal duties. Future initiatives would benefit from earlier exception testing, confirmed communication and cover for staff while they practise.

External conditions and control

A supplier outage interrupted customer messages for one afternoon on 6 July. Depot staff kept customers informed by telephone until the service returned. The team could control its fallback arrangements and escalation to the supplier. The outage itself lay outside its practical control and occurred after the original launch deadline. Its effect on cost and punctuality remains unknown.

Results Against Expectations

OUTCOMES AND VALUE

MISSED TARGET

Expected: The target was 96% on-time deliveries, compared with 88% in April.
Actual: In July, 470 of 500 deliveries arrived on time, giving a punctuality rate of 94%.
Difference: Punctuality was two percentage points below target and six above April. July includes work before launch, so the rollout's contribution remains unknown.

SCOPE

INCOMPLETE

Expected: The plan covered scheduling and automated messages at all four depots.
Actual: All four depots used the scheduling procedure. Three used automated messages; East used the approved manual arrangement.
Difference: Automation remained unfinished at one depot. The scheduling procedure was in use at all four.

TIMELINE

MISSED ORIGINAL DATE

Expected: The original launch date was 30 June. The revised date was 14 July.
Actual: Scheduling launched on 14 July. East's message automation remained unfinished on 31 July.
Difference: Launch was fourteen calendar days after the original date and met the revised date.

COST

OVER ORIGINAL BUDGET

Expected: The original supplier and equipment budget through 31 July was £60,000.
Actual: Commitments totalled £66,000, including approved unpaid invoices. This measure excludes ordinary staff pay.
Difference: Commitments were £6,000, or 10%, above the original budget and matched the approved revised budget.

Results Against Expectations (cont'd)

QUALITY

STANDARD MET

Expected: The acceptable limit was incorrect instructions on fewer than 1% of checked deliveries.
Actual: Three of 500 July deliveries checked had incorrect instructions, an error rate of 0.6%.
Difference: The error rate was 0.4 percentage points below the limit. Earlier error rates were unavailable.

EFFICIENCY

MISSED TARGET

Expected: The target was an average of ten minutes to prepare a route, compared with fifteen minutes in April.
Actual: The average was eleven minutes across 100 post-launch July schedules, measured on the same basis as April.
Difference: Preparation took one minute longer than planned and four minutes less than in April, a 26.7% reduction in time.

PEOPLE AND CAPACITY

OVERTIME ABOVE PLAN

Expected: The eight-person dispatch team was expected to work eight overtime hours per week in total during the launch fortnight.
Actual: The same team averaged fourteen overtime hours per week during that fortnight.
Difference: Overtime was six hours, or 75%, above plan. Fatigue and morale were unmeasured.

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE

RESULT UNCERTAIN

Expected: The target was positive ratings from 85% of customers across the four depots.
Actual: Of 220 invited customers, 34 replied (15.5%). Among those respondents, 28 gave positive ratings (82.4%).
Difference: Respondents were 2.6 percentage points below target. Their coverage of the four depots and wider customer group is unknown, so overall achievement remains uncertain.

Initiative Timeline

The scope gap and staffing reassignment preceded the original deadline. The supplier outage occurred during the approved delay.

1 May

Original plan agreed

The team agreed scheduling and automated messages at four depots, with a £60,000 supplier and equipment budget and a 30 June launch.

11 June

TEST GAP

Scope gap identified

East's dispatcher raised tests missing an order split between two vehicles. Six added cases found customer messages naming the wrong vehicle.

18 June

Revised plan approved

The team moved launch to 14 July, approved manual messages at East and increased the supplier and equipment budget to £66,000.

25 June

LATE NOTICE

Delayed communication reached East

The dispatcher first received the revised date and manual-message instruction, seven days after approval.

6 July

OUTAGE

Supplier messaging outage

Messages stopped for one afternoon. Depot staff used telephone updates until service resumed.

14 July

LATE LAUNCH

Launch missed the original date

Scheduling began at four depots, fourteen days after the original deadline. East retained manual messages.

24 July

Review changed the test pack

Split-delivery cases and a message checklist were added. Three East practice uses were observed by 31 July.

Behaviors and Processes

Staff raised a problem and leaders responded

When East's dispatcher identified an order split between two vehicles that the initial tests had missed, the operations lead assigned an investigation and expanded the checks. Those checks exposed incorrect customer messages before launch and informed the decision to keep manual messages at East. The number of live errors prevented remains unknown.

Clear responsibility helped people follow up

The shared issue list named the person responsible for checking each problem and gave an expected reply date. Both operations and dispatch described this as useful because staff could see who was addressing a concern and whom to approach. This is a practical coordination habit to preserve in future initiatives.

Preparation left staff less time to get ready

PREPARATION GAP

The team expanded exception testing after the dispatcher raised the missing case, while East dispatch received the revised plan seven days after approval. Preparation was further disrupted when experienced dispatchers covered sickness and practice sessions were postponed. Together, these events left staff less opportunity to prepare before launch, although their individual contributions to delay, cost and punctuality remain unmeasured.

Scoping Assessment

The intended problem was clear

The brief connected scheduling work to punctual deliveries and dispatcher effort. It defined four depots and two areas of work: the scheduling procedure and automated customer messages.

The tests missed a recurring order type

TEST COVERAGE GAP

The initial tests covered ordinary deliveries and omitted split deliveries, in which one customer's order travels in two vehicles. After East's dispatcher raised this missing case on 11 June, six added tests found messages naming the wrong vehicle. The original test scope had therefore missed a recurring delivery arrangement that affected message accuracy.

Carry forward: test common exceptions before setting dates

The operations lead should involve depot staff in defining the tests before agreeing a launch date, drawing on their experience of recurring delivery exceptions. Testing the complete customer message alongside the schedule would give the team a fuller basis for estimating the work and planning the launch.

Decision Making Assessment

Options and trade-offs were made visible

At the 18 June review, the team considered keeping the original launch date, delaying the whole rollout, and delaying it by two weeks while using manual messages at East. Depot staff described unfinished tests, and finance identified an additional £6,000 supplier cost. The operations lead recorded the selected option and its approval, making the basis of the change visible.

Staff received the revised plan late

LATE COMMUNICATION

The operations lead sent the decision to depot leads on 18 June and assumed they would brief dispatchers. East's dispatcher first received the new date and manual-message instruction on 25 June, seven days later. This left less time for preparation. The evidence does not establish when staff at the other depots received the change.

Carry forward: confirm that staff received the decision

A written change note should explain the approved decision and what it means for the staff affected, including the preparation required. Depot leads should confirm that those staff have received and understood the change, giving the operations lead a clear basis for treating communication as complete.

Execution Assessment

Named responsibility supported coordination

Operations and dispatch found the shared issue list useful because each entry named the person responsible and an expected reply date. The operations lead also described short daily calls with depots. These arrangements gave staff a practical way to raise problems and follow their progress.

Practice competed with regular operations

INSUFFICIENT COVER

From 15 to 25 June, the operations lead reassigned two experienced dispatchers to cover sickness in ordinary operations. With no protected cover plan in place, practice sessions were postponed and dispatch staff used overtime to fit practice around normal scheduling.

The workload allowance was exceeded

OVERTIME ABOVE PLAN

The eight-person dispatch team averaged fourteen overtime hours per week during the launch fortnight, compared with eight planned. Finance’s records show that the initiative required more staff time than allowed for. The effect on fatigue and morale remains unknown.

Carry forward: agree cover for normal work during practice

Launch planning should establish who will cover normal duties while staff practise, so that preparation time is considered alongside supplier cost. If staff are reassigned, the operations lead should revisit the preparation plan and explain how the change affects readiness for launch.

Learning Assessment

Feedback changed a specific working tool

At the 24 July review the team added split-delivery cases and a manual-message check to the common test pack. The dispatcher describes three East practice runs using the revised checklist by 31 July.

Wider use and lasting effects remain unverified

EVIDENCE LIMITED

The early practice runs show that the revised checklist entered use at East during this initiative. Its use at other depots, on later initiatives and over a longer period remains unknown, so the evidence supports a limited account of learning to date.

Carry forward: retain the lesson and verify its use

Future teams should use the expanded test pack before agreeing launch readiness and record what the exception cases reveal. An error found early or a resulting change to preparation would provide practical evidence that the lesson is influencing how work is done.

External Factors and Control

Supplier outage: outside the team’s control

A supplier outage stopped customer messages for one afternoon on 6 July, so depot staff telephoned customers and tracked updates until service resumed that evening. The team could escalate the fault and maintain a fallback, while preventing the outage lay outside its practical control. Because the interruption followed the original 30 June deadline, it cannot explain that initial missed date; its effects on cost and punctuality remain unknown.

Staff sickness: cover and preparation were management choices

Staff sickness reduced the people available for ordinary operations, leading the operations lead to reassign two experienced dispatchers from 15 to 25 June and postpone practice sessions. Cover arrangements, protected preparation time and adjustments to launch readiness were choices within the organization’s control. The evidence establishes disrupted preparation, while the resulting share of delay or additional cost remains unmeasured.

Practices to Preserve and Change

Keep a named person for each issue and a usable fallback

Because named owners and reply dates helped staff follow issues through, Cedar Vale should retain the shared issue list. Depot leads should also maintain a clear fallback for customer updates, drawing on the telephone response used during the outage.

Change scope testing before dates are agreed

Future launch dates should reflect tests designed with depot staff, including recurring exceptions such as split deliveries. Checking both the schedule and the complete customer message would give the operations lead a fuller basis for estimating the remaining work.

Change how approved decisions reach staff

A written change note should explain how an approved decision affects staff, including the date and preparation required. Depot leads should confirm that dispatchers understand it, giving the operations lead a reliable way to check that communication is complete.

Change how preparation time is protected

Preparation should be planned alongside the normal duties staff must continue to cover. When launch arrangements change, finance and depot leads should review that cover and the expected training time and overtime together with supplier commitments.

Check use of the lessons and improve customer coverage

Future reviews should establish whether teams use the revised tests before launch and whether customer feedback reflects the wider group. Recording survey distribution, invitations, replies and coverage by depot and customer type would support comparison with similar past surveys and clarify whose experience the ratings describe.