

HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM
OPERATIONS RESEARCH EVENT

MEET FRESH BELLEVUE

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APRIL 6TH, 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Description of the Business

Meet Fresh USA is a brick-and-mortar restaurant chain that serves traditional Taiwanese desserts and drinks. With its organic ingredients and homemade style desserts, Meet Fresh has expanded in many countries oversea since its first opening in 2007; the business now has over 500 franchised stores around the world. Meet Fresh Bellevue, the local franchise of Meet Fresh USA that this paper is focused on, is owned by Mr. Young Ye and managed by Ms. Phoebe Li. Ye and Li work back and forth with other franchised branches of Meet Fresh USA to manage human resources, innovate new holiday dessert series, and promote the business' brand.



Research Methodologies

Figure 1.1: A summary and timeline of conducted research methodologies.

Type of Research	Methodology	Recipient	Date(s) Conducted
Primary	Interview	General Manager	12/18/2021 & 1/2/2022
	Survey	Employees	1/5/2022
	Personal Experience	Employee: Aryn Xing	6/15/2021-Present
Secondary	Exploratory Research	N/A	12/10/2021 – 12/31/2021
	Descriptive Research	N/A	1/2/2022-1/15/2022

Findings and Conclusions

1 Understaffed workplace

Meet Fresh Bellevue does not have enough employees and adequate training to operate at an ideal, full-capacity state.

2 Inefficient work allocation

Meet Fresh Bellevue does not allocate its employees effectively to cover maximized store operations, causing additional stressors to the working experience.

3 Lack of incentives

Employees at Meet Fresh Bellevue are not motivated to fulfill their increasingly stressful job responsibilities under the pandemic.

4 Missing sense of community

The sense of community at Meet Fresh Bellevue can be improved to ensure that employees feel connected and informed.

Proposed Strategic Plan

Mission: The **H.O.M.E. Initiative** aims to improve and enhance the employee experience at Meet Fresh Bellevue by increasing the efficacy of human resources management, creating more incentives for work, and strengthening the sense of community. The name “**H.O.M.E.**” is chosen to encourage working conditions and a workplace culture that feel like home during troubling times such as the pandemic.

Hire: The first objective of the H.O.M.E. is to devote more efforts and resources into hiring new employees who will occupy the currently understaffed workplace.

1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will increase online promotion of its hiring content both through professional platforms and social media accounts.
2. The training process for new employees will be revamped as Meet Fresh Bellevue enhances the organization of its training.
3. Meet Fresh Bellevue will be providing systematic training on how to properly handle customer interactions.

Optimize: With the business’ existing employees, Meet Fresh Bellevue will more reasonably allocate shifts to workers and adjust its operating hours to optimize each employee’s input to the marginal productivity of the operations.

1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will improve shift coverage by increasing the number of workers per shift during rush hours.
2. Operating hours at Meet Fresh Bellevue will be adjusted according to observed trends of customer behavior on different days of the week.

Motivate: the next stage of the H.O.M.E. Initiative aims to create more financial and psychological incentives, motivating workers to better fulfill their job responsibilities.

1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will provide different wage rates to incentivize better shift coverage and job fulfillment.
2. The cleanliness of the kitchen and the storefront working area will be improved to eliminate dissatisfactory working conditions.
3. Meet Fresh Bellevue will actively award outstanding performance of its employees through open and physical recognition.

Engage: the final stage of the H.O.M.E. Initiative is to establish a sense of connectedness and involvement in the workplace culture at Meet Fresh Bellevue.

1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will refine its shift arrangement system to better communicate with its employees regarding upcoming schedules.
2. Meet Fresh Bellevue will promote employee contribution to holiday drink designs to appeal to employees’ creativity and innovation.
3. The role of social media management and outreach will be delegated to the employees to maximize their involvement in the business.

Proposed Budget

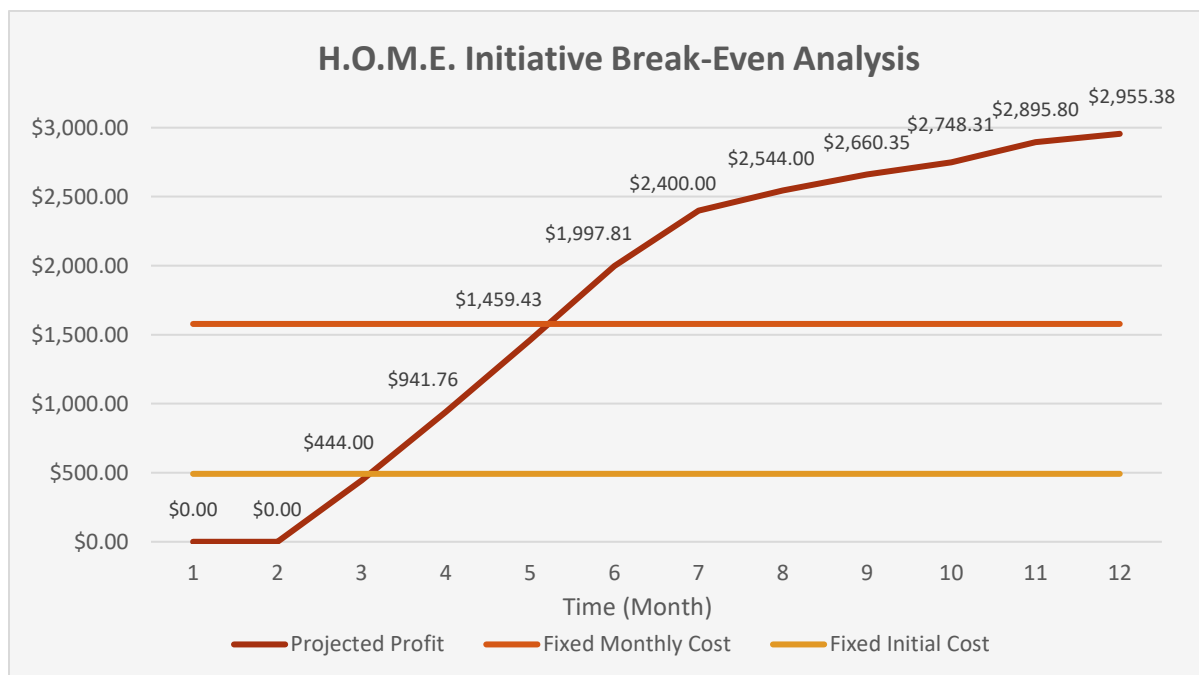
The total cost for the H.O.M.E. Initiative is **\$1578.00** monthly with an initial cost of **\$492.19**. This proposed strategic plan to improve and enhance employee experience is cost-efficient as its monthly cost only occupies around 1.3% of Meet Fresh Bellevue’s revenue.

Figure 1.4: Detailing the cost of each project per month, as well as the total initial and recurring costs.

Phase	Project	Type of Cost	Unit Cost	Quantity	Subtotal
Hire	Hiring Process	Initial	\$12.19	1	\$12.19
	Training	Initial	\$10	48	\$480.00
	Customer Handbook	-	\$0.00	1	\$0.00
Optimize	Shift Coverage	Recurring	\$16.50	48	\$792.00
	Earlier Closing Time	Recurring	\$1.50	-	\$480.00
Motivate	Higher Wage	Recurring	\$1.00	144	\$144.00
	Improve Cleanliness	Recurring	\$12.00	12	\$144.00
Engage	Employee of the Month	-	\$6.00	3	\$18.00
	Monthly Shift Schedule	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
	Holiday Drink Designs	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
	Social Media Management	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
Total Initial Cost					\$492.19
Total Recurring Cost					\$1,578.00

Meet Fresh Bellevue is expecting to see a growth in monthly profit of around **\$2955.36**, which equates to around a **25%** increase in revenue from the current revenue. In turn, the Return on Investment for the H.O.M.E. Initiative estimates at **87.3%**.

Figure 1.5: a graph visualizing a break-even analysis over 12 months after implementing the H.O.M.E. Initiative and projecting the breakeven points of the initial and recurring costs, which are around 3.1 months and 5.2 months, respectively.



INTRODUCTION

A. Description of the Business

Meet Fresh USA is a brick-and-mortar restaurant chain that serves traditional Taiwanese desserts and drinks. The first Meet Fresh store was opened in 2007 by Dong Fu, who comes from a Taiwanese family experienced in cooking and dessert making. Founded in the Feng Yuan District of Taichung, Taiwan, the business received favorable feedback from the local community and quickly gained popularity in Taiwan. With its organic ingredients and traditional, homemade style desserts, Meet Fresh expanded in many countries oversea, now with over 500 franchised stores around the world.



The Taiwanese dessert store is known for its extensive menu. Meet Fresh serves everything from the basic kinds of milk and green teas, as well as fruit teas and slushes, to shaved ices, sweet soups, and grass jelly bowls. There are also plenty of options to add toppings, such as brown sugar boba, flavored jelly, sweetened beans, and taro paste. Not only do the icy dessert bowls bring a taste of coolness on a hot summer day, the steamy, rich winter dessert series never fails to warm up the snowy winter. The business’ tagline of serving customers “exquisite teas, treats, and desserts” (Meet Fresh USA) also underlines Meet Fresh’s mission to produce the best-made foods for dessert lovers.

Meet Fresh Bellevue rivals with many competing desserts and drinks stores, such as Sharetea, Happy Lemon, and even the coffeehouse giant, Starbucks, in the area. The competition between local dessert stores is extremely intense as the restaurant service industry has a relatively low barrier to entry and a mass customer base. However, Meet Fresh stands out from its rivals with a cultural menu serving Taiwanese desserts with traditional cooking methods and organic ingredients. While other desserts and drinks stores mix premade powder and serve factory-produced jelly products, Meet Fresh baristas cook beans, barley, peanuts, and other fresh toppings to be served with its often hand-shaken drinks.

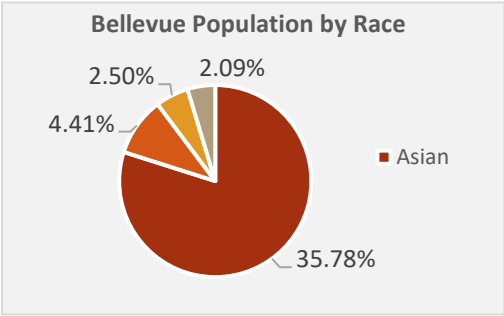
Meet Fresh Bellevue, the local franchised branch of Meet Fresh USA that this paper is focused on, is owned by Mr. Young Ye and managed by Ms. Phoebe Li. Both with extensive experience in restaurant management, Young and Phoebe strive to operate the brick-and-mortar dessert store to the best of their abilities. Ye and Li work back and forth with other franchised branches of Meet Fresh USA to manage human resources, innovate new holiday dessert series, and promote the business’ brand.

B. Description of the Target Market

Demographics

Geographics: Located in the City of Bellevue’s Lake Hills Village, which is also home to many dine-in restaurants, Meet Fresh Bellevue’s customers could simply walk to the store from the other side of the plaza for some sweets after their savory meal.

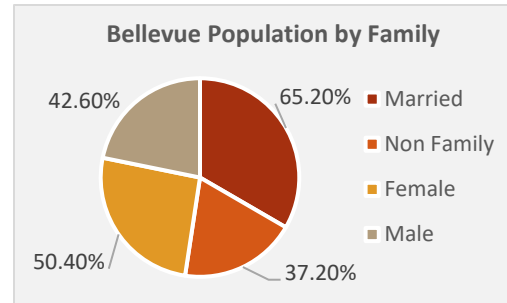
Race/ethnicity: The City of Bellevue celebrates diversity in its communities as almost 50 percent of the city population is



of a non-white race or ethnicity. Among this 50 percent, 36 percent of the city population is of the Asian race (Census Place, 2019). Serving traditional Taiwanese desserts, Meet Fresh is visited mostly by the Asian community, specifically the Chinese and Taiwanese dessert lovers.

Family: What differentiates Meet Fresh from its competitors is also its larger servings of desserts that appeal to customers that come in as a family, who make up 57 percent of the Bellevue population (World Population Review, 2021).

Income: The median annual income of the City of Bellevue was \$112,283 in 2018, demonstrating a 6.53% annual growth from the previous year. This income median is more than that of the annual income of the entire United States, which was only \$61,937 in 2018 (Census Place, 2019).



Psychographics

Buying behavior: As most people in the Bellevue community have the financial capability to purchase discretionary foods and drinks, such as Meet Fresh’s products, many people view desserts as a conventional addition to their eating routines.

Culture: The basic Taiwanese drink, milk tea and boba, is largely incorporated into the popular culture as more people consider milk tea as a broad genre of drink option. This incentivizes customers to regularly purchase these products at Asian dessert stores like Meet Fresh.

C. Overview of the Business’ Current Employee Experience

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the mode of operation at Meet Fresh Bellevue has gone through a process innovation that adapts to the contactless, digitized shopping behavior of its customers. The business successfully switches from employing a cashier for manual ordering to a 100% self-ordering system. The replacement of the cashier with a digitized process allows the dessert store to carry out efficient operations even with very few personnel. Not only were its store operations substantially renovated, but the business’ human resources management and employee experience, as a result, also saw notable changes. The most remarkable impact on Meet Fresh Bellevue’s employee experience results from labor shortage, which has been a common economic trend since the pandemic hit in early 2020.

In addition to the declining operation and thus the reducing profitability of the business as a whole, an understaffed workplace at Meet Fresh Bellevue also causes stress on individual employees. This is because they are expected to make more dessert orders during their shifts than they would in a workplace with full capacity. Flexibility in shift arrangement is also reduced as there are fewer co-workers available to cover open shifts. Most importantly, during rush hours of the store, an insufficient number of employees per shift results in the piling up of dessert orders and, in turn, negative reactions from customers, which forces extra responsibility and stress onto Meet Fresh employees. Lastly, another change in Meet Fresh Bellevue’s employee experience involves the training on how to follow, as well as to communicate with customers, pandemic guidelines mandated by the State of Washington.

The store owner and manager have put in extensive effort to hire, train, and motivate their employees. Current strategies to optimize employee experience and human resources management include attempts to publicize hiring information on social media, allowing flexibility for shift schedules, and fostering a friendly, supportive workplace culture. Current employees at Meet Fresh Bellevue also demonstrated adequate satisfaction with their pay, preparation for the job, working schedule, and general experience at the business. However, many underlying problems in Meet Fresh Bellevue’s employee experience, as expressed by the General Manager, current employees, and additional research.

RESEARCH METHODS USED IN THE STUDY

A. Description and Rationale of Research Methodologies Selected to Conduct the Research Study

To develop a proposed strategic plan for Meet Fresh Bellevue that improves and enhances employee experience at the business, a range of primary and secondary research methodologies were conducted to examine the task through varying scopes and perspectives. Primary research methodologies used to design the proposal include manager interviews, an employee survey, and personal experience working on-site. Secondary research methodologies incorporated in this process include the consultation of the Meet Fresh USA website, business blogs, and industry analysis.

While the primary research methodologies help highlight personal, nuanced perspectives on employee treatment and experience at Meet Fresh Bellevue, secondary research methodologies allow more flexibility on the different angles from which this project aims to approach its task. Secondary research offers perspectives both focusing specifically on Meet Fresh Bellevue as a business and the restaurant service industry in general, as well as a comparative outlook on the business' employee experience with other local restaurants. This information effectively corroborates the first-handed but rather limited perspective presented by primary research.

The secondary research process was conducted in two stages: exploratory and descriptive. Exploratory research was carried out to gather general information about Meet Fresh Bellevue and its position compared to other restaurant service businesses. After establishing an overall understanding of the business, descriptive research was aimed to specifically examine the employee experience and potential strategies to implement under changes from the Covid-19 pandemic.

B. Process Used to Conduct the Selected Research Methods

Manager Interview

Two interviews with Phoebe Li, the manager of Meet Fresh Bellevue, were arranged through personal connection and carried out through both in-person discussions and emails. The interview questions consisted of open-ended, quantitative, and comparative questions, with detailed prompts guiding the direction of the interview and follow-up questions encouraging more in-depth conversations. The interviews helped collect information regarding the current state of employee experience at Meet Fresh Bellevue, what strategies the business has already attempted to improve employee experience, and broad objectives for the business and its employees.

Employee Survey

An employee survey was sent out to 7 current employees and 3 previous employees at Meet Fresh Bellevue and received 9 responses. The survey consisted of 11 questions and was left open for 10 days after being directly messaged to each employee to complete. Responses to the survey were collected anonymously, encouraging honesty and openness about these employees' experiences at Meet Fresh Bellevue. Questions on the survey were presented in the forms of multiple-choice, short answer, scale rating, and open-ended responses. The survey was effective in collecting first-handed information about how Meet Fresh employees feel about their experience with their jobs.

Personal Experience On-site

Working experience and environment were noted consistently from June 2021 to the present during a job as a part-time barista at Meet Fresh Bellevue. Positive and negative aspects of employee experience were considered from a personal perspective, specifically with the aim to develop a proposed strategic plan to improve and enhance employee experience at the business.

Secondary Research

Secondary research was conducted both before and after the manager interview and the employee survey. Consultation of business blogs regarding changes in employment practices and human resources management in restaurant service businesses was used to guide the design of interview and survey questions. Preliminary research also supported an understanding of Meet Fresh Bellevue’s basic business model and the flexibility to which employee experience can be strategically improved. After analyzing the responses from the manager interview and the employee survey, further secondary research was conducted to comparatively assess the employee experience at Meet Fresh Bellevue to that at other restaurant service businesses.

Figure 1.1: A summary and timeline of conducted research methodologies.

Type of Research	Methodology	Recipient	Date(s) Conducted
Primary	Interview	General Manager	12/18/2021 & 1/2/2022
	Survey	Employees	1/5/2022
	Personal Experience	Employee: Aryn Xing	6/15/2021-Present
Secondary	Exploratory Research	N/A	12/10/2021 – 12/31/2021
	Descriptive Research	N/A	1/2/2022-1/15/2022

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

A. Findings of the Research Study

Interview: General Manager

A total of 2 interviews were conducted with the General Manager of Meet Fresh Bellevue. The first interview was done on December 18th, 2021 to gather exploratory information about the business and current human resources strategies on a general scope. After organizing the responses to the interview and secondary research to complement understanding of the business’ current state, a follow-up interview was conducted on January 2nd, 2022 to acquire descriptive information specifically about the business’ employee training process, workplace culture, staffing situation, and employee motivation. Excerpts of key questions answered in the interviews are as follows:

First Interview

1. How does Meet Fresh Bellevue ensure employees are qualified and confident in carrying out their job responsibilities?

“Every new employee we hire will go through a systematic training process, consisting of 4 paid training sessions in total. Each training session assesses the employee on a Standard Operation Exam and on-position training. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is an employee training manual provided by Meet Fresh USA that details the making of every menu item with both written and visual descriptions. Trainees will become contracted employees after qualifying in all 4 training sessions.”

2. How does Meet Fresh Bellevue cultivate a workplace culture?

“Both to our customers and our employees, Meet Fresh Bellevue prioritizes the cultivation of a family-like, cordial atmosphere. Because of the high employee turnover rate and long operating hours in the restaurant service industry, we haven’t had many workplace bonding events.”

3. How does Meet Fresh Bellevue motivate its employees?

“There are two types of hourly wage, one for working full-time (40 hours/week) and another for working part-time (under 40 hours/week). Tips are collected and distributed by dividing total tips by total hours worked and multiplying that hourly tip by each employee’s worked hours. Meet Fresh Bellevue arranges shift schedules and job responsibilities considering the different situations faced by our employees. Furthermore, during cultural holidays, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese New Year, Meet Fresh Bellevue distributes gift packages of foods and festive decors to employees.”

4. How has Meet Fresh Bellevue adapted its employment strategies to the pandemic?

“There has been quite a bit of change in our employment and operation strategy. Meet Fresh Bellevue has successfully shifted from a 100% manual ordering to 100% self-ordering exactly since the start of the pandemic. This transition alleviated problems with understaffing that we have been facing. We completely abandoned the position of cashier, which helped us to ensure operations even with very few personnel in the state of understaffing.”

Second Interview

1. What would be the ideal staffing situation at Meet Fresh Bellevue?

“Meet Fresh Bellevue has been understaffed since the start of the pandemic, especially on weekends, when there are usually a total 200-250 orders to be made in one business day. The ideal staffing situation during rush hours requires at least 4 employees working at the same time, but we currently only have 3 employees per shift at most; on weekdays, there is generally only one employee in the entire store during the day.”

2. How does Meet Fresh Bellevue communicate with its employees?

“We mainly use the WeChat workgroup feature to send out notifications regarding schedule changes, additions of menu items, and promotional activities. For employees who prefer other communication methods, the General Manager will notify them by text. There are also printed instructions in store to inform employees of business or menu changes. Weekly shift schedules are communicated through the When I Work app.”

Survey: Employees

A survey was organized through Google Forms and sent out to employees through direct channels of communication on January 5th, 2022 and received 10 responses out of the 11 employees who have worked at Meet Fresh Bellevue in the past year. This survey aimed to collect information both on the general, first-hand employee experience at the business and on specific modifications employees would like to see made to the business. Key questions in the survey were answered as follows:

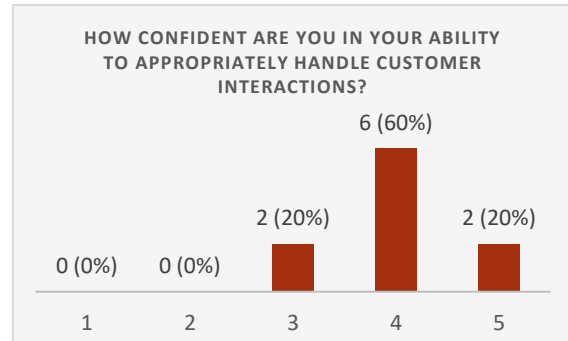
1. How confident are you in your ability to make an order correctly?

The first aspect of this survey aims to understand how qualified the employees think they are at fulfilling their main job responsibility – the making of a dessert order. When examining their ability to make an order correctly, 80% of the employees indicated extreme confidence while 20% indicated adequate confidence in this ability.



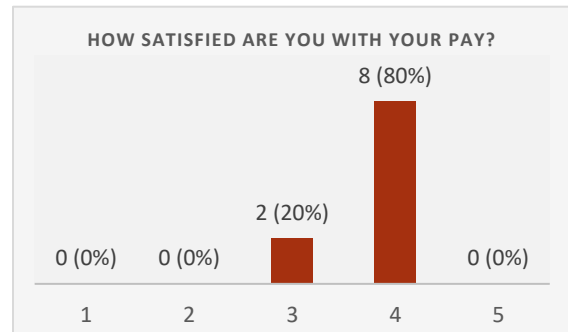
2. How confident are you in your ability to appropriately handle customer interactions?

The second aspect of this survey aims to indicate the employees' comfort level with dealing with complaints, questions about certain menu items, and phone calls. When self-assessing their ability to appropriately handle customer interactions, 60% of the employees reflected that they are adequately confident in this ability. 20% of the employees reflected extreme confidence while 20% of the employees were only somewhat confident in this ability.



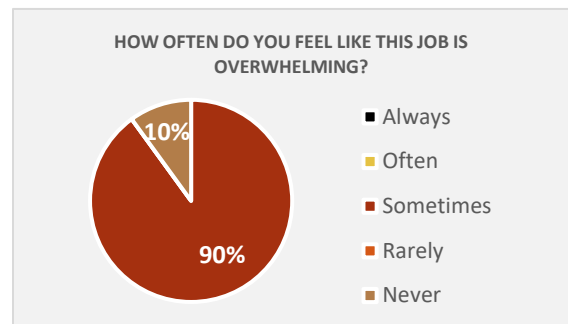
3. How satisfied are you with your pay?

The third aspect of this survey seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of financial motivation on employees. When asked about their satisfaction with their current pay, 80% of the employees showed adequate satisfaction while 20% of the employees were only somewhat satisfied with their pay.



4. How often do you feel like this job is overwhelming?

Another aspect of this survey seeks to identify the stress level Meet Fresh Bellevue's employees are facing at or due to their jobs. When asked how often they feel like their job is overwhelming, 10% of the employees reflected that they rarely feel overwhelmed while 90% of the employees revealed that they are sometimes overwhelmed by their job at the business.



5. What can Meet Fresh do to improve your working experience?

This open-ended question at the end of the employee survey was designed to understand what aspects of their working environment Meet Fresh Bellevue's employees would want to see changes in. When given the opportunity to describe what Meet Fresh Bellevue can do to improve their working experience, the surveyed employees agreed to several common problems.

Out of the 10 surveyed, 4 employees communicated about the higher stress level during business rush hours, such as weekends and evenings, due to the insufficient number of employees per shift. 3 employees suggested better communication between the employer and the employees, shorter operation hours, and a better training process that supports new employees through their job familiarization. Moreover, 2 employees suggested a different pay for weekend and evening shifts, as well as more opportunities that involve creativity and innovation.

Although responses to the previous question regarding the employees' ability to correctly make an order seem positive, it must be accounted for that most of the surveyed employees have worked at Meet Fresh Bellevue for long enough that they are now mostly confident in this ability. Responses to this open-ended question reveal that many employees see a problem with the efficiency of Meet Fresh Bellevue's training process at the beginning of their jobs.

On-site experience: personal

Areas of improvement for employee experience at the business have been noticed personally. The staffing arrangement at different business hours is not made to optimize workplace capacity and to adapt to the sporadic flow of customer in restaurant service businesses. For example, when the store is not as busy, 1 employee would be standing around during a shift of 2 people because there are not as many orders coming in, whereas when the store is suddenly busy, the 2 employees on the shift would be overwhelmed by the rush of orders. Furthermore, weekly shift schedules are pushed out to employees on the Sunday of the week before, giving employees only 1 day to a week of notice in advance, which causes inconvenience and stress for employees to prearrange their personal schedules.

Secondary Research

Exploratory research through business blogs and industry reports outlines general trends in employment and human resources management since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Workers interviewed by CNN Business revealed their struggle with an understaffed workplace and the urgent need for upskilling that causes overworking. Increased stress level caused by understaffing ultimately pushes many workers to consider quitting their jobs (Danielle Wiener-Bronner, 2021). In order to enhance employee experience and reduce worker turnover rate during a period of labor shortage, an August 2021 Bankrate survey discovered that 56% of employees demand flexibility at their workplace, 53% expect higher pay, 47% prioritize job security, and 24% prefer an inclusive work culture (Roepe, 2021).

Descriptive secondary research was conducted to explore employment trends and common work experience in the restaurant service industry specifically. Employee experience can be greatly enhanced through improved communication that makes employees feel more connected by delivering announcements, such as changes to the menu, quickly and efficiently to the entire staff (Irvine, 2014).

The pandemic has made it difficult for restaurant service employees because there are far more takeout orders than before, making it “almost like running double the restaurant with half the staff” (Danielle Wiener-Bronner, 2021). Consequently, businesses in the restaurant service industry have attempted to raise wages or increase perks to compensate for the need for employee upskilling. However, this doesn’t fix the underlying problem of understaffing (Danielle Wiener-Bronner, 2021).

B. Conclusions Based on the Findings

The findings observed in the research process were summarized in a causal context. A Fishbone Analysis is carried out to correlate the various factors that contribute to the current problems of Meet Fresh Bellevue’s employee experience.

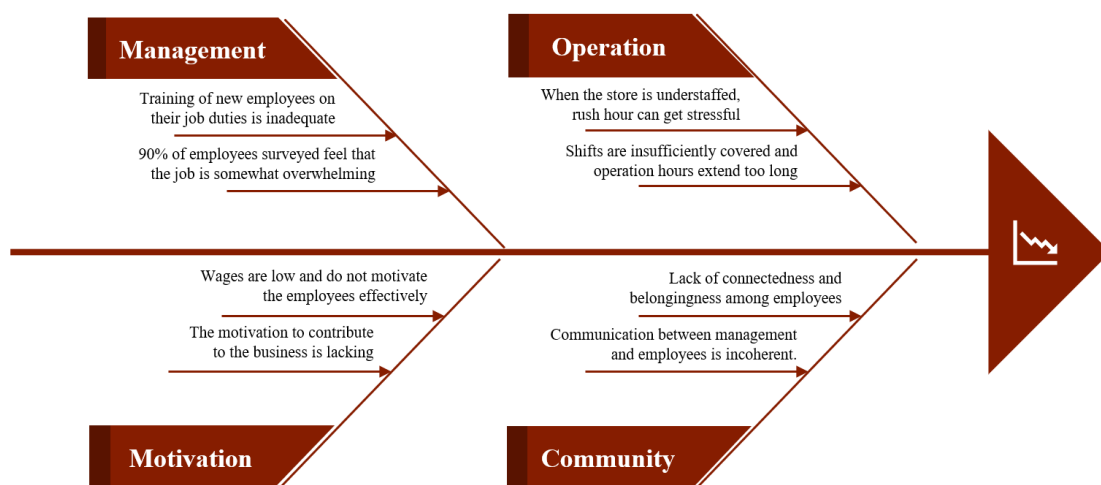


Figure 1.2: causes of decline in Meet Fresh Bellevue’s employee experience

From the Fishbone Analysis, it can be concluded that the major problems in Meet Fresh Bellevue's employee experience are related to its Management, Operations, Motivation, and Community. These conclusions are further explained as follows:

1 Understaffed workplace

Meet Fresh Bellevue does not have enough employees and adequate training to operate at an ideal, full-capacity business state. From secondary research, it can be concluded that labor shortage has been a persistent economic since the start of the pandemic. The General Manager revealed during the interview that the current number of employees does not meet the ideal condition. Employees of Meet Fresh Bellevue also communicated that understaffing has caused an increased level of stress as they have relatively less flexibility in their shift arrangements and are sometimes overwhelmed during their shifts.

2 Inefficient work allocation

Meet Fresh Bellevue does not allocate its employees well enough to fulfill maximized store operation and causes additional stressors to employees' working experience. Each shift is often not covered by an adequate number of employees to operate at rushed hours, as agreed to by the General Manager and the surveyed employees. Operation hours also start early in the afternoon and extend into the late evenings on weekdays, despite the usually small customer flow during these times.

3 Lack of incentives

Employees at Meet Fresh Bellevue are not motivated enough to fulfill their stressful job responsibilities under the pandemic. With a relatively low-paying job, the business' employees are most likely not prioritizing their jobs over other personal activities. Surveyed employees indicated a preference for higher pay during rush hours, which are usually more stressful and energy-demanding to cover. Secondary research also demonstrated employee expectations of higher financial motivators corresponding to their upskilled jobs and overworked shifts.

4 Missing sense of community

The sense of community at Meet Fresh Bellevue can be improved to ensure that employees are feeling connected and informed. Information from secondary research argues that seamless communication at the workplace can significantly contribute to a positive employee experience. Rather on-the-spot notices about upcoming shifts result in employees feeling unprepared for and misinformed about their shifts, according to the surveyed employees. There is also a lack of connectedness between employees as they, due to the prolonged operating hours of the business, usually do not have time to familiarize themselves with each other.

PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN

A. Objectives and Rationale of the Proposed Strategic Plan

The **H.O.M.E. Initiative** stands for Hire, Optimize, Motivate, and Engage. This proposed strategy aims to improve and enhance the employee experience at Meet Fresh Bellevue by increasing the efficacy of human resources management, creating more incentives for work, and strengthening the sense of community. The name “H.O.M.E.” is chosen to encourage working conditions and a workplace culture that are warm, supportive, and feel like home during troubling times like the pandemic.

H.O.M.E. Objectives	
<p style="text-align: center;">H</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hire</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To reach a larger population of job applicants and better prepare employees for their jobs</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Optimize</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To balance work allocation during each shift and maximize marginal productivity from employees</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">M</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Motivate</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To design better financial and psychological motivators, as well as maintenance factors</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Engage</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To build a sense of community through communication and employee involvement</p>

Hire

To fundamentally solve the problem of understaffing, Meet Fresh Bellevue must diverge more of its efforts to the recruitment process, specifically the outreach of its hiring information. However, the hiring process wouldn’t be successful without a coherent system of employee training that prepares employees for their jobs. Thus, both on-the-job and off-the-job training will be incorporated in the process.

Optimize

A more deliberate procedure of human resources management should be adopted to optimize productivity of current employees through better scheduling and more balanced work allocation. Operationally, this objective will take advantage of the Marginal Productivity of Labor – the increase in total production when an additional worker is employed. By maximizing marginal productivity, this objective will ultimately alleviate the ongoing problem of understaffing.

Motivate

More motivators at the workplace can better incentivize employees to fulfill their job responsibilities during stressful times like the pandemic. Financial motivators come in forms of wage raises, bonuses and perks, and psychological motivators come in forms of recognition and autonomy; these motivators are

designed to appeal to the employees' Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. Lastly, Herzberg's Theory of Motivation is used to design both the motivators, which increase job satisfaction, and hygiene factors, which remove dissatisfactions with the job.

Engage

An inclusive community is empirical to employee retention and the building of a sense of belongingness at the workplace. By offering employees opportunities for Participation and Involvement, one of Kotter's Six Change Approaches, Meet Fresh Bellevue will be expecting to see more contributions from its employees to the business. Only when employees feel like they are contributing and a part of the "working family" can they more happily work their jobs and better carry out their job responsibilities.

B. Proposed Activities and Timelines

Hire: the first objective of the H.O.M.E. is to devote more effort and resources in hiring new employees who will occupy the currently understaffed workplace.

1. **Meet Fresh Bellevue will increase online promotion of its hiring content both through professional platforms and social media accounts.**

LinkedIn, as the world's largest professional network on the internet, will be used to reach a wider base of potential job applicants through the web of business connections on the platform. To improve Meet Fresh's current LinkedIn profile, which has 152 followers, but no announcements made about job hiring opportunities, the company will open a job availability with the hiring information of a storefront dessert maker. A hiring flyer made with digital graphics will also be published as a post with hashtags and brief catchlines to increase reach among the LinkedIn social network. Similar messages about job hiring will be posted separately like other job hiring websites, mainly Glassdoor and Indeed Jobs, which are two of the largest employee hiring platforms in the United States. Meet Fresh Bellevue will also use social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram, as an effective channel to attract potential job applicants. A simple, visually appealing flyer will be posted on both social media platforms with hashtags targeting job finders in Bellevue, Seattle, and local cities.

2. **The training process for new employees will be revamped as Meet Fresh Bellevue enhances the organization of the training.**

In addition to the current training process consisting of 4 on-position sessions, Meet Fresh Bellevue will have 1 shadowing session. During this session, the trainee follows and observes an experienced employee carrying out his or her job responsibilities for 1 hour and 30 minutes. By providing this shadowing opportunity, Meet Fresh Bellevue will allow its trainees to be familiarized with the kitchen setting, job routines, and basic modes of customer interaction before they start learning the job hands-on. This can effectively reduce stress and confusion for the trainee and facilitate the training process that equips the new employee with necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill store operations. Moreover, during the 4 on-position training sessions, each trainee will be assigned an experienced employee as their shift leader to check if their orders are made correctly and answer any clarification questions.

3. **Meet Fresh Bellevue will be providing systematic training on how to properly handle customer interactions.**

Another aspect of working in a restaurant service business is dealing with customers daily. Although it is difficult and unprofessional in the service industry to strive for verbatim, monotonic responses to customers, an agreeable standard for handling customer interactions can reduce confusion and increase the employee's confidence in carrying out this aspect of his or her job. Meet Fresh Bellevue will compile a comprehensive list of commonly asked questions or complaints by customers and advise a standardized response to each situation. Common situations can include when a customer asks to cancel an order,

complains about a wrongly made order, or requests for unrealistic accommodations. This list of standardized responses will be designed into a digital handbook and distributed to new employees directly. By informing every employee of the proper ways to resolve customer requests, every employee can feel knowledgeable and confident to interact with customers like the manager of the store.

Optimize: With the business' existing employees, Meet Fresh Bellevue will more reasonably allocate shifts to workers and adjust its operating hours to optimize each employee's input to the marginal productivity of the operations.

- 1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will improve shift coverage by increasing the number of workers per shift during rush hours.**

To better prepare the store for rush hours, usually on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, Meet Fresh Bellevue will equip the dessert-making stations during all rush hour shifts with 4 employees. This change in shift arrangement will be made possible by the successful hiring of new employees, which will be accomplished through the first aspect of the H.O.M.E. Initiative. An efficient number of employees during the busy business hours will prevent the orders from piling up, both mitigating employees' stress levels and customer satisfaction with a shorter waiting time. More workers on a shift can not only handle the busy customer flow but can also adjust to the sporadic nature of the restaurant service industry's business hours. When the store is not as busy, employees that are not making orders can prepare extra servings of dessert toppings that will be stored in the fridge and used later during the day.

- 2. Operating hours at Meet Fresh Bellevue will be adjusted according to observed trends of customer behavior on different days of the week.**

It is observed that the store is usually not as busy during weekdays and does not have as many customers in the late evening, which is near the current closing time. To limit unprofitable operating hours that still require employees to be present to cover the shift, Meet Fresh Bellevue will change its closing time on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights from the current 10PM to 8PM. Since there usually are two employees per closing shift, a 2-hour early closing time will save 4 hours per business day and 16 hours per week (from the 4 days of adjusted operation hours) of shift coverage, which can then be allocated to rush hours to optimize employee input to marginal productivity.

Motivate: the next stage of the H.O.M.E. Initiative aims to create more financial and psychological incentives, motivating workers to better fulfill their job responsibilities.

- 1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will provide different wage rates to incentivize better shift coverage and job duty fulfillment.**

To encourage better coverage of rush hours during weekends and evenings, which are typically associated with higher stress levels and more job responsibilities, Meet Fresh Bellevue will provide employees working busy hours with a higher pay. As the current part-time employee wage rate is \$15.50 hourly, the business will increase that to \$16.50 for rush hours. Rush hours are classified as from 5-10 PM on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The wage rate for full-time employees, though, remains unchanged as they will need to work at least 40 hours a week and will be required to cover some rush hours shifts.

- 2. The organization and cleanliness of the kitchen and the storefront working area will be improved to eliminate dissatisfactory working conditions.**

Because of the lavish need for dessert toppings, premade drinks, and syrup sweeteners, a great number of dishes, utensils, and trash, are changed out throughout each business. The employees, however, usually cannot find enough time to clean the piling dishes and take out the trash during their shifts, especially during busy hours. Thus, on weekends, in addition to having dishwashers come in after

the store closes at 10 PM to clean the dishes and trays used throughout the business day, Meet Fresh Bellevue will pay dishwashers to come in at 6 PM. They will be in charge of washing or stacking up the dishes, taking out the trash, and mopping the kitchen floor to ensure a safe and clean environment for the storefront employees. These job responsibilities will take around 1 hour each day. This strategic activity will serve as a maintenance factor that reduces unwanted working conditions at the workplace.

3. Meet Fresh Bellevue will actively award outstanding performance of its employees through open and physical recognition.

To strengthen employee spirit and motivate employees psychologically, an “Employee of the Month” title will be awarded to an employee at the end of each month. This employee will be chosen by the General Manager, who is present in the store and working with the storefront employees most of the time. Factors to be considered when awarding this title include supportive actions toward coworkers, proactive measures in fulfilling job responsibilities, or exceeding-expectation interactions with customers. This recognition is further awarded with financial and more personal motivators: in addition to the free drinks and desserts for all employees on shift and the employee discount, the Employee of the Month will also be given 3 “Free Drink” gift cards that he or she can gift to friends or family members.

Engage: the final stage of the H.O.M.E. Initiative is to establish a sense of connectedness and involvement in the workplace culture at Meet Fresh Bellevue.

1. Meet Fresh Bellevue will refine its shift arrangement system to better communicate with its employees regarding upcoming schedules.

The current shift schedule is distributed on the Sunday of the upcoming business week, making it a rather immediate notice for employees who are working a shift earlier in the week. This short notice can cause inconveniences to employees’ personal lives as they are less flexible in arranging their own schedules and could often get surprised by the new shift schedule. To reduce this dissatisfaction, Meet Fresh Bellevue will develop a monthly shift calendar instead of the current weekly one. The General Manager will take information about employee schedule conflicts and arrange shift allocations at the end of every month for the next month. By doing this, employees can be better informed about their work schedule and better plan their personal arrangements.

2. Meet Fresh Bellevue will promote employee contribution to holiday drink designs to appeal to employees’ creativity and innovation.

During holiday seasons such as Halloween, Christmas, or the Mid-Autumn Festival, Meet Fresh usually pushes out seasonal drinks and dessert series to add diversity and innovation to the menu. Instead of having the General Manager come up with all the holiday special drinks, Meet Fresh Bellevue will challenge employees to initiate ideas they have seen on social media or heard from friends and family of potential holiday menu items. Through this interactive process, employees will be more likely to feel involved and contributive to the business, indirectly boosting employee retention rate.

3. The role of social media management and outreach will be delegated to the employees to maximize their involvement in the business.

Current social media platforms Meet Fresh Bellevue runs through Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Because most employees at the business are high school students, who are the target audience and users of trending social media, Meet Fresh Bellevue will hand its social media accounts to be run by these employees. The employees can choose to produce Instagram and Facebook posts, stories, or reels, as well as TikTok videos to promote Meet Fresh products and workplace culture. Not only does this contribute to the marketing of the business, but it also engages the employees through their personal contribution to business promotional strategies.

PROPOSED BUDGET

Hire

The total first-year cost of the Hire stage is **\$492.19**. The breakdown is as follows:

- **Hiring process (\$12.19):** no cost for professional platforms; \$7.19 per 1000 impressions on Facebook and \$5.00 per post on Instagram.
- **Training (\$480.00):** no cost for the 1 shadowing session; \$10.00 per hour paid to 3 new employees for 4 sessions of 4-hour on-position training.
- **Customer interaction handbook:** no cost.

Optimize

The total monthly cost of the Optimize stage is **\$1272.00**. The breakdown is as follows:

- **Shift coverage (\$792.00):** \$16.50 per hour for 1 additional employee during rushed hours, calculated by 4 hours a day and 3 days a week.
- **Earlier closing time (\$480.00):** \$1.50 of average profit per order, 10 fewer orders per hour of earlier closing, 2 hours of early closing on 4 days per week.

Motivate

The total monthly cost of the Motivate stage is **\$306.00**. The breakdown is as follows:

- **Higher wage (\$144.00):** \$1.00 extra pay per hour of rush hour shift, 3 employees (payment to the 4th employee is calculated in “Shift coverage” in Optimize) for 4 hours per day, 3 days per week.
- **Improve cleanliness (\$144.00):** \$12.00 per hour paid to 1 dishwasher for 1 additional hour for 3 days a week.
- **Employee of the Month (\$18.00):** \$6.00 on average per drink, 3 gift cards.

Engage

The total first year cost of the Engage stage is **\$0.00**. The breakdown is as follows:

- **Monthly shift schedule** (no cost)
- **Holiday drink designs** (no cost)
- **Social media management** (no cost)

Figure 1.4: Detailing the cost of each project per month, as well as the total initial and recurring costs.

Phase	Project	Type of Cost	Unit Cost	Quantity	Subtotal
Hire	Hiring Process	Initial	\$12.19	1	\$12.19
	Training	Initial	\$10	48	\$480.00
	Customer Handbook	-	\$0.00	1	\$0.00
Optimize	Shift Coverage	Recurring	\$16.50	48	\$792.00
	Earlier Closing Time	Recurring	\$1.50	-	\$480.00
Motivate	Higher Wage	Recurring	\$1.00	144	\$144.00
	Improve Cleanliness	Recurring	\$12.00	12	\$144.00
	Employee of the Month	Recurring	\$6.00	3	\$18.00
Engage	Monthly Shift Schedule	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
	Holiday Drink Designs	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
	Social Media Management	-	\$0.00	-	\$0.00
Total Initial Cost					\$492.19
Total Recurring Cost					\$1,578.00

Total Cost

The total cost for the H.O.M.E. Initiative is **\$1578.00** monthly with an initial cost of **\$492.19** as discussed with the General Manager of Meet Fresh Bellevue and corroborated by secondary research. This proposed strategic plan to improve and enhance employee experience is extremely cost-efficient as the H.O.M.E. Initiative has a monthly cost that only occupies around 1.3% of Meet Fresh Bellevue’s revenue. However, with employees feeling happy, motivated, and included in the workplace culture, the business is expected to see a 31% increase in employee productivity and a 20% increase in profitability (Designial, 2020). The General Manager further envisions that after the implementation of the proposed strategic plan is completed after 7 months, the business will continue to see a growth in profit of around 3% to 5% as a positive employee experience will boost the overall performance the business.

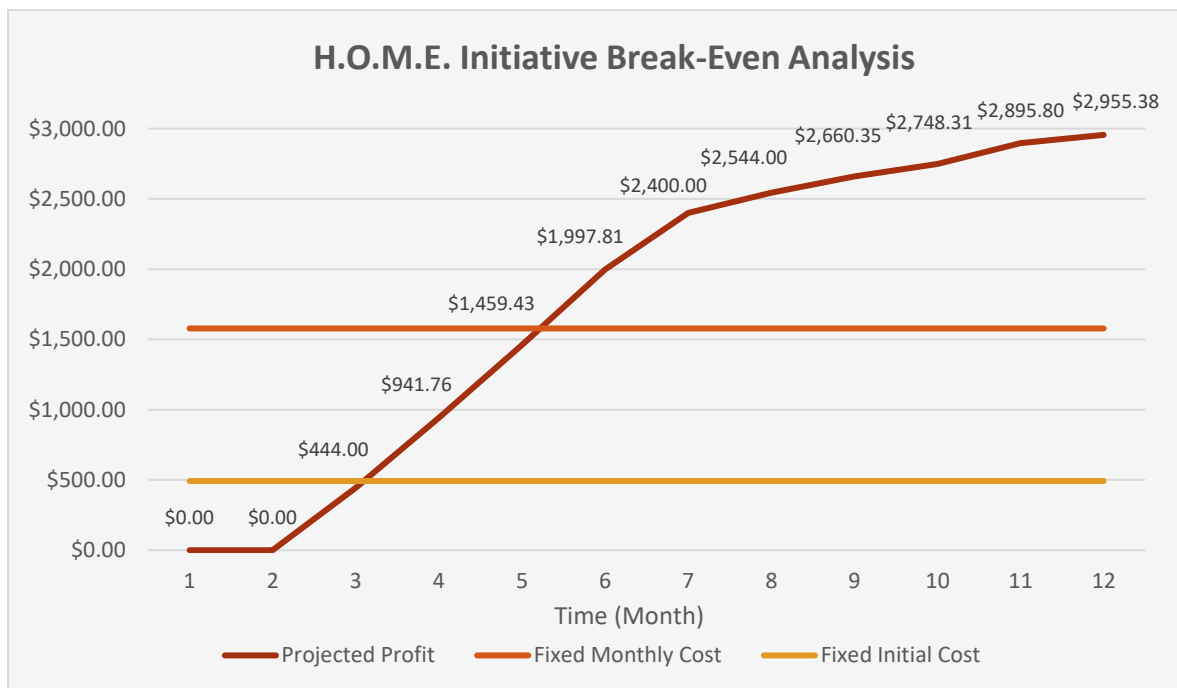
Return on Investment

With the projected increase in monthly revenue, Meet Fresh Bellevue is expecting to see a growth in monthly profit of around **\$2955.36** after 12 months into the H.O.M.E. Initiative, which equates to around a **25%** increase in revenue from the current revenue. In turn, the Return on Investment for the H.O.M.E. Initiative estimates at **87.3%**. In other words, for every \$1.00 that Meet Fresh Bellevue allocates to the H.O.M.E. Initiative, the business will earn around \$1.87 in return, profiting \$0.87. Additionally, not only is this proposed strategic plan designed to solve short-term problems with understaffing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but this strategy can also continue to develop and benefit Meet Fresh Bellevue, as positive employee experience is one of the key elements to a successful and profitable business.

Break-Even Analysis

Lastly, a Break-even Analysis is conducted to gain insight on the duration or sold quantity by which the invested cost of a new business, product, or service will be compensated entirely by the profits. For this analysis, the break-even point determines at which point in time Meet Fresh Bellevue’s investment in the proposed H.O.M.E. Initiative will start generating profit for the business.

Figure 1.5: a graph visualizing a break-even analysis over 12 months after implementing the H.O.M.E. Initiative and projecting the breakeven points of the initial and recurring costs, which are around 3.1 months and 5.2 months, respectively.



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