



Building the operating system for rapid growth

Oxford Biomedica had evolved from a university spin-out into one of the world's leading gene and cell therapy companies. Its science, partnerships and commercial opportunities were developing rapidly, but the operating model behind the organisation had not grown at the same pace.

The company was spending approximately £34 million a year with more than 440 suppliers. Purchasing decisions were distributed across scientists, laboratories, projects and corporate functions, with limited coordination or consistent commercial oversight.

I was initially asked to conduct a procurement diagnostic. It quickly became clear that the challenge extended much further.

There was no single executive owner for the end-to-end supply chain. Procurement, manufacturing, warehousing, finance and project teams operated in functional silos. Supplier and contract management were inconsistent, while the IFS system supported transactions without providing the information needed to manage performance effectively.

We designed a new operating model that brought purchasing, supply chain, warehousing and logistics into a more coherent structure. It introduced clearer responsibilities, common processes, category-management disciplines, supplier and contract-management approaches, performance measures and a plan for strengthening the team.

The objective was not to restrict scientific autonomy or slow innovation. It was to help technical teams obtain what they needed more easily, while transferring commercial analysis, administration and negotiation to people equipped to manage them.

A major capital-equipment programme for a new production facility provided an early opportunity to prove the approach.

Approximately £6 million of purchases were routed through the new process. Requirements were consolidated, business cases received greater scrutiny and negotiations were conducted with much stronger commercial rigour.

Across more than 60 transactions, the programme delivered £905,000 of savings—an average of approximately 18%. Its supporting audit trail also enabled the company to claim 50% of eligible expenditure through a government innovation grant.

With the initial model proven, my role expanded into a wider operational transformation.

Purchasing activity was progressively consolidated through a central Supply Chain and Procurement team. A procurement manager was recruited, while coaching and mentoring strengthened the capability and confidence of existing colleagues.

We also began connecting forecasts, bills of material, purchasing requirements and inventory information within IFS. Monthly reporting brought manufacturing, procurement and project management together around a shared view of demand, capacity, supply and financial commitments. This created the foundation for a more structured S&OP process.

Spend analysis showed that 80% of expenditure was concentrated among approximately 10% of suppliers. This allowed the team to focus its attention on the relationships and categories that mattered most, rather than treating every supplier in the same way.

Similar principles were applied to inventory. Requirements were consolidated, forecasting and central control improved, and laboratory teams were relieved of unnecessary ordering and administrative work.

What began as a procurement review had become an organisation-wide operating-model transformation, connecting scientific requirements with commercial decisions, supply-chain planning, manufacturing capacity, inventory and supplier performance.

The work also demonstrated the need for permanent executive ownership of the whole system. A Chief Operating Officer was subsequently appointed, bringing previously fragmented operational functions together and giving them a clear voice within the executive team.

The enduring outcome was not simply £905,000 of purchasing savings. It was an organisation better equipped to convert outstanding science and commercial opportunity into controlled, scalable operational performance.