The first stage of development was the identification of the market opportunity. Two factors contributed to the project’s initiation. First, the retailer wanted to redesign and rebrand its entire convenience offering (consisting of lunchtime and snack products). It had recently expanded the distribution of this range, to petrol stations and roadside ‘Take a Break’ shops, and was opening it up to another retailer of beauty products. The success of these projects had led to recognition of the need to change the current offering and brand, so that they could both be sold in Orchids stores and “sit outside the corporate estate” [RB9]. The product and packaging therefore had to be congruent with this. A brief was created for the range, leading to over 150 products being launched.

The second factor was more specific to the three products that form the focus of this case. Each would use lettuce as a wrap/sandwich outer. This idea originated from a senior management team trip to Japan to explore new opportunities. Japan was seen to have some very unique products and packaging, and therefore a source of new ideas. Amongst a number of new opportunities identified, the lettuce sandwich-wrap was viewed as a good opportunity, relevant to current strategies. The products would have the following benefits: offering convenience, ease of eating, low in carbohydrates, utilizing minimal packaging, and would fit with a trend for ‘street food’. This was seen as unique and consistent with the current 12-18 month strategy, key to the project’s approval. The project was approved by the category buyer, subsequently by the steering group, and the board.

Stage two involved the NPD team and the marketing team identifying and analysing the existing products in the category. Benchmarking of existing and proposed products, as well as competitors, was undertaken. Benchmarking examined ingredients, packaging and product weight, portion sizes and nutritional information, packaging type, quality of ingredients, and the delivery of the taste (e.g. did the quality of the taste or particular ingredients form a key part of the offering or differentiation, such as ‘fresh rocket from the UK’, or ‘finest free range eggs’, etc.). Concurrently, the brand and marketing teams analysed the current naming strategies used on the products, and hierarchy of brand names (e.g. relationship between the product and corporate brand). The team then began to consider options regarding the products and range, branding, prices, quality, and packaging.
The third stage involved the development of the brief from the information collected. This was put together by the brand and NPD team, with the engagement of other key stakeholders (particularly marketing and key suppliers). The brief focused on key gaps in the market, and the company’s current offerings. With respect to the three sandwich products; the first and second were a “lettuce wrapped sandwich” [RB11], while the other was an open salad with a lettuce outer (described as an ‘open lettuce salad’). Both targeted customers who were health conscious, or on a diet. From this brief concept development began, and the brief was sent to key suppliers. Development therefore occurred at two levels:

- First, internal chefs started development and testing of recipes, “playing and experimenting with the products and recipes” [RB10]. Some chefs from suppliers also worked in partnership within the retailer’s own facilities. This occurred over two days, and resulted in products to be presented at the following stage. A number of types of leaves were experimented with for both the wraps and open salad. Potential fillings were also tested (including lentils, rice, beans, prawns, and pulses). At this point, they also experimented with an egg based wrap, with an ‘omelette style’ outer. This was later ruled out, due to being too delicate and having an insufficient shelf life.
- Second, these briefs were also used by the suppliers to undertake their own internal development: which was then fed back to Orchids’s teams. From this, it was possible to gain an understanding of the preferred specifications, and how the products could be made feasibly and cost effectively.

At this stage, the packaging was considered. The head of packaging and reprographics was heavily involved in decision making: having attended the trip to Japan, and holding strong opinions on the packaging. In particular, she believed that the packaging should be formed like a “Smarties tube, with the filling tightly wrapped in the leaf, and an outer cellophane style wrap” [RB9]. The packaging team “initially experimented with overhead projector acetate and stickies, to create the desired effect of minimal packaging”: performed in collaboration with packaging suppliers, in order to explore the potential options, and establish whether a three day shelf life could be achieved. The team also applied a minimalistic label.

The idea behind the packaging was to “make the product itself the hero… without the need for lots of photography or packaging” [RB10]; but this resulted in concerns amongst both marketing staff and buyers, as it was “quite different to our current...
This especially raised the question of "how to get across what the product was, if it looked like this" [RB11].

From this, the first full brief was created. This largely focused on chefs’ specifications. An innovation day was then held to communicate the brief and overall project to suppliers and other internal teams. This was attended by those suppliers who had responded well to the brief, and all key stakeholders: brand managers, marketing, technical, buying, merchandising, retail/sales, export, and supply chain stakeholders. Chefs prepared samples, and the packaging team ‘mocked up some packaging’. The product was liked at the event; “they [stakeholders] were inspired” [RB9]. Some food suppliers bought packaging staff to the event, but packaging suppliers themselves were not invited, as the core product supplier would handle their involvement later in the project (although some had awareness based on basic prior work with the retailer).

Following the event, a decision was taken to proceed with the project, and over which products would be progressed. A final brief was also put together. This was subsequently provided to the suppliers to begin their development (based on defined costs, volumes, and the products themselves). It was was decided that three new lettuce products should be produced. Whilst five had initially been planned, the level of risk resulted in a decision that three would, at least initially, be a more appropriate number: there was “no way to establish likely success” [RB11]. The team also decided to go ahead with the minimal, risky, packaging for the wraps. The “innovation day had an important role here…helping to achieve buy in”, and as “all [stakeholders] had been involved from the beginning, they all wanted it to work….” [RB9]. In terms of the other sandwich products in the range, the NPD team decided to use the company’s existing sandwich packaging format. This format was “well established and seemed a logical choice” [RB11].

The product development and verification stage involved each supplier working on product specifications, ingredients, and form. Further experimentation on the fillings, formulations, and flavours of the wraps and open salad were undertaken, to achieve the best result within the cost guidelines. With respect to the leaf wrap, the supplier’s team eventually settled on two leaves. The team began to evaluate the packaging options. As the sandwiches were hand filled, there was a “higher level of openness to
new packaging solutions” [RB10] than for other products, due to lower investment implications.

At this stage, discussions were also held regarding “minimal packaging and labeling”, with the concern being “how to get the product across and position it if it looked like this” [RB11]. Debate particularly centred around how far how far this idea should be taken. Differences in perceptions of risk were evident between the packaging and category team: “We don’t see it as pioneering, but the category team do” [RB9]. Partly to address this, four focus groups were undertaken: “The focus of these tests is on the product, but we also look at the packaging, label, and how to use the product” [RB11]. The team used mock-ups of the proposed packs to gain feedback. The results confirmed the team’s concerns about minimal packaging, as many customers were “not all sure what to do with it” [RB11]. Eventually, the team reached a compromise by utilising “display boards at the point of sale to provide enough information and increase the shelf presence” [RB11]. However, RB9 revealed that it had been necessary for her to “put my neck on the line to push the new development…. there was a great deal of concern the packaging would negatively impact on the product’s sales”.

Now that the product was more clearly formed, the supplier’s packaging team began to work on the packaging to a greater extent. This was considered appropriate, as they “need to get the product right, then think about the packaging” [RB9]. The packaging and reprographics team already had strong opinions on which supplier they wished to work with, but competition laws dictated that the product supplier made this decision. The supplier’s packaging team worked with a selected packaging supplier to develop a pack with the appropriate barrier properties, weight, shelf life, and cost. The team also considered the product distribution requirements.

In the case of the open salad, a number of suppliers were initially involved, but two potential solutions were essentially explored:

- One supplier’s solution used a sheet of acetate that formed a plate and featured printing around the outer edge. This was contained within an outer plastic flow wrap providing a controlled atmosphere. The sheet could be re-closed if the consumer did not finish the food in one sitting.
• The second was a rigid tray with a hinge and sleeve, similar to a hot dog tray. Whilst this worked well, the team were “not at all comfortable, due to the excess packaging” [RB10] (pictured as eventually launched in Figure 8.3.4). Each of these solutions was built into the costings for approval, and final testing occurred at the following stage.

For the wrap, development focused on using cellophane for hand wrapping, with an outer cardboard sleeve, a pot of sauce inside, and a simple sticker for labeling (Figure 8.3.3). The team “didn’t really look at other solutions, as it needed to be tight and clear, as the product was about visibility” [RB11]. Other solutions were considered “impractical and would create excess packaging” [RB9]. The preferred solution changed relatively little in development, as it was fairly simple and fitted the brief well. The team initially wanted the product to be displayed ‘portrait’, using the saucepot at one end as a weight with which to stand the product up on the shelf. However, the team realized through discussions with category buyers and merchandisers that the shelf height would not be sufficient to allow it to be portrait. The saucepot was therefore repositioned onto the top of the wrap to reflect this.

Figure 8.3.3: Picture of final packaging for wrap

Figure 8.3.4: Packaging of Open Salad, as launched
Packaging Design Process - in stage seven, the packaging design process was initiated. This continued until towards the end of the eighth stage. The labelling underwent a design process, initiated by the same brief as was provided to all the other stakeholders. The design team produced three concepts, sent to a panel to be critiqued. The team then went away to make changes to those ideas which made it through the first panel. A concept was finally agreed upon, then produced as a “finished version complete with the photography” [RB10].

Concurrently, the design team produced a ‘brand guide’. This provided key information on all related elements of design which would need to be managed for consistency, including: the information and graphics that would go onto the packaging, the hierarchy of information, and the colours associated with the range. This was then presented to the consumer in a single test.

In stage eight, submissions were made to a panel, based on a tendering process. This led to the final supplier being selected for each product. Two suppliers were chosen, from the four initially invited to tender, for the products detailed in this case.

The next stage was that of transit trials. Products were sent to a distribution centre, then collected by a quality evaluator, who checked the product and its appearance, and took pictures of it. This assessed how well the product survived, and any issues which needed resolving. Tests were then undertaken to examine shelf life within a fridge. The tests focused on “how edible the product was, its safety, any blowing of the packaging, and any discolouration” [RB10]. Both packaging solutions for the open salad were tested.

The supplier of the first, “relatively innovative solution” [RB9], worked on getting the costs to an acceptable level. Despite the solution being “liked and the preferred option”, the supplier “couldn’t get the timing right… it failed in some tests as it wasn’t tight enough around the product and did not have enough strength for transit” [RB9]. Buyers and the category manager considered the costs to be “simply too high at this stage… and it required more development”.

The packaging team was also concerned about using a new, relatively untested solution; therefore, the less innovative option was selected. This was not abnormal: “Normally we have a couple of scenarios, which we develop concurrently”, and there
was often an “ideal pack and a more practical pack as a backup” [RB9]. Having selected the tray, it was modified slightly so that the hinged lid was replaced with a top web which peeled off, cutting the weight.

The final stages of the development involved the launch of the new range and post-launch evaluation. Following launch, within the firm, there was “still a desire among the relevant teams to use the new solution… but there was a need to get it to work better and undertake more testing” [RB9]. After launch, the team also carried out ongoing investigations into the minimal packaging used on the wraps: “We will be interested to see how it works, as we may need more in-store information on what the product is and how to use it…. there is risk involved…” [RB11]. Indeed, buyers were “concerned to give it this space” [RB12] as they were unsure of its likely success, and aware that it would take up a lot of shelf space. Indeed, this influenced the decision to launch three products as an initial trial.

8.3.4 Project F: Development of New Packaging for Meat.

Project F focuses on the development of a new packaging format for meat. The project was initiated based on a desire to “differentiate our meat packaging and make it stand out…. [because] when you walk down the aisle you just see a ‘shedload’ of trays” [RB9]. The project was initiated by the category and packaging teams.

However, despite agreeing to it, there was a concern within the category team that considerable investments would be required for any change. The project was managed by the head of packaging and reprographics, who strongly believed in its importance. The process is summarised in figures 8.3.5 and 8.3.6.