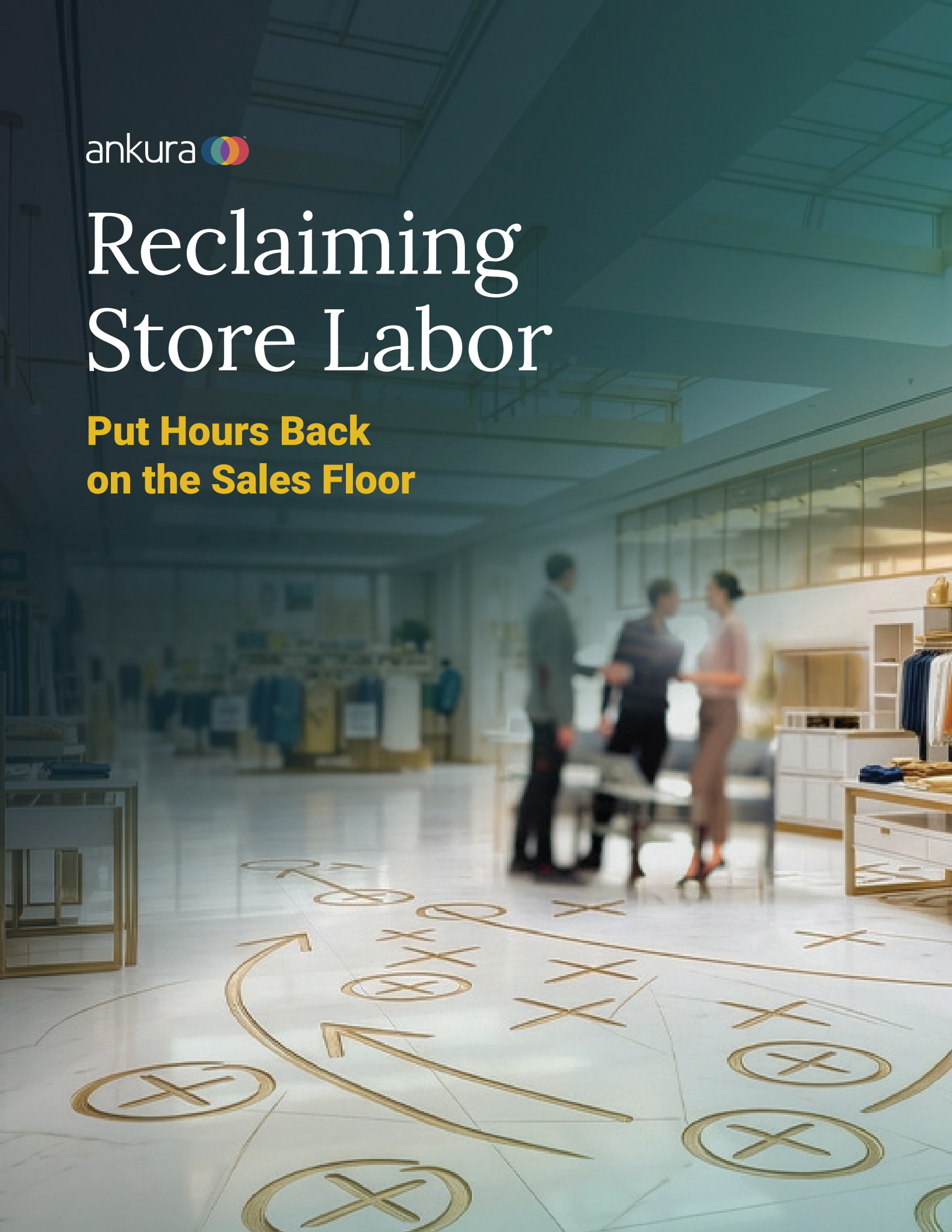


ankura 

Reclaiming Store Labor

**Put Hours Back
on the Sales Floor**



Shifting Time From Tasks to Customers

Retailers are not short on labor effort — they are short on productive, customer-facing time. Over the last decade, store operations have absorbed growing complexity: tighter delivery windows, more frequent price changes, more frequent resets to keep up with product trends, omnichannel fulfillment, promotional churn, and exception-driven work that pulls associates off the floor at exactly the wrong moments.

The result is a familiar pattern. Associates spend a growing share of their day reacting — receiving late trucks, reworking price changes, hunting inventory, picking digital orders — while customer engagement is squeezed into whatever time remains. Importantly, this erosion rarely shows up clearly in labor budgets. Total hours may be flat or even declining, yet execution suffers and the in store experience deteriorates.

Consumers who choose to shop in-store are making a deliberate tradeoff, sacrificing convenience in exchange for interaction, assistance, or expertise that cannot be replicated online.

When customer-facing time is not meaningfully utilized, the in-store experience loses its justification.

As a result, this time must be both visible and valuable to sustain consumer engagement and loyalty.

This is not a staffing problem. It is a process design problem.



Most store processes were not designed around a single governing principle: protect customer-facing time as a scarce and valuable resource. Instead, work arrives when it arrives, tasks are sequenced for upstream convenience, and stores absorb the variability. The mantra for many retailers is to shift work from corporate or supply chain down to the stores, where the hourly rates are less, but that is not always the optimal approach. Hourly rates might be lower, but each of those hours focused on a task takes away from critical customer interactions that can convert visits to additional transactions and sales.

Retailers that confront this trend start by asking these critical questions:

- Which processes force reactive labor?
- Where does variability create rework?
- What tasks can be simplified or eliminated?
- What tasks can be performed more efficiently through better use of technology?
- Which tasks truly require execution during peak selling hours?

Answering these questions consistently reveals a meaningful opportunity:

Reclaim hours already in the system and redeploy them where they can drive incremental sales, service, and conversion.

When customer-facing time is protected and redeployed effectively, the benefits compound – improving execution, conversion, and the overall economics of the store.



The Guiding Principle: Design Around Customer Time

Customer-facing time should be managed the way retailers manage in stocks or inventory turns, i.e., measured, protected, and actively governed.

Leading operators flip the traditional logic of store operations. Instead of asking, “How do we get all the work done?” they ask, “How do we ensure the right work happens at the right time, with the least disruption to customers?”

Three principles consistently differentiate high performing store models.

1

PROACTIVE OPERATIONAL VISIBILITY

Stores must shift from reactive staffing to intentional labor planning by establishing visibility into workload drivers. Inbound transparency, delivery reliability, and sequenced tasks allow managers to align staffing with off-floor work, SKU volumes, and arrival windows, improving predictability, efficiency, execution discipline.

2

FRICTIONLESS PRODUCT AND WORKFLOW FLOW

Every store process should be designed to minimize touches and move value directly to the customer. This principle guides backroom, truck-to-floor, and omnichannel fulfillment by reducing handoffs, streamlining pick-and-pack workflows, accelerating flow, and ensuring inventory does not sit idle within operations during peak periods.

3

STRATEGIC TASK SEQUENCING

Work that does not require customer interaction should be scheduled outside peak traffic windows. Activities such as price changes, staging, packing, signing, resets, product cut-ins, and administrative routines should be consolidated into periods to protect capacity, reduce congestion, and preserve focus on service and conversion.

When these principles are applied consistently, stores unlock time previously lost to friction and variability.

The Work: 6 Store Processes That Matter Most

While every retailer's operating model is different, labor leakage is remarkably consistent. The biggest gains typically come from focusing on six core store processes:

1 INBOUND VISIBILITY AND DELIVERY RELIABILITY

Unplanned deliveries force managers to reshuffle labor on the fly. Even modest improvements in advance notice and delivery windows reduce disruption.

PROCESSES TO EVALUATE

- Advance notification of inbound product by SKU and quantity
- On-time and in-window delivery performance
- Store-level visibility into upcoming deliveries

ILLUSTRATIVE KPIS

- Deliveries with 24–48-hour advance notice
- On-time, in-window delivery rate
- Unplanned store labor hours driven by delivery variance

2 BACKROOM AND TRUCK TO FLOOR EXECUTION

Product sitting in the backroom delays sales and consumes labor. Proper timing of product allocations, streamlining unload sequencing and reducing touches accelerates flow.

PROCESSES TO EVALUATE

- Truck unload sequencing and labor deployment
- Backroom layout, slotting, and space constraints
- Direct-to-floor versus staged processing

ILLUSTRATIVE KPIS

- Time from truck arrival to product on shelf
- Average number of touches per unit before shelving
- Backroom inventory as a percentage of total store inventory

3 MERCHANDISING, PRICING, AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Resets and price changes are necessary but often poorly sequenced, pulling associates off the floor during peak hours.

PROCESSES TO EVALUATE

- Reset and planogram execution
- Price change and markdown workflows
- Promotional signing and advertised item execution

ILLUSTRATIVE KPIS

- Percentage of price changes completed on time
- Reset execution accuracy
- Customer price-challenge incidents per store

4 OMNICHANNEL FULFILLMENT

Without clear prioritization rules, buy online pickup in-store (BOPIS) and ship from store tasks compete directly with customer service.

PROCESSES TO EVALUATE

- BOPIS pick, stage, and handoff processes
- Ship-from-store picking and packing workflows
- Labor triggers, cut-off times, and prioritization rules

ILLUSTRATIVE KPIS

- BOPIS orders picked within service-level targets
- Average pick time per order
- Fulfillment tasks completed during off-peak hours

5 FRONT END AND DAILY ROUTINES

Opening, closing, and service desk routines often include hidden redundancy that erodes selling time.

PROCESSES TO EVALUATE

- Store opening and closing routines
- Checkout queuing and service desk workflows
- Daily task assignment and manager workload

ILLUSTRATIVE KPIS

- Average checkout wait time
- Opening tasks completed before doors open
- Manager hours spent on non-customer-facing work

6 ENABLERS: LABOR, TOOLS, AND GOVERNANCE

Sustained improvement requires labor aligned to traffic, tools that surface exceptions, and clear store level decision rights.

KEY ENABLERS TO ASSESS

- Labor scheduling aligned to traffic patterns
- Task prioritization and visibility tools
- Clear store-level decision right



The Outcome: Reinvesting Time Where It Matters

Reclaiming store labor is not about asking associates to work harder. It is about removing friction, so their effort translates into customer impact.

Retailers that redesign store processes around customer time consistently achieve:



More hours on the floor during peak traffic



More accurate and faster execution with fewer errors



Improved conversion and customer satisfaction



Reduced manager overload and burnout

Critically, these gains can be achieved without increasing total labor spending. In many cases, simplification allows retailers to absorb growth – more SKUs, more channels, more change – with the same or fewer hours.

For leadership teams, this work creates a practical bridge between strategy and execution. It translates high level objectives – growth, margin, and customer experience – into tangible changes in how stores operate every day.

The retailers that win are not those with the most labor. They are the ones that use it best.

To learn more about how Ankura's Store Operations practice can help your organization, contact any of our team members – we would love to talk with you.

Our Experts



Keith Jelinek

Senior Managing Director
keith.jelinek@ankura.com



Michael Casey

Managing Director
michael.casey@ankura.com



Jesse Lehman

Managing Director
jesse.lehman@ankura.com



Eugene Kim

Senior Director
eugene.kim@ankura.com



Sara Bakacs

Director
sara.bakacs@ankura.com

ANKURA PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Delivering End-to-End Solutions to Companies at Critical Inflection Points

The Performance Improvement team partners with private equity, lenders, and management to drive rapid EBITDA and cash flow improvement. Using our 3D (Diagnose, Define, Deliver) framework, we assess opportunities, develop sustainable goals and operating plans, and implement solutions. Our expertise spans diverse industries, including Retail, Direct-to-Consumer, Healthcare, CPG, Services, Education, Manufacturing, and Logistics. Our experienced operators and consultants address strategic and operational challenges, delivering data-driven, transformative results quickly and efficiently.

Ankura Consulting Group, LLC (“Ankura”) is a leading global consulting and expert advisory firm that partners with organizations at critical inflection points. Driven by its mission — Driving Excellence, Delivered with Humanity™^{vv}— Ankura delivers end-to-end solutions across conflict, crisis, performance, risk, strategy, and transformation by combining the judgment of seasoned, multidisciplinary experts with advanced technology and analytics. With more than 2,000 professionals serving 3,000+ clients around the world, Ankura brings deep industry insight, collaborative problem-solving, and innovative tools to help clients protect, create, and recover value.

For more information, please visit ankura.com.

