INNOVATION - R1

THE CSU INVOICE PROCESSING HUB TEAM & PROJECT ACCOUNTANTS

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THE INNOVATORS

The AGEM CSU Invoice Processing Hub Team have a drive for excellent customer service, and real team effort approach to tackling the agreed ongoing targets. The implementation has supported this aim, and the process has evolved over the 5 years being used, but is integral to the current team, allowing them to spend the time saved on value added activities, being pro-active rather than re-active.

THE PROBLEM

The Invoice Processing Team **need to** improve processing and query resolution speed **because otherwise** invoice backlogs build up creating delays in payment to suppliers.

THE CHALLENGES

- **How might we** make initial validation faster **so that** invoices without query can be paid quickly?
- **How might we** use the system differently **so that** queries can be easily tracked and chased up appropriately?
- **How might we** use the system differently **so that** summary reporting and reconciliation can be done faster and with more targeted information for customers?

THE INNOVATION

The flow of invoice validation was reviewed and efficiencies introduced. Staff had dual monitors so they could work on the Finance system (SBS ISFE) and the Clinical database (Broadcare). We identified key stroke errors were making reconciliations very manual so implemented copying invoice numbers from the Finance system and pasting in the Clinical system so lookups between reports had higher match rates. Approach to validation was standardised with daily Non-Po invoice workflow reports were run and invoices prioritised ensuring initial validation was done within days of receipt, and follow up queries were targeted monthly.

Query resolution depended on relevant information being held in the Non-Po comments which feeds through to the report. The queries holding up payment of invoices were analysed, and common themes identified. These were summarised to a list of standard query categories. Historic requests for reporting were assessed, such as Financial Year, package ID and spend type. These had all been queries which would have taken someone hours to go through manually checking when initially requested. Taking all of these elements a standard invoice workflow comment was designed, and also a spreadsheet which allowed this to be quickly generated for copy and paste removing key stroke errors and saving time typing comments. Utilisation of the package ID in the comment meant that if a query was resolved for a single package, all the invoices relating to it could be identified easily and all released for payment together. This could also

be used for identification of issues needing escalation where high values start to build.

Standardisation of comments meant that reporting and reconciliation was much faster. A series of formulae and pivot tables combine into a summary comparing week on week volumes of invoices which can be pulled together in half an hour rather than taking hours to compile data when requested. It is provided fortnightly and trends can show any problem areas building to focus processing resource. To speed up the processing, the invoice needed to get to the processor as fast as possible. The ISFE system uses rules to auto route invoices from specific supplier to specific workflows. When anyone leaves a role this then has an impact on the AP service re-inputting the rules manually or routing invoices individually. By having some generic inboxes we could route all new queries to a specific workflow avoiding the need to change. This has to be done alongside stringent monitoring of the workflow, and appropriate governance of the workflows. The team supervisor runs reports daily and allocates invoices to the processors. All actual processing would be done from individual logins to retain full audit trail, so no-one would log in using the generic workflow to process, and no approval limits or other responsibilities would be assigned to the account. The user accounts are reviewed quarterly by service leads to ensure access is restricted and appropriate and invoice approvals are monitored monthly. Similar workflows are used to identify invoices in query and those with the Clinical team for resolution.

THE LESSONS LEARNT

- We wouldn't avoid standardising high volume repeated processes again because people can be adverse to change, however by positively sharing best practice and demonstrating real efficiencies people soon benefit from faster and more simple processes.
- We learned to lead other teams and customers in a suggested process flow by engaging with them on suggested improvements and explaining the benefit of the change.

THE OUTPUTS

- Bi weekly invoice reporting to customers.

- Standard query outputs to all Suppliers.

- Clear targeted daily work plans to teams.

THE OUTCOMES

- Improved performance as a processing team and improved relationships with customers and Suppliers.

- A reduction in volumes of unpaid invoices.

- Faster payment of validated invoices without query.

- More visibility of volumes and query meaning less ad hoc urgent requests.

- Reduction in contact from Suppliers chasing payment.

- Reduction in ad hoc reporting queries from customer management accounts teams.

THE QUICK WINS

Check physical process is efficient (dual monitors / copy and paste where possible rather than typing). Define the type of invoice to apply the change to, i.e. CHC invoices. Agree a standard format of text for your invoice hold comments. Define ownership for query resolution. Agree targets for initial validation and frequency of query follow up. Always add follow up comments into the system. Build a report to track progress against your targets which can be largely automated from a system report. Commit to the change and make sure everyone uses it.

THE REVIEWERS SAID

THE TEAM HAS DEMONSTRATED GOOD INNOVATION IN IDENTIFYING AN AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT, WORKED TOGETHER TO IDENTIFY A SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENT IT TO IMPROVE THEIR PROCESSING. THERE IS A GOOD FOUNDATION TO BUILD UPON.

DEMONSTRATES COLLABORATIVE WORKING ACROSS NUMEROUS SECTIONS WITHIN FINANCE & TRYING TO STREAMLINE A PROCESS.

THE TEAM TOOK A PROBLEM AND IDENTIFIED A STANDARDISED WAY OF WORKING AND INPUT THAT WORKED FOR THEM. THE MANUAL NATURE OF THE PROCESS CHANGE MEANS IT IS VERY EASILY REPLICABLE.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

If you recognise the problem stated and have implemented your own innovation to overcome it please submit this innovation to the programme and give others more examples to learn from.

SUBMIT INNOVATION

If you recognise the problem stated and would like to know more details about this innovation in particular, we will be hosting showcase and workshop sessions throughout the year, so all interested staff can gain ideas and inspiration from innovators in a manageable one-to-many format.

REGISTER INTEREST

If you have a problem but don't currently know of a solution to it, then please submit it here and in 2022 the Forum intends to crowdsource solutions to problems that don't currenlty have known innovations.

SUBMIT PROBLEM

If you would like to learn more about about the innovation programme please click below for more details

LEARN MORE

IN SEPTEMBER 2021 THE FORUM LAUNCHED...

- A national Innovation Programme for NHS Finance staff to submit their innovations for peer review. Successful innovations will be published and accessible to all on the One NHS Finance website
- A 'Software Skills For Finance Staff' event series taught by NHS Finance for NHS Finance including MS Excel, PowerBI, SQL etc.
- An 'Art of the Possible' briefing which explains two new technologies AI & Blockchain and discusses the opportunity for NHS Finance
- An Automation Group to review and improve the efficiency of existing national processes and returns

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Submit your innovations for peer review
- Sign up to be an innovation peer reviewer
- Read Art of the Possible
- Sign up for Software Skills for Finance
- Register your interest in automation and all things innovative

Innovation Programme	Software Skills	Automation sign up	Be a peer reviewer	Art of the Possible

FURTHER INFORMATION

Website: **FinanceInnovation.nhs.uk**

Email: **finance.innovation@nhs.net**

LinkedIn: **One NHS Finance**

Twitter: **@OneNHSFinance**

One NHS Finance brings together the Future-Focused Finance, National Finance Academy, and the Finance Innovation Forum programmes and networks to make sure that everyone working in NHS Finance has access to skills, knowledge, methods, and opportunities to influence and enhance patient services.

Identifying and developing innovative ways of working and new areas of improvement.