

USING POWER QUERY TO CONSOLIDATE EXCEL FORECASTS

SOUTH WEST YORKSHIRE PARTNERSHIP NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

NORTH EAST AND YORKSHIRE, MENTAL HEALTH



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INNOVATION PROGRAMME
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THE INNOVATORS

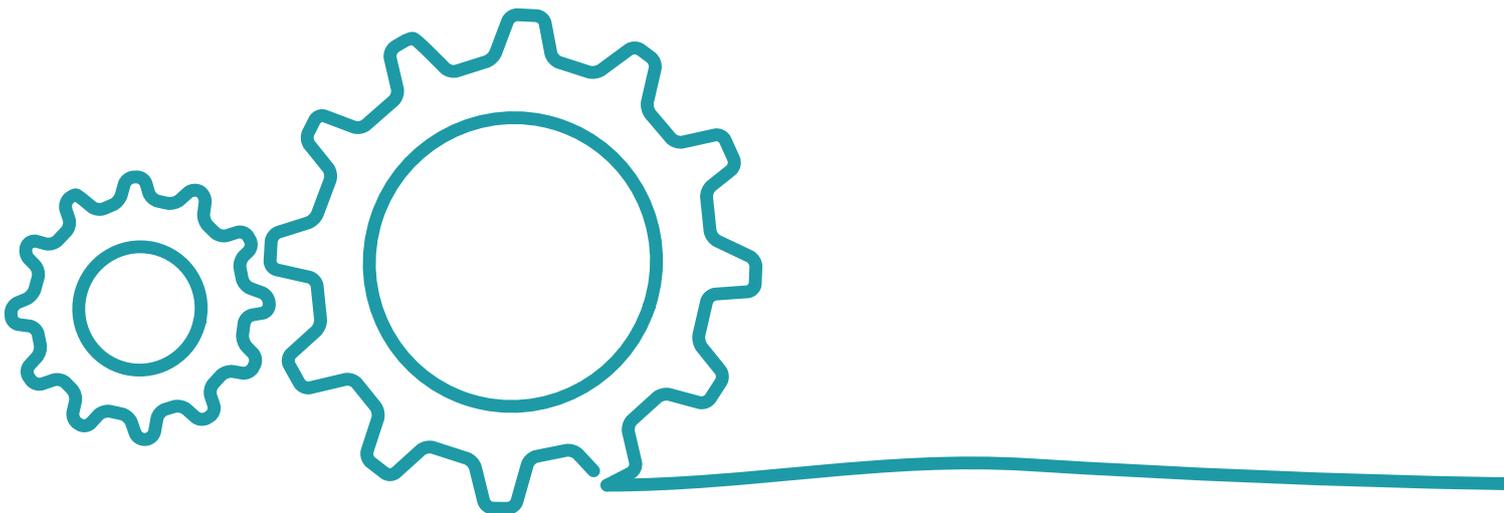
The management accounts team is responsible for providing high quality and timely forecast information to support trust decision making. The team use detailed spreadsheets by cost centre so that forecast information is live and detailed enough to be relevant and meaningful for budget holders. The team is always looking at ways to streamline manual processes which led to this innovation.

THE PROBLEM

The team need to quickly consolidate the forecasts from each individual care group to meet both internal and external deadlines. Otherwise, time would be spent on manual processes rather than value added activities, such as review and challenge.

THE CHALLENGE

How might we reduce the time spent manually consolidating our detailed forecasts so that more time can be spent reviewing and validating the assumptions with budget holders?



THE INNOVATION

The management accounts team was already producing detailed forecasts for each individual cost centre by subjective code and profiled by month. To consolidate these at a trust level the headline figures from each care group were copied into a central document. This was time consuming for the senior team and made interrogating the data difficult as the detail was held in multiple tabs within multiple spreadsheets.

With the use of Power Query in Excel we created a process that extracts and transforms each individual forecast and combines it into one dataset. This data set could then be used to populate both national returns and internal reporting. This means that all levels of the trust are making decisions based on the same data and assumptions.

The process needed a couple of month-ends to refine with the main issues arising due to inconsistent naming conventions. The team was fully briefed on the new process, with a guide created on how to set up and maintain each individual forecast. This is now a routine part of month-end.

The process has now been expanded to include workforce information. This allows an additional sense check of the financial forecast and also means risks around agency usage can be quickly identified.

THE LESSONS LEARNT

We rely heavily on spreadsheets to transform our data into meaningful information for the trust. We would not introduce such a manual process again without considering the options for consolidation first. By planning the process up front we can ensure consistency in the formatting and layout required to use the more advanced functions in Excel.

We learnt to use the more advanced functions that Excel has to offer, using collective knowledge from the team and thorough research of internet forums. Following the initial roll out of financial data it was very quick to expand the dataset to include workforce information.

THE OUTPUTS

The outputs are:

- a consolidated forecast supported by detailed assumptions
- detailed dataset that can be used to support decision-making
- detailed workforce information in the same data set and format as the financial information
- time saved by automating previously manual processes.

THE OUTCOMES

- Time previously spent by senior finance managers producing the forecast is now spent reviewing outputs and challenging the assumptions. This also allows for quicker internal reporting and decision-making.
- The financial forecast is now supported by consistent WTE information. This makes internal reporting more relevant for non-financial colleagues and allows more meaningful discussions with budget holders.
- Consistency in naming conventions and formatting has made it easier to identify and correct spreadsheet errors. Checks have been built into the process to ensure the data matches the ledger and give assurances on data quality.

THE QUICK WINS

- Have standard naming conventions that the team uses. This makes it simpler to use the more advanced functions of Excel to aggregate your datasets.
- If a task is repetitive and time consuming there is usually a quicker way. Take advantage of the system training that One NHS Finance offers or post your problem in the Value Maker Teams channel.
- Ensure multiple people in the team have advanced Excel skills. This allows constant challenge and improvement of processes.

THE REVIEWERS SAID

“BY SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING THE AUTOMATION AND STANDARDISATION OF AN OVERLY MANUAL PROCESS, THIS ORGANISATION HAS ENABLED THEIR FINANCE TEAM TO OFFER A BETTER SERVICE TO THE REST OF THE ORGANISATION AND USED A TOOL THAT COULD BE APPLIED ELSEWHERE IN THE TRUST.”

“THIS IS A NO BRAINER, POWER QUERY IS THE BEST OF EXCEL AND EVERYONE SHOULD BE MAKING USE OF IT, ESPECIALLY WHEN CONSOLIDATING MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES.”

“USE OF SOFTWARE THAT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL TRUSTS. THIS CAN BE ROLLED OUT QUICKLY AND ADAPTED.”



WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

SUBMIT INNOVATION

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.

REGISTER INTEREST

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.

SUBMIT PROBLEM

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 currently have known innovations.

LEARN MORE

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

ENDORSEMENT DISCLAIMER

The Finance Innovation Forum's Innovation Programme asks NHS Finance peer reviewers whether the "Innovation overcomes, successfully addresses, or solves the problem identified". The programme does not endorse, recommend or provide any assurance of software used or mentioned in any of the published innovations. If you think a published innovation is being used to falsely validate a commercial product or company please contact finance.innovation@nhs.net



WHAT ARE WE DOING

- 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
- Software Skills is a network of likeminded NHS Finance staff which exists to help its members see what's possible when using accessible software to its full potential.
- An 'Art of the Possible' briefing which explains two new technologies AI & Blockchain and discusses the opportunity for NHS Finance
- We helped develop a Provider Finance Return (PFR) Automation Project tool, to save NHS Finance teams excessive manual time in their monthly returns.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Submit your innovations for peer review
- Sign up to be an innovation peer reviewer
- Share you problems and ideas with us
- Join the Software Skills network
- Register your interest in R&D and automation

**Innovation
Programme**

**Software
Skills**

**Automation
sign up**

**Be a peer
reviewer**

**Art of the
Possible**



FURTHER INFORMATION

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LinkedIn: [One NHS Finance](#)

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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.



An NHS Finance platform for the discovery and development of problems, ideas and innovations.