

Advanced Approval Workflows and Approval Management in Time & Attendance

Session 1200

David Reiersen

Software Engineering Manager, Time & Attendance



Contents

Introduction	3
Common Terms	3
Scenario for Examples	3
Workflow Approval Best Practices	4
Employee Approval Starts the Process for Everyone	4
Example	4
My Pending Approvals is Your “To Do” List	5
Example	5
Remove Add and Edit Controls from Time Approvals	6
Approve All Time Entries on the Timecard.	6
Example	6
Approvers Must Wait Their Turn	8
Example	8
Policies That Change Time Entry Attributes	9
Using Secondary Approvers	9
Auditing and Reporting	9
Workflow Audits	9
Workflow Reports	10
Master Workflow	10
Workflow Status	10
Report Formats	10
Using Reports	10
Workflow Structure	10
Remove Complexity	10
Utility to copy workflow approval configuration.	11



Introduction

This session discusses aspects of the supervisor-level approval process and managing approval configurations to help users of Time & Attendance avoid scenarios known to cause problems with getting approvals completed.

Common Terms

The following terms are use in this document when discussing the approval workflows in Time & Attendance:

- *Approval, approval workflow, and approval process* all refer to the three types of approval workflows in Time & Attendance: time-off request approvals, hours request approvals and timecard approvals.
- *Approvers and workflow approvers* refer to the people in your organization who approve employee requests.
- *Approval criteria and approval rule* refer to the set of conditions – location, org unit, pay code, etc. – applied to an approver. The criteria determine when the approver participates in an approval workflow.
- *Approval configuration, workflow configuration, and approval workflow configuration* refer to the set of workflow steps, approvers and approval criteria used to configure the settings that control an approval workflow.

Scenario for Examples

The examples for this session use employees in a fictional school district, New Vermaine Public Schools, using the following:

- Administration Building: The administrative center for the district. Payroll is located here.
- Central Elementary School: One of the K-6 elementary schools in the district.
- Dennis Edwards: Principal of Central Elementary School.
- Carol Andrews: A third grade teacher at Central Elementary.
- Nicole Mason: A custodian at Central Elementary.
- Irene Hamilton: A payroll administrator responsible for approving FMLA leave.
- Bob Parr: A payroll administrator responsible for approving overtime.
- Brenda Torres: The payroll supervisor responsible for final approval of all timecards.



Workflow Approval Best Practices

Employee Approval Starts the Process for Everyone

Time & Attendance approval workflows are designed to start with the employee. The employee submits their completed timecard or a request for time off. Both actions record the employee's approval and launch the supervisor-level approval workflow.

For this reason, supervisors attempting to approve before the employee will raise a warning in the system stating that there is nothing to approve until the employee takes the first step. There is the ability for the employee's supervisor to approve timecards or enter time-off and hours requests on behalf of the employee, but this should be the exception.

Example

Carol Andrews is a teacher at Central Elementary School. The principal is Dennis Edwards, who approves all timecards for the school. No staff have submitted timecards for approval, but Dennis wanted to try getting approvals completed early.

Dennis goes to Supervisor Actions > Time Approvals. No employees display, so he needs to uncheck "My Pending Approvals" to view any employees on the screen. He selects Carol Andrews and clicks the "Approve" button.

The result is that a warning is displayed stating the employee must complete their approval step first. This warning informs Dennis that he cannot approve timecards that do not have employee approval. Without Carol's approval, there is no supervisor-level workflow to accept Dennis' approval and monitor the timecard approval process.

The screenshot shows the 'Time Approval' interface. At the top right, it says 'Saturday, March 2 2024 9:27:54 PM'. Below the header, there are tabs for 'CURRENT PERIOD', 'PREVIOUS PERIOD', and 'HISTORY'. A red warning message states: 'Employee approval must be completed prior to this step. Please complete this approval level first, so supervisor approval or reject for Andrews, Carol Hourly Weekly (2928) can occur.' Below the warning, there are checkboxes for 'My Pending Approvals' and 'Unsubmitted Timecards'. The 'Employee' field is set to 'Andrews, Carol Hourly Weekly (2928)'. The 'Pay Period' is '02/26/2024 00:00 - 03/03/2024'. A table shows the following data:

Regular	Overtime	Benefits	Deduction	Rounding	Other	Amount	Total
40.00	0.00	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	0.00	0.00	40.00

Below the table, there is an 'Approval Type' dropdown set to 'Approver', an 'Initials' field, and a 'Comment' field. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Approve & Submit', 'Approve', and 'Reject'. A 'Pay Period Approval' table is also visible:

Regular Time	Employee	Approvers
40.00		



My Pending Approvals is Your “To Do” List

The “My Pending Approvals” checkbox under *Supervisor actions > Manage time-off, Supervisor actions > Manage hours requests, and Supervisor actions > Time approvals* is intended to help approvers focus on the approvals that need attention.

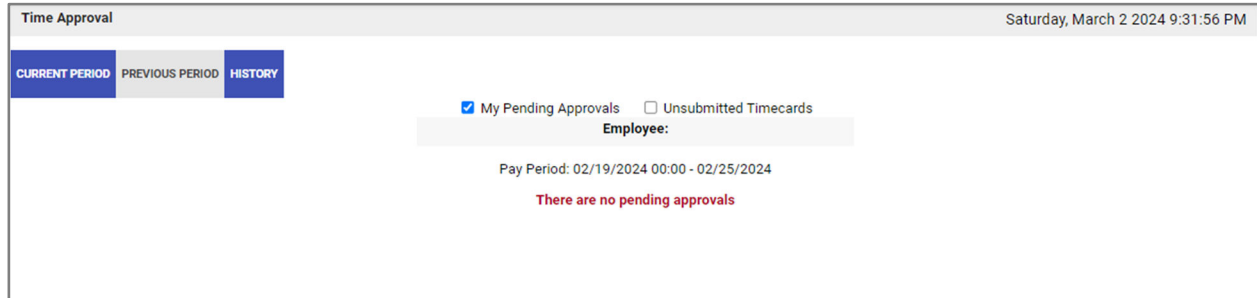
With this checkbox active, these screens will only show time-off requests, hours requests and timecards that have been approved at the employee level. As the supervisor approves these items, they are removed from the pending approvals lists. When the list is empty there is nothing waiting for approval.

The need to uncheck pending approvals should be rare. Once time-off or hours requests are approved, they appear on the timecard. Once timecards are approved their status is shown on the employee time summary as a list where it is easy to see the approval status.

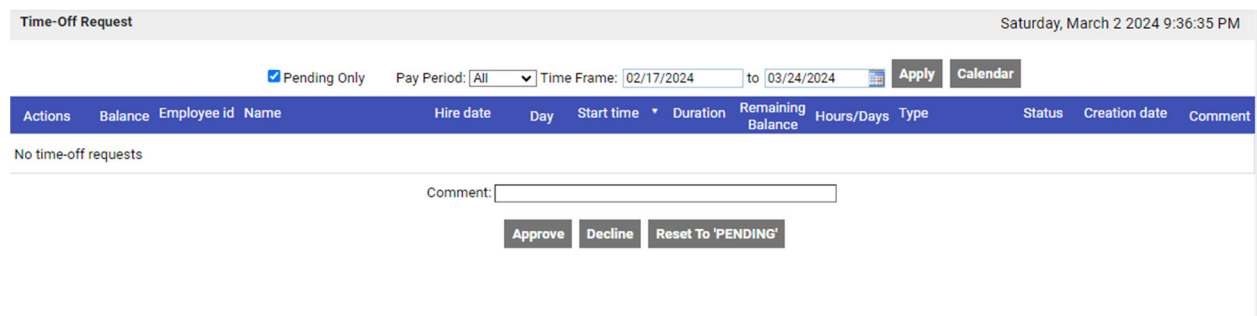
Using the pending approvals feature keeps approvals moving and is far more effective than supervisors clicking through the full list of their employees looking for waiting approvals.

Example

When Dennis checks the Time Approvals screen and sees the message “There are no pending approvals” he knows there are no timecards requiring his approval. On the Manage Time-off screen the message “No time-off requests” displays when there are no requests to approve.



The screenshot shows the 'Time Approval' interface. At the top right, it says 'Saturday, March 2 2024 9:31:56 PM'. Below the header are three tabs: 'CURRENT PERIOD' (selected), 'PREVIOUS PERIOD', and 'HISTORY'. In the center, there are two checkboxes: 'My Pending Approvals' (checked) and 'Unsubmitted Timecards' (unchecked). Below these is a field for 'Employee:' which is empty. Underneath, the 'Pay Period' is '02/19/2024 00:00 - 02/25/2024'. A red message states 'There are no pending approvals'.



The screenshot shows the 'Time-Off Request' interface. At the top right, it says 'Saturday, March 2 2024 9:36:35 PM'. Below the header are two checkboxes: 'Pending Only' (checked) and 'Unsubmitted Timecards' (unchecked). Below these are fields for 'Pay Period: All' and 'Time Frame: 02/17/2024 to 03/24/2024', with 'Apply' and 'Calendar' buttons. Below this is a table header with columns: 'Actions', 'Balance', 'Employee id', 'Name', 'Hire date', 'Day', 'Start time', 'Duration', 'Remaining Balance', 'Hours/Days', 'Type', 'Status', 'Creation date', and 'Comment'. Below the table, it says 'No time-off requests'. At the bottom, there is a 'Comment:' field and three buttons: 'Approve', 'Decline', and 'Reset To 'PENDING''.



Remove Add and Edit Controls from Time Approvals

Allowing time entries to be created and edited on the time approvals screen blurs the functionality between the employee time maintenance and time approvals screens. The best approach is to not enable the property *UI environment flags > Time processing > Application control > Allow editing of timecards from Supervisor Time Sheet Approval*.

When this property is off the supervisor time approvals screen is focused on approving timecards. The “My Pending Approvals” check box can always remain selected, and your supervisors will only see timecards needing approval.

Approving on behalf of an employee is done by selecting “Unsubmitted Timecards,” making the approval, and then switching back to “My Pending Approvals.”

Approve All Time Entries on the Timecard.

In Time & Attendance, the timecard is the unit of approval needed for payroll export. This is necessary because of the ways that policies and rules can affect the timecard totals. The timecard totals will not be final until all time entries are entered on the timecard and the calculations for rules and policies are applied.

Due to the cumulative effect of time entries, daily approvals are not practical. The approvals can be recorded, but they will be cleared when the next entry is added.

Approvers are only approving time entries that they are responsible for reviewing based on the approval rules. When viewing the timecard, time entries that require the reviewer’s approval are indicated with a disabled checkbox in the “All” column.

Example

Nicole Mason is a custodian at Central Elementary School. Custodians in the district are eligible for overtime. The district policy is that overtime must be approved at the district level by Bob Parr.

If Nicole Mason and Dennis Edwards approve the timecard before the end of the pay period, Nicole’s timecard will not show the overtime she will earn. At this point, Nicole’s timecard will be partially approved but will bypass Bob Parr because there are no overtime entries.



Time Approval Saturday, March 2 2024 9:52:13 PM

CURRENT PERIOD PREVIOUS PERIOD HISTORY

My Pending Approvals Unsubmitted Timecards
 Employee: Mason, Nicole Hourly Bi-weekly (5157)

Pay Period: 02/19/2024 00:00 - 03/03/2024

Regular	Overtime	Benefits	Deduction	Rounding	Other	Amount	Total
36.00	0.00	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	0.00	0.00	36.00

Submitted: 03/02/2024 21:51:16 Last Approved: 03/02/2024 21:51:44

Approval Type: Approver Initials: Comment:

Approve & Submit Approve Reject

Pay Period Approval		
Regular Time	Employee	Approvers
36.00	DHE	DHE

Showing 10 per page, 4 total records

Actions	All	Rules	Day	Date	In	Out	Type	Time Logged	Daily Total	Weekly Total	Time Total	Amount	Position	Schedule	Shift	Work Order	Job Project	GeoData	Comment	Employee	Approvers
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mon	02/19/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	0.00	Custodian							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tue	02/20/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	18.00	18.00	0.00	Custodian							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wed	02/21/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	27.00	27.00	0.00	Custodian							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thu	02/22/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	36.00	36.00	0.00	Custodian							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

When Nicole adds her last time entry for the week, her totals activate the overtime policy, and this calculation is added to her timecard. Adding the Friday time entry also clears the time entry approvals on the previously approved entries. Nicole can now submit her complete timecard for the week. Since overtime is present the supervisor-level approval workflow will now include Bob Parr so her overtime can be approved.

Time Approval Saturday, March 2 2024 9:53:47 PM

CURRENT PERIOD PREVIOUS PERIOD HISTORY

My Pending Approvals Unsubmitted Timecards
 Employee: Mason, Nicole Hourly Bi-weekly (5157)

Pay Period: 02/19/2024 00:00 - 03/03/2024

Regular	Overtime	Benefits	Deduction	Rounding	Other	Amount	Total
40.00	5.00	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	0.00	0.00	45.00

Approval Type: Approver Initials: Comment:

Approve & Submit Approve Reject

Pay Period Approval		
Regular Time	Employee	Approvers
40.00		

Showing 10 per page, 5 total records

Actions	All	Rules	Day	Date	In	Out	Type	Time Logged	Daily Total	Weekly Total	Time Total	Amount	Position	Schedule	Shift	Work Order	Job Project	GeoData	Comment	Employee	Approvers	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mon	02/19/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	0.00	Custodian							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tue	02/20/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	18.00	18.00	0.00	Custodian							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wed	02/21/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	27.00	27.00	0.00	Custodian							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thu	02/22/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	36.00	36.00	0.00	Custodian							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fri	02/23/2024	07:00	16:00	IO (Clock in/out)	9.00	9.00	45.00	45.00	0.00	Custodian							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fri	02/23/2024	07:00	11:00	IO (Clock in/out)	4.00	4.00	40.00	40.00	0.00	Custodian									
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fri	02/23/2024	11:00	16:00	OT (Overtime)	5.00	9.00	45.00	45.00	0.00	Custodian									



Approvers Must Wait Their Turn

For an approval process that has two or more workflow steps, the steps are sequential, and the current step must be completed before later steps can start.

An approver could only attempt to approve early by bypassing the “My Pending Approvals” feature. In the current version, an approver can view the timecard before they are an active approver but cannot approve at this time and the “Approve” and “Reject” buttons are disabled. Because unchecking “My Pending Approvals” is discouraged, this is not considered a best practice.

An approver’s response only counts when their workflow step is active. Trying to approve early will be ignored by the system and the approver will still need to respond when their step becomes active.

Example

Brenda Torres is the payroll supervisor for the district. There was a question about a time entry for Carol Andrews, so Brenda went to the Time Approvals screen to review.

She can view the timecard and see which entries have approval, but she is not able to do any approval herself at this point because the approval workflow has just started and is on the first workflow step. This step needs to be completed successfully before Brenda will see Carol in her “My Pending Approvals” list.

The screenshot shows the 'Time Approval' interface for the pay period 02/26/2024 00:00 - 03/03/2024. The employee is Carol Andrews, Hourly Weekly (2928). The summary table shows 40.00 Regular Time, 0.00 Overtime, and a total of 40.00. The approval type is set to 'Approver'. Below the summary is a 'Pay Period Approval' table with columns for Regular Time, Employee, and Approvers. The detailed timecard table below shows five entries for Regular Time (RG) from Monday to Friday, each for 8.00 hours, with a total of 40.00 hours. The 'Comment' column for all entries is empty, and the 'Approver' column shows a green checkmark and a red exclamation mark.

Regular	Overtime	Benefits	Deduction	Rounding	Other	Amount	Total
40.00	0.00	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	0.00	0.00	40.00

Submitted: 03/02/2024 21:31:13

Approval Type: Initials: Comment:

Pay Period Approval		
Regular Time	Employee	Approvers
40.00	DHE	

Actions	All	Rules	Day	Date	In	Out	Type	Time Logged	Daily Total	Weekly Total	Time Total	Amount	Position	Schedule	Shift	Work Order	Job	Project	GeoData	Comment	Employee	Approvers	
			Mon	02/26/2024	08:00	16:00	RG (Regular Time)	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	0.00	K6 Teacher										
			Tue	02/27/2024	08:00	16:00	RG (Regular Time)	8.00	8.00	16.00	16.00	0.00	K6 Teacher										
			Wed	02/28/2024	08:00	16:00	RG (Regular Time)	8.00	8.00	24.00	24.00	0.00	K6 Teacher										
			Thu	02/29/2024	08:00	16:00	RG (Regular Time)	8.00	8.00	32.00	32.00	0.00	K6 Teacher										
			Fri	03/01/2024	08:00	16:00	RG (Regular Time)	8.00	8.00	40.00	40.00	0.00	K6 Teacher										

If Brenda needs to see time entry details for Carol’s timecard it is best to use Employee Time Maintenance. This shows the timecard without needing to uncheck “My Pending Approvals.”



Policies That Change Time Entry Attributes

It is common to use clocking policies to modify the department, position or pay code on time entries. Since timecard approvers are assigned when their approval rule matches a time entry, changes to these attributes can affect the approvers assigned to the timecard approval workflow.

Approvers require a security role that allows access to the employees they will approve. If this is lacking, the approver's response will not be received, and the workflow will not complete successfully.

Planning of your approval workflow process is important to ensure that this mix of approval rules and policy behavior does not create a situation where the workflow cannot be completed.

Using Secondary Approvers

The use of secondary approvers should follow the same approval conditions set on the primary approvers of the approval step. This is most important when the approval condition is "all approvers required." Since the primary approvers are distinct, the secondary approvers must also be distinct. If the secondary approver is the same for all primary approvers, and all primary approvers are away, the approval condition has unintentionally switched to a "one approver required" condition because a single response from the secondary approver will complete the step.

Auditing and Reporting

Workflow Audits

The workflow audit is available at *System Admin > Workflow Management > Workflow Status Audit*. Audits are grouped by organizational units and display a general status with the option to open a detailed view which shows all workflows.

The general status view is useful for spotting problems with workflows. If the failed count is growing in relation to the successful count it can point to a problem with the approval workflow configuration. If the idle count is growing this can indicate a network connectivity issue.

The detailed view will display a row for each workflow transaction. The columns are sortable. In this view you would want to see a status of "successful." If the status on the most recent records begins to show a trend of "unhandled exception" or "failed" this can indicate approval configuration or network connectivity issues.

If the audits are trending toward errors place a support call so the issue can be investigated.



Workflow Reports

Master Workflow

The Master Workflow report shows all approvers and approval rules set for each employee. The report options allow filtering to specific organizational units, approval workflow type, primary and secondary approvers.

Workflow Status

This is a report version of the workflow audits showing the status of approval workflows in the system. The report options allow filtering to specific pay periods, organizational units, employee types and approval workflow types.

Report Formats

Reports can be created as PDF, CSV, Word or Excel files.

Using Reports

The Master Workflow and Workflow Status reports can be used together to track down approval issues. The Workflow Status report can be filtered to show only idle approval workflows for employees. If the Master Workflow report is filtered by these employees, you can view which approvers need to respond to complete the approval.

Workflow Structure

Remove Complexity

Workflow configuration should be kept as simple and direct as possible. Approvers are assigned to a request based on their approval criteria. This results in some approvers, like a supervisor, always participating while approvers that review certain project codes or pay codes are only included as needed.

Adding workflow steps can increase the time needed to complete the approval process. Adding granular approval criteria can reduce transparency into the intent of the approval rule. The best practice here is to use the fewest steps and the fewest approval rules that meet your approval needs.

For situations where the approval condition is a combination of “any of these people can approve and we need all of these people to approve” it is best to place those in the “any” group on a workflow step with one approver required, and the those in the “all” group on a workflow step with all approvers required.



Utility to copy workflow approval configuration.

Over the past several months, we have worked with Technical Services to develop a method for copying the workflow steps, approvers, and approval criteria within an environment and between environments.

A typical use would be to configure and test the workflows in a non-production environment. Once satisfied with the configuration, it can be copied to the production environment.

Supported options include:

- Using the timecard approval configuration for all three workflow approval types in the production environment.
- Using each approval configuration as it exists for their respective workflow approval type in the production environment.

This utility is not intended for maintenance. It is intended for the initial configuration before go-live or for a significant reconfiguration of the workflow approvers. Ongoing maintenance should be done in the production environment.

To use this utility, please make a support request so that Technical Services can connect to your environment and perform the copy operation.

