Mobile Approval (P2P): Reviewing and approving orders on the go

Mobile Approval (P2P) refers to the approval of purchase requisitions and purchase orders via mobile devices within the purchase-to-pay process. It replaces paper-based or desktop-bound approval steps with app- or browser-based workflows. For buyers and supply chain managers, this significantly shortens the cycle time from demand notification to order placement.

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Key facts at a glance

01 Mobile Approval (P2P) is part of the digital purchase-to-pay process and enables approvals via smartphone or tablet.

02 It typically reduces approval times from days to hours, often just a few hours in practice.

03 Effective procurement approval limits and multi-stage workflows remain fully valid on mobile.

04 Legal validity requires a documented purchasing policy and audit-capable logging.

05 The four-eyes principle, delegation rules and escalation logic must be mapped on mobile just as on the desktop.

06 Mobile approval relieves managers in the field, in production and while travelling of approval backlogs.

Definition: Mobile Approval (P2P)

Mobile Approval (P2P) is a functional module of digital procurement systems that enables approval steps in the purchase-to-pay process via mobile devices. Purchase requisitions, purchase orders and, in extended setups, invoices are delivered via push notification for review and can be approved or rejected with just a few interactions.

Distinction from classic desktop approval

The classic approval takes place at the desktop PC in the ERP or workflow system. Mobile approval does not change the process itself, only the point of access: authorised approvers decide from

anywhere, for example between meetings, during a shift or on business trips. Rules, stages and documentation remain identical.

Positioning within Source-to-Pay

Mobile approval sits operationally between demand specification and order closure and is thus part of the P2P cycle. While source-to-contract (S2C) covers the strategic upstream phase from tendering to contract, mobile approval ensures that the results of strategic sourcing are quickly converted into binding purchase orders.

Methods and approach to implementation

Implementation typically follows a multi-stage approach: review the purchasing policy and approval matrix, map workflows digitally, connect mobile devices and involve pilot users. It is essential that the mobile functions replicate exactly the same controls as the desktop system.

Define the approval matrix and authority rules

Before digitalisation, the approval matrix must be right: value limits, cost centre responsibility and multiple approvals are defined in the purchasing policy. Procurement approval limits are often used, where amounts up to a threshold are approved in a single stage and higher amounts in multiple stages. The mobile solution must adopt this logic unchanged.

Push, app or browser

Three access routes have become established in practice: a native app with push notification, a responsive web interface for the browser, and integration into existing collaboration or chat tools. Native apps usually offer convenience features such as fingerprint approval, while browser solutions score with low maintenance effort.

Delegation and escalation rules

To prevent holiday cover and long absences from blocking the process, delegation rules and automatic escalations are defined. If an approval is not given within a defined deadline, it is forwarded to the next hierarchy level. This keeps cycle times stable even during staffing bottlenecks.

Key KPIs for steering mobile approval

Mobile approval can be managed with measurable metrics. Key metrics relate to the speed, throughput and quality of approvals. They should be recorded before and after implementation in order to demonstrate the benefits.

Approval time and cycle time

The average approval duration per requisition is the key metric. In practice, mobile approval typically reduces approval times from several days to under one day. In addition, the entire lead time from

demand notification to order is measured.

Rate of on-time approvals and escalation rate

The share of requisitions approved within the SLA shows process stability, while the escalation rate reveals systematic bottlenecks. High escalation rates often indicate missing delegation rules or overloaded approval stages.

Change order and rejection rate

Changes after the order, for example via a change order clause in the supplier contract, should be correlated with approval quality. A high change order rate may indicate that requisitions are being approved too quickly and with too little scrutiny.

Risks and controls of mobile approval

Anyone moving approvals to the mobile phone must control new risks: secure authentication, clean logging and clear responsibilities are mandatory. Without these measures, unauthorised orders and audit findings loom.

Authentication and IT security

Mobile devices expand the attack surface. Common measures include multi-factor authentication, encrypted connections and device-based access rules. The supplier's cyber risk must also be considered if approval data is exchanged via external platforms. Legal questions of evidentiary value should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Audit capability and documentation

Every mobile approval must be logged completely: who, when, with which amount and which attachments. For internal and external audits, the use of an audit checklist has proven effective, allowing regular spot checks of mobile approvals to be traced.

Control quality despite speed

The convenience of one-tap approval carries the risk of superficial reviews. Countermeasures include mandatory fields, attachments displayed exactly as they would appear, and a four-eyes principle for critical requirements. Especially for open items such as advance payments or long-running framework orders, additional review steps and procurement cost centre reporting should be defined more precisely.

Current developments and outlook

Mobile approval is evolving from a pure approval tool to a mobile cockpit for procurement topics. AI support, chat approvals and integration with supplier risks will shape the next development steps.

AI-supported review suggestions

AI in procurement increasingly supports pre-screening: anomalies in prices, duplicate requisitions or deviations from the demand specification are automatically flagged. Approvers thus receive a decision template on mobile instead of long document lists.

Mobile end-to-end processes

Beyond approval, further P2P steps are moving to the mobile device: goods receipt capture, invoice clarification in the clarification round, and shipment status monitoring. Logistics metrics such as carrier performance or demurrage and detention charges for container transport can also increasingly be viewed on mobile.

Risk awareness in the approval

Future approval screens will display supplier information directly, such as the EcoVadis rating for sustainability, the DUNS number for company identification, or indications of the supplier's cyber risk. This allows the approver to make their decision with full context.

Typical metrics

Metric	Typical value
Average approval time	< 4 hours *typical target value after introducing mobile approval*
Share of on-time approvals	> 95 % *share of approvals within the SLA deadline*
Escalation rate	< 5 % *share of automatically escalated requisitions*
Lead time from requirement to order	1–2 working days *total cycle time of the requisition up to order closure*

Practical example

A mid-sized mechanical engineering company with around 400 employees suffered from approval times of four to six days, as many approvers spent a lot of time on factory floors and at customer sites. Urgent spare parts repeatedly ended up in backorder, straining the backorder rate and production.

- Introduction of a mobile approval app with push notifications and biometric authentication
- Revision of the purchasing policy with tiered procurement approval limits and automatic delegation rules
- Escalation to the next management level after 24 hours, logging of all approvals for the audit checklist

- Display of supplier master data including DUNS number directly in the approval screen

Conclusion

Mobile Approval (P2P) is one of the few procurement measures with an immediately noticeable impact on cycle times and production reliability. The prerequisite is a clean approval matrix established before digitalisation. In terms of security, authentication and logging must be maintained at desktop level. Anyone systematically measuring metrics such as approval time and escalation rate can demonstrate the benefits and optimise further. For mid-market suppliers, the step is usually quick to implement and pays off immediately through faster procurement of critical materials.

Frequently asked questions

? What does Mobile Approval mean in the P2P process?

Mobile Approval (P2P) allows purchase requisitions and purchase orders to be reviewed and approved via smartphone or tablet. It replaces desktop-bound approvals with location-independent approval steps. Rules, approval limits and documentation remain unchanged.

? Is a mobile approval legally binding and audit-proof?

Yes, provided the approval is authenticated, logged and embedded in a documented purchasing policy. What matters is complete logging and traceable delegation rules. The exact requirements for evidentiary value and retention should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

? What benefits does mobile approval bring to procurement?

Typically, approval times fall from several days to a few hours. Urgent requirements reach suppliers faster, which reduces backorders and production stoppages. In addition, mobile approval relieves managers in the field and in manufacturing.

? What are the risks of mobile approval?

The main risks are insufficient authentication, superficial reviews due to quick tap approvals, and gaps in logging. Countermeasures include multi-factor authentication, mandatory fields, the four-eyes principle for critical amounts, and regular spot checks using an audit checklist.

? How do you implement mobile approval in the mid-market?

First review the purchasing policy and approval matrix, then map the workflow digitally and test it with a pilot group. Delegation and escalation rules should be defined from the outset. A phased rollout over six to twelve weeks is common practice.

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