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The cost of unproven work

How delivery evidence supports operational control, commercial approval and payment in field services. A FortyFive white paper.

Executive summary: completion is a status, acceptance needs a record

The business accountable to the customer needs to know what was delivered, whether it meets the agreed standard and what can be approved for payment.

Field work can be completed without leaving a usable record of delivery. The engineer may have finished the task, but the evidence, approved changes and commercial terms can sit in different systems or in separate conversations.

That separation creates practical costs. A delivery manager spends time reconstructing events. A provider answers an invoice query weeks after the visit. An engineer returns to resolve something that could have been checked before leaving site.

Not every repeat visit or late payment is an evidence problem. Parts, access, skills, credit risk and contractual terms still matter. This paper focuses on the avoidable cost of incomplete or disconnected delivery records.

Own the outcome. Set requirements before the job starts. Give teams and partners the information they need. Review the evidence against those requirements and make exceptions visible to the people responsible for resolving them.

Move the money. Connect accepted delivery to the agreed rates, authorised changes and invoice. A clearer record can reduce queries and support payment decisions; it does not replace commercial approval or guarantee when money will arrive.

> **The central argument.** Capture the information needed for acceptance as the work happens, then keep it connected to approval and payment. This gives both the commissioning business and the delivery team a record they can refer back to.

1. Where the cost appears

The same gap can affect delivery, commercial approval and cash collection. Separate the causes before deciding what to change. We see five recurring costs: four operational and one financial.

A repeat visit that could have been avoided. A team arrives without confirmed access, the right parts or a completed prerequisite. Alternatively, the work is finished but an acceptance check is missing. A further visit adds travel, labour and scheduling costs. Record the cause: incomplete evidence and failed preparation require different remedies.

Rework with disputed responsibility. A later fault raises questions about what was tested, which conditions were present and whether the original requirements were met. A contemporaneous record helps the parties assess those questions. It cannot, by itself, establish the cause of every fault or determine contractual responsibility.

An invoice that needs reconstructing. The invoice includes six hours, but the work order allowed four. Extra work may have been necessary and properly agreed; the approval is simply hard to find. Both sides spend time checking messages, timesheets and recollections before they can settle the query.

Payment waiting for a decision. Where acceptance is incomplete, an otherwise valid invoice may wait for review. The provider still has wages and operating costs to meet.

The cost of carrying the gap. Even when nothing goes wrong, money is tied up between work done and payment received. Each of the four operational costs adds days to that gap. Shortening review can reduce the cash tied up in a job, although agreed payment terms and the customer's payment behaviour remain separate factors.

> **Follow the exception through the chain.** A single job can generate a revisit, an invoice query and a payment delay. Link those events to one job record so that the underlying issue is visible and costs are not counted twice.

2. Research context: benchmarks need boundaries

Published research shows that repeat visits, scope changes and cash collection deserve attention. It does not establish a universal cost of unproven field work.

- **77% first-time fix rate.** Service Council's 2013 field-service study reported a 77% first-time fix rate across 226 respondents [1]. This is a historical service benchmark, not a current forecast for any individual operation. Repeat visits can reflect parts, skills and other constraints as well as missing information.
- **52% experienced scope creep.** PMI's 2018 report found that 52% of completed projects experienced scope creep or uncontrolled changes over the preceding 12 months [2]. The finding concerns projects across industries, not individual field-service jobs. It supports the importance of change control; it does not quantify the cost of missing delivery evidence.
- **53.7 days sales outstanding.** McGrathNicol reported average days sales outstanding of 53.7 days for the Australian building-products companies in its FY2024 sample [3]. This is an adjacent-sector comparison, not a field-services average. DSO reflects the collection cycle overall and cannot isolate delays caused by acceptance or invoice queries.

These findings provide context, not a combined loss estimate. The studies cover different periods, populations and measures. None establishes the share of field-service cost caused by an incomplete delivery record. A useful business case starts with the organisation's own job, approval and payment data.

3. Measurement: build the case from your own work

Measure the delay and effort between completion, acceptance, invoicing and collection. Use consistent definitions across teams and suppliers. Start with four measures:

- **Evidence-related queries:** jobs queried because required records are missing or unclear, as a proportion of completed jobs.
- **Review effort:** staff time spent obtaining records and resolving those queries.
- **Avoidable revisits:** additional visits attributed to a recorded, preventable cause.
- **Approval time:** elapsed days from evidence submission to a decision. Track invoice-to-payment time separately.

An illustrative monthly calculation

The figures below are assumptions, not FortyFive results or industry benchmarks. Replace them with observed data before using them in a business case.

Cost	Assumption	Monthly
Query handling	50 queries × 0.75 hours × £40/hour	£1,500
Avoidable revisits	20 visits × £250 incremental cost	£5,000
Cost of delayed cash	£100,000 × 10% × 15/365 days	£411

The cash example assumes an annual funding cost of 10% on £100,000 outstanding for an additional 15 days. The outstanding balance is not itself a loss. Staff time is an opportunity cost unless the reduction produces a cash saving or usable capacity.

Compare similar work before and after introducing a consistent evidence and approval process. Check job complexity, volume and customer terms. Count only attributable changes, avoid overlapping costs and include the time required to capture and review the evidence.

4. The delivery record: agree what proof is needed

A photograph is useful only if it answers a relevant question. The record should reflect the work, the customer's acceptance criteria and the decisions needed afterwards.

- **Before work starts.** Define the scope, site requirements, rates and acceptance criteria. Confirm who may approve changes and who will review completion. Make these details available to the delivery team before it accepts the job.
- **While the team is on site.** Capture the relevant checks, test results, photographs and observations against the job. Add times, locations and sign-off where appropriate. Record an access failure or an incomplete prerequisite when it happens, rather than trying to reconstruct it at invoice stage.
- **When the work changes.** Keep the proposed change, its effect on time or price and the authorisation together. Where approval is outstanding, show that status explicitly. Evidence of extra work is not the same as permission to charge for it.
- **At review and invoicing.** Let the authorised reviewer accept the work or identify a specific exception. Keep the decision, supporting evidence and agreed commercial details connected so that the invoice can be checked against them.

> **A record people can rely on.** Control access, retain a visible history of corrections and distinguish submitted evidence from approved work. Allow genuine mistakes to be corrected without obscuring the original record. Capture only what is needed and apply appropriate retention rules.

The aim is proportionate evidence: enough to support a sound decision, without creating unnecessary administration for the team doing the work.

5. The FortyFive approach

FortyFive connects the management of field work with the record needed to review delivery and support payment.

Operational control for the accountable business. The business responsible to the customer sets the requirements, manages its teams and partners, and reviews whether delivery meets the commitment it made. FortyFive brings the job, evidence and approval process together so that progress and exceptions can be managed in context.

Clarity for the team delivering the work. Work is offered and accepted. The delivery team can see what is expected and submit evidence against the job. The resulting record supports review and gives both sides something concrete to refer back to when a question arises.

A connection from acceptance to payment. Agreed rates, recorded work and commercial approval provide the basis for invoicing. Connecting these steps can reduce the need to assemble the same information again in a separate payment process.

> **Payment and working capital.** Payment services depend on the arrangements agreed for each business. Factoring and extended payment terms are planned, initially through finance partners and subject to eligibility and terms. A stronger delivery record can inform assessment; it does not remove credit risk or guarantee finance.

Start with a defined operation. FortyFive runs standalone from the first job. Businesses can begin with a project or delivery team, then connect ticketing and finance systems when required. The starting point is practical: agree the record your customer needs, use it consistently and measure whether approval becomes easier.

Discuss your delivery model: workbetter@fortyfive.work. Book a walkthrough: demo@fortyfive.work.

Sources and scope

This paper combines published research with FortyFive's analysis of delivery and commercial processes. It does not report a measured FortyFive customer study.

1. Service Council, August 2013. *Field Service Efficiency: Strategies for Improvement*, Sumair Dutta. Research base: Field Service Challenges, Q2 2013, n=226. First-time fix rate: Table 2.
2. Project Management Institute, 2018. *Pulse of the Profession 2018: Success in Disruptive Times*. Scope creep or uncontrolled changes: 52% of completed projects, preceding 12 months. Research base: 4,455 project management practitioners across industries.
3. McGrathNicol, 2024. *Working Capital Report 2024: Building Products*. Australian sample: average DSO of 53.7 days in FY2024. The report also presents days working capital, a different measure that should not be used interchangeably with DSO.

The research findings are historical and retain their original scope. The operational examples are explanatory, and the calculation in section 3 is hypothetical. No forecast of savings, payment speed or funding availability is implied. Sources reviewed 15 September 2026.