

3 ways to make your procurement department really stand out

By Tom Holmes | [Inside View](#) | [Procurement & supply chain](#) | Thu, 15 Oct 2015 - 15:53 BST

Procurement expert and author, Sigi Osagie explains the three things you need to do to raise your department's profile



If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

It follows then that a change to how you see yourself and others leads to solutions for problems, or the realisation that the problem didn't actually exist. Perception therefore is fundamental to success. That is particularly true of the procurement function. Savvy companies realise that purchasing is critical to the organisation's value chain, but the lingering sense that it is little more than perfunctory prevents smoother transitions from administrative to strategic operations.

"Procurement's true positioning in the enterprise is largely determined by the perceptions of stakeholders, not necessarily the enterprise's structure," says Sigi Osagie in [Procurement Mojo](#), his book on strengthening the function and raising its profile. "The more stakeholders feel that procurement is meaningful to their activities and existence, the better procurement's brand position." Building brand capital is therefore an important part of the procurement transformation process; successful promotion of the department not only wins over sceptical stakeholders, it highlights the importance of the function to the organisation. As Sigi says, it is important to be doing a good job and just as important to be seen to be doing a good job too. So where do you start?

1. Harness your people power

“The first is the procurement people - they are one of the key parts to raising the profile,” says Sigi. “Everything that they say, do, and how they behave affects the image of procurement. Often they are not aware of that.” It is important in this instance for procurement people to change their thinking and change their perspectives – it is absolutely crucial because success is at least 50% psychological. They need to challenge how they think, the attitudes they have, and the view of the world that they hold. “Why is that important? Because a lot of procurement people think of their stakeholders as the enemy,” Sigi says. “Or they come to the party thinking they deserve a seat at the table. If they can change their perspective it works wonders. Don’t think of stakeholders as enemies – think of them as your internal customers.”

Sigi says that the trick is to focus on the people, and remember that those we are dealing with are individuals. You need to get to know the person behind the function they are performing. “Think about your three most difficult stakeholders – what do you know about them as an individual? How many children do they have, what are their hobbies and interests? Most of the time people don’t know those things because they are too focused on the task in hand. “You need to foster positive emotions with people because it helps with the business relationship you have with them. We are dealing with people at the end of the day.

If you approach people confrontationally it creates a negative experience, so thinking of these people as individuals and understanding their perspectives helps you to work successfully with them. “Each person who holds a negative perception of you and procurement will behave in a way that is driven by that emotion,” Sigi adds. “Humans don’t behave based on logic most of the time because their emotions are always at play. If you can tap into that emotional connection it will work wonders. “Fundamentally every member of the procurement department is an ambassador for the function and is promoting it, or is an assassin that is damaging the department’s reputation.”

2. Make positive connections

On one hand, this aspect applies to how the job is done daily and on the other being conscious of the soft elements. “It’s one thing to turn up with big stick to beat a stakeholder round the head,” says Sigi, “but it’s quite another to approach them in a friendly way. If you can connect emotionally then you are likely to have a better experience together.

If you want people to have a positive perception you have to check that your behaviours – what you say, do and how you act – are positive, because that is what creates people’s perception of you. “You have to remember that the results we are trying to achieve are not just to deliver savings or de-risk the supply chain, for example,” Sigi says, “but also to maintain a good reputation. So use the way you behave and the way you communicate to do that.” The department also needs to be a lot savvier. Boosting soft skills - like empathetic listening, persuasive conversation and clear communication – will foster good working relations and help to develop stronger relationships. “Use opportunities to communicate persuasively and to demonstrate what procurement can do,” says Sigi. “Ensure that people know and remember what you are saying so that procurement stays in their thoughts positively. “The message I have sent to stakeholders in previous jobs is ‘I am here to serve you.’ Treat your stakeholders as customers.”

3. Be your own PR department

This is an area that most procurement people don't know how to do, but irrespective of that it needs to be done. Whether or not the procurement people are savvy in the way they go about doing their job, and whether or not they are connecting with stakeholders, they still need to tell the rest of the organisation what they are doing – it is an important aspect if you are driving transformations.

“In this instance align everything that procurement does with the organisation's priorities and make it obvious,” Sigi says. “Of course you must deliver results. Make your goals are SMART and achieve them and then make sure you broadcast them. “Use PR avenues like publishing articles on the company intranet and do it in a structured and formalised way.

For example, about two years ago I worked with a client to set up their global supply chain. I made sure that we had a procurement intranet site, that all the regions had access. “I also used the corporate intranet to publish updates, gave periodic executive briefings to the board and sent out regular newsletters. These were all done according to a schedule and updated regularly. For example, every month-end when we had our performance results we distributed an email newsletter across the company telling people how we performed.” It has to be done in a structured way to build the procurement brand awareness and ensure procurement is always perceived positively in people's minds.”

About Sigi

Sigi Osagie is a leading expert on effectiveness in procurement and supply chain management. He helps organisations and individuals achieve enhanced performance growth to accomplish their business and career goals. Sigi has extensive leadership experience across most operations and supply chain areas, and previously held senior executive and board roles with several blue-chip multinationals and SMEs. Today Sigi works as a writer, speaker, business advisor and coach, drawing on insights from his atypical life journey and career success to inform and inspire others. He is the author of the highly-acclaimed book [***Procurement Mojo – Strengthening the Function and Raising Its Profile***](#), and can be contacted on www.sigiosagie.com

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