DAY IN THE LIFE:
PROCUREMENT PRINCIPAL

Sarah Dzik- Optimum Procurement

Describe the main responsibilities of your role.

Reporting directly to the Head of Procurement, I lead a team of experienced and highly talented category managers at Optimum Procurement Group, a leading procurement services provider. Together, our dynamic team consistently delivers sustainable cost reduction programmes for our clients. My main focus is to ensure successful and effective implementation of key operational and commercial projects.

I am responsible for establishing and ensuring adherence to all procurement processes within the client; driving significant and sustainable cost savings whilst maximising supply chain value and closely managing risk to the business.

How does your average day start?

Working for an outsourced procurement services provider means every day can be different; I may be at our office, at the client’s office or even at one of their customers’ or suppliers’ sites. Most days I engage with my team for a progress update on current projects, offering support and direction where necessary.

As a company, we manage expenditure across more than 200 categories, meaning every day and every project brings with it exciting new challenges and possibilities to make a real difference for our clients. More than simply reducing costs, our primary driver is to add value to our clients’ business operations and, ultimately, improve their profitability.

What is your favourite part of your job?

I enjoy establishing and developing relationships with key stakeholders, including our clients as well as their customers and supply base. The day-to-day management of client spend can be a highly technical process, demanding the use of cutting edge spend management software and a high level of analytical prowess. While this ongoing technical challenge is highly rewarding, it’s the personal side of the role that I find most satisfying. Without strong and fruitful relationships, the procurement function would be isolated and unproductive. It’s vital to build strong ties to maximise value from suppliers and to understand and deliver what customers want.

What is the most fulfilling part of your role?

Delivering a successful project, knowing that I have made a difference, delivered value to our clients and enhanced strategic supply chain partnerships is especially fulfilling. Working at the strategic level means we consistently make large scale improvements to our clients’ organisations. Our involvement at the very heart of businesses means the projects we deliver vastly improve business performance, leading to enhanced competitive advantage. Even seemingly slight changes to procurement processes and procedures can have wide ranging benefits when properly implemented. To see these benefits come to fruition is particularly pleasing.
What is the most difficult part of your job?

If procurement was an easy profession, it wouldn’t be so rewarding! There are many challenges, such as managing multiple stakeholders and meeting their needs. For example, establishing relationships between procurement personnel and incumbent suppliers can initially be met with resistance, which demands high levels of negotiation and inter-personal skills to overcome. To demonstrate to such suppliers that it’s in their interest to build upon existing relationships and deliver increased value can be a challenge even for the most experienced procurement practitioners. Experience does however show that actively engaging with suppliers and building upon existing relationships can yield significant and long lasting benefits.

What do you feel are the key skills needed to be successful in your role?

When a client makes the decision to outsource their procurement, they expect to see results much faster and achieve significant savings compared to in-house procurement. Change management is key to this as you need to be capable of quickly improving existing processes and establishing strong relationships with both internal and external stakeholders.

Being able to successfully implement change programmes is an indispensable weapon in a procurement practitioner’s arsenal; as is the ability to ensure that the implementation of change does not expose the business to excessive levels of risk. Risk management and change management go hand in hand.

How and why did you get started in the profession?

Prior to my procurement career I was a successful and valued member of the finance team at a shop fitting company. After achieving my personal objectives they encouraged me to manage the implementation of an electronic purchase order system, including training. It was then decided that I should build upon my experience and move into procurement, which I saw as a huge challenge and a big step up. It certainly has been extremely demanding and required high levels of commitment and determination, but it’s a challenge I’m delighted to have taken on.

Are you a CIPS member and if so and how has CIPS helped you in your career?

I am a full member of CIPS and have been very fortunate as Optimum sponsored me throughout the three years of studying. Attending the classes gave me a valuable insight into how other organisations operate, and it was great to interact with other students who face the same challenges as I do in my role. I believe the course has improved my performance, competency and capability and allowed me to advance my career. Putting the theory learnt with CIPS into practice with Optimum has helped me to improve my personal abilities and performance while adding significant value to our clients’ organisations.

What advice would you give someone who wants to progress to your position?

They need to be results driven, able to work well on their own initiative, demonstrate high motivation levels and enjoy being part of a productive team. They would need to be flexible, approachable, adapt easily to various learning and development styles and have strong leadership skills.

I would highly recommend that those considering working for an outsourced procurement services provider do so. Working at the forefront of the industry alongside some of procurement’s sharpest thinkers and most inspirational leaders has been extraordinarily beneficial to my professional development.

What do you think the next step in your career will be?
Many exciting opportunities arise when working for a growing company such as Optimum. The next position along my development path is likely to be Head of Procurement, where I would be fully responsible for managing a client or potentially multiple clients. Thanks to continued support and encouragement, I’m confident I can successfully move to the next level of my procurement career and can’t wait to do so!