Soft Skills and Communication Tools Guidance Notes
The document outlines the CIPS Soft Skills and Communication Tools created to help you to improve your communication and enhance soft skills to improve performance.
CIPS Soft Skills and Communication Tools Guidance Notes

Soft skills are any skill or quality that can be classified as a personality trait or habit and these interpersonal and communication skills and often intrinsic. The key to good relationships is emotional intelligence and soft skills, which we are becoming increasingly important to our profession and critical for success.

Soft Skills are highly sought after skills for modern professionals. The CIPS/Hays Salary Guide highlights the importance of soft skills, which dominate the top five skills in demand for 2020 and are seen as very important by procurement professionals for doing their jobs well. The key for procurement professionals to deliver strategically is through the development and use of the right soft skills. Technical skills and procurement qualifications are an important foundation for professionals to perform well and demonstrate credibility but they can be learned and so abilities such soft skills are high in demand.

Top 5 Soft Skills for Procurement Professionals

- **Communication** – Procurement need to be able to communicate effectively on all levels to engage with stakeholders and suppliers to develop the correct specifications, accurate expediting and stock control as well as good supplier relationships and effective contract management.
- **Influencing skills** – Procurement professionals on all levels need to be able to influence colleagues and suppliers, while at senior levels it is important to influence upwards to gain buy-in and raise the profile of procurement in the organisation.
- **Internal Stakeholder Management** – Building a relationship and managing internal stakeholders through effective identification, communication and engagement strategies is critical for success.
- **Leadership** – Strong leadership skills for procurement will not only help to create a successful team but also elevate the profile of procurement at senior levels.
- **Supplier Relationship Management** – Relationship management is fundamental to creating value with suppliers and contract management. Through a more collaborative relationship procurement can be more innovative and achieve competitive advantage.

You can access further CIPS Soft Skills guidance here.

Tools

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Communication

Communication is the sharing or imparting of information from one source to another. This could be via speaking, writing, electronic means or via sub conscious actions. For communication to be effective it has to be delivered without distortion to a willing or capable recipient.

Communication can be conveyed from one person to another, from a person to an electronic device or from one electronic system to another. In all communications there is a sender and a receiver. As long as all parties are able to accept the message without distortion, communication will be effective. Effective communication within procurement contributes towards correct specification development, accurate expediting and stock control as well as good supplier relationship and contract management.

1. Communication Model

This model shows the different types of communication. Communication can be verbal through conversations for example, written via letters or non-verbal. Non-verbal communication includes areas such as para-linguistics which include the way in which things are said, the tone of the voice or the emphasis on certain elements of the message. The appearance of the message sender can be of importance as this creates a sub-conscious impression to the recipient and may or may not create credibility. Body language relates to the way in which people react, present themselves and accept communication. This may not be a conscious action but it does give clear signals to the other party.

Gestures relate to body language and are the way in which a person moves their body to express emotion. For example, if during a negotiation a supplier puts their head in their hands, this may suggest that they are getting stressed with the situation. Being able to understand gestures can help buyers “read” the situation and react accordingly.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand one’s own and others’ emotions and this is an important aspect of communication being effective.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
2. Gestures

This model demonstrates some of the gestures that could present themselves in communication. Reading body language and gestures aids procurement individuals within negotiation, supplier management meeting and other aspects of the procurement cycle.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
3. Communication Distortion

Communication distortion can occur in a number of situations and present in a variety of formats. Distortion is the changing of a shape of something and in communication is used to explain factors that can influence what has been sent being different to what was received.

Distortion can be caused by technological failure or hacking. It may be that an electronic message or signal gets corrupted between the sender and the recipient. Should correspondence be confidential or important to a third party, hacking could cause distortion as the third party tries to access the data required. Should one electronic device not be compatible with another the message may present itself in a different format to that which was required.

Whilst some forms of distortion may be linked to technology or incompatibility other forms could relate to cultural or language differences and the way in which the message is received could be different to the intended way when it was sent by the creator of the message.

Distortion is not something that can be avoided but strong relationships with suppliers and up to date technology can reduce the risks.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
4. What Is Emotional Intelligence

This model shows what elements of an individual’s mentality are related to their level of emotional intelligence (EI). In procurement EI relates to how aware a buyer is of themselves and their actions as well as how these will affect others, such as suppliers or colleagues. EI also relates to the level of empathy an individual can show and feel, how motivated they are and the level of compassion that can be demonstrated in various situations. For example a procurement professional that has strong EI would be able to empathise and show compassion to a supplier who is not able to achieve the price increase that they aimed to achieve as part of their negotiation objectives.

Strong relationship management closely relates to high levels of EI. By understanding how actions can affect both parties within a procurement transaction the relationship is most likely to be strategic and long-term.

EI is linked to how a procurement professional is motivated within the workplace. Good motivation as well as well as having met both personal and professional needs will enhance the likelihood of providing and receiving effective communication.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
5. Levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Most individuals have some level of EI but it is believed that strong leaders often present an increased skill set. This model demonstrates that individuals within a procurement role with low levels of EI are more likely to display character traits that are demanding and anti-social.

Individuals with a slightly higher level of EI are likely to be easily distracted and often selfish. This would not prove a positive attribute when trying to build strategic relationships or win-win outcomes within the supply chain.

People with relatively high levels of EI present themselves as being good listeners and are attentive in all situations.

Professionals with very high levels of EI are proven to be assertive, decisive and sociable. These skills are often a useful factor when trying to build supplier relationships or reach a negotiated agreement.

Whilst most people are pre-determined with their natural level of EI, it can be enhanced through training and personal development which will add value to a procurement professional and their organisation.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
6. **Leaders v Managers**

This diagram shows the differences between leaders and managers.

Some situations demand management and some are more suited to leadership. In most situations strong leadership is believed to be a more person-friendly approach.

Managers tend to be more reactive to situations whereby leaders are linked to making the change happen.

Leaders create environments where procurement teams can be proactive, innovative and are encouraged to succeed.

When working with suppliers or stakeholders and trying to ensure effective communication, leadership skills come into play as part of the management and negotiation tactics.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
7. **Hard V Soft Skills**

Communication is made up of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are learnable and soft skills are traits. Effective communication needs both hard and soft skills.

Hard skills include the ability of a person to be able to read and write whilst soft skills relate to flexibility and time management. Whilst it is important to be able to convey a message factually using hard skills, equal importance for effective communication is the ability to deliver the message in the correct environment for the recipient to have as little distortion as possible.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
8. IQ vs EI

IQ is intellectual quotient. This is the predetermined level of intelligence that any person will have. IQ is related to the ability a person, i.e. a procurement professional, has to think and how able they are to concentrate.

EI is not an intellectual skill but a trait linked to being self-aware and having the ability to feel emotions.

A procurement professional with strong levels of IQ and EQ will be able to demonstrate effective communication as they will have the skills of being able to create a factual and accurate message to the recipient in the correct atmosphere using the right tone to gain understanding without distortion.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)
9. Influencing Tactics

Effective communication can be achieved by the use of influencing tactics. This model shows the different types of tactics that a procurement professional could use in a meeting with a supplier or a supply chain member.

The most negative form of influence is the use of coercion. This is when threats are involved. This type of influencing should not occur as it breaches ethical codes of practice.

Pressure is also a form of influencing tactic that does not reflect positively on the influencer. Pressure is less intense than coercion but still does not reflect good procurement practice.

Exchange, as an influencing tactic, is far from the best option to use. Should exchange be used as a tactic from a supplier to a buyer this could put the procurement professional in a situation whereby they are susceptible to bribery or corruption.

Consultation is a more focused and fair approach where a party within the communication uses advice gained from a third party to help reach their objective.

Inspirational appeal is a tactic that uses appeals or requests to one party that arouse their buy in through their emotions, values or beliefs. Inspirational appeal often provides encouragement to one party through communication that the desired outcome will benefit them in a personal or professional way which in turn helps to secure their buy in.

Rational persuasion is a factual base use of communication to try and influence one party that the concept, ideal or contract being offered is the best. By using facts and figures to influence, the party being influenced may be likely to change their opinion to agree with that of the influencer.

The final tactic which promotes effective communication is collaboration. Collaboration should always be present between a supplier that is strategic to a buyer and when a buyer is seen as core by the supplier.

Collaboration uses undistorted communication, an understanding of body language, appreciation of how the other party is feeling (EI) and combines it all to work towards an outcome that is acceptable to all parties. Collaboration as an influencing tactic offers support to the party being influenced to ensure that they can arrive at the objective required by the influencer.
10. Importance of effective communication

Whilst understanding the “hows” of creating effective communication is very important, this model demonstrates the reasons why effective communication should occur.

Through effective communication the development of specifications is more likely to be right first time which in turn reduces the amount of potential defects within the supply chain which in turn minimises risk.

Effective communication with the supplier and/or logistical departments will promote the likelihood of on time delivery which will aid in the objective to reduce running out of stock of core products.

If products/services are arriving and being delivered on time in the correct and expected specification the stakeholders are more likely to be satisfied.

Motivation will be higher if communication is effective. Internal and cross-functional teams will be aware of what is expected, results and any potential concerns and will be able to manage the situation accordingly.

Strong motivation results in higher levels of innovation which is another positive derived from effective communication.

If motivation is high, stakeholders are more inclined to share ideas and concepts to help create efficiencies within the supply chain.
These efficiencies will contribute towards driving down cost which will be well received by customers and consumers and enhance the organisation’s reputation.

If communication is clear, transparent and without distortion the likelihood and impact of any risk which may present itself should be reduced and mitigated against.

Effective communication through the supply chain will promote whistleblowing, unacceptable behaviours and ensure that ethical and sustainable procurement is practised at all times.

By being willing to accept communication any changes to legislation or regulations will be received and acted upon ensuring the procurement departments and their associated organisations are compliant.

When all the above are maximised the use of resources within the supply chain will be optimal and therefore the output should also be optimum.

(Source: Jarvis-Grove, 2020)

CIPS members can download the tools covered [here](#).