Client and Supplier Relationships

L3-03

Senior Assessor’s Examination Report

May 2012
INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

The senior assessor’s report is written in order to provide candidates with feedback relating to the examination. It is designed as a tool for candidates - both those who have sat the examination and those who wish to use as part of their revision for future examinations.

Candidates are advised to refer to the Examination Techniques Guide (see the following link: http://www.cips.org/en-GB/Qualifications/study-support/) as well as this senior assessor’s report.

The senior assessor’s report aims to provide the following information:

- An indication of how to approach the examination question
- An indication of the points the answer should include
- An indication of candidate performance for the examination question

Each question has a syllabus reference which highlights the learning objectives of the syllabus unit content that the question is testing. The unit content guides are available to download at the following link:

http://www.cips.org/Qualifications/About-CIPS-Qualifications/cipsqualifications/

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Supply Management magazine is a useful source of information and candidates are advised to include it in their reading during their study. Please see the following link to the Supply Management website: http://www.supplymanagement.com/
Q1 (a) (i) Explain the nature of the relationship with customers of the bespoke fire protection systems.  
(ii) Explain the nature of the relationship with customers of the smoke alarms and fire blankets.  
(2 marks)

Q1 (b) Outline, using examples, FIVE types of information required across the FPS supply chain.  
(3 marks)

Q1 (c) Suggest FIVE ways that communication between the functions at FPS might be improved.  
(10 marks)

Analysis of the Question

Part (a) of the question aims to examine the candidates’ ability to compare two characteristics of external customer relationships within the context of a case study.

Part (b) of the question aims to examine the candidates’ ability to identify the information requirements of all stakeholders within the supply chain. Answers needed to be in the context of the case study.

Part (c) of the question aims to examine the candidates’ ability to suggest how barriers to communication at FPS could be removed and consequently how communications between the functions might be improved.

Analysis of the Answer

Part (a) (i): Answers need to go no further than to state that as the external customer relationship is long term (several months lead time and extended warranties) and the systems are bespoke (specially designed for a specific customer) the relationship is likely to be close. This suggests a collaborative or partnership in which information is shared and innovation takes place.

Part (a) (ii): The case study information states that DIY outlets use their purchase power and leverage to force down prices and that margins are minimal for this range of products. This should suggest an adversarial / transactional approach on the part of the DIY outlets.

In part (a) (i) and (ii) candidates might also include reference to the relationship spectrum and use this as the basis for their answer. This is perfectly acceptable as long as it compares the characteristics of the two customer relationships.

Part (b): Answers should reflect case information and not simply repeat the case, hence ‘the use of examples’. Typical responses would relate to the following types of information:

• Sales forecasts
• Stock levels by item
• Stock valuation
• Outstanding orders – delayed deliveries
• Supplier lead times
• Manufacturing, design and installation capacity and hence accurate lead time forecasts

Reference to qualitative information such as complaints, customer plans and other market intelligence might also be present. As long as contextualised, this is also acceptable. Relevant examples provided or discussions commenting on the value of...
accurate information and its contribution to effective operational relationships. Responses may also discuss qualitative information and its value in addition to the more obvious quantitative information.

**Part (c):** The case does not say what the problems are hence the question ‘how communications might be improved’. There are though clearly problems in communication between the functions. Typical responses might therefore include reference to:

- Investigation as to the reasons for the breakdown in communications
- Cross functional team working
- Deciding on the type and frequency of information communicated.
- Establish clear reporting procedures both pre and post contract award
- Investigation into the use of appropriate channels of communication to ensure shared access. This might include investment in shared data base /intranet
- Regular meetings supported by functional heads /senior manager against a specific agenda for improvement
- Targets for improvement could also be set and these would be reviewed on a regular basis. Identification of problem areas would attract additional investment to overcome specific problems identified.

Any **FIVE** of the above or appropriate alternative suggestions acceptable. Candidates might also discuss the importance of managing communication for FSP and the contribution effective communication could make to FSP falling profits and margins.

**Exam Question Summary**

Overall, questions were generally well answered. Responses were tailored to the case study and command words and scoring key understood. Most candidates achieved full marks for part (a) and achieved high marks for parts b and c.

**Q2 (a)** Explain the meaning of supply chain management for FPS (5 marks)

**Q2 (b)** Outline **FIVE** possible costs to FPS of poor relationship management with its suppliers. (10 marks)

**Q2 (c)** Discuss how relationships between FPS and its suppliers might be improved. (10 marks)

**Analysis of the Question**

**Part (a):** To examine the candidates’ ability to outline the difference between supply chain management.

**Part (b):** To examine the candidates’ ability to explain the costs of poor relationship management between FPS and its suppliers

**Part (c):** To examine the candidates’ ability to explain how poor relationships between FPS and its suppliers might be improved.
Analysis of the Answer

Part (a): Candidates should be aware and be able to describe supply chain management. Typically, that supply chain management is concerned with the co-ordinated flow of materials and services from origins through suppliers, into and through the organisation and on to the ultimate consumer in such a way as to maximise value added and minimise cost. In short, it represents the ‘bigger picture’ and includes the elimination of waste throughout the supply chain. Candidates may comment / contextualise their answer to reflect that neither is happening at FPS and this is contributing to a number of operational problems.

Part (b): Candidates should contextualise their answers.
Constant changing of suppliers by Billy and his belief that suppliers are ‘profiteering’ at FPS expense will all contribute to poor supplier relationship management and is likely to lead to the following:

• Lack of supplier commitment
• Lack of motivation and subsequent contribution to innovation by suppliers
• Realisation on the part of suppliers that any additional effort on their part is not going to be rewarded and consequently minimum effort is likely to be forthcoming.
• No supplier loyalty to FPS
• Likelihood of supplier exploitation
• FPS reputation will deter suppliers in the longer term
• Supplier exploitation more likely

Reputation will discourage good performing suppliers and lead to only poor performing suppliers who find it difficult to find work elsewhere.

In addition, there are other costs to FPS of constantly changing suppliers such as:

• Supplier appraisal
• Setting up a payment account
• Cost of additional (unwanted) stockholding
• Cost of redundant and or obsolete stock
• Cost of waste – repeatedly doing things over and having to correct mistakes

All of which will significantly increase costs associated with supply
Candidates may additionally discuss the fact that whilst Billy feels he is saving money by constantly changing suppliers the hidden costs of such activity will significantly outweigh any possible savings.

Part (c): Candidates should have discussed the following points
The most obvious from the case is that Billy does ‘soften’ his attitude as directed by his managers!

• Reducing the supply base – currently it is not manageable
• Entering in to longer term supply agreements with selected suppliers
• Listening to suppliers particularly their suggestions that might lead to cost improvements /price reduction.
• Moving from competitive bidding from a large and changing supply base to negotiation with a smaller supply base.
• Holding supplier open days and sharing business plans across a smaller supply base
• Using less adversarial language
• Focussing on and developing relationships with those suppliers who are still performing well, despite Billy.

Ultimately, Billy needs to realise the importance of a motivated supply base and that FPS can only be as good as its worst supplier

Candidates might also state that engaged and motivated suppliers could help to improve profitability by contributing to innovation and cost cutting. Equally that FPS will become more attractive to a smaller supply base as it is able to consolidate expenditure and reduce costs associated with placing orders.

Exam Question Summary

Overall, questions were generally well answered. Many candidates achieved full marks for part (a). Very few candidates scored full marks for part (b). The common mistake was failing to construct the response based on costs that FPS would incur due to having poor relationships. Overall, high marks were awarded for part (c)

Q3 (a) Identify FIVE different roles within teams (5 marks)
Q3 (b) Explain the stages of team formation. (10 marks)
Q3 (c) Explain the importance of team working in the purchasing environment (10 marks)

Analysis of the Question

These questions were aimed at testing the candidates’ knowledge and understanding of the contribution effective teams can make to the management of operational relationships

Analysis of the Answer

Part (a): For full FIVE marks candidates need not go beyond an outline based on the following. Belbin suggested team roles reflecting different positions adopted by individuals within a team. Belbin argued that team roles depend on individuals’ personal characteristics and behaviour, just as much as their functional expertise and experience. Belbin identified nine team roles. This question requires candidates to outline FIVE from the following.

Plant - creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.
Resource investigator - extrovert, enthusiastic and communicative. Explores opportunities.
Shaper – challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has drive and courage to overcome obstacles.
Team worker – cooperative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic
Implementer – disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient
Completer-finisher – painstaking, conscientious, anxious
**Specialist** – single minded, self starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply

**Chairman** – leader, focuses on team objectives

Candidates may have discussed roles within a team they are familiar with

**Part (b):** This is a straightforward question that allows the candidate to demonstrate awareness of known theory (Tuckman). The question asks for an explanation and therefore answers should go beyond a simple list. The four stages candidates should identify are as follows:

**Stage 1 Forming** – this is the earliest stage of team development. Team members might exhibit a range of emotions from excitement to suspicion and fear of what lies ahead. The team accomplishes little at this stage. This is normal.

**Stage 2 Storming** – this stage is marked by clashes of personality and different views / opinions. Team members might experience resistance to the task and or ideas generated or fluctuations in attitude about the team. A perceived pecking order might emerge and there is disunity, increased tension and jealousy. Again there is little productive work at this stage but the team are beginning to understand one another.

**Stage 3 Norming** – at this stage the team has established itself and members understand where each is coming from. The team settles down and its behaviour and performance become normal. As the team members begin to work out their differences they now have more time and energy to spend on the project. Thus they are able to start making progress.

**Stage 4 Performing** – high performing teams are those that have successfully worked through each of the three prior stages effectively. With good leadership and direction the team begins to stretch itself beyond ‘normal’ performance. The team is now an effective cohesive unit and productivity will be at its highest.

A fifth stage - Mourning – as a team comes to the end of its life /project but is reluctant to ‘break-up’ and start another team, might also be mentioned.

Candidates may have discussed team formation within their organisation with which they are familiar with

**Part (c):** There is no definitive answer to this question. Candidates should be aware that most manufacturing companies spend approximately 55 - 60% of total sales income on bought out goods and services. Therefore, effective team working in the purchasing environment can help ensure that income is spent effectively, risk is reduced and waste, in all its forms, is minimised.

Team working within the purchasing department is important for the following reasons:

- Improves communication within the purchasing department
- Facilitates information sharing
- Provides and generates a supportive culture
  - Allows new members of staff the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of other more experienced personnel
- Supply market trends /problems may be more readily identified and more effective group solutions arrived at.
- Decision making is improved as a broader set of values is used in the process.
Exam Question Summary

A very popular question with most answers scoring full marks for parts a and b. Part (c) was not well answered with many missing the command word explain and instead focusing on the outcomes of team working

Q4 (a) Identify FIVE benefits of a purchasing plan (5 marks)
Q4 (b) Discuss FIVE types of supply information a buyer would need to develop an effective purchasing plan (10 marks)
Q4 (c) Describe FIVE benefits of providing feedback to a supplier (10 marks)

Analysis of the Question

Part (a): To examine the candidates’ ability to explain the benefits of a purchasing plan

Part (b) and (c): To examine the candidates’ ability to explain how purchasing plans are used as a means of communication within the purchasing function

Analysis of the Answer

Part (a): For full marks candidates are not expected to go beyond the following which are not prioritised:

• Purchasing plans are developed with other stakeholders and therefore should contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.
• Improves communications with other stakeholders – creates ‘buy-in’
• Helps to establish the role of purchasing within the organisation – improves status.
• Identifies and sets meaningful targets for improvement within the purchasing function
• Identifies (purchasing function) resource issues such as: people, systems, processes, time frames and budgets that might prevent plans being achieved.

Candidates may state that purchasing plans are not developed in isolation but also involve organisations stakeholders.

Part (b): Answers should reflect the question ‘supply information’. Therefore, generic lists comprising ‘all and everything’ will not attract high marks. Candidates may look at risk, supply market stability, demand and availability, their share of the suppliers’ turnover and therefore perceived importance to the supplier.

Typical of the types of supply information required and that should be discussed are:

• Who can supply the product and or service
• Capacity within the supply market
• What is the level of (buyer) competition for this supply
• What are the typical lead times for this product and or service
• Supplier information (financial stability)
• How competitive is the supply market
• Will there be sufficient business to attract volume discounts.
Note! Question is specifically SUPPLY MARKET, therefore reference to customer information and or internal capacity, budgets etc will not attract high marks.

Part (c): Typical of the benefits that might be explained are the following:
• It provides informed feedback to the supplier – they know ‘where they stand’in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
• It ensures communication links are maintained and potential problems to be identified at an early stage.
• It can contribute to improved motivation and performance levels
• It can be a mechanism for discussing potentially difficult issues that might Impact on performance
• If conducted constructively, is objective and avoids emotive language it helps enhance the relationship

Exam Question Summary

Not a popular question and candidates who attempted this question gave weak answers resulting in low marks being awarded. It was apparent from those candidates that did answer this question that the importance and benefits of a purchasing plan had not been covered well, which then impacted on their response to part (b) and resulted in low marks being achieved. Part (c) of the question was well answered, with many scoring full marks

Q5 (a) Identify FIVE benefits to the internal customer of purchasing acting as an internal consultant (5 marks)
Q5 (b) Explain, using FIVE examples, the role of the purchasing professional as an internal consultant (10 marks)
Q5 (c) Outline FIVE methods the purchasing function might use to manage its stakeholders (10 marks)

Analysis of the Question

This question aims to examine the candidates’ ability to describe the importance of multi tasking (the role of the internal consultant) within the purchasing process

Analysis of the Answer

Part (a): There is no definitive set of benefits. However, to attract high marks candidates are expected to go beyond simple list /theory dumps and consider benefits that a purchasing professional could bring. Therefore, answers should reflect purchasing and supply side issues. Candidates are likely to reflect on issues such as risk management, lower costs of supply, simplified processes, and alternative material /suppliers.

Typical benefits which might be explained include:
• Decreased cost of ownership and reduced supply side risk improves profitability and ensures high levels of customer service
• Approved supplier lists and supply contracts in place to meet internal customer needs with minimum delay / lead time
• Ad hoc commercial support to decision makers. For example new product
design implications and risks..

- In depth market knowledge to advise on lead times, supply market conditions to ensure correct lead / delivery times are quoted
- Supply base and materials knowledge to advise on possible lower cost / lead time alternatives- contributing to improve profitability.
- Provide legal advice for example on contract formation, terms and conditions etc.
- Adding value and continuous improvement in line with organisational objectives

**Part (b):** There is no definitive answer to this question. Candidates should be able to explain possible roles based on the following or similar.

Role might include:

- Develop and build rapport with internal stakeholders. This will create trust and confidence and create ‘buy-in’.
- Gather and analyse information from diverse external sources that might impact on internal customers plans
- Prepare reports on relevant supply market conditions and circulate using appropriate media and frequency
- Network both internally and externally to ensure they (the purchasing professional) remain up-to-date with regard to supply market conditions and be able to advise internal customers accordingly.
- Assist in product development (early buyer involvement – EBI) identifying/suggesting innovative and cost reducing ideas.
- Act as a facilitator between internal functions to achieve organisational objectives

Candidates should be aware that to efficiently and effectively carry out these activities requires the internal consultant to demonstrate a number of skills. These may include: empathy, sense of humour, patience and the ability through demonstrate professionalism to gain the respect of others.

More specifically, candidates may refer to any FIVE of the following;

- Excellent communication skills
- Rapport building
- Excellent listening and communication skills
- Ability to gather and analyse information
- Creative thinking – developing acceptable solutions
- Networking
- Approachability – not appearing aloof or stand-offish

**Part (c):** Stronger answers will briefly explain stakeholders. For example, explaining stakeholders might be internal or external to the organisation and they represent a diverse group of people, or other functions, organisations or businesses that have an interest in the organisation. As stakeholders have different levels of interest and are more or less able to influence outcomes it is possible to segment stakeholders using a
2x2 matrix based on different levels of interest and power (the ability and desire to influence outcomes).

The different methods the purchasing function might use to manage its many stakeholders include:

**Education and communication.** This might be used when stakeholders may not have sufficient information or have inaccurate information. Its use creates a willingness to contribute.

**Participation and involvement.** This might be used when stakeholders have significant interest and power to influence purchasing decisions and their participation and their commitment is required.

**Facilitation and support.** This might be used when stakeholders express negativity relating to a proposed project or process and have specific emotional or support requirements.

**Negotiation and agreement.** This may be used when a stakeholder or group of stakeholders feel they will lose something as a result of a proposed or planned project and intended to overcome barriers to success.

**Manipulation and cooperation.** Might be used when all other methods do not work, often requires an exchange or trade-off of something important to the stakeholder/s to achieve results.

**Explicit and implicit coercion.** This method might be used in a crisis situation when quick results are needed. Whilst offering the opportunity for quick results its use can damage relationships in the long term.

Other relevant answers will be considered

**Exam Question Summary**

Not a popular question and candidates who attempted this question provided weak answers, resulting in low marks being awarded. It was apparent from those candidates that did answer this question that there was confusion regarding the definition of an internal customer and the role Procurement would take as an internal consultant. This confusion had a negative impact on the responses to part (b) and as a result low marks were awarded. Part (c) of the question was also weakly answered. Candidates tended to draw and label Medelows stakeholder power/interest model but failed to use the model to expand on their response. As a result low marks were awarded

| Q6 (a) | Explain the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication | (5 marks) |
| Q6 (b) | Explain FIVE reasons why communication programmes might fail | (10 marks) |
| Q6 (c) | Discuss the techniques that might be used to improve operational relationships with suppliers | (10 marks) |

**Analysis of the Question**

This question aims to examine the candidates’ ability to explain why communication programmes fail
Analysis of the Answer

Part (a): Responses may state that communication is the process of exchanging information between individual or groups both within and outside the organisation and that the effective management of communication is vital to the success of the organisation.

Verbal communication relies on the spoken word to individuals or groups. In addition to the actual spoken words tone and pitch of voice may also be used to convey urgency, sincerity or authority depending on the message and the purpose of the communication. In a business context verbal communication is more likely to be planned for and controlled. In the communication process less than half the meaning is verbal.

Non-verbal communication (body language) is far more subtle and is often seen as a better (true) indicator of a person’s feeling. Non-verbal communication can be used instead of speech, to reinforce speech or to display (or betray) a person’s mood or feeling. Non-verbal communication accounts for over half of all the meaning in the communication process – hence its importance in communication. There are several key areas of non-verbal communication could use in their answer these include:

- Facial expressions
- Posture
- Gestures-arm and hand (limb) movements
- Proximity (distance)
- Dress Code

For full FIVE marks candidates do not need to go further than the above.

Stronger answers may state that that over 60% of all communication is non-verbal and that both verbal and non-verbal language needs to be aligned to prevent the credibility of the message being lost.

Part (b): An explanation as opposed to a list is required for high marks. Candidates should explain any FIVE of the following. Other relevant reasons for failure should also be considered.

- Insufficient support to make the programme work
- Loss /lack of faith in the message being communicated and or the sender
- Lack of resources due to conflicting priorities
- Other organisational events overtake the programme
- Organisational climate does not support the communication programme
- Organisational politics undermine the programme
- Use of wrong media to transmit the message
- Inappropriate message being sent
- Over communication / message overload / noise
- Target audience not correctly identified
- Language barriers
- Time barriers
Part (c): There is no single answer to this question. Stronger answers are likely to discuss techniques such as the need for honesty, trust, transparency and improved communication on the part of the buyer. Other relevant techniques that might be discussed include:

- Recognising problems, concerns and issues as and when they arise and responding appropriately
- Offer support to suppliers in ‘good’ times as well as ‘bad’ times
- Help overcome difficulties
- Acknowledge the value and contribution the supplier/s bring to the relationship
- Share experiences and learning
- Collaborate on new ventures
- Maintain open communication channels to ensure continual dialogue

Stronger answers may state that any improvements in operational relationships should be the result of a joint effort between the buyer and the seller. Should a commitment not be present on the part of the supplier the buyer risks being exploited in the short term by an opportunistic seller.

Exam Question Summary

Very popular question with most candidates scoring full marks for parts (a) and (b). Many candidates achieved low marks to part (c) for lack of discussion on techniques. Most candidates inserted a very similar response to that supplied to Q2 part (c). Another common mistake was to insert communication as one point, and then include various different types of communication methods as additional points which did not gain marks.

APPENDIX:

Syllabus matrix indicating the learning objectives of the syllabus unit content that each question is testing
# L3-03 CLIENT AND SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS
## SYLLABUS MATRIX

**May-12**

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