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THE ABCs OF AI PROCUREMENT

WHAT EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT - AND WHAT THEY'RE MISSING



By David Kershaw
Founder
Posterity Global

How do you learn to address something both new and uncertain - and how do you act in the face of this uncertainty?

Since hosting the UK's first Public Procurement and AI unconference in June 2024, we've been working with many of the first public, near-public and private sector organisations who are adapting their procurement and commercial functions in a world of rapidly-changing technology.

In recent months, at events like Procurement Act Live 2025 and World Commerce and Contracting EMEA 2025 Summit, one thing has become clear: *everyone's talking about AI*. It's on main stages and panel discussions, in boardrooms and briefing papers.

But while the pace of interest is accelerating, so too is the challenge: how do we buy something we don't fully understand yet, and build contracts for capabilities still in flux? Let alone manage investments in these contracts and plan for contract closure and supplier exit. For procurement professionals, it feels like being handed a brand new alphabet. To start with:

- **A** is for *Accountability - anticipatory and participatory governance to navigate rapid advancements and complexities of AI*
- **B** is for *Bias - measures to ensure non-discrimination, equality and fairness in data and AI systems*
- **C** is for *Compute* - and the sustainable infrastructure questions it raises.

At the same time, the spotlight falls back on familiar terms that now carry new weight (and complexity):

- **IP**: Who owns the model? The data? The learning?
- **T&Cs**: Are standard clauses ready for probabilistic tools?
- **X**: How do we exit well - without losing value, knowledge, or control?

These aren't glamorous topics - but they're make-or-break. Procurement and commercial professionals are not just buyers in this space, they're stewards of public trust, fairness, and impact.

In this article, we explore the three things every AI procurement team needs to do in 2025: understand their persona, map their risks, and act on what matters.

1. Understand Your Persona

Situational awareness is key. Before buying anything, understand who you are. From our experience, there are four buy-side personas:

- **Pursuing:** You've decided to implement AI and are actively looking, but may not know how.
- **Debating:** You're thinking about it, evaluating need, value, and readiness.
- **Detached:** You're not considering AI yet, but pressure from others in your organisation (i.e. pursuers or debaters) may be coming soon.
- **Non grata:** You believe AI is an unwelcome problem or unacceptable solution.

And four supply-side personas:

- **Tech Giants:** Full-stack AI platforms with global reach.
- **Leading Suppliers:** Well-established firms with a broad range of AI solutions who have already successfully delivered AI projects.
- **Established Suppliers:** Mid-size or specialist firms with proven public sector credibility.
- **Emerging Innovators:** Newer, agile firms with domain-specific products and less procurement experience.

| | Known | Unknown |
|---------|--|--|
| Known | Known Knowns: Bias, IP ownership, black-box issues | Known Unknowns: Pricing, integration, explainability |
| Unknown | Unknown Knowns: Folklore, rigid T&Cs, lack of exit planning | Unknown Unknowns: Emergent use cases, market disruption |

Rumsfeld Matrix

Successful AI procurement often fails not because of poor tools, but mismatched expectations between buyer and supplier personas. Knowing which of these personas you represent, and who you're buying from, sets the stage for every decision that follows.

2. Map the Risks

Once you understand your starting point, the next challenge is navigating risk. Procurement teams are being asked to act quickly, but often without a clear map of what the risks even are, and without early involvement during upstream activities such as developing AI investment cases. Here, we've found the Rumsfeld Matrix to be a helpful thinking tool.

It categorises risks by what is known and unknown, helping procurement professionals make sense of complexity and surface blind spots. We're seeing a lot of focus on known knowns (like bias and governance) and unknown unknowns (like future risks or supplier behaviours).

But not enough on unknown knowns, the legacy beliefs and outdated institutionally-ingrained customs and practices we don't even realise we're carrying. For example:

- Assuming that existing SLAs can cover AI.
- Forgetting to plan for supplier exit.
- Using outdated Common Procurement Vocabulary (CPV) codes that simply don't fit emerging AI products.

These institutional blind spots are some of the biggest causes of failure demand.

The Rumsfeld Matrix doesn't solve them, but it helps teams identify where they're most vulnerable. Running sandbox sessions and conferences will help surface and constructively challenge all forms of the knowns and unknowns.

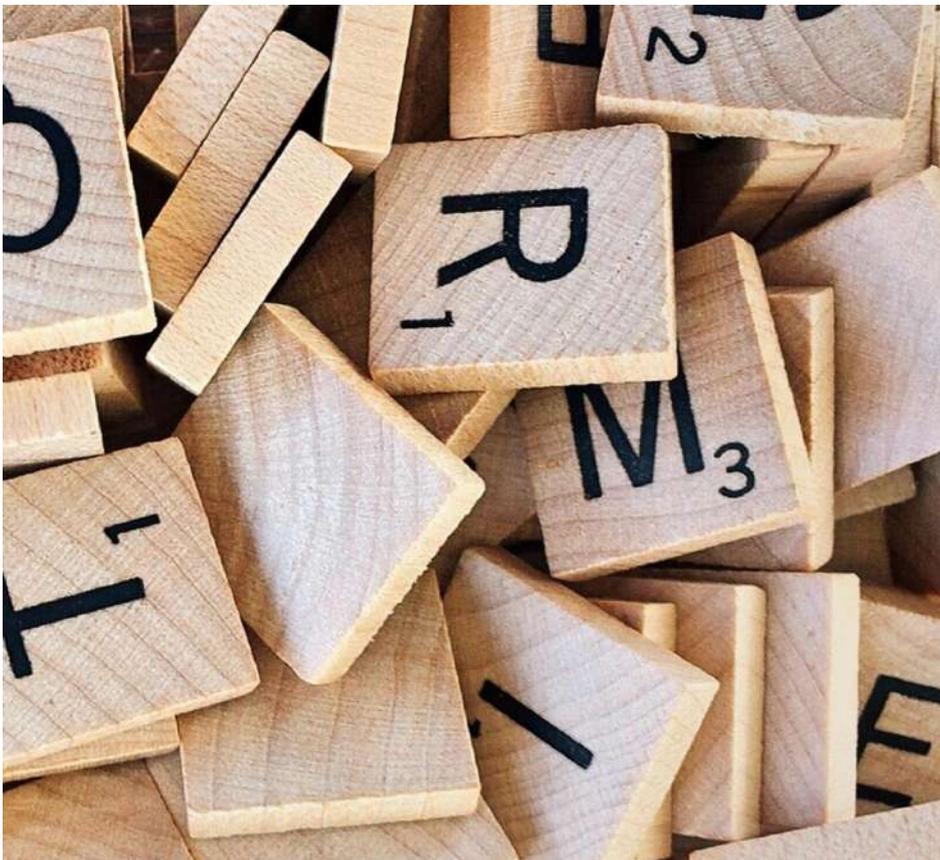
3. Act on What Matters

Identifying risks is only half the battle. The next step is making decisions about what to do, and when and how. Here, we find the Eisenhower Matrix useful: a way of distinguishing between what is urgent, what is important, and what is both.

Rather than follow it rigidly, we use it to guide timing and type of attention.

Some of the most critical enablers, like building multidisciplinary teams or updating evaluation models, don't always feel urgent. But without them, AI procurement risks becoming performative rather than transformative, and will build up as an unaddressed backlog of technical debt.

This isn't abstract theory. We've seen the value of sandboxes firsthand in our work with Cyd in Wales, and multidisciplinary and cross-



functional Intelligent Client Functions (focusing on constructively managing collaborative supplier relationships, outcomes-based approaches to delivering public value, contract obligations, etc) are already delivering better outcomes where they've been piloted.

Everyone's Talking About AI, But What Are We Missing?

Despite the buzz, most AI conversations still stay at the surface: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it going to take our jobs?

What's often missing is the conversation about contracting and commercial practice. The unglamorous, foundational stuff. What clauses go in. What flexibility you need. How supplier relationships evolve. And how to exit effectively. Procurement is often treated as an afterthought in AI strategy, but purpose-driven procurement to solve real problems through experimentation should be the starting point. Because what and how we contract shapes what we get.

The procurement of AI is forcing us to learn a new language, and rethink the meaning of familiar ones. It's about aligning what and how we buy with what we value.

Eisenhower Matrix

| | Urgent | Not Urgent |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Important | <p>Do now:- Plan supplier exits - Address critical data/IP issues - Establish governance for AI tools</p> | <p>Build for the long-term:- Update templates and playbooks - Develop market shaping strategies- Invest in supplier capability building</p> |
| Also Important (Iterative) | <p>Run and learn:- Pilot new procurement approaches - Embed multidisciplinary teams- Use sandboxes to explore solutions</p> | <p>Reform foundations:- Shift evaluation criteria beyond lowest price - Improve AI literacy in procurement- Re-think internal risk frameworks</p> |

- So start with your ABCs.
- Know your persona.
- Map the risks.
- Prioritise the work that matters.

And, most of all, make sure your procurement systems and contracts are designed for a world that's changing rapidly.

Follow Posterity Global's ongoing insight series for practical frameworks, case examples, and toolkits to support

the next generation of public sector procurement professionals.

Posterity Global exists to help contracting authorities use procurement as a catalyst for economic growth and delivering social value. Next month, we're bringing the AI conversation live to Cardiff at our AI Procurement and Commercial Lifecycle Unconference. Head to our website to buy tickets and for more information: www.posterity.global



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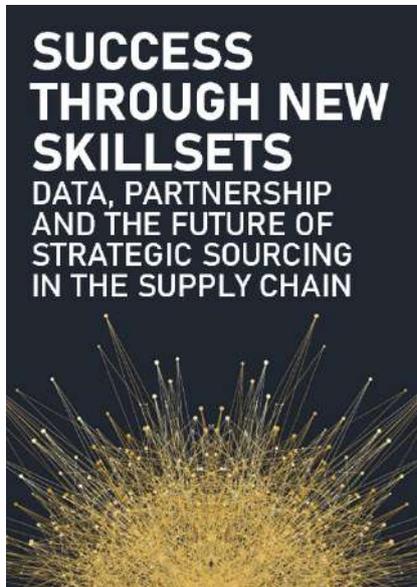


By Richard Guest
Head of Procurement
& Supply Chain,
Associate Partner
Berwick Partners

Back in 2019, we were invited by In-Procurement magazine to write an article on the future skill set of procurement. We are delighted to revisit this topic six years later, reflecting on the challenges the function has faced and exploring the future impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within procurement.

The world has changed dramatically over the past six years. The term "coronavirus" was largely unheard of in 2019, yet it has since reshaped global business landscapes. Procurement and supply chain functions have played a vital role in navigating these changes.

We've seen the resulting global shipping crisis on the back of the pandemic, to the Ever Given blocking the Suez Canal for almost a week, through rampant inflation and interest rates denting consumer confidence. We have experienced significant conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, which have impacted established supply chains, and more recently, the introduction of tariffs by President Trump. While across the wider public sector, we are seeing the impact of a change in government and, like their counterparts in the private sector, are



tasked with delivering more for less, while at the same time adapting to the new 2023 Procurement Act.

Organisations across both sectors have had to make some tough decisions on the back of a challenging global economic outlook, with widespread redundancies across a number of organisations. Sadly, the procurement and supply chain functions haven't been immune to these decisions, and we have seen teams reduce in size as a result.



The past six years have highlighted the critical role of these functions at the board level, emphasising their importance in mitigating risk, delivering value and innovation, and driving the ESG agenda. However, this increased recognition comes with heightened expectations for performance.

Amid the current economic challenges and the reduction or hiring freeze in team sizes, procurement and supply chain professionals are facing escalating workloads and pressure.

This is leading to burnout with no imminent change in sight.

While geopolitical and economic challenges are beyond our control, AI presents a potential solution. The development of AI, from generative to agentic, has been rapid and transformative. Tools like ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot have demonstrated the potential of generative AI, which can assist in creating RFP templates, conducting supplier assessments, forecasting demand, and inventory management etc.

Agentic AI takes this a step further by making decisions based on real time data. For example, a 3PL company might use agentic AI to automatically adjust delivery routes and schedules based on real-time traffic conditions and shipment priorities.

So, is AI the golden ticket for businesses and the procurement function?

There are some obvious hurdles with cost, perhaps being the main barrier for entry for many organisations at this moment in time. However, like any emerging technology, the cost will be high for early adopters, but we will inevitably see these costs reduce over time with more users and more providers entering the market.

AI is here to stay and will become increasingly prevalent in both our professional and personal lives.

“ It’s still early days to see a full utilisation of AI embedded within all procurement functions spanning all sectors across the public and private landscape. ”

According to a 2024 Deloitte CPO Survey, which canvassed the thoughts of over 100 global CPOs, 92% of respondents are planning and assessing Generative AI capabilities in 2024. Only 8% indicated they have no plans to assess Generative AI capabilities in 2024. Close to 11% of the organisations are currently spending more than \$1 million of their annual budgets on Generative AI capabilities for sourcing and procurement in the year 2024. By the year 2025, this number would be more than 2 times, where 22% of the CPOs are planning to invest \$1 million+ in GenAI capabilities.

This utilisation of AI not only allows the procurement functions to do things differently, but also to do different things. Used as expected, it should eradicate relatively resource-hungry tasks that bog down procurement

functions, to free up time to spend with stakeholders and key suppliers to unlock and deliver real value and innovation. I expect procurement functions in the future to be more tech-led, shedding the perception of simply existing to reduce year-on-year cost or sign a contract, to one that is utilising real-time data to truly influence commercial decisions in an organisation.

It’s still early days to see a full utilisation of AI embedded within all procurement functions spanning all sectors across the public and private landscape. The speed of adoption of AI, like all technologies, will vary enormously, with the large global organisations with enviable budgets likely to be the forerunners. There will be a degree of keeping up with the Joneses in play for sure, and costly mistakes will be unavoidable, but the benefits and opportunities are very much there for the pioneers. The investment in technology must, however, be matched with the investment in training to ensure the system is utilised and the opportunity maximised and adopted by the procurement team and wider business.

What does this mean for procurement teams and the skillset needed to succeed?

25 years ago, when I first started recruiting in procurement, the career path was relatively linear as individuals cut their teeth in a junior buyer role with a hope of rising through the ranks. A lot of those early days were spent undertaking some of the tasks that AI will undertake in the future, so that career path may well alter and that poses the question around how talent comes into the profession. Roles will inevitably evolve, though, as new technologies are adopted and new entry-level roles will emerge.

Procurement professionals need to be curious by nature and willing to embrace new ways of thinking – this won’t change, but the utilisation of technology is only going to continue to grow, and individuals need to be willing to commit to a lifelong learning





mindset or they risk being left behind. Within procurement, we have seen the impact technology has had from the emergence of MRP/ERP, IBP, e-procurement platforms, P2P and S2P, to name but a few and AI is the latest technology businesses are embracing and has the potential to be the greatest step change.

However, while many of these technologies are widely utilised, they aren't adopted by all. It ultimately falls down to an investment and a fit-for-purpose decision. You will see huge variations from one sector to another and even within sectors, depending upon the size, culture, budget and willingness of the board to invest and embrace the new AI era.

I don't envisage the key skill set built around the critical softer skills to succeed in procurement changing or being replaced by AI in the foreseeable future. AI should not be viewed as a threat, but as a tool to add to your toolbox. It's not yet perfect, and there are significant issues and concerns to be ironed out

regarding data accuracy and bias, privacy and security, to name but a few. Like all technologies, it will evolve rapidly, and it will be fascinating to see its widespread impact over the next 5-10 years.

This is a wonderful time to be in procurement and supply chain. I can't remember a time when the function received this much attention from the main board.

Seize the potential that AI offers by investing in yourself to understand how these emerging technologies can benefit you and your teams. Embrace the chance to move away from transactional, low-value tasks and engage in true strategic business partnering, which has immense potential to add value and transform the perception of procurement permanently.

With 25 years dedicated procurement and supply chain recruitment experience, Richard Guest, joined the firm 11 years ago and leads our international procurement and supply chain practice. He has successfully appointed a number of procurement and supply chain leadership roles across a variety of industry sectors.

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WHAT IS CARBON ACCOUNTING AND WHY DOES IT AFFECT BUSINESS?

By Emily Alexander
Associate Carbon Scientist
Tunley Environmental

Companies are seeing increased requirements to report their carbon emissions from a governmental level, as well as increased pressure from consumers to publish this information. We are undergoing a shift in the market where environmental sustainability is becoming a priority. An essential tool for an organisation is the ability to account for the carbon emissions produced as a result of their business activities. This can be quantified by a third-party consultant, but the skillset can also be performed internally, with adequate training. If your organisation hopes to build this competency, a partnership with Astutis and Tunley Environmental to identify key employees and train them on the step-by-step process of carbon accounting and reporting might be the answer to developing this skillset.

Climate change is upon us, with its effect being felt, and is increasingly a priority for

organisations to address. Carbon accounting is the process of quantifying GHG emissions attributed to your business model, and making necessary plans to reduce these emissions.

Who Should Account for Their Carbon Emissions?

Carbon accounting is important at the organisational level. To effectively reduce carbon emissions, an organisation must first identify sources of emissions and assess the areas where reductions can be made. As carbon accounting continues to be an essential responsibility of businesses in the UK, as well as a priority worldwide, having an internal team trained in the carbon accounting process would be an asset to your organisation. Environmental managers, experts on the organisation's operations, and sustainability team members would be ideally suited to learn how to quantify carbon emissions and develop a road map to reduce and eventually reach zero emissions.

“ As carbon accounting continues to be an essential responsibility of businesses in the UK, as well as a priority worldwide, having an internal team trained in the carbon accounting process would be an asset to your organisation. ”

“ Reduction of indirect emissions presents a cost-saving opportunity through collaboration and innovation ”

Methodology

Carbon accounting can be personalised to your organisation, but it follows a straightforward set of steps.

International standards follow the GHG Protocol and BS EN ISO 14064-1, and emission factors per UK governmental agencies are considered best practice.

- Define the reporting year and a standard year-to-year reporting procedure.
- Decide on the organisation's reporting boundary.
- Identify emission sources that fall into the boundary.
- Collect data and calculate carbon emissions.
- Finalise the calculation of your organisation's footprint and put together a roadmap to zero emissions.

Scope 1 and 2 GHG Emissions

Those emissions sources that fall into the greatest control of the reporting business fall within Scopes 1 and 2, as defined by the GHG Protocol. Scope 1 includes any fossil fuels used in combustion on-site in boilers or in company-owned vehicles or equipment. Electricity use falls into Scope 2 emissions. Direct control of emission sources offers the greatest opportunity for carbon reduction.

Scope 3 GHG Emissions

Scope 3 emissions are considered under the indirect control of the reporting company. These emissions occur due to business activity but are controlled by another organisation. There are 15 categories of emissions to consider, some of which might be outside your organisation's scope. These emission sources can be

challenging to define, and even more difficult to quantify and assign the correct emission factors. Experts in carbon accounting can provide advice to ensure Scope 3 emissions are accurately identified and quantified. Scope 3 emissions account for most of an organisation's emissions resulting from the supply chain, customers, and product use. Reduction of indirect emissions presents a cost-saving opportunity through collaboration and innovation and extends the environmental benefits to multiple organisations as these upstream and downstream emissions are reduced.

Carbon Reporting

Following the successful quantification of carbon emissions comes reporting of this. A baseline business carbon assessment is the starting point for your organisation's carbon reduction journey. Annual assessments reveal the progress made towards reducing emissions. Carbon reporting allows both internal and external stakeholders to understand your progress towards net zero carbon goals. Visibility and a commitment to the environment continue to be a priority to consumers and governmental agencies, so accurate reporting is essential to your brand reputation. Learn what reporting requirements your company has concerning carbon.

Master Carbon Accounting with Expert Training from Astutis & Tunley Environmental

Is your organisation hoping to gain internal expertise in carbon accounting? Astutis has partnered with Tunley Environmental to provide an in-depth course designed to develop this skill set within organisations. This course will provide an overview of carbon accounting methodologies, tools to identify and quantify various emission sources, and how to create a road map to reduce emissions. The collaboration between these two organisations will provide you with an enhanced opportunity to learn, as the course is an effort between an experienced scientist in carbon accounting and an educational expert to provide both a great learning experience as well as scientifically rooted content.

Enjoy a comprehensive full-day training experience—available as a virtual classroom open course or tailored for corporate teams, delivered either in person or online. There is both a foundational teaching and a practical exercise to ensure these skills are both learned and applied. Learn more about this course and sign up for a training slot on the Astutis website.

Carbon accounting experts within your organisation are available. You have talented and passionate people who have a deep knowledge of your business model. This carbon accounting course offered by Astutis would bridge the gap needed for your organisation to take ownership of carbon accounting and develop an internal roadmap to reach net zero emissions. Carbon accounting is an annual requirement, so why not build the capacity to perform this task internally?



PENSIONS HEALTH CHECK: ARE YOU ENSURING YOUR PENSION SCHEMES ARE ADMINISTERED CORRECTLY?

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Ensuring pension compliance isn't just a regulatory necessity; it's a fundamental part of responsible business leadership. As organisations strive to attract and retain top talent, offering a well-managed pension scheme can be a significant differentiator. In an era where employees are more conscious about their financial futures, employers must go beyond basic compliance and foster a culture of financial wellbeing.

The pensions landscape is continuously evolving, with regulatory changes, technological advancements and shifting workforce demographics shaping the way pensions are managed. As automation and analytics driven by artificial intelligence become more integrated into payroll and pension systems, businesses can enhance accuracy and efficiency while also reducing administrative overhead.

Employers must stay ahead by adopting digital-first approaches, ensuring their pension schemes are not only compliant but also optimised for future developments. Partnering with organisations like IPPE provides businesses with the expertise and insights needed to navigate these changes effectively.

So, what is the pensions health check?

Managing workplace pensions is a complex and ever-evolving responsibility for employers. With the increasing scrutiny from regulators and the need for compliance with auto-enrolment legislation, it's crucial for businesses to ensure their pension schemes are administered correctly. At IPPE, we offer a pensions health check, a comprehensive review designed to assess and improve pension compliance and efficiency. This service is similar in approach to the PAYE health check, which helps organisations identify risks and rectify payroll issues before they become costly problems.

“ The pensions landscape is continuously evolving, with regulatory changes, technological advancements and shifting workforce demographics shaping the way pensions are managed. ”

The pensions health check is an independent audit service which examines an organisation's pension processes, policies and compliance with UK pensions legislation. This service is valuable for businesses of all sizes, as pension management is subject to stringent regulatory requirements enforced by The Pensions Regulator.

Our expert consultants review an organisation's pension arrangements to ensure contributions are being correctly calculated, deducted and submitted on time. The service helps businesses identify potential errors, inefficiencies or areas of non-compliance which could lead to financial penalties or reputational damage.

Benefits of the pension's health check

Organisations that undergo a pensions health check can expect multiple benefits:

Compliance assurance

Minimise the risk of penalties by ensuring pension processes meet legal requirements.

Process improvement

Identify inefficiencies and errors which could be costing the business time and money.

Risk reduction

Avoid common pitfalls in pensions administration which may lead to employee disputes or regulatory scrutiny.

Enhanced employee confidence

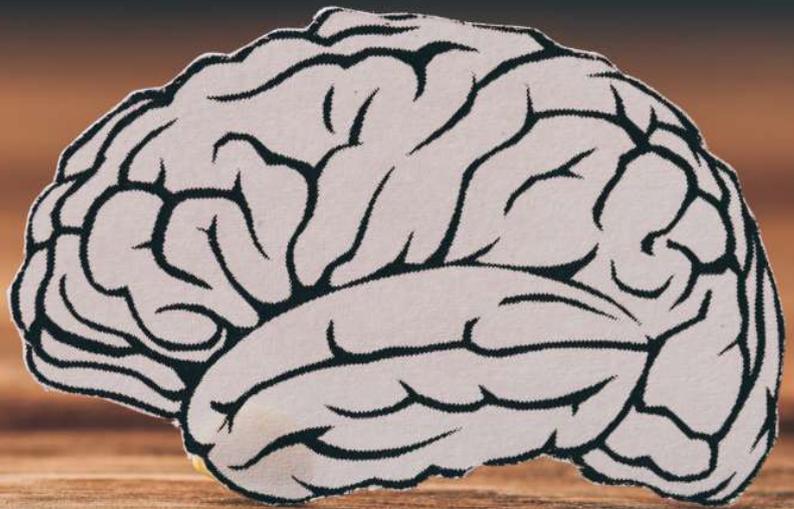
Ensure employees have confidence in their pension scheme, leading to improved engagement and retention.

The IPPE's pensions health check is a proactive service which helps businesses maintain compliance and efficiency in their pension administration. With the ever-changing pensions landscape, having a structured and professional review can prevent costly mistakes and ensure peace of mind. Employers who want to stay ahead of pension regulations and optimise their payroll processes should consider engaging with IPPE for this essential service.

Ultimately, the organisations that embrace a forward-thinking approach to pensions won't only meet regulatory requirements but will also foster a financially secure workforce, positioning themselves as leaders in employee wellbeing and corporate responsibility.

For more detailed information or to discuss your specific needs, contact Natasha at consult@ippeeducation.co.uk

SUPPORTING NEURODIVERSE SUPPLIERS



By Iain Steel, FCIPS(CS)
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BENEFFREY
Consulting

Recognising that neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia are natural variations rather than deficits has become central to building innovative and inclusive workplaces. Neurodiversity challenges traditional notions of “normal” and highlights the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodivergent individuals bring. In the UK, recent estimates suggest that approximately 15% of the population is neurodivergent. This significant representation underscores the

importance of designing systems and processes that accommodate a range of cognitive styles.

Neurodivergent individuals are disproportionately represented in the self-employed and small business sectors. For example, research indicates that approximately 20% of entrepreneurs may be dyslexic, almost double the prevalence found in the general population, and within the UK’s 4.4 million self-employed workforce, a recent investigation by the ONS found that many individuals

choose self-employment because traditional workplaces have not effectively met their unique needs. It is estimated that approximately 20-35% of self-employed and micro-SME workers are estimated to be neurodivergent.

Through the National Procurement Policy Statement, the UK Government has a stated mission for public procurement to ‘Kickstart economic growth through...opportunities for small businesses and social enterprises across the country’. Given this stated mission, and the figures showing the scale of neurodiversity in the workforce, UK public sector organisations have an opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, to reconsider their procurement processes.

Many neurodiverse-owned suppliers, or those employing neurodivergent talent, face unique challenges when

“ In the UK, recent estimates suggest that approximately 15% of the population is neurodivergent. This significant representation underscores the importance of designing systems and processes that accommodate a range of cognitive styles. ”

bidding for contracts. Traditional public procurement has been characterised by rigid, complex systems that can inadvertently exclude neurodivergent suppliers. With the new flexibility afforded by the Procurement Act 2023 (“PA23”), by adopting inclusive practices, public sector bodies can level the playing field and harness the innovation, creativity, and problem-solving abilities that neurodiverse suppliers offer.

Challenges Faced by Neurodiverse Suppliers

Despite their significant potential, neurodiverse suppliers often face several barriers within the public procurement process:

- **Complex Procurement Language:** Tender documents frequently employ dense, legalistic language that can be a major barrier for individuals with neurodivergent traits such as dyslexia or ADHD. Simplifying language and using clear, concise formats is essential to ensure all suppliers can fully understand the requirements.
- **Rigid Submission Timelines:** Traditional procurement deadlines and long waiting periods are challenging for neurodivergent individuals who may struggle with time management or executive functioning. For instance, difficulties with “time blindness” can lead to underestimating the time needed to complete tasks, putting neurodiverse suppliers at a disadvantage.
- **Overemphasis on Written Communication:** A heavy reliance on written submissions can disadvantage those who may communicate more effectively through verbal or visual means. Many neurodivergent individuals have strengths in alternative communication modes, which may not be adequately recognised in current tendering processes.

- **Lack of Clear Guidance:** The complexity of public procurement is compounded by a lack of clear, concise guidance. Multiple portals, extensive compliance requirements, and opaque specifications can overwhelm neurodivergent entrepreneurs, who may require more structured support to navigate the system.
- **Unconscious Bias in Evaluation:** Evaluation processes may inadvertently favour neurotypical behaviours. Neurodivergent entrepreneurs might present their ideas in unconventional ways or struggle with structured proposals, resulting in potential biases during the supplier evaluation process.

Supporting Neurodiverse Suppliers

To overcome these challenges and promote inclusivity, UK public sector organisations can implement several strategic adaptations within their procurement processes:

Simplify Tender Documentation

- **Use Plain Language and Clear Structure:** Rewrite tender documents using plain language and clear bullet points. Avoid unnecessary legal jargon and complex sentence structures. This makes the documents more accessible, benefiting all suppliers, particularly those with dyslexia or ADHD.
- **Incorporate Visual Aids:** Utilise diagrams, flowcharts, and infographics to convey information. Visual aids can help neurodivergent suppliers quickly grasp key requirements and overall process flows.

“One in five neurodivergent employees have experienced harassment or discrimination at work because of their neurodivergence”

- CIPD

- **Provide Multiple Formats:** Supplement written materials with video or audio summaries. By offering information in various formats, organisations can cater to different learning and communication styles for those who struggle with text-heavy materials.
- **Requirement Summaries:** Offer summaries of key tender requirements with clear bullet points and checklists.

Offer Flexibility

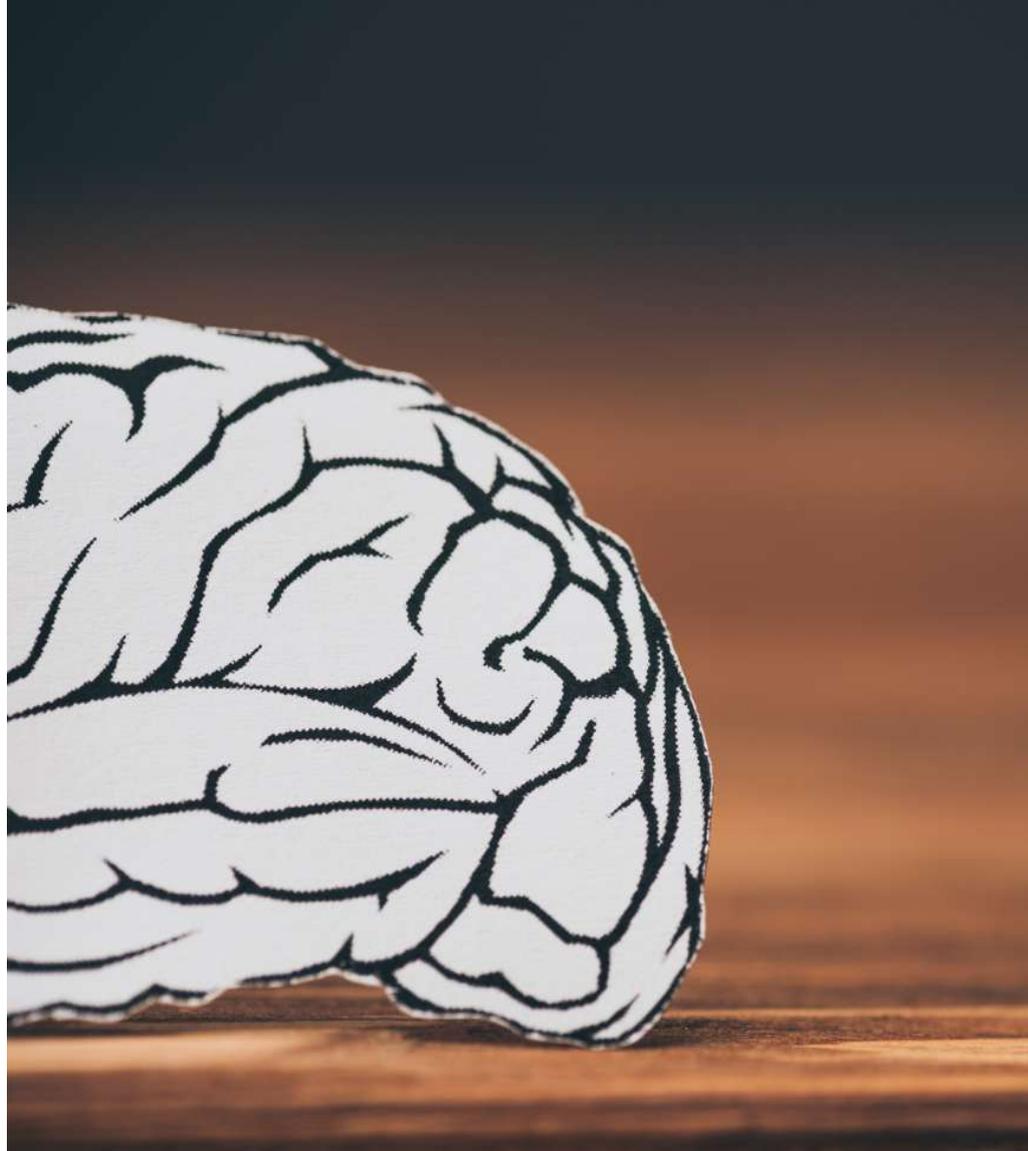
- **Alternative Formats:** Allow suppliers to engage with tendering processes in formats other than traditional written documents. Options such as video presentations, live virtual briefings, or structured Q&A sessions enable suppliers to relate with your requirements and showcase their strengths in a manner that best reflects their capabilities.
- **Flexible Submission Timelines:** Use the pre-market engagement process to understand potential barriers to participation that could be relieved by flexing submission deadlines wherever possible. Recognising that some neurodivergent suppliers might require additional time to process and respond can reduce stress and improve the overall quality of submissions.

Neurodiversity-Inclusive Communication

- **Interactive Briefing Sessions:** Organise interactive briefing sessions or online Q&A webinars to clarify tender requirements. This interactive approach allows suppliers to ask questions in real time, ensuring they fully understand the expectations. However, make sure that this is fully documented and distributed to both participants and non-participants to ensure equal treatment.
- **Structured and Constructive Feedback:** Provide detailed and constructive feedback to unsuccessful bidders. Clear feedback helps suppliers understand areas for improvement, fostering continuous development and demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity. This should be a minimum expectation for all suppliers but can be particularly useful for neurodiverse suppliers to understand where support may be required.

Train Procurement Teams on Neurodiversity

- **Implement Neurodiversity Awareness Training:** Regular training sessions for procurement teams can increase awareness of neurodiversity. Such training should cover how to recognise and accommodate neurodivergent traits and mitigate unconscious bias in evaluations.



- **Adopt a Strengths-Based Approach:** Encourage evaluators to consider the unique strengths and innovative potential that neurodivergent suppliers offer. A strengths-based assessment recognises that unconventional approaches can lead to creative problem-solving and innovation. Recognise that unconventional approaches to problem-solving or communication can be an asset rather than a liability.

Encourage Neurodiverse Supplier Participation

- **Targeted Outreach and Promotion:** Actively promote procurement opportunities to neurodiverse-led businesses through specialised networks, chambers of commerce, and community organisations that support neurodivergence. Such targeted outreach can help

“ Research has shown that diverse teams are likely to outperform their less diverse counterparts, largely due to the increased creativity and range of perspectives they can bring. ”



“ Supporting neurodiverse suppliers is not only a matter of social responsibility but also makes strong business sense. Inclusive procurement practices lead to a more diverse supply chain, which in turn drives innovation and enhances problem-solving capabilities ”

increase participation from this often underrepresented group. Public sector organisations often adopt the approach that their minimum advertising obligations are sufficient to attract ‘the best’ suppliers to provide their requirements – this is an outdated mindset and assumes the public sector is always the ‘customer of choice’.

- **Mentorship and Support Programmes:** Develop mentorship initiatives tailored specifically to neurodivergent entrepreneurs. By providing guidance on navigating the procurement process and offering tailored support, these programmes can significantly boost supplier confidence and success rates.

- **Co-Design Inclusive Processes:** Involve neurodiverse suppliers in the design and review of procurement processes. Their insights can help public sector organisations identify potential barriers and develop more inclusive and accessible systems.

The Business Case for Inclusive Procurement

Supporting neurodiverse suppliers is not only a matter of social responsibility but also makes strong business sense. Inclusive procurement practices lead to a more diverse supply chain, which in turn drives innovation and enhances problem-solving capabilities. Research has shown that diverse teams are likely to outperform their less diverse counterparts, largely due to the increased creativity and range of perspectives they can bring.

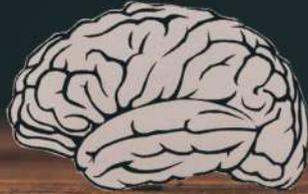
By opening up opportunities for neurodivergent entrepreneurs, public sector organisations can tap into a pool of untapped talent. This approach enhances the quality and competitiveness of procurement outcomes, ultimately leading to the development of innovative solutions that address public needs in new and effective ways. As the UK public sector aims to deliver high-quality services, integrating diverse suppliers into its supply chain can provide a significant advantage.

As an example, I have recently supported a public authority to launch a mentorship programme aimed at supporting neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Participants reported that the programme not only helped them navigate the complexities of public procurement but also boosted their confidence and overall business skills. These initiatives highlight that even relatively small adjustments in procurement practices can have a significant impact on supplier participation and success.

Opportunity for Change

The need to refresh documentation and procedures following the implementation of the PA23 affords UK public sector organisations with the opportunity to transform their procurement processes and create a more inclusive, dynamic supply chain by supporting neurodiverse suppliers. Inclusive procurement is a win-win strategy: it promotes social equity, taps into a rich vein of untapped talent, and leads to better procurement outcomes by fostering a diverse and creative supply chain. Adopting practices to reduce barriers for neurodivergent businesses not only empowers neurodiverse suppliers but also drives innovation and enhances the overall quality of public services.

As the UK continues to champion diversity and inclusion, public sector organisations must lead by example. By investing in accessible procurement practices, the public sector not only fulfils its social responsibilities but also paves the way for a future where innovation and diversity go hand in hand.



The question is, will UK public sector bodies take the proactive steps necessary to ensure that every supplier, regardless of neurological profile, has an equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the economy?

By embracing inclusive procurement, we can build a robust, resilient, and forward-thinking supply chain that truly reflects the rich diversity of our society. The time to act is now – what can your organisation do to better support neurodiverse suppliers and help shape a future where every voice is heard and every talent valued?

About the Author: Iain C. Steel is an award-winning procurement professional and trainer with over 30 years in the procurement and business transformation sector. He is passionate about improving procurement processes, and helps organisations create positive, productive environments for procurement professionals, suppliers and stakeholders alike. Iain is the author of 'The Soft Skills Portfolio' book series, available now on Amazon in paperback, hardback and Kindle.



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