

Why Investment in Soft Skills Can Significantly Increase Procurement Outcomes

Using Soft Skills to Improve Business Performance

There are many avenues that can be explored to improve business performance and investing in soft skills is up there amongst the most valuable.

Spending time developing and fine-tuning relationship management, negotiation and communication skills – in addition to improving our emotional intelligence – not only enhances personal development but will help to achieve increased procurement efficiencies and added social value outcomes.

Read on to take a more in-depth look at the importance of these soft skills, how they can be used and the benefits they can bring.

Relationship Management using Emotional Intelligence

Developing and maintaining key stakeholder relationships is critical for procurement professionals – resulting in us being able to achieve better outcomes whilst improving business performance.

Being more intuitive whilst remaining aware of external market factors that could impact or influence relationships with buyers, suppliers or customers will enable you to tap into a higher level of emotional intelligence - allowing you to form and maintain better interpersonal relationships, whilst considering other viewpoints and gaining alternative perspectives.

At Fusion21 we provide fully compliant procurement frameworks for property, construction and the built environment, alongside community regeneration services designed to help tackle some of the biggest challenges facing people across the UK. It's imperative that we engage with our suppliers in a way that creates mutual trust and enables us to better manage performance – ensuring that our public sector members receive high quality services. These relationships mean we can have honest discussions about cost models and commercial management to ensure significant savings are delivered to our members year on year.

Negotiation and Communication

Once you're in a position where relationships are being managed effectively, this opens opportunities to deliver more than just business requirements via your supply chain. Our industry has the potential to have a wider social, environmental and economic impact

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within our local economy and communities – and you can support the delivery of social impact through procurement by working closely with your supply partners.

From creating job or apprenticeship opportunities, to supporting training and skills building or contributing to education and delivering community initiatives – use your negotiation and communication skills to see what your suppliers are willing to offer.

At Fusion21 the procurement strategies we devise on behalf of our members consider local drivers and challenges – this is because the social value generated through our frameworks is important to our members, ranking highly alongside securing cashable cost efficiencies.

Engaging with your suppliers, the wider market place and local groups will help to determine what and how social impact can be achieved on a business and project level.

To date, Fusion21 has created more than **3,700 jobs** through procurement and generated more than **£63m in social impact** – as a social enterprise we're committed to making a measurable difference by helping communities to thrive and grow and we're strong advocates of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which actually places an obligation on public organisations to consider delivering social impact through public spend. If you're a private company you can still do your bit as part of your corporate social responsibility commitment.

Streamlined Outputs and an Increase in Procurement Outcomes

Having addressed the benefits of soft skills development, your department, organisation, colleagues and customers will start to reap the rewards – and generate even greater procurement results!

Enhancing soft skills will also improve your tendering and contracting process, resulting in achieving better procurement outcomes – from increased efficiency savings to social value outputs.

At Fusion21 we use the soft skills outlined (in addition to our technical expertise) to help us remain aware of changes within the external market place, and we also work alongside our supply chain to conduct early market engagement to ensure our procurement and social value offer meets our members needs.

Investing in relationships means we are also able to effectively manage supplier performance and understand any challenges they face.

Our ultimate aim is to deliver procurement frameworks that bring genuine, cashable cost efficiencies in addition to social value outcomes that transform people's lives and make a real impact in local communities.

**Read our case studies on the pages overleaf*

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Case Study One

Generating Procurement Efficiencies and Social Outcomes in Practice

Fusion21 member Weaver Vale Housing Trust (WVHT) approached us after embarking on a project to provide all homes with energy efficiency measures or advice by 2020. The social landlord's objectives were clear:

- To keep tenants warm in their homes;
- Reduce the cost of energy bills to leave more income for everyday essentials;
- Ensure a wider environmental impact through reducing carbon emissions.

Meeting the above criteria, a £4m project to install solar photovoltaic panels on 1250 properties was undertaken through Fusion21's Retrofit framework - securing **31% efficiency savings**, saving residents **£150 a year** on energy bills and reducing carbon emissions by more than **5,200 tonnes** a year.

Having provided a quick, best value and compliant route to market we also used our soft skills (relationship management; emotional intelligence; negotiation and communication) to dig a bit deeper - identifying further opportunities to generate added social value, making a difference to people living in the local community.

Helping people to find work is of one of WVHT's business objectives and so having listened to their needs a total of nine employment opportunities were created during the project - with one of the roles taken up by a WVHT customer. The project provided a **£12.09 social return for every £1 invested**.

In addition, we supported residents to gain Level 1 Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and Health & Safety training, and **eight residents** were helped to obtain their Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards – improving their chances of securing employment.

As this case study highlights, there is more to procurement than bottom-line savings, it can be used to also drive community regeneration and other positive social outcomes.

Case study Two

In Practice – Fusion21’s Investment in Soft Skills

The procurement and supply chain landscape is constantly changing and at Fusion21 we’re committed to delivering leading procurement services to our members.

That’s why we’ve chosen to invest in supporting employees to obtain Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS) qualifications, enhancing existing knowledge whilst sharing this expertise business-wide.

To date **nine employees** have successfully completed their CIPS Diploma with **eight people** having moved on to study the Advanced Diploma. A further two staff members are now studying for the CIPS Diploma. We’ve invested more than **£50,000** supporting staff to obtain CIPS qualifications – with Fusion21 providing employees with a total of **2,850 hours** studying time during business hours.

Studying is the perfect way to brush up on your soft skills – in theory and in practice. Upon completion of the CIPS Diploma, we’re supporting our employees to continue their qualifications, whilst also attending regular CPD sessions to ensure they remain up-to-date with the latest technology and changes in the market place.

Investing in soft skills and upskilling our employees enables us to significantly increase the procurement outcomes we deliver on behalf of our members, whilst also contributing to employee personal development.

As a CIPS Knowledge Partner we’re passionate about procurement, compliance and achieving cost efficiencies. If you’re interested in delivering public sector efficiencies through a framework approach, tackling the barriers and challenges of public procurement or learning how to manage risk, visit our Knowledge Partnerships resource page.

<https://www.cips.org/knowledge/categories-and-commodities/public-sector-services/fusion-21/>



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