

Assessing Supplier Capability

Need to assess and develop supplier capabilities

The situation:

In 2003 a step change was needed by the highways industry to meet the changing expectations expressed in Government and Highways Agency agendas. In response, Highways Agency Procurement and the Advance Consultancy developed and delivered the Capability Assessment Toolkit (CAT). This was part of the pre-qualification process, assessing key suppliers' organisational capabilities. I was invited to join the small team of lead assessors for the programme.

Lead assessment teams and feed back to suppliers and HA. Develop and deliver briefings and training.

My work:

I led assessor teams to carry out capability assessments of a number of major suppliers to the HA – civil engineering contractors, highways design consultants and fixed term maintenance contractors. Suppliers' scores were used by the HA over the following few years to select shortlists for contract tenders. The process provided valuable in-depth feedback to the supplier as well as the HA, and included (my favourite bit) face to face feedback with the supplier's leadership team. This gave them the opportunity to dig into their feedback and make sure it was clearly understood and actionable. It also allowed them to test the assessors' conclusions thoroughly, and generated some very robust discussions. For the second phase of assessments, I was asked to redevelop and deliver the assessor briefing and training. I reshaped both considerably to draw on the learning from phase one.

Substantial improvement in supplier capability

The outcome:

The capability assessment process was extremely effective for the Highways Agency. It prompted an entirely new level of engagement between the HA and its key suppliers, built around a much clearer understanding of the capabilities that matter to the HA. Over the period, there were marked improvements in capability in the supply chain.

An acute eye for what distinguishes organisations and what constrains them

The Goldsmith factor:

The value I added was in applying my experience to set a clear focus for my teams on identifying the important threads that illuminated each assessment. I conveyed the critical messages to the leaders of each organisation clearly, and was happy to develop the key points further in discussion. Faced with a new team to lead on each assessment, I established working processes designed to make the best use of limited time, and to keep a clear focus on producing a thorough assessment and valuable, meaningful feedback.