

Developing Supplier Assessment to Focus on Mission Critical Issues

Need suppliers to engage with and drive strategy

The situation:

Facing challenging times, it was important for the Highways Agency to focus its suppliers' attention on mission-critical issues in order to drive the Agency's results:

- a smoothly functioning road network to support national economic recovery;
- meeting diverse customer needs to promote national wellbeing;
- continuing to develop a sustainable approach.

The focus therefore turned from a broader assessment of supplier capability to a focused assessment of strategic alignment in a critical few areas. The HA asked me to design the process to achieve this.

Design a new process to assess and change suppliers' behaviour

My work:

My role was, in very short order, to develop a process for the Highways Agency that:

- produced a valid and consistent assessment of suppliers' alignment to the HA strategic plan in selected focus areas;
- achieved 30% cost saving on the capability assessment process;
- fitted within established tight delivery parameters.

With only three weeks to go until the process would be reviewed and signed off, I produced a draft in a week, reviewed it with the HA over the next week and finalised it with the Industry Advisory Group a week later. While representing an evolution in approach from the capability assessments (CAT) and preserving the powerful scoring mechanism from CAT, the core assessment framework and process was developed from scratch to ensure the design was best fit for its purpose. Once it was approved, I briefed the assessors to develop their understanding of the process and the HA assessment history. I wrote and delivered the training workshop for the suppliers and their assessors.

Successful roll-out of an efficient process. 30% cost saving

The outcome:

The programme of Strategic Alignment (StART) assessments was rolled out very successfully, despite an almost impossibly tight delivery schedule. It achieved the required 30% cost saving. The Highways Agency was very happy with the results. The efficient design enabled the assessors to cover the necessary ground and still evaluate and moderate their conclusions to ensure results were equitable.

Making it ambitious

The Goldsmith factor:

The value I added was in the skills, expertise and experience to design the HA's process directly to fit the constraints in funding, timescales and so on, whilst not allowing that to water down what could be achieved. I ensured that the scope of the assessment process was seriously ambitious and totally in tune with HA and wider government and public agendas.