



Procurement Professionals

Today and tomorrow

by Anne Phillips

WHETHER IN THE public or private sector, procurement is increasingly perceived as strategically important to an organization. As they strive to provide the goods and services to support programs and corporate operations, demands are being placed upon procurement departments to be more cost effective, efficient, “green” and accountable – both to their senior management and their clients. In the public sector, procurement is conducted under the close scrutiny of media, the general public, internal auditors, political bodies and sharp-eyed suppliers. In this environment even making an honest mistake can have serious consequences.

This environment places additional demands on the people who actually perform procurement/purchasing functions. Traditionally most people do not choose procurement as a career, they sort of “fall” into it or “morph” into it. That approach to staffing may not be good enough anymore. With Canada’s competitive labour market, the demographic change that could see more than 40 percent of current procurement practitioners retiring, and the increased demands to do more and do it better, procurement organizations are looking for ways to recruit, retain, retrain, and provide a defined and appealing career path for “new and old” procurement practitioners. For example, the federal government has recently launched a certification program for its staff, as has the Province of British Columbia.

However, Canada does not have a national certification body for public procurement professionals. The thousands of people doing this job in a wide variety of public sector organizations across Canada find their training in various places: on the job, at some colleges and universities, and with some private sector associations and certification bodies. Without a national organization it is difficult to get a real “handle” on the profession today and what it needs for tomorrow such as who is doing what now; what skills do they require; what skills and educational standards should organizations look for in new recruits; how can experienced people be kept in the workforce; and how can their knowledge be documented and transferred to new recruits.

Summit magazine is partnering with an Ottawa-based firm, Talentmap to develop and conduct a workforce survey of public procurement professionals that will address these issues and others. We invite each and every one of you to take part. You will be able to participate online or by faxing or mailing the paper version of the survey. Talentmap and *Summit* will publish the results of the survey in articles that will appear this fall. ~~~