This paper provides an overview of the 2014 Innovators Forum with a distillation of the key discussion points and recommendations regarding talent management. The group engaged in robust dialog about presenting a case for change to senior administrators, but also focused on pragmatic ideas and practices that can be acted on today. The paper outlines a talent management framework and recommendations for critical practices procurement leaders should follow.
HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT:
Insights from the 2014 NAEP Innovators Forum and Recommended Talent Management Strategies for Procurement Leaders
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher Education institutions are increasingly in pursuit of important strategic objectives to enhance the delivery of research, instruction and regional/community impact. The achievement of these objectives must be carried out within complex organizational structures more akin to a loose federation, than a strong central government and they often require additional funding and/or the redirection of existing funds.

Procurement has the ability to be a significant partner in delivering on these goals by pursuing initiatives that have strong returns on investment and customer service improvements.

In the past several years, procurement has substantially improved basic processes related to technology, customer service, strategic sourcing and others. This upward performance trend is moving the profession toward increased challenges that require skills necessary for enhanced selling and influential negotiations as well as other strategic issues that demand advanced problem solving. In other words, there is a significant need for highly qualified talent. We need this talent across two important dimensions, 1) the select few who can lead cross-functional teams to accomplish strategic objectives and 2) the folks with individual talents that can be leveraged to enhance the service orientation of the procurement function.

The 2014 Innovators Forum attendees came together in Orlando to discuss the critical topic of talent management with this strategic context in mind. The group consisted of a strong cross section of higher education professionals including several chief procurement officers, senior human resource officers, chief business officers and a change management consultant. The objectives of the discussion included:

- Understand major university strategy trends and the role of procurement’s support;
- Identify the talent management practices necessary to attract and retain individuals with the right skillsets to obtain the results required;
- Evaluate the issues and challenges that make it difficult to obtain talented resources needed and determine what can be done today to move forward; and
- Provide an integrated framework to discuss and define procurement talent management that provides a useful roadmap for colleagues to utilize and follow.

This paper presents a summary and distillation of the key recommendations from the Forum Group related to these key objectives.
ABOUT THE INNOVATORS FORUM

The National Association of Educational Procurement (NAEP) convened the 3rd annual Innovators Forum in Orlando, Florida on February 26, 2014. College and university leaders gathered to discuss future trends in higher education and their impact on procurement. The purpose of the Innovators Forum is to engage in an analysis of the major issues impacting higher education institutions and procurement professionals and to better inform institutional stakeholders on alternative ways to approach these challenging issues.

The previous NAEP Innovators Forums resulted in distribution of white papers titled “Key Insights from the NAEP Innovators Forum and Recommended Strategies for Procurement Leaders” and “Procurement and the Impact of Technology and Expectations.” Feedback from those attending this year and in previous years suggests these white papers are powerful tools for senior leaders and procurement professionals to learn about the challenges confronting higher education procurement and to educate administration about those challenges.

Building upon the initial momentum of the 2012 and 2013 Forums, which explored a broad range of issues affecting higher education and procurement, this year’s group was asked to take a deeper dive into the strategic topic of talent management.

The outcome of this year’s discussion continues the Forum’s goal of developing roadmaps that procurement professionals can use to better understand complex procurement topics, communicate those topics effectively to senior leaders and to improve results in support of critical university strategic goals.
ATTENDEES

New attendees bring fresh ideas and insight. This year’s Innovators Forum was assembled by NAEP with the intent of deepening talent management discussions. Attendees included administrative and C-level executives along with procurement leadership, business and HR officers as well as key representatives from professional organizations. The team was committed to fulfilling the mission of the Innovators Forum by capturing and sharing insights with each other – and with their colleagues in higher education and procurement via this white paper – so that other institutions and industry professionals may benefit from their exchange of ideas.

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CASE FOR CHANGE

The higher education industry attracts individuals who are thoughtful about the world and who want to make a difference in the lives of others. Most universities publish their strategic plans and in general our institutions are pursuing significant aspirational goals to make improvements in the lives of their students, their local communities and the world.

Institutions pursuing the most aggressive goals have recognized the need to attract the brightest students, researchers, teachers, athletes, coaches and administrators. They implicitly recognize the need for talent and pursue strategies to attract, nurture and retain the best resources across many dimensions of human performance. Arguably, no other industry depends upon a clearer link between the value of the organization and the value of its human talent.

While established measures exist in the evaluation of performance in the areas of academics, research and even athletics, efforts, such as this, continue to improve our understanding of the critical impact of administrative support functions on our success. A considerable body of research supports the notion that there is a direct link between business performance and talent. The goals of our great universities are increasing in both scale and complexity. In order for the procurement department to become an essential partner in assisting university leadership in achieving strategic objectives, our aspirations must increase significantly and the need to acquire and retain talented professionals with enhanced skillsets will be required.

The reason we establish strategic plans with aspirational goals is to propel us forward to tackle and overcome barriers and challenges. Our universities are in need of substantial additional or redirected funds and procurement can play a vital role in this pursuit. This enhanced procurement role requires skills and competencies that are in short supply. Chief Procurement Officers in other industries, who are serious about talent management wield significantly greater strategic influence on their organizations. In the past, procurement professionals have been able to build the business case for investments in technology and improved processes. The right people are the most important assets we have and it is time we made an investment in them. Of all the initiatives procurement can undertake, there is nothing as important as acquiring the right talent, developing talent to its full potential and surrounding the right people with a challenging and nurturing culture more compelling than the lure of other opportunities.

Figure 7: Procurement’s Top Challenges in 2014

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff/Talent constraints</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of engagement with the business</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget constraints</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of technology (i.e. technology gaps)</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in aligning processes and systems</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

"…procurement’s challenges of the first order are all about people --- getting the right mix of people into procurement (57%) and getting the right mix of people engaged with procurement (35%)."²
Over the past several years a significant body of literature has developed around the concept of talent management. If you search for images on the phrase “talent management framework” you will find many well-developed and professional looking graphics. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the volume of material about this topic.

Sifting through the volume of material a few key themes emerge. The Innovators Forum group discussed talent management with the following general understanding and agreement:

1. The essence of strategy is to create differential advantage and therefore strategic procurement is about being a partner with university leadership in executing on goals that create a difference.
2. Significant amounts of literature and research supports the proposition that there is a direct relationship between business performance and talent and that talent is a rapidly increasing source of value creation.
3. Many organizations say that people are the most important asset when in truth they mean “the right people are the most important asset”.
4. In considering how to attract, select, develop, retain and position future leaders we realize how important it is to have an integrated talent management strategy. Our strategy is only as good as its weakest link.
5. A clear understanding of what drives superior performance in people is challenging and most universities and business organizations have not thought clearly enough about it.
6. Achieving excellence in talent management will be difficult in most universities because many entrenched practices and beliefs must be challenged.
7. When faced with a complex and multi-faceted problem we should be mindful of the balance between the ideal and what is do-able.

The Innovators Forum participants are hopeful this white paper will make progress toward the ideal by pursuing things we can accomplish today. In a pragmatic fashion the ensuing discussion followed key elements of the talent management framework illustrated below.
ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

Forum attendees first addressed organizational strategies. What are the common university strategies being pursued today and how are procurement strategies integrated with them? “The ability to effectively hire, retain, employ and engage talent at all levels is the only true competitive advantage an organization possesses”

Each university is pursuing unique strategies; however, forum participants identified four common themes. They include 1) growing a diversified source of revenue, 2) pursuing initiatives related to globalization, 3) enhancing student accessibility and 4) to be of service to a variety of constituents and stakeholders.

Realizing that integration with the university is key and that all members of the procurement team should be engaged in strategic initiatives, the forum group identified the following critical procurement strategies:

- Become recognized as an essential strategic partner to the institution;
- Develop and continually refine the ability to define and communicate procurement’s value proposition to a variety of stakeholders;
- Implement a plan to proactively engage campus constituents;
- Develop and continually refine ability to provide essential information to support strategies and selected initiatives; and
- Drive process redesign and technology innovation to support the need to be of service to the campus.

Additional context from the Forum discussion included the idea that the essence of strategy is to create differential advantage and most procurement groups today are not pursuing strategic objectives unless they are involved in achieving goals and results that matter to university leadership.

CASE STUDY – The University P200 Strategic Procurement Project

Overview: Collaborating system-wide to build an integrated, sustainable procurement framework. By developing and utilizing competitive contracts innovative supply chain strategies and robust reporting and analytics, we will recapture $200 million annually currently lost through sub-optimal purchasing contracts and practices, redirecting these critically needed funds to support UC’s core missions of teaching, research and public service.
TALENT STRATEGY

Forum attendees next turned their attention to the key competencies and skillsets they need to pursue the procurement strategies identified in the previous section. This discussion occurred within the context that talent is defined by Webster’s to be “a person or group of people with a special ability to do something well”. The forum group believes the right people are the biggest drivers of success and that talent trumps experience every time. In procurement, basic business acumen and other “traditional” skillsets (contracting, negotiation, ethics, supplier management, etc.) are assumed, but this group recognized that the required skillset of procurement professionals have gone beyond these basics and other important core competencies sometimes not as easily recognized or taught in traditional procurement have emerged as critical to the success of the organization. The group further recognized that some element of risk taking is required to push things forward and that often we do not recognize and select talented people because we are not looking for the right attributes.

Realizing that talent strategy is about knowing what you are looking for and being thoughtful about the key competencies and skillsets that are required to achieve strategic goals and objectives the forum group reached consensus around the following core competencies:

- Ability to develop compelling business cases;
- Ability to sell and influence diverse stakeholders around service and strategy;
- Proficiency in prioritization and management of complex, high-value projects;
- Demonstrated skills in critical thinking and adaptability;
- Ability to build and manage relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders; and
- Ability to translate data to information.

Additional discussion from the group included the notion that we are looking for people with non-traditional skillsets. They should have a significant degree of curiosity and the capacity and desire to learn. Their emotional intelligence must be high. They must be able to deal with challenges, have a high degree of self-awareness and strong communication skills. Above all else it is critical to find people who can work in a team, lead others, be coachable and who can build relationships at many levels.

CASE STUDY – NAEP’s Procurement Core Competencies

Overview: Competencies are the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that when aligned with organizational goals lead to high performance. In 2013 NAEP’s Professional Development Committee finalized the NAEP Competency Model that is specific to procurement professionals.

Currently, Members are using the model as they develop and update job descriptions, interview candidates for positions and create development plans. The competencies are also mapped to the Procurement Academy.

For more information about this Member’s only resource, go to www.naepnet.org.
TALENT ACQUISITION

Having identified key competencies and skillsets that emphasize non-traditional procurement functions, the Forum Group turned their attention to the critical function of talent acquisition. Talented people have options and therefore to acquire talent requires careful consideration of recruitment and selection processes. The Forum Group reached consensus around the following key talent acquisition elements:

Recruitment / Attraction
- Develop and sell an exciting image and culture;
- Emphasize professional growth and investment in people;
- Develop positive and honest messages to attract entrepreneurial minded people;
- Develop and emphasize leadership recognition of the group’s strategic value; and
- Revise job descriptions to emphasize talent skills.

Selection
- Incorporate stakeholder, supervisor and supervisee feedback;
- Test critical thinking;
- Develop an evaluation team with different roles around technical, behavioral and cultural fit;
- Build a bench (a list of potential employees) and don’t neglect internal candidates;
- Develop behavioral based questions that bring out the key talent attributes of curiosity, critical thinking, logic and other;
- Develop interview questions and processes to evaluate cultural fit in addition to abilities; and
- Perform background checks.

We know that talented people have options and that attraction is more important then selection. Many of our recruitment processes focus on procurement as a back office operation as opposed to procurement as a strategic partner delivering on a critical value proposition. We need to realize that selection is a two-way street and emphasize how recruits will benefit from employment with the team. In a smaller way we can think of this process as similar to athletic recruiting. A message is developed that emphasizes the positive elements of joining the team and involves a two-way process of dialog and open questions. There is clearly an element of selling and influencing that occurs. None of these more advanced recruiting and selection techniques are necessary if we are just filling jobs for back-office operations. On the other hand, if we need talent that can bring differential advantage to us, then there is no substitute for deploying these techniques as effectively as we can.

“If you only have $1 to spend on either improving the way you develop people or improving your hiring and selection process, pick the latter.”
-- Douglas Bray from AT&T 30-year management study
CASE STUDY – Arizona State University’s Recruitment Strategy of WP Carey Graduates and Interns

ASU has a top five undergraduate Supply Chain Management program at the WP Carey School of Business, but until 2012 it had never recruited from there like other top companies due to HR restrictions and how job descriptions were written for entry level buyers. With a commitment from the Chief HR Officer and the AVP of University Business Services, the first Supply Chain Buyer was hired into the role in 2012. In 2013, the procurement department hired its first Management Intern from WP Carey offering the student hands on experience, while gaining a fresh perspective from someone just out of college. This not only fulfilled immediate resource needs in the department, it also supports ASU’s overall goal of student service and success. ASU Procurement hopes to turn the intern program into a feeder program for future entry-level hires.
TALENT PERFORMANCE

The discussion on this topic was focused on performance management and development processes. Procurement leaders need to develop talented people in a way that inspires them to reach their full potential and retains them within the organization. As background it is helpful to understand the definition of the words performance management, training and development. Performance management is defined as the process of creating a work environment in which people are enabled to perform to the best of their abilities. Training refers to educational activities to support the current job a person holds and development refers to educational activities that may relate to a future job. It is commonly understood that people quit their supervisors before they quit their organizations. Procurement’s ability to execute performance management and development processes at a high level is significantly correlated with the ability to retain talented resources. The Forum Group believes the following strategies are critical in these two areas:

**Performance Management**
- Develop *measurable goals that are jointly set* between the individual and the supervisor;
- Have employees create a *self assessment* as the first step in performance management;
- Realize and support *some degree of failure* and have a mechanism for positive reinforcement;
- *Align individual goals* with university, procurement and user departmental strategies;
- Use *360 degree feedback*; and
- Develop strong *coaching programs* to set goals and track progress.

**Development**
- Develop *visible career paths* and assist employees to make progress against them;
- Develop a strong *curriculum map* that emphasizes the building of core competencies and values;
- Ensure that *committed training funds* are available and there is accountability around usage;
- Provide for *internal and external knowledge sharing*; and
- Develop *mentorship opportunities* with university executives and thought leaders.

Employees should be actively involved in performance management. As procurement transitions to challenging strategic activities it is important to recognize that some degree of failure is likely to occur. Performance management processes must encourage some risk taking and be supportive when things do not go as planned. People who are afraid of failure may not take the leap needed to challenge the status quo. Measurement is important, but should not be carried too far. The ability to create differential salaries based on performance and bonus programs is ideal, but there is also much that can be done to recognize and reward employees short of this. We need to professionalize our coaching, mentorship and training processes.

“The number one activity impacting employee performance is the alignment of individual goals with overall organizational goals.”

-- Aberdeen Group
Procurement Services at UNL has years of strategic sourcing, negotiating and Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) experience. In the fall of 2013, key individuals within the group were requesting to attend negotiating classes, or seminars to improve their skills in that area. Looking at course offerings, we realized the skills were ones we had learned over our long careers. We decided that while the seminars were fruitful, we had 86 years combined negotiating skills under our own roof. We decided to tap into those resources over our lunch break every two weeks. This was our first step of many, toward scheduling “lunch and learns”.

Our first session was titled “Negotiating 101”. Senior staff presented video of negotiating skills along with their own experiences. The staff was then paired off with the goal of each negotiating one side of a contractual agreement resulting in a contract satisfactory to both sides. Senior staff monitored and mentored each pair in the exercise. The result has been sourcing staff entering into negotiating sessions with confidence and established goals, thus contracts of greater value to the university.

Below are talking points from a slide used during the “Negotiating 101” lunch and learn.

**On your mark...**

*Do Your Homework*

- Understand the market
- Be more knowledgeable than your opponent
- What is reasonable?
  - 15% is reasonable
  - 11% this might be your personal best
  - 8% this could be your average
  - 5% may be achieved just for asking

**Get set!**

*What Technique to Use*

- On the phone
- In-person
- Email
- Tag Team
- Pull the trigger

**Go!!**

Don’t be afraid to ask for what you want!
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

The discussion on this topic was focused on the barriers and challenges within our universities that are making it difficult to attract and retain top talent. Procurement leaders are competing for talent against private industries that pay differentiated market competitive salaries based on performance. There is a general perception in higher education that procurement is a tactical, back-office operation. Most universities have not recognized the strategic value of procurement and do not offer effective compensation processes. There was considerable discussion about the need for procurement to “re-brand” and change this perception. This will take some time, but it is a critical path to pursue. The Forum Group believes the following barriers and challenges are critical to overcome:

- Competing for talent against other industries
- Offering competitive salaries for skills in high demand;
- Support from leadership to prioritize needed investment in human resources;
- Retaining talent – keeping them engaged and excited;
- Senior leadership perception of procurement as more of a back office function; and
- Human resource salary benchmarking practices.

The Forum Group engaged in a passionate discussion about the ability to pay competitive salaries. To fix this issue requires a substantial challenge to the current practices embedded in most universities around budgeting, the reluctance to pay differentiated salaries and bonuses and the funding challenges generally. Many attendees believe the problem stems not from a lack of funds, but from archaic practices for how funds are prioritized and distributed within the university. There are many examples from athletics and the hiring of star researchers that suggest universities do understand the need for competitive salaries and differentiated compensation based on performance. The chief procurement officers discussed the need for them to do a better job of articulating the return on investment that strategic procurement brings and how that translates to the need for talent and the difficulty of acquiring this talent when competing against private industries with better defined compensation programs.

CASE STUDY – The University of Kansas Strategic Plan - Bold Aspirations

GOAL 5

Recruit, value, develop, and retain an excellent and diverse faculty and staff

Enhance the recruitment process for excellence in hiring (5-A)

Develop and retain talent and leadership at all levels to thrive in an era of change (5-B)

Be accountable (5-C)

Enhance the diversity of faculty, staff, and student body (5-D)
ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE NOW

Developing the ideal solution set to all of the challenges inherent in acquiring and retaining talented people will take time. At the end of the second day and after many hours of debate and conversation about a wide range of talent management topics the Innovators Forum group turned their attention to a few things that can be done now. Their recommendations include:

1. Evaluate and complete a skills assessment of your current organization. Perform a gap analysis and prepare a roadmap to address;
2. Understand university goals and objectives (read the strategic plan) and learn how to map personal and departmental goals against those objectives;
3. Define your pathway to success and identify the executive sponsors and/or key influencers you need in your corner for support;
4. Develop a re-branded concept of procurement and market the value proposition;
5. Listen to the needs of key stakeholders. Develop a process to solicit their feedback by listening to what they need instead of telling them what you can do;
6. Develop metrics to track and measure value creation;
7. Encourage people to have patience to support the change that is needed and help them plug into the change where they best fit.

SUMMARY

The 2014 Innovators Forum built on the strategic procurement themes developed in the previous two years. The group believes that talent management is the foundational element that must be performed with excellence if procurement is to become an essential strategic partner to the university’s mission and vision. The group is hopeful this white paper will establish a foundation to support further conversations with key university leaders and to address the significant challenges that exist. The group also believes there are many practices within procurement’s control that can be improved now and that should be committed to action in the near term.

“If you want to hire great people and have them stay working for you, you have to let them make lots of decisions and you have to be run by ideas, not hierarchy. The best ideas have to win...”

-- Steve Jobs
QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TEAM

Organizational Strategy
- Do you understand the key strategies being pursued by your university?
- Have you thought about the procurement team’s role in supporting key university strategies and do you have a "re-branded" message you can deliver to the executive team?
- Does the procurement team have a strategic plan with identified objectives, goals and initiatives to drive results?

Talent Strategy
- What does “the right people” mean to our group?
- Considering the demands on procurement today and in the near future, what skill sets are needed for our success?
- Do we have the skill sets needed or do we have a gap?

Talent Acquisition
- When was the last time we reviewed and updated procurement job descriptions? Have they changed, or perhaps are they mired in traditional language?
- Are we willing to consider individuals without traditional procurement background if they have other attributes we need such as subject matter expertise and relationship skills?
- Have we fully considered individuals from other campus departments who could be trained as needed?

Talent Performance
- Are the individual goals in our performance plans aligned with departmental goals?
- Do we invest enough in the people we have through training, coaching and mentorship programs?
- Have we developed processes to provide performance feedback on a real-time or periodic basis, or is it something that happens once per year?
ABOUT US

**NAEP** is the association of choice for educational procurement professionals dedicated to their continued professional development and to reinforcing the strategic role of procurement in education. Since the 1920’s, NAEP has been the non-profit professional association primarily dedicated to serving higher education purchasing officers in the U.S. and Canada. In 1934, members of the Association founded E&I Cooperative Purchasing, Inc. as an important undertaking and benefit of NAEP membership. Currently, over 1,500 colleges and universities are members. NAEP is a member-focused association providing progressive knowledge management in strategic sourcing, supply chain, materials and logistics for procurement professionals. NAEP provides professional development and networking opportunities regionally and nationally. These meetings, workshops, and seminars provide knowledge transfer ranging from “beginning” to “advanced” and are conducted throughout the year and across the nation. Visit [www.NAEPnet.org](http://www.NAEPnet.org) to learn more.

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END NOTES

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
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