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Old-School Purchasing to eProcurement

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In keeping with the theme of our Winter issue, “Changing the Landscape of Procurement” I’m excited to announce the publication of a new NAEP white paper—Higher Education Industry Report: Key Insights from the 2012 NAEP Innovators Forum and Recommended Strategies for Procurement Leaders. Available free to NAEP Members only, the report delivers actionable insights that senior administrators and educational procurement professionals can leverage to succeed in their expanding role as strategic leaders within the rapidly evolving university procurement landscape.

NAEP created the Innovators Forum to address the mounting social, demographic and fiscal pressures education procurement professionals are facing today. With sponsorship from SciQuest, Inc. and Huron Consulting, we assembled higher education and procurement industry thought-leaders from Yale, Stanford, Penn State, Virginia Tech, Washington University and more in Miami, Florida for a two-day workshop in February 2012. Attendees worked together to create an informed understanding of current challenges, and to anticipate the drivers of change in higher education and procurement over the next five to ten years. We also developed specific recommendations for procurement officers to drive strategic leadership within their own departments, as well as contribute to the overarching goals of the colleges and universities they serve.

The results of this incredible event have been assembled in our new white paper. Packed with powerful insight from procurement leadership, the white paper delivers:

- Extensive Industry Scholarship, Relevant Research and Analysis.
- The white paper is available now on the NAEP website (www.naepnet.org) and is free to all NAEP Members. Non-members may also purchase a copy for $199 by contacting NAEP at 443.543.5540.

The new white paper and the Innovators Forum are strong examples of NAEP’s continuing commitment to fostering professional excellence and collaboration within our community. We plan to make the NAEP Innovators Forum an established annual event and will be delving more deeply into technology challenges and strategies for higher education procurement officers during the 2013 Innovators Forum, which will be held in San Antonio, Texas, February 12-13, 2013.

I hope that you will download your free copy of the NAEP white paper soon. While you’re on our site, be sure to click through the many resources that we offer to NAEP Members, including direct links to industry events and publications, topic-specific listservs, an RFP library, case studies and other informative white papers full of best practices you can use to further your professional growth and development.

I strongly believe that today’s procurement leaders can become true drivers of change who shape their institutions’ futures and enhance higher education’s ability to meet its mission—critical goals. You can be assured that NAEP is working tirelessly to bring you the information and resources you need to do so. I look forward to your feedback regarding our new white paper and to bringing you news from the 2013 Innovators Forum!
I am so sick of hearing the phrase, “doing more with less.” It is a trite utterance used by politicians and organizations as they cut budgets, employees and resources. Doing more with less only makes sense to a point. If you are inefficient, overstaffed, and underutilizing technology, then this may be the case. Most universities have been forced to become more efficient and to use more technology because of budget cuts in tough times. They have reduced paper, trimmed the fat out of processes, and leveraged technology to assist people and systems.

The problem with continuous cuts, reversions, and layoffs is that a tipping point will be reached where “we” are not doing more with less—but less with less. What things are we going to stop providing? Risk assessment? Conflict resolution? Bids? Contract management? What do we provide that no longer has value? I would argue that none of these things should be cut. We need to create a more strategic department to become an indispensable part of the institution. This means finding ways to increase our budgets, staff, and technology.

How do we accomplish this? Do we need to beg, borrow and steal? The answer is—sort of—“Yes.”

We need to be proactive in requesting more funding (the beg). Developing relationships with upper administration is important and can lead to conversations by which the value of purchasing can be expressed and the potential value of a better-staffed purchasing department can be articulated.

We also need to ensure that we are receiving all of our earned P-card rebates and look at new ways to pay for items (ghost cards, e-payables) that can create revenue for purchasing (the borrow). A case can be made for purchasing to retain the funds associated with the program to pay for positions that issue cards, audit the usage and monitor the systems. That creates an incentive to be efficient and look for other opportunities to create revenue. This can lead to a partial self-funding of the purchasing operation.

We can proactively ask vendors for early pay discounts and show the institution our value by calculating what we can give back, and then ask for funding that assists those efforts (in a manner: the steal). Some universities are finding great success in garnering more early pay discounts just by asking. It may also be something to add to any registration or application system. Some vendors offer it without the asking.

We can use augmented resources to create positive items. These can include process improvement, system enhancements, spend analytics, and similar advances—things we can deliver to the university to enhance value and make a case for more purchasing resources. Purchasing should become an operation that is more of a business services organization. It should act more as a consultant and business advisor, which should lessen its need to serve as “police.” Purchasing can offer a one-stop shop for procurement, consultation, and information by creating value and using informational strength for e-procurement, P-card, vendor, and purchase order systems. Purchasing can create savings and value.

Rather than continuing to accept cuts in resources, we likely have the greater duty to ourselves and to our institutions to find ways to get more by providing more—and demonstrating it.
Old-school purchasing to eProcurement.

You may be asking yourself, “Now what does this mean?”

Here’s my take. Old-school purchasing is your basic pick-up-the-phone to place an order, or use of the phone to source (research) goods or services at the best possible price. Old-school purchasing may also include sourcing via the pen and paper method to obtain quotations or bid proposals. That brings me to the subject of eProcurement. It is a sourcing tool that gives freedom to end-users to shop vendor punch-out or hosted catalogs that have been selected by their institution. Catalogs can also include established contracts.

Now let’s hear from a few experts on this subject: Gina Arms, Director of Purchasing at Colorado College; Tom Kaloupek, Director of Materials Management at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; and Bill Lyle, Director of Purchasing, Delaware Valley College.

Gina Arms, Director of Purchasing, Colorado College

“User-friendliness was a huge consideration, as well as the time commitment required for implementation. Since we have limited resources available for implementation and training, we needed to find the right product that would require minimum effort while providing maximum results. eProcurement has been a consideration since our Banner implementation in 1996, when we took a look at SciQuest. However, because of limited human resources, we tabled it until there was another opportunity to consider an alternative product. Then, when E&I began discussing the E&I Marketplace product and provided a demonstration of the functionality provided by ESM Solutions, we saw it as a chance to try it out gradually.

“Financial, as well as human, resources were a large part of the evaluation. The amount of time required to fully roll this out was especially important because we are a small institution, and availability of staff in the Purchasing Department is extremely limited. Ease of implementation, easier access to E&I contracts (particularly the punch-out catalogs for Grainger and OfficeMax), reporting functionality for spend analysis—these were major benefits we sought.”

When we asked Gina to outline the steps taken to bring eProcurement to Colorado College, to describe the biggest challenges in implementing the platform, and how these challenges were tackled, she said, “We have just implemented the E&I marketplace (two weeks prior to the writing of this article) and are currently only utilizing this in the Purchasing areas. Subsequent roll-out will take place after OfficeMax and Grainger have their punch-out catalogs available via the Marketplace site. Resistance to change was the biggest challenge and, as with any other new initiative, the key has been in thoughtful discussions and communication to campus, and in understanding how to ‘finesse’ each new program or initiative.

“In terms of an eProcurement provider, our goals are to have the ability to partner with a vendor that is able to have hosted and punch-out catalogs through our relationships (after spend analytics are completed); to have ease of use and the ability to add additional functionality to ‘customize’ as our needs evolve. I hope to come out of this implementation alive (just kidding!). I hope that the campus-users will embrace this as something that is easy to use and beneficial in the sense that they can save time and money by using the E&I Marketplace tool. The response it receives from the campus users will ultimately be how its success is measured.”

Tom Kaloupek, Director of Materials Management, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Tom shared that Virginia Tech utilizes SciQuest, integrated with Banner, and they are completing their sixth year of full use. When deciding to go with this platform, Tom said, “Three things were
of great importance: 1) Full integration with the Banner financial platform; 2) SciQuest’s orientation toward the higher education and research market segment; and 3) SciQuest’s history of periodic system development and refreshments that are coordinated to Banner.”

At the present time, Tom states that the most important features/benefits are that “the system has proven to be highly reliable and flexible. People can use the system 24/7 from anywhere in the world to conduct their business. It is very empowering in that regard. Over time, system flexibility has allowed us to make changes in our workflow to accommodate new business requirements. We are not stuck in the mode of having to say, ‘Sorry, you cannot do that because the system will not allow it.’ Working with SciQuest, we are often able to find a way to make desired modifications.

“We did a phased roll-out. We worked first with a Steering Team of selected academic and administrative departments that helped us think through desired process changes and workflow. This group then tested the system before we introduced it to the campus as a whole.

We worked first with a Steering Team of selected academic and administrative departments that helped us think through desired process changes and workflow.

“Following agreement that we were ready, we spent a month with each college in training and rollout. The process took a full year.”

When asked if any resistance was encountered, Tom responded, “Yes, this was a big change and not everyone was exactly eager to jump in there. Also, seven to eight years ago when we were doing this, use of online ordering was not as developed or as prevalent as it is today. We tried to be patient and provided easy access to help-desk services. Like with any system, if you are a frequent user, it gets easy to retain the knowledge and skills. If you are an infrequent user, it is more difficult to pick up and retain the new skills that are needed.”

With regard to gaining support/buy-in at all levels, Tom added, “We did several things. First we obtained support from top leadership. The executive vice president issued a letter to the deans and department heads announcing that we were purchasing a license for the system, change was coming, and full participation was expected. We also met with the deans, gave them a briefing on the system and its benefits and helped prepare their expectations. Finally, we met with college business officers and fiscal leaders before we started the training and conversion process. To the extent that we could, we tried to make this as least disruptive as possible.

“Turning over the coin, we also decided early on that we wanted to make this our single system for processing as many types of transactions as possible and stated such. So, people quickly rec-

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We have very high user-processing rates today, but it took years of monitoring and meeting to bring some units around to more modern processes.

Tom also shared, “We extended our pre-rollout testing period to ensure that we had the system correctly configured and processing with reliability. This delayed our final roll-out by about six months. We felt that if we rolled out the system and it was not reliable or functioned more poorly than the old process, it would spell disaster for the larger conversion process.

“We also worked individually with departments that struggled with the process reorganization that was necessary for electronic processing. We developed three organizational models that seemed to fit most situations and met with department heads to explain them before roll-out.

Lastly, it has been a long effort with some administrative departments. We have very high user-processing rates today, but it took years of monitoring and meeting to bring some units around to more modern processes. Personnel turnover also had something to do with this.”

When asked about unexpected challenges or obstacles, Tom had this to say: “The software that runs the communications servers had issues and was not as reliable as it has become today.
This led to many days when the system was down or was not passing orders correctly. These technical problems were on ‘our side’ and not on the Sci-Quest side.

“We continue to wrestle with some suppliers who have unstable catalogs. eProcurement users have no control over what a supplier does with their punch-out catalogs. Many catalogs are complete, stable and reliable, but some are not and need continuing attention.

“Our key objectives were to modernize our business system, to improve financial controls and the availability of information, and to become 100 percent electronic from requisition to check to the extent that we could. Yes, we have accomplished each of these to a level that senior leadership is very satisfied with. I would add that we did not achieve these objectives right out of the box. It takes several years of training, building the marketplace and making increased use of the system.”

Tom shares that his department has become more strategic, and this is evident as he explains, “Data shows increased usage of term contracts and therefore cost savings. The mindset of campus customers has shifted to where they now look in the system for contracts for their requirements. We also are able to approach new suppliers with a package of eProcurement, eInvoicing and payment card settlement. We believe this is the most efficient processing package currently possible. It works to the mutual advantage of both sides.”

In closing, Tom offered three pieces of important advice, as well as his future goals and plans for eProcurement:

“We recognize a need to develop more capabilities with analytics and reporting. (Now we have all this great data—what do we do with it?). We are in the early processes of thinking through those areas. I would recommend to those who have installed a system and are in the early years to take a look at the numbers and percentage of transactions flowing through and how can they be maximized. Also, look at individual marketplace suppliers and determine their electronic versus non-electronic throughput. How can it be improved? Best-in-class performance is in the 90 percent range.”

“We continue to wrestle with some suppliers who have unstable catalogs. eProcurement users have no control over what a supplier does with their punch-out catalogs…”

Bill Lyle, Director of Purchasing, Delaware Valley College

Bill states that Delaware Valley College has been using the EasyPurchase system by ESM Solutions for about six years. Regarding the determination of what platform to use he said, “We were still using a paper-based system, and we needed an eProcurement system that we knew could seamlessly bolt on to our ERP (Datatel Colleague). This narrowed our scope considerably. ESM had everything we needed, and they are a preferred partner with Datatel. The system effectively ensures the money is in the budget, and that all appropriate approvals have occurred. It also allows for electronic storage of all documents for auditing purposes in one easy-to-find place. Having punch-outs to vendor catalogs make the procurement process easy for the end-user.”

When approaching the rollout and training processes, Delaware Valley College started out with a small pilot consisting of a high-use staff department and a high-use academic department. When talking about resistance to bringing users on board, Bill shared, “Change is a four-letter word in higher education. Any change is met with resistance, and this was no exception. There were those who believed purchasing was now forcing them to do procurement work.”

In order to gain support, Bill stated, “We made sure to include a department that had a high number of nay-sayers to help us find problems in the system and to bring them into the fold. We also had support at the highest levels. The resistance to change was the hardest challenge.”

How did Bill’s team overcome this challenge? He responded, “Perseverance and the fact that we

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had a good product made all the difference. We found during the main rollout that, by limiting users, we had people demanding that they get access.” While there were not any unexpected challenges or obstacles, Bill added, “We needed initially to streamline our procurement process and make them more effective. These goals were met. Since that time, we have focused on improving the experience for the end-users with catalogs, and that, too, has been a success. This improved experience has minimized leakage as well.

“By implementing catalogs online, we take the time up front to bid out the vendor, not the product. We thoroughly vet the vendor, implement a relationship with them, and focus on contract management, not individual procurement.”

When asked for his three most important pieces of advice for those getting their feet wet in the eProcurement pool, Bill said:

“Perseverance during the implementation process is key. We all know how hard change is in higher ed.

Have a champion, or many champions, if you can, at cabinet level or above. It must be driven down.

Keep track of your successes. You will need to justify your system at a time when you least expect it.”

In the future, Delaware Valley College plans on integrating the pCard system into the eProcurement system, which will further streamline the processes in A/P, and increase our rebates.

Summary
In closing, I would like to list a few of the benefits of using an eProcurement tool:

- It is an opportunity for potential increased productivity. Some internal customers say that it is a faster way to procure needed supplies and equipment. Procurement professionals may find that they have additional time available to focus on more strategic initiatives.
- There is a potential for reduced cost, which can be achieved by leveraging volume.
- With transparency of spend, it can assist in ensuring compliance with existing and established contracts. Compliance and transparency can be a key to potential savings.

In short, some would argue it is a smarter way to procure items by offering end-users freedom to explore and order what they need when they need it to get their many jobs done.
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Are We Neglecting Suppliers Within the P-Card Value Proposition?

by Lynn Larson, CPCP
National Association of Purchasing Card Professionals (NAPCP)

For years, suppliers worldwide have complained, lobbied and sued over the rules and fees related to card acceptance (see sidebar). The center of the battle is usually interchange, the largest component of the merchant discount fee paid by suppliers (www.napcp.org/CardFees).

This year, information flooded the news in mid-July when MasterCard, Visa, and major banks settled a longstanding U.S. lawsuit to resolve claims in the multi-district interchange litigation (MDL). End-user buying organizations, including universities, paid particular attention to the element in the settlement that would allow U.S. suppliers to impose a surcharge on card payments, if desired. Such a practice has been historically prohibited in the U.S., as per the card networks’ merchant rules. In addition, surcharging is outlawed in 10 states.

Plaintiffs had until October 19, 2012, to formally request court approval of the settlement. Early reports conveyed merchants’ dissatisfaction with it, indicating possible settlement rejection. Visit www.napcp.org for the latest news.

If surcharging is a reality, the worst thing your organization could do is have a knee-jerk reaction. This advice applies to any sort of regulatory change. Not all suppliers will jump at the chance to surcharge—something that has been proven in Australia, which has allowed surcharging for years. First, arm yourself with the facts by staying informed about networks’ merchant rules, including rules about surcharging, which can change regularly. You might need to point out specific rules when talking with your suppliers.

Most importantly, look at the big P-Card picture—the benefits gained through card usage, such as process efficiencies and savings. Make thoughtful business decisions based on costs versus benefits and involve your suppliers. The industry news about surcharging presented an opportunity for you to have meaningful discussions with suppliers to ensure a purchase-to-pay process (P2P) that benefits all.

As buyers, have we added fuel to our suppliers’ fire over the costs of card acceptance? For example, an NAPCP first-quarter 2011 poll (www.napcp.org/polls) on payment methods for A/P spend revealed a questionable practice. Within the poll, A/P spend was defined as payments initiated by accounts payable for approved invoices. One question asked, “What is the primary card product/application that your organization uses for A/P spend?” The top answer, reported by 41 percent of respondents, was traditional P-Cards (issued to specific A/P employees). Taking this at face value, it indicates that a buying organization waits for a supplier to provide an invoice and then, at some point following invoice receipt and approval, an A/P staff member contacts the supplier to pay via P-Card. The supplier loses out on quick payment but still pays the merchant discount fee. Neither the organization nor the supplier gains the benefit of process savings—not an ideal P-Card P2P process.

Are we neglecting suppliers? How often does your organization consider the cost/fees to suppliers when determining the appropriate payment method(s) for its purchases? This question was also asked via an August NAPCP online poll. As shown below, 39 percent of respondents noted seldom or never.

Card acceptance could be more costly than it should be if a supplier uses outdated or inefficient processes—at no fault of your organization as the buyer. You might find yourself in an educator role. Encourage your suppliers to charge the appropriate P-Card upon order fulfillment and eliminate invoices. Ask suppliers to provide a priced packing slip or similar documentation that indicates “paid via credit card,” thereby eliminating the invoice and associated cost. The supplier experiences process savings and the transaction doesn’t enter the costly receivables process or require collections activity. A supplier might also be in need of a better contract for card services—one that sufficiently addresses B2B card payments.

Suppliers cannot overlook the cost of checks and cash either. From a retail perspective, cash payments require keeping adequate cash on hand (and secure), counting it regularly, making...
deposits and so forth. Checks present another set of challenges. In response to NAPCP’s August poll on card acceptance, one end-user commented, “We often have to share with suppliers the cost of cash and other payment methods because it is readily assumed that ACH and cash are ‘free.’ This is simply not true, causing many issues that, in the end, cost the supplier and our organization time, effort and money.” Overall, suppliers need to be proactive in understanding the pros and cons of all payment methods and then pursue improvements to optimize accounts receivable.

As a buyer, recognize that, even with efficient P2P processes, there might be times when a card payment does not make sense for suppliers. Understand the break-even concept, which differs by supplier. This is when card acceptance costs/fees are basically equal to the benefits, providing no monetary advantage or disadvantage. It’s the maximum transaction amount before card acceptance may no longer benefit the supplier, exceeding estimated cost savings, depending on the terms of the merchant agreement.

When a supplier agrees to accept your card payments, incorporate card acceptance and related terms into your contract with the supplier. This might seem like an unnecessary statement. Yet, per research released in 2010 by the NAPCP and First Annapolis Consulting, 47 percent of survey respondents noted they seldom or never include such contract terms.

Work with suppliers in good faith now to create strong partnerships. Become educated about card acceptance, including the fees. Do not rely on media hype when forming your opinions. Utilize the NAPCP to obtain the facts, as well as balanced guidance. Become an NAPCP member (www.napcp.org/JoinNow) or complimentary subscriber to participate in polls and review results.
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Cooperative Purchasing: What’s In It for You?

by Nicole Katz
E&I Cooperative Purchasing

When it comes to cooperative purchasing in higher education, the phrase ‘another tool in the procurement toolbox’ seems to be quite common.

But what exactly does that mean? If cooperative purchasing is another tool in the proverbial ‘toolbox’ what are the benefits of putting it to use? And, equally as important, what are the potential challenges to this purchasing strategy… or what are the drawbacks to this ‘tool’?

Cooperative purchasing is about more than just cost savings.

Ask any member of a purchasing cooperative, and one of the primary benefits of membership they will likely mention is economies of scale. While this is typically true, there’s more to be said for the cooperative purchasing model than just aggregated volume.

“We view cooperative purchasing as an integral component to our purchasing strategy,” explained Eileen Miller, Procurement Services Manager at Chemeketa Community College, located in Salem, Oregon. “In very general terms, it allows us to leverage deeper discounts than if we competed on our own. Add to that the time savings and the reduced administrative burden, and it’s obviously a winning equation.”

Chemeketa is an active member of a number of purchasing cooperatives, including WSCA, U.S. Communities, E&I, The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN), Organization for Educational Technology and Curriculum (OETC), and National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA) to name a few. “We keep ourselves open to exploring whatever groups are most advantageous to us,” explained Eileen.

In addition to many GPO memberships, Chemeketa heads up a local community college procurement group that meets periodically throughout the year. “So many of us in procurement are stretched so thin…we felt it made sense to pool our local resources and share our experiences.”

The group—known formally as Participating Oregon Community Colleges (POCC)—comprises purchasing units from the 17 community colleges throughout the state, and is connected by intergovernmental agreement that memorializes its purpose and mission.

This sharing of best practices is, in many ways, the distinguishing factor of many of today’s cooperative purchasing organizations.

“I believe that one of the biggest advantages to a cooperative is the feeling of connectedness,” explained Patty Reich, Director of Business Services for the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges (IVAIC). “It’s never really just about purchasing. It’s about coming together as a group and realizing you are stronger when you work together. This group dynamic often gives you better results than any school would be able to achieve on its own.”

IVAIC is a non-profit organization that comprises six private higher education institutions as core members and seven associate member institutions. The group’s overriding vision is to make each of its member schools stronger through collaboration.

Though IVAIC Business Services functions as a cooperative purchasing organization in and of itself, IVAIC’s members also belong to a number of larger purchasing groups including, among others, E&I, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania (AICUP) and U.S. Communities.

Continued on page 20
According to Patty, the opportunity to share best practices with colleagues, and the strength of these personal connections, is what defines a cooperative.

“The ability and the willingness of people to come together and discuss their experiences can really help others in the group come up with a new idea or a new perspective on something,” she said. “Great things can come from this kind of collaboration.” LVAIC has a number of different ‘functional’ groups that meet on a regular basis. Examples of these groups include: purchasing directors, facilities directors, IT directors, etc. “We have a history of success where positive relationships formed in these working groups have generated some unique and progressive agreements. Some examples are the office supplies agreement created by the procurement group, and the bandwidth agreement created by the IT group.”

As a regional cooperative, LVAIC has an opportunity to truly deepen these personal connections.

Patty: “There’s something to be said for being able to just jump in the car and drive to one of the other schools for a live meeting, or to see something in person. Oftentimes when one of our members is hosting an activity, all the other members are invited to share in the experience. This provides them with the opportunity to gain education and insight, yet they didn’t have to invest the time in planning the event. Everyone benefits, and at the same time you’ve really improved the efficiency of the resources you have.”

From a contracting perspective, Patty also explained that some purchases lend themselves better to a regional cooperative. “There are some situations where it’s just not possible for a national supplier to be able to offer the level of service you’re looking for. Regardless of the commodity, this can be true if you want some sort of next-day service guarantee, or perhaps a specific time guarantee for a service call. On a local or regional level, because you have a very distinct group of members and the supplier knows exactly where you are all located, it’s a lot easier for them to logistically handle that.”

Cooperatives can be a great starting point in your procurement strategy.

When LVAIC is exploring the potential of pursuing a new contracting opportunity, existing cooperative purchasing agreements are the first stop.

Patty: “Let’s say one of our members wants to look into a new contract for electrical supplies. Typically, the first thing we will do is work with our purchasing directors group to check out what is already available to us. What agreements does E&I have? What about U.S. Communities? What is available through the Pennsylvania Department of General Services COSTAR program? What agreements does AICUP offer? If one of these co-ops has an agreement that meets our needs, we will gladly use it. This, of course, saves us a considerable amount of time on the administrative end, since we don’t have to undertake any of the tasks associated with negotiating

Continued on page 22
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the contract. If none of these options meet our needs, we will determine the feasibility of moving forward and creating our own contract. For us, this decision is made on a case-by-case basis.”

Jim Hudson, Chief Procurement Officer at Ivy Tech, explained his institution sometimes takes a similar approach. Ivy Tech comprises 30 degree-offering locations across 14 regions in the state of Indiana.

“Though our buyers have considerable autonomy with purchases that fall below a certain spend threshold, what we try to do is influence how people make buys and to do it as professionally as possible.”

A supporter of the cooperative purchasing model, Ivy Tech is a member of such organizations as E&I, Horizon Resource Group, National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA), NIPA, U.S. Communities, MiCTA and Provista, among others.

According to Jim, Ivy Tech considers cooperative purchasing agreements as a good starting point in the procurement process. But that doesn’t mean they always represent the best value.

“There’s no question that many cooperatives have done a great deal of work in identifying what higher ed institutions need, with regard to building a set of standards, a scope of work, developing RFPs, identifying suppliers, and building price lists, etc. associated with their contracts. All of this leg-work is extremely useful since we don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

Occasionally, Jim explained, there are a few situations where a cooperative contract may not always represent the best deal. “There are varying degrees of ‘competitiveness’ in many agreements made available through cooperatives. It’s not so easy to assume that, because there’s a winning supplier and a related contract that results from a competitive process, that it’s always the best outcome for your institution. Sometimes GPO pricing may not be as strong as that which could be obtained through a ‘committal RFP process’ where the institution agrees to buy exclusively on a multi-year basis from a given supplier. You’ve just got to do the research to make sure you’re spending wisely.”

In all things, it pays to do your homework. Some cooperatives make this easier than others.

Cooperatives can stretch your financial resources to help you achieve your goals.

Today’s procurement professionals continue to face the daunting challenge of spending less and getting more. Be it through aggregated knowledge, time efficiencies, or leveraging of resources, cooperative purchasing contracts can certainly help ease the burden.

“The number of cooperatives in existence has increased tremendously over the last 20 years, and it’s easy to see why,” Eileen explained. “Based upon increasing expectations and diminishing resources, I see a growing need for shared services and consortia. Cooperative purchasing is a valuable tool we can all consider to ensure we accomplish our goals responsibly and efficiently.”

Importantly, the benefits of cooperative purchasing extend beyond the procurement department.

“If we can generate more products and services for the same amount of money, and we can positively impact student lives by making more things possible, then we have fulfilled our mission,” said Patty. “At the end of the day, as procurement folks, we’re all just aiming to be the best stewards of the financial resources that we have. Cooperatives enable us to achieve that goal.”
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recently ran the Vancouver, BC, Marathon. About five miles into the 26.2-mile race, my right leg started aching. At the 10-mile mark, the pain was such that I started rationalizing about how it would be OK to start walking or, heck, just quit. I had been training for five months and now, at the moment of truth, I was ready to give up.

My pace slowed but before I could completely quit, a man I did not recognize came out of the crowd and started running alongside me. Grinning from ear-to-ear he proclaimed very loudly, “Wow, I’m running with the great Bob Ashby. Wow. Wait until I tell Mary (I didn’t catch her last name) that I got to run with the great Bob Ashby. She is really going to be excited to hear that I not only saw you but got to run with you.” He then peeled off and left me to my running.

My first thought was, “Who the heck was that? Who the heck is Mary?” But my second thought was, not only could I not stop running now but I had to resume or even surpass my previous pace. Why? Because people around me were looking and wondering who in the heck was this “great Bob Ashby” guy? Yes, someone was checking me out and expecting great things from me. Those who have seen me run know that I am definitely not a great runner, but someone I did not even know thought I was “the great Bob Ashby.” So, yes, I sucked it up, got my adrenaline flowing, and finished the race.

As I continued running I thought about how all of us in the supply management profession have people watching us, expecting to see great things, and wondering if we will work through our pains or just quit.

If we are managers, our staff members want to know if we are leading them in the direction best suited for them, the department, and the school. They want to see if their career development path will be best enhanced by emulating our work ethics and efforts. They want to see if, when the going gets tough, we tackle problems head-on or if we just sweep them under the rug, bury them in the bottom of our in-box, or place blame on someone else.

We managers are also being observed by our higher-ups to see if we are getting the best and most out of our staff, if we are developing less expensive means of accomplishing our tasks, if we are encouraging a more educated workforce, if we are innovative in our approach to problem solving, and if we are leading by example.

If we are staff, we are being monitored to see if, based on our work habits and efforts at improving ourselves educationally and intellectually, we merit being considered for promotion—or if we should be considered for the lay-off list, if that situation presents itself. We are being measured to see if we are preparing ourselves for that next opportunity or if our modus operandi is to just “cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Regardless of our place in the hierarchy, we are being observed as to how we handle difficult situations and how we react when the going gets tough. Do we push forward, work harder, and smarter? Or throw up our hands and quit. Do we find excuses or solutions? Or do we just respond with the “woulda, shoulda, coulda” mantra?

In the vast universe of your campus is there someone who sees you and says “Wow. There goes the great…”? That person may never run out of the crowd and say it to your face but he/she is out there trying to find a “great” person to emulate. Shakespeare said, “Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” Whether you are a manager, or a staff member looking for promotion, prepare yourself for achieving greatness. Be prepared in the event greatness is thrust upon you. To do that you must improve yourself educationally and intellectually. Don’t have your opportunity thrust upon you and then see it taken away because you were not prepared. And don’t disappoint those looking to see if you will define for them the path to greatness.

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Higher Education Opportunities for Purchasing

by Michael Chmielewski, C.P.M.
Law School Admission Council

For purchasing professionals like me, who have been in the field for more than five years, it seemed like there was very little chance to get a degree in procurement. Those of us “old timers” who have college degrees usually have them in accounting, business administration, psychology, education, or similar...just about anything besides purchasing. The degrees were just not available when we were getting ready to go to college.

As I have discovered by talking to many of our colleagues, most of our job starts off at some other job before we wound up in procurement. Some higher-up at our institution asked us if we would take the job or told us that it was our new job. Also, for most of us, our education was on the job as we go. I don’t think the majority of us were lucky enough to have the benefit of tutoring from the outgoing person.

Our best chance at any sort of quality instruction was through conferences and institutes offered by groups such as NAEP, ISM, NIGP, and their local chapters. Networking with our colleagues at these events and via the NAEP listserv provided a great deal of help.

The most we could hope to achieve was to receive a certification such as C.P.M. Very few schools offered courses in supply management let alone degrees. That has now changed for the better.

Many schools now offer degrees in procurement, supply management and supply chain management. Some also offer master’s degrees. The University of San Diego now offers a Master of Science in Supply Chain Management. This master’s degree program is approved by the Institute of Supply Management (ISM). So is the program offered by the University of Texas at Dallas. There are many other schools offering graduate degrees with a concentration in supply management: Cleveland State University, Governors State University, Michigan State University, Tennessee State University, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin – Stout, and Washington University in St. Louis. California State University, Long Beach offers a Master of Arts in Global Logistics.

There are a lot of schools offering bachelor’s degrees with either a major or concentration in supply chain management, global logistics and transportation, and operations management.

The increase in educational opportunities is not only helpful to those already working in procurement, but it should help our institutions in the future. As many of us know, a big problem in our profession is succession. We have a hard time finding and retaining young people in procurement. Many of them just don’t see it as a path for advancement. But if supply chain management keeps increasing its profile there will be more students interested in following that as a career path.

A number of schools now have centers, schools, or departments dedicated to supply chain management. The Michigan State University Broad College of Business has a Department of Supply Chain Management that is ranked number one in the U.S. The Supply Chain Management & Marketing Sciences Department of the Rutgers Business School is also highly ranked. Cleveland State University’s Monte Ahuja College of Business has an Operations and Supply Chain Management Department. Florida International University has the Ryder Center for Supply Chain Management. You get the idea.

Many of the schools and degrees I have listed in this article are not all-inclusive. There are many more schools than I have mentioned. Much of the information in this this article I got from the Supply In Demand supplement to Inside Supply Management (August 2012 issue). The supplement has a long listing of schools offering procurement courses, certificate programs, and degree programs. The courses are offered via the in-person traditional method and some are offered online.

Things are changing in a good way in regard to procurement education. We still have the great sessions offered at the NAEP’s conferences and institutes, but now we have even more chances to advance and educate ourselves.

It seems that it may not be too far in the future that employers will be requesting degrees in supply chain management from people who are applying for jobs in procurement. Of course, on-the-job experience may continue to be preferred, but it is nice that the alternative is now available. Hopefully it will help to lower the average age in our profession and help us to keep those younger people. They can bring a new and interesting perspective to the job.

As always, if you have any questions or comments about this topic or article please feel free to contact me at mchmielewski@lsac.org.

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When you think about it, most of what we do is funny. I tend to see the humor in just about anything, so it’s a good thing I am in procurement, as there is always a lot to laugh about. A few examples.

When we first started an e-commerce system, we decided that we would invite our high-volume suppliers to a meeting so we could present our plans. And to ensure that they would come, we decided to buy them lunch. We sent out the invitations to the people we knew, who, of course, were our sales reps. All of them showed up for our presentation. At the end, they all said, “We have no idea what you are talking about, but thanks for lunch.”

OK…that didn’t go quite as planned. So we set up another lunch presentation, and this time invited both our sales reps and their sales directors. The thought was that maybe the sales directors would see the brilliance of our plans, a brilliance that seems to have escaped the sales reps. All of them showed up. Our presentation was marvelous. At the end, they all said, “Does this have anything to do with our commissions? And, thanks again for lunch.”

It took a third lunch before we could get the company’s IT and management people to see what we were doing. In the grand scheme of things, the three lunches were worth the investment, as we now have more than 250 suppliers in our e-commerce system.

Once we got our e-commerce system up and running, we made it easy for users to order from online catalogs. We expected that since people could see what they were ordering, there would be far fewer ordering mistakes, and less returns. This was true, except for one of our more famous users. Now that she had the capacity to easily order stuff, she was going to use it. So, she would order stuff just to see what it was, and then return it. We figured that she was simply one of the lunatic fringe, and that the benefits of our e-commerce system far outweighed the cost of the returns. Until the day she ordered one each of 42 different color pens to decide which color she liked! So we had to have a word with her. It never occurred to her that we could see what she was doing.

Along those same lines, we recently added a home improvement store to our e-commerce system. They deliver everything in one of their big flatbed trucks that has a forklift. Sure enough, someone ordered one box of sandwich bags. Not a case, mind you, just one box. And sure enough, they delivered it on the flatbed truck. Knowing them, they probably used the forklift to get the box of sandwich bags on our receiving dock! We didn’t even know you could order sandwich bags from a home improvement store.

We used to operate a copier repair service. Our techs were really sharp people and always looked good in the uniforms we provided to them—maybe too good looking. One of them came in to see me with a complaint. A woman in one of our departments had fallen in love with him and was deliberately jamming her copier just so she could call in a repair order and see him. He wanted me to talk to her about it. I am thinking that I am a procurement professional, not a relationship counselor (probably more money in that, though). So, we flagged the account in our call system and always made sure that another tech responded. It did not take long before the poor love-starved woman quit jamming the copier.

My favorite story at the moment fortunately did not happen to me. A famous-named school of public affairs, let’s call it the Milton Smedley School of Public Affairs, managed to make a small typo on the cover of their graduation program. It now said, in capital letters: Milton Smedley School of Public Affairs. Good thing I was not graduating, as that would send me into fits of laughter. Have fun.
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