

BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY

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CATCH-22 AND THE BIDDING PARADOX



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WHERE IS ALL THE COMMON SENSE?

FOREWORD - MARTIN SMITH

LIKE MOST IN OUR PROFESSION, I COULD PROBABLY WRITE A BOOK ON THE BIDDING PITFALLS I HAVE EXPERIENCED AND STILL ENCOUNTER. THIS ISSUE OF BIDDING QUARTERLY ILLUSTRATES NUMEROUS CATCH-22S, PARADOXES, CONTRADICTIONS, IRONIES, ABSURDITIES, BENT RULES AND CONFLICTING INSTRUCTIONS AS WELL AS THE GENERAL AMBIGUITY AROUND SUBMITTING COMPLIANT BIDS. THIS TANGLE OF TRAPS AND TENSIONS IS SLOWLY ERODING THE MOTIVATION AND MENTAL HEALTH OF A LARGE SWATHE OF OUR PROFESSION. THE REAL CHALLENGE IS HOW WE ALTER THE MINDSETS OF THOSE WITH THE POWER TO CHANGE THEM.

A considerable number of us are now openly sharing our frustration; we are noticeably tetchy, we goad others and some of us are even openly insulting those with whom we need to forge strong and lasting relationships (think sales teams, procurement specialists, etc). Even if these frustrations are expressed with a 'tongue in cheek' approach, each has a serious underlying message.

Observing these behaviours (and counting myself among the frustrated) led me to the theme for BQ22. There are aspects of our profession which are swerving away from common sense and veering straight into the nonsensical.

All we want is to deliver exceptional customer value in a practical way. And while it's always good to get something off your chest, it is sometimes difficult not to go 'all in' with your despair and frustrations once the 'red mist' descends. Cancel culture has taught us that sympathy rarely comes from our intended audience (those with the power to effect change) but more often from those with shared predicaments. Sadly, this provides only short-term comfort while doing little to change the long-term narrative or the culture overall.

I often share my frustrations about the lack of investment in our profession by APMP. I'm clearly not alone in thinking this, with 70% of our recent UK salary survey respondents stating they are seeking a better funded professional body.

APMP UK recently posted an advert for a part-time role with a grand title that would look great on a CV – but most of us know all APMP UK roles are filled by volunteers. All this role required was '8-12 hours per week' of the candidate's time. Against a 40-hour work week, that's 20% - 30% of their time. For free.

For nearly 20 years we have been publishing statistics about the excessive number of additional unpaid hours that most of those in our profession work each week, and how this contributes to high levels of employee turnover. Alongside this, there are endless articles about mental health and burnout in our profession – many of them originating from APMP. And now let's contrast this with the millions of pounds APMP has in the bank.

Common sense should dictate some of those millions are used to properly resource important, full-time APMP roles currently filled by volunteers. Instead, APMP is exacerbating the burnout – setting people up for potential failure while taking advantage of their goodwill. Perpetually, a lack of progress within APMP UK has been excused with "You know we're all volunteers."

The revolving door of short-term volunteer C-level appointments is doing little to truly propel our profession forward. Quite simply, we must invest in ourselves to break down the barriers preventing progress. It is the only way to gain the traction and recognition our profession deserves.

Catch-22 and the Bidding Paradox has 28 amazing expert contributions and is full of fantastic advice and suggestions for navigating the complexities and challenges of winning work.

“WHILE IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO GET SOMETHING OFF YOUR CHEST, IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT NOT TO GO 'ALL IN' WITH YOUR DESPAIR AND FRUSTRATIONS ONCE THE 'RED MIST' DESCENDS.”

WHAT HOUSE HUNTING CAN TEACH US ABOUT WINNING BUSINESS

LUCIE ARISS

BUYING A HOUSE IS ONE OF LIFE'S BIGGEST DECISIONS. YOU START WITH A VISION OF YOUR DREAM HOME BUT QUICKLY REALISE TURNING IT INTO REALITY REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST KNOWING THE PRICE AND LOCATION. YOU NEED REPORTS, CERTIFICATES, GUARANTEES, KNOWLEDGE OF NEARBY SCHOOLS AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. WITHOUT THE RIGHT INFORMATION, YOU RISK ENDING UP WITH A HOUSE FULL OF PROBLEMS - OR NEIGHBOURS THAT MAKE YOU WANT TO MOVE AGAIN. AND WHEN IT GOES WRONG, IT'S COSTLY.

Now, let's apply that to business, specifically, responding to a first-generation opportunity with a client you've pursued for 18 months. You've built strong relationships and understand their strategy. But the RFP is handed off to procurement, and suddenly, the detail disappears. You're expected to make a robust bid/no bid decision and submit a comprehensive response without the detail and other data needed.

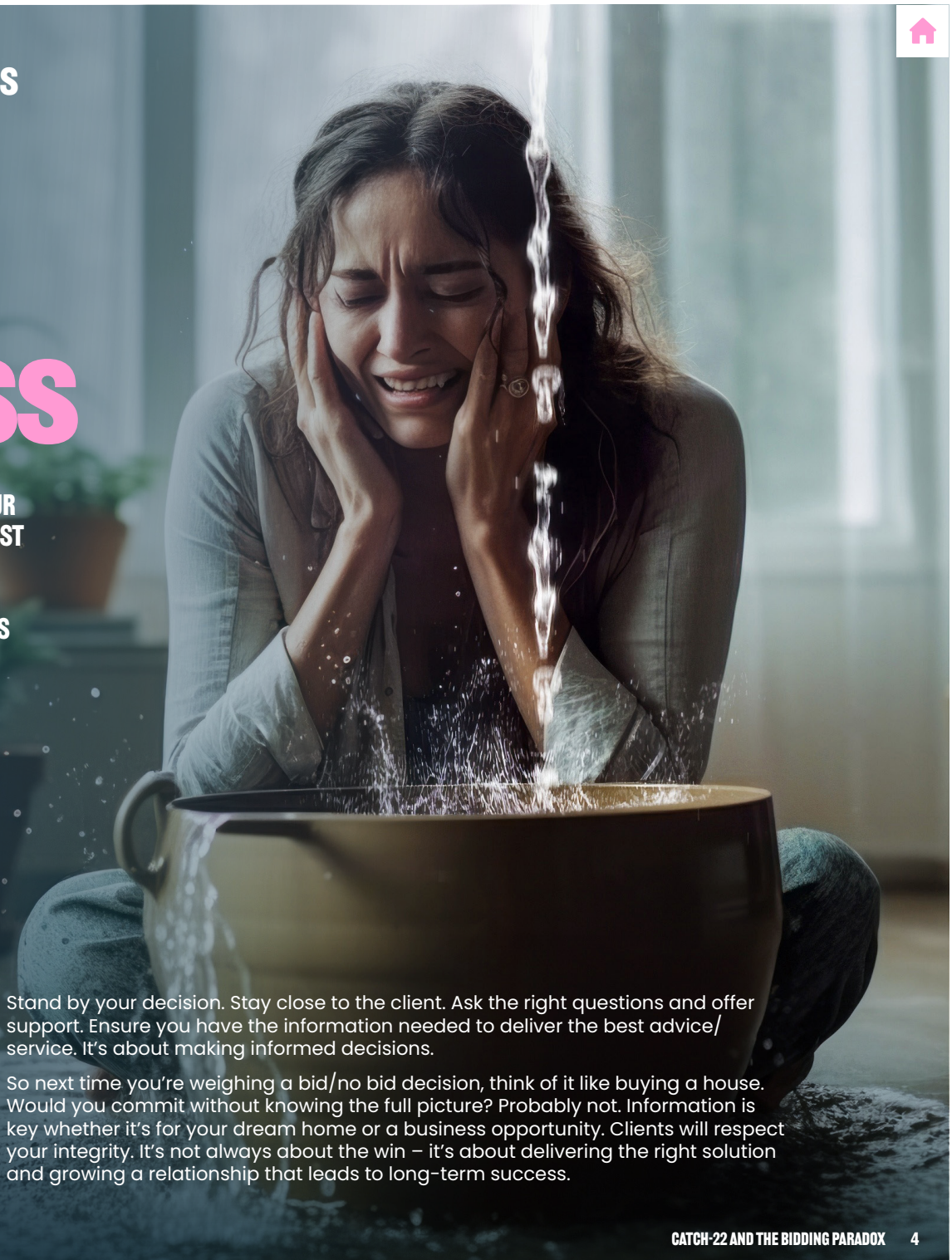
This is a classic Catch-22. The process meant to ensure a thorough evaluation ends up undermining it. Like buying a house without knowing if the roof is about to cave in, you're being asked to commit without the facts. Some suppliers push ahead, driven by the costs and the time invested in the relationship. But without the right information, how can you offer the right solution?

Procurement expects detailed responses but often withholds the very details needed to deliver them. It sets everyone up to fail. Worse, it risks damaging the relationship you've worked so hard to build. The opportunity may require more resources than expected, and costs can spiral.

Sometimes, the best decision is to say, "No Bid". Be honest with the client and often they will challenge procurement. I've seen suppliers win under these conditions, only for the client to return six months later disappointed, out of pocket, and with an unhappy workforce. It's a "told you so" moment.

Stand by your decision. Stay close to the client. Ask the right questions and offer support. Ensure you have the information needed to deliver the best advice/service. It's about making informed decisions.

So next time you're weighing a bid/no bid decision, think of it like buying a house. Would you commit without knowing the full picture? Probably not. Information is key whether it's for your dream home or a business opportunity. Clients will respect your integrity. It's not always about the win – it's about delivering the right solution and growing a relationship that leads to long-term success.



WHEN GOVERNANCE GOES TOO FAR: REBALANCING PROCESS AND PURPOSE

“WE SPENT 90% OF OUR TIME ON INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ONLY 10% ON THE ACTUAL BID.”

That was the stark reality for one bid team in a heavy-duty engineering firm operating in a highly regulated environment. And while this may sound extreme, it's a scenario that's all too familiar.

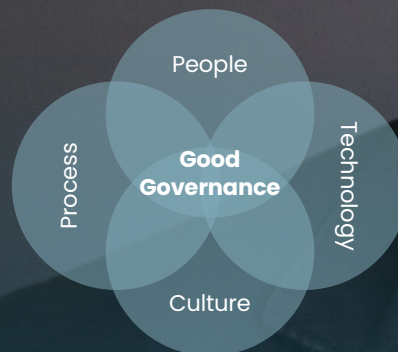
Governance is essential. But when it becomes the dominant force in a bid process – layer upon layer of reviews, sign-offs, and compliance checks – it can smother the very creativity and customer focus that wins work. The customer doesn't care how many internal hoops you've jumped through. They care about how well you understand their needs, how clearly you've articulated your solution, and why they should pick you over the competition.

Often, governance evolves reactively. A problem arises, and the fix is to add another step. Over time, these fixes accumulate into a bloated process. The root cause – whether it's a skills gap, unclear roles, or poor tools – is rarely addressed. Instead of thinking holistically about people, process, and technology, organisations default to adding more to the process.

So, what does good governance look like?

It's a framework that supports, not stifles. It ensures quality without becoming a bottleneck. It's built on trust, not just control. And it's designed to help teams develop the solution, price, and story in parallel – through well-planned gates and collaborative reviews that add value, not delay. The enablers of good governance are:

- **People:** Cross-functional team involvement from the start
- **Process:** Scalable, phase-based structure with clear milestones
- **Technology:** Tools like compliance checklists, proposal timelines, and responsibility matrices
- **Culture:** Early engagement, continuous feedback, and shared ownership



So, think about your process and ask yourselves these questions:

- **Is your approval process streamlined? Or does it cause headaches?**
- **Are the roles and responsibilities crystal clear to all involved?**
- **Does everyone know why we're doing this and what for?**
- **Are you missing a trick to use technology to automate repetitive tasks?**

GRAHAM ABLETT

GOVERNANCE

“GOVERNANCE IS ESSENTIAL. BUT WHEN IT BECOMES THE DOMINANT FORCE IN A BID PROCESS - LAYER UPON LAYER OF REVIEWS, SIGN-OFFS, AND COMPLIANCE CHECKS - IT CAN SMOTHER THE VERY CREATIVITY AND CUSTOMER FOCUS THAT WINS WORK.”

Take a step back and consider all the above. Often a sprinkle of understanding, collaboration, coaching and training is all that's needed to make a big difference.

Think how much better your bids would be if you could divert some internal effort time on to persuading the customer to pick you.

PROCESS OVER PROGRESS

CHRISTINA
CARTER

BID TEAMS LOVE PROCESS. WE LIKE TO THINK OF PROCESS AS OUR SAFETY NET: CHECKLISTS, REVIEWS, COLOUR TEAMS, COMPLIANCE MATRICES. WE BUILT THESE SYSTEMS TO HELP US WIN, RIGHT?

Most proposal processes were built to survive corporate politics, not to win deals. And today, those beloved workflows are dragging us backwards.

We're seeing our world change quickly, and our processes need to change with it.

You're now operating in a world where:

- Response timelines are far shorter
- Buyers expect personalisation
- AI can draft most of the response in seconds

Yet most proposal teams are still working like it's 2021, kicking off with 30-slide decks, chasing SMEs across Slack, running content through four colour reviews "just in case", and manually updating a knowledge base that nobody trusts.

The process we built to win is now the reason we lose. It's part of the reason burnout is baked into our profession and we're seen as a cost centre. Our processes are fundamentally based on the belief that humans have to touch everything.

They don't.

Let me be blunt: if your process starts with "assigning questions" and ends with "finalising formatting," you've already lost. You've designed your workflow around human bottlenecks in a world where AI *is fundamentally doing much of*

this work better than we are.

So no, this isn't about "optimising" – it's about replacing the entire operating system.

Here's what that looks like:

- **Kill waterfall timelines.** Build agile pods that can adapt as new info arrives.
- **Stop chasing SMEs.** Let AI generate first drafts and give SMEs structured prompts to react to, not blank boxes.
- **End the review theatre.** Reviews should fix logic, tone, and risk, not approve font size or rewrite AI's grammar.
- **Forget tagging KBs.** Use retrieval-augmented generation to surface answers in context.
- **Redefine quality.** It's not about polish or internal consensus, it's about clarity, speed, heavy personalisation, and buyer relevance.

The proposal process we inherited was built for control. The one we need now must be built for **trust, adaptability, and AI-first execution.**

It's not enough to "add AI to your process." You need to burn the old one down and rebuild it around what AI can now do in seconds. Because what got us here won't win what's next.

“

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO "ADD AI TO YOUR PROCESS." YOU NEED TO BURN THE OLD ONE DOWN AND REBUILD IT AROUND WHAT AI CAN NOW DO IN SECONDS. BECAUSE WHAT GOT US HERE WON'T WIN WHAT'S NEXT.

”

THE COMPLIANCE TRAP – AND HOW TO ESCAPE IT

CHRIS KÄLIN

WHEN WE'RE PUTTING TOGETHER A BID, WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES IN A FAMILIAR DILEMMA: WE NEED TO BE 100% COMPLIANT, OTHERWISE WE RISK BEING EXCLUDED RIGHT FROM THE START. IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT THE PHRASE "COMPLIANCE IS KING" HAS CAUGHT ON. IN THE RFP, THE CUSTOMER SETS OUT THEIR REQUIREMENTS, AND IT'S UP TO US TO SHOW HOW WE MEET THEM, USUALLY BY OUTLINING THE FEATURES THAT TICK ALL THEIR BOXES.

The trouble is this often leads to bid documents that are pretty dull. All bids start to look the same. But here's the catch: in order to win, we need to stand out. Yet strict compliance often leaves little room for differentiation. It's a balancing act. The reality is that many bidders play it safe, sticking rigidly to the questions, typically describing their solution using massive amounts of technical terms and TLAs (three letter acronyms). The outcome? Predictably homogeneous proposals, where the only real point of distinction becomes – yes, you've guessed it – the price.

Some bid writers are aware of this issue, so they try to jazz up their responses with a bit of marketing twaddle like *"we're the leading provider of..."* or *"our state-of-the-art solution..."* and *"we have a long track record in..."* (sounds familiar?). But more often than not, that only makes things worse. Useless corporate language. Urgh!

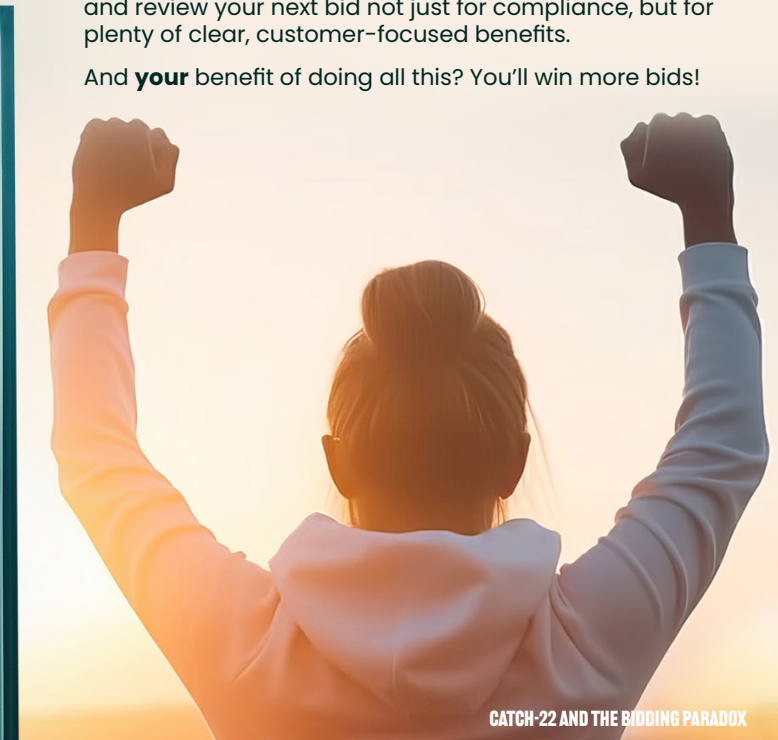
From a writing perspective, the key to making a document genuinely appealing is to complement features with benefits. Remember, benefits are the outcomes that happen on the client's side, what they actually stand to gain. Think along the lines of: *"you'll save up to 23% in maintenance costs"*, *"helping you expand your presence in the Scandinavian market"*, or *"...reducing your workload by around 25%"*. Notice the use of the word *"you"*? That's no accident.

However great your track record or your cutting-edge software is, these are all show-off features, not benefits.

Unsurprisingly, most of us find it easier to talk about our own products or strengths. It's what we know best, and

it feels safe. It's our comfort zone. But here's the thing: to really connect, we need to step out of our comfort zone and into the customer's. That's where the real impact happens. So, give yourself that little push, get some support from your sales colleague (yes, they're the expert when it comes to the customer's comfort zone!), and review your next bid not just for compliance, but for plenty of clear, customer-focused benefits.

And **your** benefit of doing all this? You'll win more bids!



THE PROCESS OF A RATIONAL MIND

ALANA MCCARTHY

“THERE WAS ONLY ONE CATCH AND THAT WAS CATCH-22, WHICH SPECIFIED THAT A CONCERN FOR ONE’S OWN SAFETY IN THE FACE OF DANGERS THAT WERE REAL AND IMMEDIATE WAS THE PROCESS OF A RATIONAL MIND.”

In Joseph Heller’s novel, *Catch-22*, wartime fighter pilots were deemed fit to fly whether they acted rationally or irrationally when facing almost certain death. They were damned if they did, damned if they didn’t.

The theme of *Catch-22*, and being punished for rational thinking, got me musing over price and quality evaluation in public sector procurement. We’re familiar with the shift from Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) to Most Advantageous Tender (MAT). Hurrah! Our rational mind tells us that choosing a balance between quality and price will generate value for money. But will this subtle shift discourage a ‘race to the bottom’ in public sector procurement? If it does, it will be pretty revolutionary.

I had a look at the last 30 pre-February 2025 public sector tenders. 25 of these bids (83%) had a quality weighting of 50% or more. But the lowest price won 60% of the time. Six of the tenders had a quality weighting of 70% or more, and five of these were still awarded to the lowest priced bid. And the price variance wasn’t huge in most cases.

Because of the pressure contracting authorities are under, they understandably often default to measuring value in price terms. We get it. It’s hard to justify not choosing the lowest price when your performance indicators are all about saving money. But, paradoxically, the approach often doesn’t serve anyone (most of all the ones making the rules).

Here are three Catch-22-busting (possibly rational) thoughts on the subject.

1. If you price tenders for long-term sustainable value for money, be explicit about what you’re offering beyond the specification. What will you do that your lower-priced competitors won’t? Demonstrate where you’ve achieved additional benefits, and long-term cost savings, for other clients.
2. If the public sector is serious about getting value for money, maybe a more rational approach to tender evaluation is needed. Encourage clients and consultants to add site visits, live scenario planning, or interviews with the delivery team to ‘add weight’ to the quality evaluation. If the buyer has a market-tested fixed budget, there is potentially an option for the tender to be evaluated on quality alone. And when you can’t see how the lowest price can possibly deliver the specification sustainably? Ask for more transparency around the sense-checking of abnormally low pricing.
3. Keep data on your quality and price scoring. Feed it into your opportunity evaluation process. Only tender for clients who consistently value quality over a race to the bottom.



BALANCING HEAD AND HEART IN THE PROPOSAL PROFESSION

IN OUR EVER-EVOLVING PROFESSION, A CURIOUS PARADOX HAS EMERGED. SEASONED PROPOSAL PROFESSIONALS, LED BY LOGIC, DATA, AND A DRIVE TO ELEVATE OUR STANDING, ARE FOCUSED ON STRATEGIC GROWTH AND C-SUITE INFLUENCE. MEANWHILE, NEWCOMERS TO THE PROFESSION SEEK CONNECTION, RECOGNITION, AND PURPOSE AS THEY NAVIGATE THE EARLY STAGES OF THEIR JOURNEY. BALANCING THE NATURAL TENSION OF HEAD'S VISION WITH HEART'S PASSION IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUSTAINING A THRIVING AND FUTURE-READY PROFESSION.



NIGEL DENNIS



FUTURE-READY PROFESSION

THE STRATEGIC DRIVE OF HEAD

The Head represents those who have long-served the profession. They speak the language of business cases, win strategies, and executive influence. Their focus is on maturity: refining tools, measuring performance, embedding proposal teams earlier in the sales lifecycle, and elevating the function as a business-critical discipline.

They push for systems and processes that show tangible value, whether through automation, improved metrics, or direct revenue impact. The goal of Head is influence and recognition, to move the profession from support to strategy, and elevate conversations from compliance to contribution.

THE EMOTIONAL PULL OF HEART

In contrast, the "Heart" belongs to those new to bidding. Often entering the field by chance, they bring energy, openness, and an eagerness to contribute. But they also

want to feel valued and be supported. As such they need onboarding, mentorship, and moments of connection to help turn a job into a career.

It may take Heart time to truly fall in love with the profession, but a sense of belonging drives retention. Recognition, encouragement, and meaningful inclusion are just as vital as tools and templates. Without Heart, the profession risks becoming efficient but empty.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

The challenge, and opportunity, is to bring these perspectives together. The profession cannot grow through logic alone, nor thrive on passion without direction.

Leaders play a crucial role by advocating upwards while nurturing those coming in. It means listening deeply to both the frustrations and aspirations across levels of experience. We must build layered growth within our teams: foundational training and recognition for early-

career professionals, alongside leadership development and strategic advocacy for those ready to step up.

Our profession deserves strategic investment through professional development, building communities of practice, and creating clear pathways for growth. That investment case is much stronger when we're developing talent, and building a pipeline of skilled, committed professionals.

A UNITED FUTURE

We must create a culture where both Head and Heart are valued. Celebrate innovation and impact, but also praise curiosity, care, and contribution. Let the experienced lead with vision, while empowering the emerging to lead with enthusiasm. Innovation and inclusion aren't opposites.

Because in proposals, as in life, sustainable progress is made when the experience of Head and the energy of Heart walk forward together.



REBECCA LINK

WORKING THROUGH THE PARADOX: SERVING THE GREATER GOOD IN HARD TIMES

THERE'S A QUIET MORAL TENSION HANGING OVER MUCH OF THE FEDERAL CONTRACTING COMMUNITY THESE DAYS - A SORT OF COLLECTIVE SOUL-SEARCHING WE DON'T ALWAYS NAME OUT LOUD.

Many of us are caught in a Catch-22: we dedicate our careers to supporting federal programs that improve lives, strengthen national security, and serve communities. Yet, under the current administration, some of those same institutions feel misaligned with the values we hold dear. There's a sense that by continuing to work in this space, we're complicit (or at least complicit-adjacent) in policies or rhetoric that may undermine equity, justice, or truth.

The paradox is painful. We question whether we're compromising our principles for a paycheck. We whisper about feeling like we're selling our souls just to keep the lights on. And still, we show up. We staff the programs. We write the proposals. We deliver the services.

Because here's the truth: behind every contract is a mission. Behind every mission are people – military families, underserved communities, public servants, veterans, students, scientists – depending

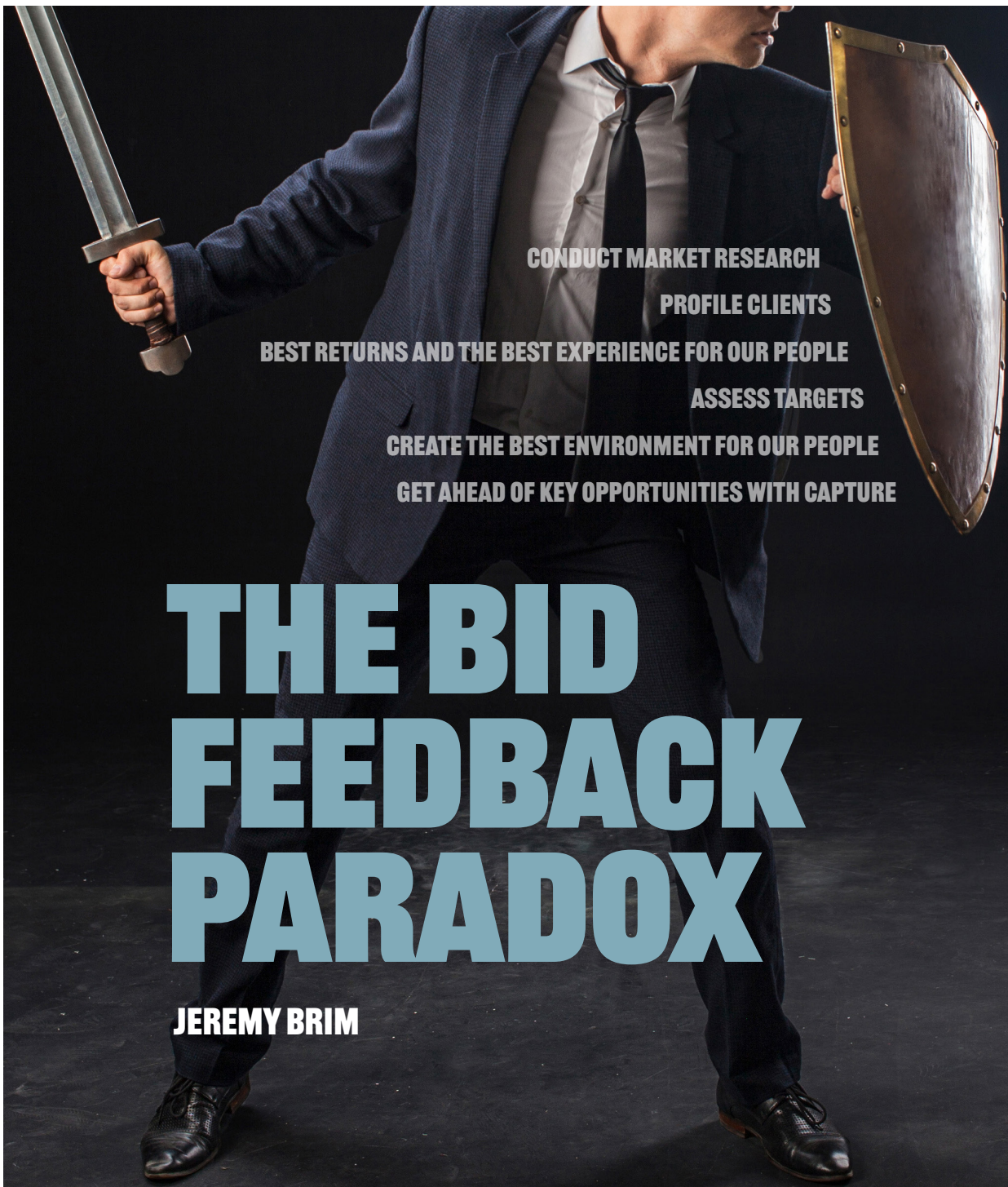
on the systems we help build and sustain. We're not serving a party. We're serving a nation.

The machinery of government may sometimes feel broken, but the purpose behind it is not. It's in the resilience of a public health program. In the innovation behind a new defense capability. In the reach of a grant-funded nonprofit working in forgotten corners of the country.

Yes, it can feel dark right now. Cynicism comes easy. But purpose still exists in this work if we remember who we're really doing it for.

We don't have to agree with every decision from the top to continue making a difference where we can. If anything it's in these moments, when the headlines feel most discouraging, that we're needed most.

So, we navigate the paradox. We hold on to our integrity. And we keep going. Not in spite of our values but because of them.



CONDUCT MARKET RESEARCH

PROFILE CLIENTS

BEST RETURNS AND THE BEST EXPERIENCE FOR OUR PEOPLE

ASSESS TARGETS

CREATE THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE

GET AHEAD OF KEY OPPORTUNITIES WITH CAPTURE

THE BID FEEDBACK PARADOX

JEREMY BRIM

WE BIDDING PROFESSIONALS TEND TO EASILY SPIRAL TOWARDS THE NEGATIVE AND FEEL THE WORLD IS AGAINST US, WITH SMES LETTING US DOWN AND CLIENTS ASKING TOO MUCH OF US IN TOO LITTLE TIME. I'M TRYING MY BEST OF LATE TO BE POSITIVE, SO LET'S SEE IF WE CAN LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS IN WHAT COMES NEXT.

It's not unusual for me to end up in some tussles on LinkedIn with others in our discipline or those on the other side in procurement. I feel it important to stand up for our discipline, and particularly our early careers people. One in particular this year really irked me.

I had an interaction with a procurement lawyer whose post stated they specifically guide their public sector clients to give as little feedback on tenders as possible. As a taxpayer, I was appalled. They also later guided their clients to group together procurement notices under the new Procurement Act rather than breaking them out per opportunity. Just poor.

Most of us in the work winning game actually really care about delivering outcomes for clients and their communities. We can see the tremendous value our organisations can deliver if given the right environment. We need to continually improve to drive greater value for stakeholders – with feedback on bids being a key building block.

In my response to the lawyer's post, I mentioned that I guide my clients to deselect contracting authorities who do not provide decent feedback. If they can't be bothered to help us improve – what are they going to be like to work with?

Around 80% of a company's margins come from just 20% of their clients. These tend to be clients who engage early, collaborate constructively and provide an environment where maximum value can be delivered. We are simply asking for a share of that value in return. Contracts awarded solely on price in a cold competitive tender with standoff-ish clients can result in less favourable outcomes for both sides. Client behaviours and maturity in engagement and procurement are a key factor in overall success.

So, what can we do? We can conduct market research to understand where the opportunities will be and profile the clients in those spaces who provide the best journey to delivering value. We can look at our client portfolio and identify where we get the best returns and the best experience for our people. We can review previous procurements to assess who we should be targeting to deliver at our best and where we can create the best environment for our people. Then we can get ahead of key opportunities with capture to guide clients on how to approach good procurement for the best outcomes for all.

A THOUSAND SPLENDID

HOLGER GARDEN

IN BQ19 I REFERRED TO THE BID LIFECYCLE AS A VALUE CHAIN, USING THE METAPHOR OF THE CHAIN PULLED TIGHT SO EACH LINK (PROCESS STEP) WORKS TO FULL POTENTIAL. HEALTHY TENSION ALIGNS PROCESS STEPS WITH THE TEAM GOAL, GENERATING MAXIMUM VALUE.

But value is eroded by process activities mismatched with their intentions. Consider response reviews and feedback: i) internal in process steps, and ii) external from the procuring client.

Their purpose is to:

- i. **Internal:** Assess proposals for responsiveness and compliance to maximise scores. Internal assessment is essential for the proposal's continuous improvement.
- ii. **External:** Explain which areas would have benefited from more detail or didn't provide confidence; acknowledge where responses did provide high confidence.

INTERNAL FEEDBACK CONSISTENT WITH ITS INTENTION OF IMPROVEMENT

If review remarks aren't meaningful, they don't maximise value because the feedback and its intention are mismatched. Examples are: "Rewrite", "No", and "What about...?" They're not specific and actionable, and little more useful than no feedback. 'Secondary handling' is needed to establish what the reviewer meant. Always ensure your reviewers, including the AI ones, are well briefed on question requirements, assessment criteria, expectations for feedback, why it's needed, and how it will be used.

EXTERNAL FEEDBACK TO KEEP CHALLENGING THE MARKET

Procuring clients are more likely to receive strong submissions when bid requirements are clear and

when feedback to bidders supports their continuous improvement journeys. There must be consistency between the drive for ever-rising standards and the usefulness of feedback, including for winning submissions. While detailed feedback is usually discretionary, even high-level remarks can help inform improvement areas ahead of bidder decisions and strategy development for future submissions to the same client.

Remarks could be about areas for which more detail would have helped. Inconsistency here occurs when, for example, response size restrictions aren't aligned with the number of topics to be addressed and won't be increased through tender queries. This scenario prevents highly detailed answers, so planning focus areas (based



NONES



on capture intelligence and bid strategy) becomes even more important. I recall a question asking for a detailed delivery methodology, including 11 significant and fundamental topics, to be provided on one page of A4 with large margins, font and line spacing. We innovated in how to present the response, which scored high marks. The client's feedback suggested areas for more detail, which was frustrating and useful in equal measure.

THINK OF THE READER

We gain most from the feedback stages of the bid lifecycle when remarks are meaningful, clear, and actionable, supporting us to take bids and bidding to the next level.

NIGEL THACKER

THAT DECISION MAKES NO SENSE!

WE OFTEN COMPLAIN AND GET FRUSTRATED ABOUT 'NONSENSICAL' BID/NO-BID DECISIONS. THE ONES THAT MEAN WE SPEND SIGNIFICANT TIME AND EFFORT BIDDING FOR OPPORTUNITIES WE'RE UNLIKELY TO WIN AND LESS ON THOSE WE SHOULD. I'VE COMPLAINED MYSELF IN THE PAST. OFTEN. LOUDLY. OCCASIONALLY SUCCESSFULLY.

But recently, I've started to look at things differently.

The bid/no-bid is important, but it's just one of hundreds of decisions made during a bid. From strategy and storyboarding decisions to writing (or editing the AI's draft of) a single sentence, every part of a bid exists because someone decided it should be done – and done that way.

You could argue a submitted bid is simply the outcome of all the decisions made throughout its creation.

If you look at your bids from that perspective, could improving even a small percentage of those decisions lead to better, smoother bids – and more wins? What if, instead of focusing on actions and outputs, we paid more attention to the decisions that drive them?

Think about all the decisions being made during your bid, and ask yourself:

- Are the right people making the right decisions?
- Is it clear who owns each decision?
- Do they have the right information, skills, and authority to make a 'good' decision?
- Are they making decisions at the right time during (or before) the bid?

- Do they have a framework or process for making good decisions?
- Do they feel empowered, and psychologically safe to make, and act, on their decision?
- Where are the decision-making bottlenecks, or gaps where no one is really deciding at all?

We're used to analysing customer decision-making units – identifying decision makers, gatekeepers, and influencers. We map their decision-making processes and develop strategies to shape their choices.

But how often do we apply that same rigour to our own organisations?

Try conducting a 'Decision Audit' on your latest bid. Map out who made which decisions, when, how and why. I bet you'll spot several opportunities to improve how decisions are made.

You might discover ways to empower your team to make better decisions more confidently (or ways to delegate more decisions to them); identify the decisions you need to focus on (and those you don't); see more clearly how you can influence the bigger decisions (like the bid /no bid decision) more effectively.

Ultimately, by improving the **decision architecture** your bids are built on, you'll improve the quality and effectiveness of the bids themselves.

So now, when I hear a bid/no-bid decision that seems to make no sense, I don't shout (honest). I ask who made the decision, how, and why? And how can I help make a better one next time?

INFORMATION
THE RIGHT
PEOPLE
FRAMEWORKS
PROCESS
DECISIONS
SKILLS
AUTHORITY
TIMING

NO BID

SO WRONG, IT'S RIGHT

CHARLOTTE REES

IT'S CONFESSION TIME. HAVE YOU EVER FELT THE RULES IN BIDDING ARE DESIGNED TO BE BOTH MANDATORY AND IMPOSSIBLE? WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF CATCH-22, WHERE SOMETIMES THE ONLY WAY TO WIN IS TO PLAY THE GAME OF "SO WRONG, IT'S RIGHT"!

I can't take full credit, as I invited some fantastic bid, pursuit and BD experts to share their confessions. Some may be a little ethically ambiguous, but all are tried, tested, and when used carefully, surprisingly effective.

CONFESSIONS:

"I may have 'tweaked' the deadline a few times."

Providing fake deadlines: Let's be honest, dealing with missed deadlines is almost always a factor in bid management. By building in a little contingency with an alternative deadline here and there, you can be ready when key milestones are missed – ultimately keeping your bid plan on track.

"Oh, I thought you were on the distribution list."

Forwarding to someone you "shouldn't":

Navigating internal politics can be a minefield. When a key stakeholder is "accidentally" left out, sometimes it's best to send them the draft anyway, feigning ignorance. It keeps the peace and ensures the right voices are heard, without getting caught in the crossfire.

"Did you know another team is..."

Leveraging competing teams to get yourself

heard: Humans are naturally competitive, so if they think someone else is doing a better job than them, they can't help but be intrigued. By suggesting

another person or team is already implementing your idea, you'll see their interest piqued.

"I once saw someone slip a celebrity headshot into a slide!"

Intentional 'wildcards' in a draft: A common way to test whether a document has actually been read is by placing a small, deliberate 'error'. This reveals whether your key stakeholder is invested, giving you an opportunity to escalate, prepare for last-minute comments, or find another reviewer.

"I like your thinking; what if we develop this further..."

Let them think it's their idea: Sometimes, the only way to get buy-in is to let others believe they came up with your idea. Rather than disagreeing, a gentle nudge or a well-placed pivot can do the trick. This natural redirection prevents egos from being bruised, and ensures teams are fully on board with your approach.

"I'm assuming you no longer need my help"

Lightly suggesting you won't be helping anymore

to elicit a reply: There's nothing quite like the sound of silence. This is a go-to for dealing with a stakeholder who's gone radio silent. It's a polite, non-confrontational way to encourage a response, and it subtly puts the ball back in their court.



“

**SOMETIMES THE ONLY WAY TO
WIN IS TO PLAY THE GAME OF
"SO WRONG, IT'S RIGHT"!**

”

IT'S 1-0 FOR BUREAUCRACY

RITA MASCIA

BIDDING FOR GOVERNMENT WORK IS LIKE WALKING A TIGHTROPE WITH PROCUREMENT OFFICERS BELOW, JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO FALL. THE RULES APPEAR RIGID BUT BECOME AMBIGUOUS WHEN YOU SEEK CLARIFICATION. AFTER 25 YEARS IN PROPOSALS, HERE ARE THE PARADOXES I'VE ENCOUNTERED REPEATEDLY:

1. THE INNOVATION PARADOX

We're told innovation is essential. But only if it fits inside a dated template, adheres to existing service models, and stays within a budget that hasn't been updated since 2014. If you offer something truly new, you risk being marked "non-compliant." Colouring outside the lines? Beware.

2. THE EXPERIENCE CONUNDRUM

To win, you must show you've done it before – preferably for another public body. But how do you break in if experience is the entry ticket? This Catch-22 locked out many SMEs for years. The Procurement Act 2023 has eased some barriers (insurance levels pre-contract come to mind), but the experience conundrum was a significant challenge that prevented many first-time bidders from tendering.

3. THE CLARIFICATION BLACK HOLE

You read the RFP instructions. Section 4 says UK-based staff; Section 7 encourages overseas delivery. You seek clarity. Two weeks later, the reply: "Please refer to the original documents." Translation: "Good luck trying to sort out this mess – you're on your own."

4. DEATH BY PORTAL

You hit "Submit" with an hour to go. Then the portal crashes. Yes, you could've sent the response earlier, but you were waiting on last-minute approvals from the legal department. The Portal Helpdesk says, "Try again later." You do. It's still down. The deadline passes. The next day, you receive the dreaded email: "Late submissions cannot be accepted." Bureaucracy: 1. You: 0.

5. THE SUSTAINABILITY HYPOCRISY

The tender proudly states its commitment to carbon neutrality and green procurement. There is even a 10% weighting for environmental credentials, but it demands five printed, double-sided, bound copies to be delivered by courier before the digital deadline. Nothing says "eco" like trucking 500 pages of recycled hypocrisy across the country.

SUMMARY

These contradictions are all too familiar to those in the field. After too many hours spent wrangling portals, deciphering RFPs, and chasing ghostly clarifications, I'm still (mostly) optimistic. But until procurement stops chasing unicorns, we'll keep tightrope-walking between rulebooks and reality with no safety net.



UNTIL PROCUREMENT STOPS CHASING UNICORNS, WE'LL KEEP TIGHTROPE-WALKING BETWEEN RULEBOOKS AND REALITY WITH NO SAFETY NET.





SARAH HINCHLIFFE

WHY, THANK YOU, KIND CUSTOMER!

LET'S START FROM THE PREMISE THAT BUYERS WANT TO BUY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THAT WILL MEET THEIR NEEDS AND GIVE THEM THEIR DESIRED RETURN ON INVESTMENT. LET'S ADD THE PREMISE THAT SUPPLIERS ARE KEEN TO DELIVER SAID PRODUCTS AND SERVICES WITH THE SAME AIM. A PERFECT MATCH - WE ALL ENTER THE TENDERING PROCESS ON THE SAME PAGE. WHY, OH WHY, DO BUYERS THEN SOMETIMES APPEAR TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO PREVENT A PERFECT MATCH?

Imagine you are reading a tender document and are genuinely foxed by a question. Maybe it's unclear, ambiguous, contradictory, incomplete or just downright unintelligible. You decide to use the clarification question process to unravel things. Surely it's to everyone's benefit to clear things up?

So you ask away. "Please clarify..." And the response is "Suppliers should answer the question as posed."

Why, thank you, kind customer, for clearing that up for us (not).

I'm sure this has happened to you. It's certainly happened to me. But what can we learn from this Catch-22 situation?

It's essential to start bid planning early, before the clarification window closes. And bid planning includes deconstructing every question and checking that the entire team understands each part and the whole. If there's any doubt, ask.

If you get the obtuse response noted above, you have time (if you are inclined) to ask again in a different way – consider being more specific about the problem with the question, point out the consequences of leaving it as is.

And what if the answer is still the same? Probably best not to go back a third time. Instead, live with the risk of misinterpretation and mitigate that risk by using your best judgment. One tip is to include a definition of any ambiguous terms in your response.

A recent example involved a buyer who used the term "service delivery" twice in a two-part question, but with what we felt were different meanings. The buyer provided an obtuse response, so we included a definition in each part of the answer to explain our interpretation.

There's no doubt that if you don't give due care, attention and time to checking your understanding of the questions, you risk re-work. I became stricter about this validation step after several instances of late disagreement about question meanings. Now, no one starts writing until everyone involved agrees. My content plans include deconstructing questions, providing definitions, and offering a clear, plain English description of what each question is asking. The Catch-22 clarification conundrum hasn't gone away but I'm much savvier about its management and mitigation.

THE RFP DROPPED. NOW WE PANIC - STRATEGICALLY.

CERI MESCALL

R F P

CAPTURE IS WIDELY SEEN AS ESSENTIAL - BUT RARELY RESOURCED WELL. IT'S NOT ABOUT NEGLECT OR LACK OF INTENT. IT'S THAT TIMELINES TIGHTEN, PRIORITIES COMPETE, AND JUST LIKE THAT, THE RFP ARRIVES BEFORE WE'VE HAD TIME TO TRULY PREPARE.

If you've ever sprinted from "we might bid" to "first draft due" in a matter of days, you've felt the paradox. Strategic intent meets operational reality - and the result is often a reactive bid that ticks the boxes but doesn't quite stand out.

WE SAY "STRATEGIC" - BUT ACT "LAST MINUTE"

Strategy often begins at the kick-off workshop. But by then, the opportunity to influence has started to close. Teams are pulled in late, SMEs are stretched, and we rely on what's available - patchy CRM notes,

informal chats, gut feel. Everyone wants to do the right thing - but time rarely allows us to do it right.

The RFP becomes the starting line - when it should be the final leg of a thoughtful pursuit.

PROPOSALS ECHO THE RFP, NOT THE CLIENT

Without early insight, proposals naturally reflect the RFP. The language mirrors the spec. The structure follows the template. The value proposition is safe - and sounds like everyone else.

Technically compliant. But emotionally flat.

WHAT IF CAPTURE DIDN'T HAVE TO BE BIG TO BE EFFECTIVE?

The answer isn't to enforce more process. It's to make capture accessible - right-sized to the opportunity, the resources, and the runway.

Think capture with a small c - early effort that's simple, shared, and sustainable.

- **Start small:** Run a quick pursuit huddle. Use tools like LinkedIn Sales Navigator and Crystal Knows for customer insight, Klue or Crayon for competitor intel, and ChatGPT Deep Research for both. It's not about formality - it's about momentum.
- **Clarify roles early:** In many organisations, capture isn't owned by a single team. Agree upfront how sales, proposals and SMEs contribute - and where handoffs happen.
- **Build a "minimum viable capture" checklist:** One page. 10 questions. Enough to start smart. Focus on the client, competition, and your capabilities.

Strategic doesn't have to mean complex. It just has to start sooner.

“STRATEGIC DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN COMPLEX. IT JUST HAS TO START SOONER.”



WHERE LOGIC GOES TO DIE

LARISSA CORNELIUS

WELCOME TO THE BIDDING PARADOX.

WE'RE PART OF A PROFESSION BUILT ON CLARITY, PERSUASION, AND ORDER BUT OFTEN RUN ON CHAOS, LAST-MINUTE MIRACLES, AND CONTRADICTORY INSTRUCTIONS. JUDGING BY THE MEMES DOING THE ROUNDS (AND THE COMMENTS FROM MY RECENT APMP FOUNDATION V4 CLASS), WE'RE NOT IMAGINING IT.

Let's play a game. Tick off every one you've faced in the last month:

- Pricing arrives at the final hour
- Everyone expects a win, but no one shares customer or competitor intel
- A sales exec says, "It's just a copy-paste job, right?"
- A colleague had three weeks to write content... but starts 30 minutes before deadline using a dodgy AI draft

If any of the above sounds familiar, congratulations! You're officially a bidding survivor.

Here's the paradox. We're asked to deliver high-quality, strategic proposals with too little time, too few insights, and barely enough resources. We ask for early input. We get silence. We build schedules. They implode. We chase scope. It changes.

And yet, we show up. We plan, write, review, chase, rewrite, format, reformat, and submit. We do it while juggling multiple deals, short notice bids, and the occasional existential crisis.

It's exhausting. And still we care.

We care because we know what's at stake. We're not just ticking boxes. We're helping win work that creates jobs and sustains livelihoods. We fight for strategy. We advocate for the buyer. We ask the hard questions no one else wants to face.

And when it all aligns, when leadership backs us, when content sings, when the deadline is met and the win email lands – it's magic. That's the high we chase. That's why we stay.

If nothing else, you'll know you're not alone. Take comfort that you do add value.

But we can't fix what we don't call out. So let's talk about it. The late inputs. The broken processes. The volume-over-value mindset. The reactive scrambling. Let's name the paradoxes and push for better.

Proposals are not an afterthought; they are a critical part of business development and a powerful lever for growth. It's time businesses start seeing bid offices as strategic powerhouses. The companies that win more already do.





WHEN PROCUREMENT LOGIC GOES IN CIRCLES

ANDY HAIGH

HOW TO WIN CONTRACTS YOU CAN'T BID FOR WHILST LOSING BIDS YOU SHOULD WIN

Joseph Heller may have invented the term 'Catch-22' but surely he never endured the maddening reality of modern public sector tendering. If he had, his protagonist wouldn't be dodging missions; he'd be frantically trying to prove "relevant experience" for a contract that requires the very experience you can only gain after winning it.

THE EXPERIENCE PARADOX

Imagine you're reading an Invitation to Tender (ITT) that demands "a minimum of five years delivering identical services to similar organisations in comparable circumstances." The twist? This is the first ITT of its kind the client has issued. It's like being asked to provide references from past lives before you've even figured out reincarnation. So you need experience to win but need to win to get experience.

Meanwhile, the procurement team has designed the evaluation criteria so narrowly that only the incumbent could possibly qualify. Cue the surprise when only one compliant bid arrives.

THE INNOVATION CONTRADICTION

There is a cry for new, transformative solutions to revolutionise operations – but only if you can prove you've successfully delivered them elsewhere. "We want something completely new and different," they demand – with case studies as evidence. Innovation is welcome – but only if you've already delivered it.

THE COMPETITIVE TIGHTROPE

The evaluation criteria are no less baffling. Can you handle complex, high-value contracts, yet offer personal service? Do you have global reach and deep local knowledge? Can you provide cutting-edge technology with years of proven stability? Competitive pricing with premium quality?

In short, can you be Amazon and your local corner shop at the same time?

THE COMPLIANCE CONUNDRUM

None of these matter if you can't navigate the compliance minefield. Here's another Catch-22. Bids that meet every compliance rule often lack the very creativity and innovation the buyer claims to want. Follow the rules too closely and you reduce your chances of winning.

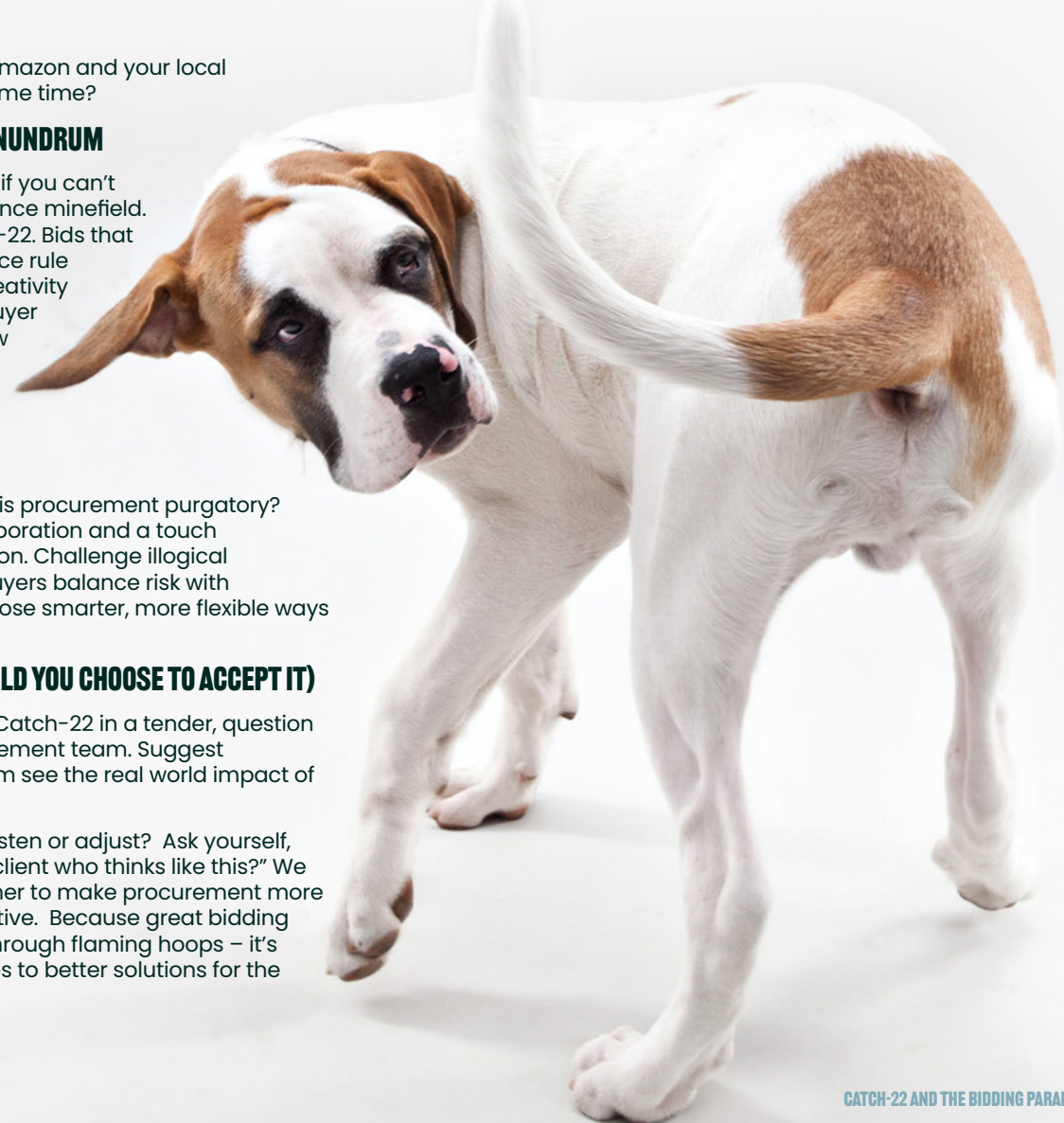
BREAKING THE CYCLE

How do we escape this procurement purgatory? With education, collaboration and a touch of professional rebellion. Challenge illogical requirements, help buyers balance risk with practicality, and propose smarter, more flexible ways to meet their needs.

YOUR MISSION (SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT)

Next time you spot a Catch-22 in a tender, question it. Contact the procurement team. Suggest alternatives. Help them see the real world impact of their requirements.

And if they refuse to listen or adjust? Ask yourself, "Do we really want a client who thinks like this?" We should all work together to make procurement more logical, fair, and effective. Because great bidding isn't about jumping through flaming hoops – it's about building bridges to better solutions for the taxpayer.



THE INVISIBLE WRITER

BY A SENIOR BID WRITER WITH 20+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND ONE VERY SHARP PENCIL

I think there are fairies at play in Bid World because fully formed responses appear on portals, packed with compelling narratives, perfectly pitched answers and miraculous CVs. And what's actually behind this curtain of apparent spontaneity and dark magic? I can guarantee it's a bid writer – half-strategist, half-translator and full-time miracle worker – typing away like a caffeinated maniac while the rest of the team cheers, "We did it!"

Except...did we?

Ask any seasoned bid writer and you'll hear versions of a story as old as time: the bid is submitted, the win is announced, and the credit floats up the chain. And the writer? They are still behind the scenes, smashing through the next submission, pleading with SMEs and rewriting technical answers that need 'fluffing up' (real words actually said to me recently). Bid writers are the invisible ink holding submissions together, and we only tend to be visible and legible under the pressure of a looming deadline.

Let's be clear, I'm not asking for parades or bunting. But for me, the bid paradox is this: bid writers are held accountable for the quality of the final submission, often with minimal input, shifting deadlines, and eleventh-hour 'suggestions' from people who've only just opened the brief. We're accountable for the win, but rarely visible in the victory.

Part of the problem is that great bid writing looks effortless. At our best, we move mountains, making complex narrative flow, and because the completed responses sing off the page, it's easy to forget the difficult and messy steps it took to get there.

This isn't a personal gripe; I believe it's a systemic issue across most sectors. From infrastructure to tech, health to housing, bid writer invisibility is echoed in every industry that bids. And it's time for a change.

SO HOW CAN BUSINESSES FIX THIS?

- **Treat bid writers as strategic partners, not glorified admin.** Invite us into the room early. Let us test and challenge the win strategy so we can shape the story with you to make maximum impact. When the writer understands the strategy, the submission performs better.
- **Build cultures where writing isn't a last-minute rescue job but a respected craft.** Great bid writers don't just fill in the blanks; they align, interrogate, translate and often make your product or service sound more coherent than it is.
- **Give credit where it's due.** A simple "This win wouldn't have happened without you" will go a long way. And yes, we will screenshot it and perhaps even post it on our noticeboards.

We know SMEs, reviewers and designers are stretched too, and this is why collaboration and great relationships matter. Everyone benefits when we all work together with a shared goal.

After two decades of decoding tenders, I can tell you: the invisible writer has been there all along – in every win, every shortlist and every compliment from a buyer who understood what you were trying to say.

It's time we stopped pretending the magic happens by itself – and it's time we said it out loud.

LEONIE THOMAS



FIXING THE UNFIXABLE (WITH AI)

MINI QUIZ TIME. WHICH OF THESE HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED?

- A. A detailed clarification question answered with "Please refer to the RFP"
- B. A 1000-character limit for a "comprehensive and technically sound" response
- C. A 10-day deadline for a "strategic procurement that will shape our organisation for the next decade"
- D. All of the above

I bet you picked D. These classics of the bidding world are no longer just war stories we share over coffee; they're now daily posts on our feeds. The rise of professional social media has made it impossible to ignore just how widespread (and absurd) these situations are.

And while it's easy to laugh (or cry) at these contradictions, they reveal a deeper truth: our profession often operates under a bizarre blend of formality and dysfunction. Some of it comes from internal processes but a big chunk originates in the procurement process itself.

Let's break this down. There are two kinds of Catch-22s we deal with.

STRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

These are the true Kafkaesque moments: conflicting instructions, broken scoring logic, or requirements that undermine the stated goals of the RFP.

ARBITRARY CONSTRAINTS

Think: 2,000-word limits for entire solution sections, impossible turnaround times, or formatting rules that prioritise uniformity over clarity.

For the first type, there's not much we can do. We should keep providing feedback, but real change depends on procurement teams embracing modern tools and practices. The good news is that it's already starting to happen. As more buyers use AI to draft RFPs, we're seeing better structure, more consistency, and fewer contradictions. That trend is promising.

But the second type, the arbitrary limitations? That's where we can take back control. Because here's the thing: AI won't stop silly deadlines or word counts from being imposed. But it will help you deal with them.



JAVIER ESCARTIN

If you've got to squeeze a brilliant answer into a tiny box or produce a winning response in days instead of weeks, AI gives you the speed and flexibility to pull it off without compromising quality. For Catch-22 situations, this is gold.

But I want to go further because the higher quality and faster proposals that AI gives you are not the real advantage. Everybody is using it (or is about to) so that's the new bar. It's what you do with the time that AI gives you that really matters.

Imagine using those freed-up hours not to wrangle layouts or cut words but to deep-dive into your client's business. To map out competitor strategies. To hold a real conversation with your SMEs. To think creatively about your solution. To run a proper red team review instead of a rushed proofread.

That's where bids are won.

THE PROPOSAL DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSAL ON HOW TO MAKE BETTER PROPOSALS

ANDERS DYRHOLM

I HAVE SEEN MY FAIR SHARE OF SQUARE-WHEELED CARTS AND HOLES BEING DUG JUST TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE DIRT FROM THE PREVIOUS HOLES. THE LEVEL OF INEFFICIENCY IN THE BIDDING WORLD IS SOMETIMES STAGGERING.

The inefficiencies can be split into two areas:

- Self-inflicted problems and time-wasting within proposal departments
- Management-induced problems and time-wasting

There are plenty of self-inflicted problems to focus on, caused by the proposal professionals themselves. There is no shortage of square wheels.

However, in my work to optimise bidding processes and organisations, the proposal professionals themselves pale in comparison to management. Most often, the square wheels are being delivered from the top.

As a client of mine once said: "In proposals, we are supposed to make money, not spend it." In many organisations, the proposal department is considered a group of people with laptops and a Wi-Fi connection – and that's it. In recent years, a subscription for ChatGPT or Copilot might be available if they are lucky.

Within proposals, there has been a tooling shortage for many years.

If a construction company needs a new piling rig for a project, it will buy or rent one. Without one, the project will come to a standstill. So they handle it.

But if the proposal department in the same construction company requires a tool to optimise their work or enhance their winning chances, the likely answer is no. In spite of the fact that the price tag amounts to just a tiny fraction of what the company spends on machinery (often spent without a second thought).

The problem runs deeper because the work they do could be done 'by hand'. You can make references and CVs from scratch for every proposal. You can run your bid/no-bid process from a spreadsheet. You can collect SME

contributions by sending e-mails and walking around the office with a stern look on your face. It is terribly inefficient – but possible.

When proposal teams approach senior management with requests to update their toolkit, they are often met with the notion that things have been working so far, so why a need to change? This is just one challenge for our profession and encapsulates the paradox that many bid and proposal professionals are facing.

On one side, they are expected to match the competition, be innovative, creative and in the end, win. On the other side, they are often considered mere office clerks who can pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

The bid and proposal departments that I see succeed are the ones with a fierce leader able to carve out a position of acknowledgement within the organisation and resources to go with it.



SHOW US WHERE YOU HAVE DONE THIS BEFORE

MICHAEL
BROWN

THE COMPANIES WE WORK FOR ARE ALWAYS AIMING TO GROW AND EXPAND OUR SERVICES INTO OTHER SECTORS. THIS STRATEGIC PIVOTING OFTEN REQUIRES TENDERING FOR SECTORS AND SERVICES WE DO NOT HAVE THE COLLATERAL, PERSONNEL OR COMPANY EXPERIENCE, TO ACHIEVE A STRONG SCORE WITH THE CLIENT.

Here are a few tips for companies and bid teams to counter these issues.

STRATEGIC HIRES

A strategic hire on a conditional offer is a great way to counter a lack of specific experience. Working together with the Talent Acquisition team, a strong candidate with specific skills and experience is a surefire way of demonstrating to the client you have what it takes to deliver the service. While finding the right person is tough, a strong CV, their agreement to a conditional offer and to attending interviews can make or break a new foray into a strategic sector.

COLLATING EXPERIENCE FROM ACROSS THE COMPANY

Even if your company may not have delivered projects in a specific sector, your personnel may well have done so. Reaching out to your people is a good way to demonstrate experience you may not have internally. You must be clear, though, that this 'experience' is from team members prior to them working at your company. The last thing you need is to have your integrity questioned!

DEMONSTRATE YOUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Representations of how your expertise is applicable to the new sector can be very effective in demonstrating your transferable skills. High tech industries are a good example of this: many of the skills gained in one tech industry are directly applicable to another.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE STRONG BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

While the above points can lend a hand to entering a new sector, there is nothing like building strong relationships with clients before the RFP comes out. As much as you try with CVs, team experience and a demonstration of transferable skills, if you have not convinced the client of your ability to do the job, you may be seen as just making up the numbers.

STAY THE COURSE AND DON'T GIVE UP!

Entering a new sector requires the efforts of senior leaders, concerted business development activities, bid teams and strong candidates. You may not get the job the first time, nor even the third or fourth but this approach pays off in the end. Stay the course and you can find your way around procurement teams' complex evaluation criteria by hitting the buttons of experience and expertise.

STRATEGIC
HIRES

EXPERIENCE

TRANSFERABLE
SKILLS

BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT

DESCRIBE IN DETAIL (JUST NOT TOO MUCH)

AS BIDDERS, WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE. THE TENDER COMES OUT AND WE FLICK TO THE RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS.

There are 20 questions.

Most of the questions ask you to:

'Describe in detail' (or other similar openings) X, Y or Z process, followed by a list of 10 bullet points, which 'should include but are not limited to.....'

You read to the end of the question and the criteria states:

Answers should not exceed 750 words'.

The question is almost as long as the space available to answer.

Your first instinct is to raise a clarification to request more space to answer the question, pointing out that this extra space will enable bidders to demonstrate the value they can provide to the client's organisation.

The buyer rejects your request, stating, "bidders have sufficient space to provide a response" and adding "answers should focus on the key aspects of the question, and bidders should refrain from including any irrelevant or generic information."

So you spend the next month trying to find creative ways to cover all components of the question rather than focusing on actually answering it and demonstrating why your company

offers the best solution for the buyer's requirements. It becomes a test on style over substance, and we resort to tactics such as using graphics and tables (where permitted!!), sketches and drawings, combining parts of the question into one section, using active headings to help partially answer the question and removing filler words.

You submit your response and the buyer then spends the next month clarifying bidders' responses due to 'lack of detail'.

You receive the outcome letter, see your quality score and realise you've lost marks – with the buyer's feedback being, "The answer failed to address all points of the question."

In my (near) 15 year procurement career, I have received many textbook-size bids full of generic marketing literature, so I empathise with a procurement team's desire to receive concise, focused bid responses. But the procurement process should be two-way, designed to set both parties up for success.

For this to happen, there needs to be more space – literally – for bidders to provide better, more solution-focused answers that address the buyer's needs. Because when great suppliers can't fit greatness onto the page, everyone loses – including the buyer, who might miss out on the best supplier for the job.

ANSWER HERE
(In no more than 750 words)

**PAUL
JOHNSTONE**

THE BID BRAIN: WHY WE CAN'T STOP SAYING YES (EVEN WHEN WE KNOW BETTER)

SAM BURNS

EVEN THE MOST EXPERIENCED SALES PROFESSIONALS FALL INTO THE SAME TRAP. WE SEE A POORLY SCOPED RFP WITH NO RELATIONSHIP AND LITTLE MARGIN. YET SOMEHOW, WE SAY YES TO RESPOND. WE FIND REASONS. WE CONVINCE OURSELVES IT COULD LEAD TO SOMETHING.



In 2023, Loopio reported that 51 percent of organisations respond to most of the RFPs they receive, even though only 16 percent have formal qualification criteria. That means many of us are saying yes not because the bid is right, but because saying no feels uncomfortable.

We don't want to damage a relationship or appear uncommitted. Saying no can feel personal, especially when internal expectations are high. It is easier to press ahead than to disappoint someone or question momentum.

Several common psychological biases are at play because, as we know, the brain is often on autopilot! **The sunk cost fallacy** makes it harder to stop once we have started. **Optimism bias** leads us to believe we will win, even when the odds are low. And when the pipeline is dry, **scarcity mindset** pushes us to chase everything.

THESE ARE ALL VERY HUMAN BEHAVIOURS. BUT THEY COST US TIME, ENERGY, AND FOCUS.

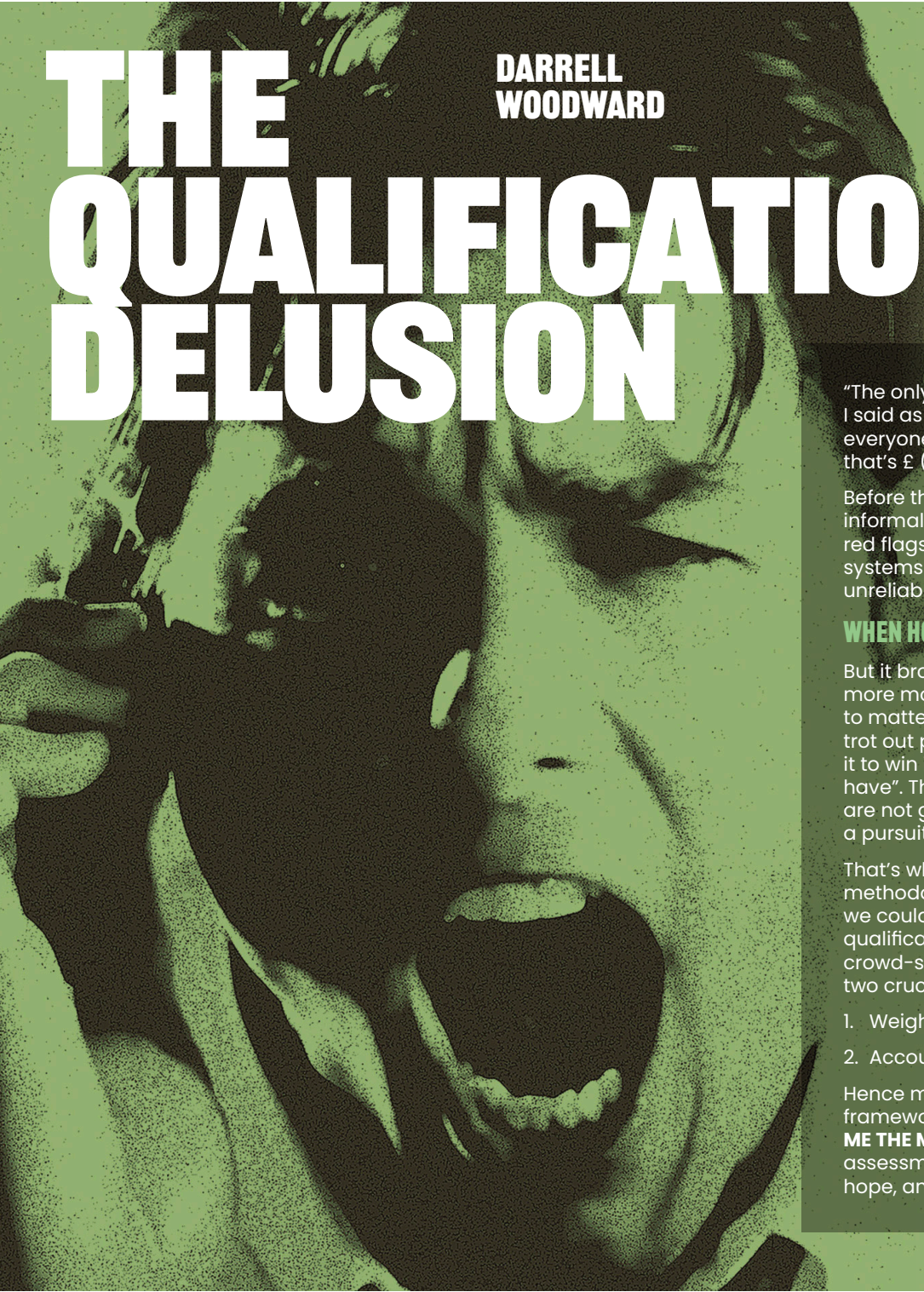
Artificial intelligence now makes it easier than ever to respond. Tools that can analyse requirements, write content, and summarise win themes in minutes lower the barrier to entry. But they also risk making poor decisions faster. If we are not careful, AI will amplify the paradox rather than solve it.

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

We need stronger qualification processes that account for both commercial fit and emotional drivers. We need to transform how we are doing this, mindful of the times we are living. Processes formed previously should be checked, amended and reviewed against AI, culture and business objectives. We need leadership to support

thoughtful no bids, not just celebrate wins. And most importantly, we need to build a culture where people feel safe to ask tough questions (this doesn't just mean saying it's safe, it means demonstrating it through example).

Saying no is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of maturity. The best bid teams do not chase every opportunity. They choose where to compete and why. Because in this work, knowing when to walk away is just as powerful as knowing how to win.



THE QUALIFICATION DELUSION

DARRELL
WOODWARD

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT A BID/NO BID PROCESS AND HOW WE REPEATEDLY BROKE IT.

BACK IN 2012, I WAS A PROPOSAL TEAM OF ONE, SITTING IN A MEETING ABOUT ADOPTING A NEW OPPORTUNITY QUALIFICATION PROCESS. I WAS A BIG FAN. IT BROUGHT STRUCTURE TO ALL SALES STAGES, NOT JUST THE BID/NO BID REVIEW. WE WERE ALL WRITING OUR IDEAS FOR OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON A WHITEBOARD.

"The only qualification we actually use is this," I said as I drew a large pound sign all over everyone else's contributions. (US readers – that's £ (UK Sterling) not #.)

Before this our system was...well, let's say informal. Sales got overexcited, I waved red flags, and sometimes they listened. As systems go it was simple, fast, and stressfully unreliable. But it worked... sort of.

WHEN HOPE IS THE STRATEGY

But it broke for high value contracts. The more money, the more the risk didn't seem to matter. Suddenly, decision makers would trot out phrases such as "you've got to be in it to win it" and "it will be a nice problem to have". These are justifications of hope. They are not good reasons to commit resources to a pursuit.

That's why I was happy to adopt a methodology (despite a mnemonic we couldn't remember!) for systematic qualification of opportunities. But, as we crowd-sourced decision criteria, we'd missed two crucial factors:

1. Weighting contract value.
2. Accounting for the cost of pursuit.

Hence my badly drawn £. Our real qualification framework was **Jerry Maguire's "SHOW ME THE MONEY!"** Our detailed opportunity assessment would always be overruled by hope, ambition, and FOMO.

MANY QUALIFICATION PROCESSES ARE BROKEN

I know I'm not alone. Many organisations have no process or one that doesn't work:

- **83%** of teams have a go/no-go process¹ but we're responding to more RFPs.
- **30%** of organisations don't have an effective qualification process.²
- **64%** say their qualification process is ineffective at helping them win.²
- **43%** say "implementing processes to better qualify opportunities" is a top priority³, suggesting they're not doing it well today.

FOCUS ON WINNABLE WORK

Bad bid decisions can be costly. Yes, we want to pursue big ticket contracts we can win but chasing the wrong opportunities wastes resources, dilutes effort, demoralises the bid team, and is a fast track to burning out people. It's also expensive to invest in projects we'll ultimately lose.

Remember: in bids, first is first and second is last. Trust your process and be the first to walk away from the wrong opportunity.

¹ 2025 RFP Response Trends & Benchmarks Report

² Active Qualification by Strategic Proposals

³ 2025 State of Strategic Response Management Report

WHY DO SMART BIDDERS KEEP SAYING YES TO STUPID TENDERS?

HOW FEAR, HABIT, AND HOPE KEEP US STUCK IN FLAWED PROCESSES.

- YOU MUST BE 100% LOCAL...AND HAVE 10 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE.
- YOU MUST COMPLY WITH CLAUSE 5.3 - WHICH DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS CLAUSE 7.4.
- YOU MUST RESPOND TO AN RFP SO VAGUE IT COULD DESCRIBE ANYTHING FROM A CHATBOT TO A PHOTOCOPIER.

We've all seen it. We've all whined about it. And we all kept bidding anyway.

Take South Africa's infamous "tall trains" saga. A R3.5 billion rail contract was awarded to a shell company with no track record and trains that were too tall for the actual tracks. The specs? Allegedly reverse-engineered to match a preferred supplier's product.

Or SANRAL, the South African National Roads Agency (the state-owned body responsible for national road infrastructure), which canned R17 billion in tenders after its own board discovered internal teams had ignored the rules. A bidder who should have been disqualified was recommended for the award. The industry erupted and then quietly scrambled to rebid under tighter deadlines with their pricing already exposed.

Eskom, South Africa's embattled state-owned power utility, cancelled a 'mission-critical' billing system RFP four months in, admitting the scope was flawed. Its nuclear tender went further off the rails: a court overturned the

award because Eskom added "strategic considerations" after the bids were in. You can't make this stuff up.

And then there's the R180 billion National Lottery licence, a bid process so politically fraught that it made headlines before the award was even announced. The contract went to a consortium with questionable technology partners and direct links to ruling party insiders. Competing bidders cried foul, citing conflicts of interest, opaque scoring, and shifting deadlines. At one point, even the High Court had to step in to block a backdoor appointment. The irony? It's a lottery – and still, it didn't feel like a fair game.

And that's merely a sample from the public sector.

As bidding professionals, we say we want better procurement, clearer scopes, cleaner processes, fewer games. But we keep twisting ourselves into knots to comply with tenders that are contradictory, broken, or blatantly unfair. Why? Because we're too scared to walk away.



So, here's the paradox: it's not just the RFP that's the problem. It's us.

We're meant to be the voice of reason in the chaos. When we choose silence over scrutiny, when we reward bad behaviour with great bids, we teach buyers that this is acceptable. That we'll absorb the inefficiency. That we'll play along no matter the cost.

It's time to lead, not just comply.

Escalate before you submit.

Decline strategically.

Push for reform internally and externally.

Because the most valuable bid you ever write might be the one you refuse to deliver.

Not all work is worth winning. And not all silence is neutral.



GEMMA WARING

PRE-MARKET ENGAGEMENT: PROGRESSIVE UNDER PA23 OR PROCUREMENT CATCH-22?

I'VE BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH CONTRACTING AUTHORITIES OVER RECENT MONTHS TO HELP THEM TURN THE REQUIREMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE PROCUREMENT ACT 2023 INTO WORKABLE PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES. ONE AREA OF FOCUS HAS BEEN PRELIMINARY MARKET ENGAGEMENT (PME). THE INTENTION IN PA23 IS CLEAR: EARLIER, MORE OPEN ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPLIERS TO SHAPE BETTER PROCUREMENT OUTCOMES AND REDUCE CONTRACTUAL ISSUES IN THE LONG RUN. ALL GOOD STUFF!

However, the reality of making that happen is a little bit more difficult to achieve than the legislation maybe banked on.

At a recent supplier roundtable I chaired, the conversation turned quickly to the elephant in the room. Suppliers are encouraged to help shape future procurements, yet many are hesitant. Why? Because while they want to influence the approach, they fear giving away intellectual property or tipping their hand too early. There's a real and understandable concern that their ideas could end up front and centre in the specification, essentially handed to competitors on a plate and removing their competitive edge. From the buyer's side, the situation isn't much easier. Most procurement teams I've spoken to are keen to

engage earlier and more meaningfully. They get it. They see the benefits and quite often they need market expertise to help them understand the product or service. But practicalities then get in the way. Teams are often stretched thin, lacking in resource to conduct meaningful 1-2-1 engagement. They are also wary of unintentionally giving one supplier an advantage, opening the door to challenges. For some, PME feels like an extra burden rather than a gateway to better outcomes.

The result? A familiar Catch-22. Suppliers hold back because they don't want to give away the family jewels. Buyers hold back because they don't have the capacity (or desire) to manage the process. Everyone agrees that better pre-engagement is needed, but no one wants to take the risk of doing it.

So, where does this leave us? The Procurement Act 2023 certainly gives us more tools and clearer permission to talk early and openly. But using those tools requires trust, time, and a willingness to accept a degree of risk on both sides.

The question I find myself asking, and one I'll leave with you, is this: will the new approach to pre-market engagement actually result in meaningful change? Or is it, for all the policy shifts and fresh terminology, still just good old-fashioned business development in a new wrapper? Is it more about showing your face than showing your hand?

“WILL THE NEW APPROACH TO PRE-MARKET ENGAGEMENT ACTUALLY RESULT IN MEANINGFUL CHANGE? OR IS IT, FOR ALL THE POLICY SHIFTS AND FRESH TERMINOLOGY, STILL JUST GOOD OLD-FASHIONED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN A NEW WRAPPER? IS IT MORE ABOUT SHOWING YOUR FACE THAN SHOWING YOUR HAND?”

DON'T LOSE ON PRICE, LEARN TO SELL THE VALUE



THAT IS THE TITLE OF A PRESENTATION THAT I GAVE AT AN APMP EVENT IN 2008. WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN? IN MY OPINION, NOT A LOT!

Buyers say they are looking for value, compliance, and innovation but generally seem to award contracts to the lowest priced bidder. So bidders are forced to promise more for less. This creates a Catch-22 type paradox of lowest price versus best value – where overpromising in bids becomes normal practice, resulting in increased risk of failure to deliver.

This is not an easy paradox to overcome. Addressing it at the time of submission is probably too late. Buyers are genuine in their requests for things like innovation, quality, and compliance. But it is difficult not to choose on price when all bidders seem to be offering the same capabilities.

Equally, when submitting a bid you are offering your best solution which is almost certainly not the cheapest; it is so tempting to think reducing your price will make your offer more attractive. But cutting the price at the last-minute makes it likely you are offering 100% of your solution for a smaller percentage of the price.

Then the worst thing happens – you win with your reduced price and are obliged to deliver what you offered. Your delivery team must try to recover your margins whilst delivering the innovative, compliant, and high-quality solution specified in the contract. That causes them to be less client-focused than normal, with the outcome being long-term damage to buyer-supplier relationships.

So, how do we resolve this paradox? By engaging early with key stakeholders in the buyer organisation, well before their tender requirements and evaluation criteria are finalised. We can help them see supplier selection should be based on value, not just price. Where possible, we encourage them to quantify the value of the service

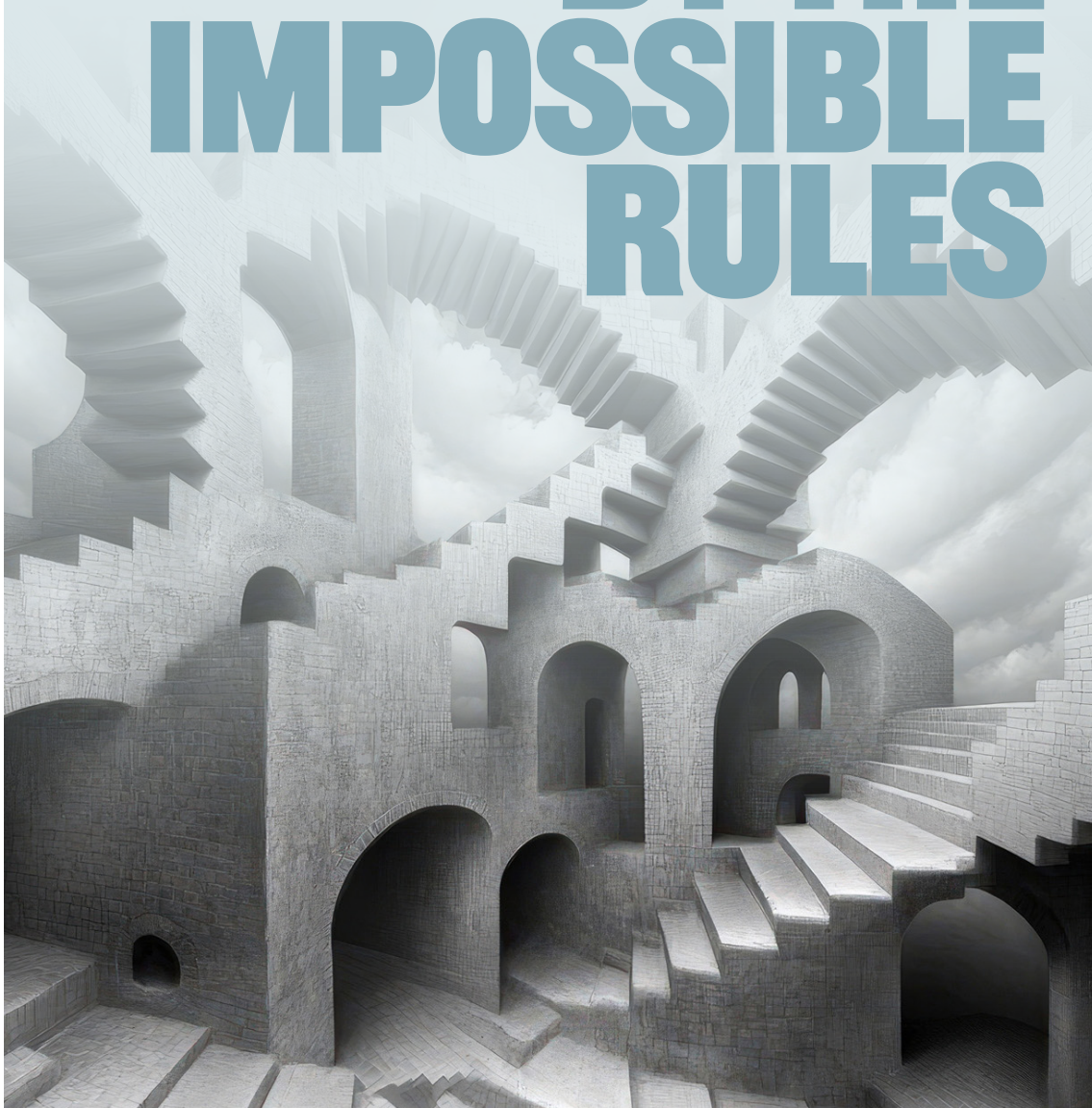
and capability you propose. If they share that information with us, we can quote their numbers back to them. Referencing their own figures lends credibility; people trust the numbers they've helped define.

Take action: Talk to prospective clients as early as you can about the value to them of what you offer. Try to influence the evaluation criteria to be more about value than price. Offer a solution they value, at the right price, and deliver!



PIPPA BIRCH

PLAYING BY THE IMPOSSIBLE RULES



I WAS SO PLEASED WHEN I FOUND OUT THE THEME OF THIS EDITION AS IT GIVES ME THE CHANCE TO HAVE A GOOD OLD MOAN ABOUT STUFF AGAIN! WIKI STATES THAT A CATCH-22 IS “A PARADOXICAL SITUATION WHERE AN INDIVIDUAL CANNOT ESCAPE BECAUSE OF CONTRADICTIONARY RULES OR LIMITATIONS.”

As bidders in the public domain, we are subject to ALL the procurement rules but have absolutely no control over them – to be compliant we must do our best to work them out and then actually sell ourselves within that strict compliance.

I love that challenge. But it seems our government procurers, so very keen on making us play by the rules, wilfully (by design or by stupidity) neglect the rules themselves by providing contradictory instructions throughout the process.

They get SO many things wrong – and it hasn't got any better in my 25 years in bidding. Typical ridiculousness (and examples):

- **Conflicting information littered throughout documents:** One place says you can append information, another place says you cannot
- **Documents copied from other local authority tenders that are not actually appropriate for what they are procuring:** Leaving a requirement to write about managing high-speed roads when there aren't any high-speed roads in that location
- **Contradictory quality restriction instructions:** Page counts in the documents read as word counts on the portal or word counts in the instructions are different in the evaluation criteria

- **Instructing us to submit our clarification questions via the proper route, but then not dealing with them the proper way:** Not answering those questions, or even putting the names of tenderers in responses (not on people, not on)

Is this an abuse of power or simply because they don't understand what they are doing? In that case, why aren't they listening to those of us that put these darn things together?

No matter their ineptness, we must play by the rules if we want them to even open our bids, let alone give us the highest scores. So I suggest:

- Turning, reading, and understanding every page of the documentation – they hide stuff (and yes I know AI can summarise, but how do you know it's not missing important snippets?)
- Cross-checking submission requirements between the portal and all the documents, before creating a comprehensive compliance matrix
- Asking as many clarifications as is necessary for you to reassure yourselves that your submission will be compliant in line with their rules

And my final one: Keep fighting the good fight. Let's talk to government procurement teams so we can tell them what they can do to make the process better for everyone. Ultimately, this means we, as the British public, get better value for money from their services.

PROCUREMENT - THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES

WHAT WORDS COULD DESCRIBE THEM? BRILLIANT. VISIONARY. INSIGHTFUL. ETHICAL. VALUE CREATORS. SENIOR. THOUGHT LEADERS.

JON WILLIAMS

Some years ago, I was lucky to serve for a time as a director of a strategic procurement consultancy, and they're words that leap to mind thinking about some of my amazing colleagues.

"What?", I hear you cry incredulously. "Those phrases describe procurement people?" Because I'm guessing that if I asked most bidders to play word association about the folks on the opposite side of the table, that's not exactly the list they'd come up with.

Undoubtedly, customers have got better at buying. CEOs understand the importance of supply chains in creating competitive advantage. Chief Procurement Officers sit at boardroom tables. Their profession has arguably moved further and faster than ours – anyone met a Chief Proposal Officer recently?

Yet, at the coalface – the ITT or RFP process – enlightenment feels far, far away. Too often it feels like buyers are setting bidders up for failure – posing exam questions disconnected from their organisation's real needs, masked in pompous and self-important bureaucracy. It results in them selecting the best of a bad bunch, rather than choosing between excellence in the evaluation room.

I do occasionally see brilliantly run procurement processes. Fantastic early engagement with the market that helps shape the art of the possible for all involved. An insightful RFP that encourages and enables bidders to create the best possible proposition, followed by thorough – but fair and warm – post-proposal engagement to pick the winner. A smooth segue for all concerned

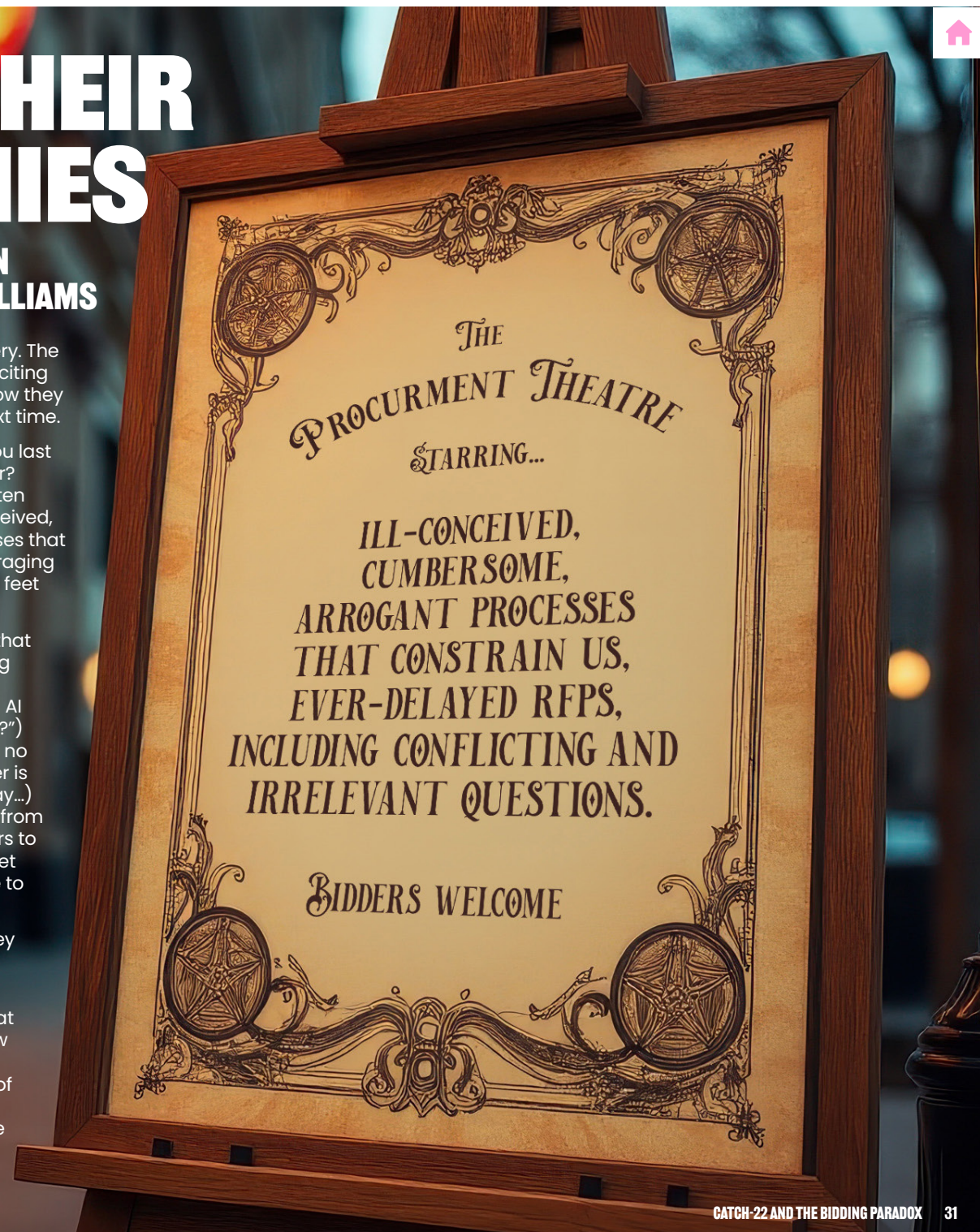
from buying/bidding into delivery. The procurement team actively soliciting feedback from vendors as to how they could improve their process next time.

But: "occasionally". When did you last see one like that? Have you ever? The reality of our world is too often more about reacting to ill-conceived, cumbersome, arrogant processes that constrain us rather than encouraging and enabling us to put our best feet forward.

Frameworks that don't. "Work", that is. Ever-delayed RFPs. Conflicting and irrelevant questions. (My latest favourite: "Have you used AI while developing your proposal?") Amusingly, the evaluators have no idea whether the correct answer is "yes" or "no". It's "yes", by the way...) A lack of a firm grasp on reality from too-junior buyers forcing bidders to price high to factor in risk and set projects up for inevitable failure to meet expectations.

Customers get the suppliers they deserve, right?

So find the good procurement people out there. Celebrate what they do. Learn from them. I know I do. And then downgrade your expectations for the mundane of the day-to-day – the endlessly frustrating procurement theatre of the absurd.





ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



GRAHAM ABLETT

Graham Ablett is a Consulting Director at Strategic Proposals, where he helps clients to win specific opportunities as well as implementing effective and efficient proposal processes. He is a former board member of APMP in the UK, holding APMP Professional status, and is an APMP Approved Trainer.



JEREMY BRIM

Jeremy works with leadership teams and business owners as a consultant and advisor to plan and deliver sustainable growth through analysis and interventions across the sales cycle. Jeremy has also taken on leadership of the Bid Toolkit, bringing with him a wealth of bidding knowledge and desire to help businesses of all sizes improve their win rates.



LUCIE ARISS

Lucie is a Partner in the Global Growth & Strategy Team and Head of Bid Management for Global Occupier Services at Cushman & Wakefield. With 25 years' experience in business development, bids, and marketing for professional services firms, she drives client-focused, value-added solutions. A champion of collaboration and diversity, she also serves as EMEA Chair and Mentor for the Women's Integrated Network. Lucie holds certifications from APMP, CMI, and the Chartered Institute of Marketing.



MICHAEL BROWN

Michael Brown is a seasoned bid professional having won multiple projects across the built environment throughout Europe, the Middle East, APAC and North America. He is passionate about leading global teams to deliver top quality proposals and pitches to multinational clients.



PIPPA BIRCH

Pippa owns award-winning Pipster Solutions Ltd and has over 20 years' bid writing experience, mainly in highways and civil engineering. She is an active member of the Institute of Asphalt and has won several industry awards. She is APMP Professional certified and mentors other bid professionals, winning Contribution to the Profession in 2022. She also developed #ThursdayThrong and #BidBites – free online meetings for the bidding community to reduce isolation.



SAM BURNS

Sam is a passionate and innovative Senior Bid Consultant and APMP Practitioner who has worked in both the private and public sector. She has won major opportunities across rail, real estate, infrastructure and utilities. In 2022, she was awarded APMP 40 under 40 award, which recognises proposal management professionals from around the world.



TONY BIRCH

Tony Birch is the founder and current Chairman of Shipley Limited in the UK. Tony served on the main board of the APMP for four years and was elected a Fellow of the organisation in 2006, for his work in developing and launching the APMP's Certification Programme. Since founding Shipley, Tony has trained thousands of sales and bid professionals around the world.



CHRISTINA CARTER

Christina is the founder of Win Every Proposal. She has helped businesses win billions of dollars through RFPs and has sold multi-million dollar deals to nearly every Fortune 100 company. She teaches SMBs and Mid-markets how to master the art of enterprise proposals. She provides tailored business strategies and comprehensive training to empower your teams with the skills to win. Her ongoing support creates sustainable momentum and results.



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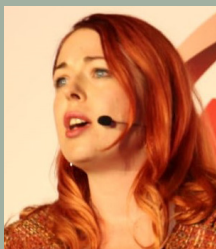
IZANE CLOETE-HAMILTON

Izane is the Master of Inspiration at nFold, a strategic proposal consultancy in South Africa. She is a compassionate leader with a rare and innate ability to develop people. She has held various senior management positions in business development, marketing, and bid management for over 20 years. Izane joined nFold as a partner in 2021, where she continues to inspire success in others through thought leadership, training and strategy development.



JAVIER ESCARTIN

Javier is an aerospace engineer who has climbed the corporate ladder from engineering to business development. He is a full-time freelance Proposal Manager and has recently launched a business to make our work easier with artificial intelligence. He is the founder of DeepRFP.com, runs the proposals newsletter jescartin.com, and manages proposals for worldwide technology companies as a consultant.



LARISSA CORNELIUS

With over 12 years in business development and proposal consultancy, Larissa offers bid expertise across various industries. She has trained thousands of people and worked with over 260 companies on strategic bid work. She has a further seven years of operational management expertise and actively promotes the proposal profession by combining proposal best practices with her operational and sales background, helping businesses win more.



HOLGER GARDEN

Holger is a bid manager and writer, and a personal/team performance coach. He spends most of his time supporting construction clients bidding for civil infrastructure and building projects, but his transferable skills have led to his work in the medical, charity and security arenas also. He works with businesses of all sizes to help them win more work.



NIGEL DENNIS

Nigel has been called a proposal pioneer in Australia for his work in shaping the professional bidding landscape in the region. He has three decades of proposal consulting experience and has trained thousands of people. Nigel started the APMP Australia New Zealand Chapter, runs Australia's largest specialist bid consultancy and is a strong advocate for development of the profession.



ANDY HAIGH

Andy is an expert in bidding and tendering, specialising in competitive formal bids into EU Public Sector organisations. He is an authority on EU procurement legislation and can bring all these capabilities together to initiate and drive major complex bids through to a successful completion.



ANDERS DYRHOLM

Anders Dyrholm is a Client Manager at the Danish bid and process management software company Orbit Online. He works primarily within the AEC sector, consulting or managing projects for over 100 companies and specialises in resume and reference management solutions. He is also the lead organiser of Denmark's first Proposal Conference in September 2024 in Copenhagen.



SARAH HINCHLIFFE

Sarah labels herself a 'Storyteller, Organiser, Timekeeper'. After a 30-year sales career in the IT industry, Sarah decided to share what she'd learnt about winning business using great stories, a systematic approach and consistently delivering on time. She continues learning and sharing through her freelance consulting work and volunteering as a writer, speaker and mentor.



ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



PAUL JOHNSTONE

Paul is a 'poacher-turned-gamekeeper'. He established Optimum Business Growth in 2020 after spending 15 years in procurement roles across financial services, manufacturing and the public sector. He has led strategic infrastructure deals and large Framework Agreements. He knows 'what good looks like' to buyers, enabling him to help clients win profitable contracts using a more strategic approach to winning work. Paul has also developed the award-winning Bid Journey methodology.



ALANA MCCARTHY

Alana is Head of Bids and Marketing for a tier one construction company. She has 20 years' experience in public sector bidding within the construction, facilities management, and transactional banking industries. With a passion for lifelong learning, Alana recently completed a Level 7 Apprenticeship in Senior Leadership and has embarked on a MSc with a focus on the bidding function to drive research into our profession.



CHRIS KÄLIN

Chris is a global authority on bid and proposal management. He was co-founder and chairman of the German-speaking APMP chapter and regional director for Europe/Africa. He is APMP-certified at Professional Level (CPP APMP) and is an APMP Approved Trainer. In 2013, he received the prestigious Fellows Award.



CERI MESCALL

Ceri is the Managing Director at Strategic Proposals Canada. Clients trust her to help them win. Ceri is a presenter/panelist, podcast guest, article author/contributor, and awards judge. She holds all four signature APMP certifications plus the Executive Summaries and Bid & Proposal Writing micro-certifications. Ceri was an APMP 40 Under 40 award winner (class of 2019), and is an APMP Fellow (2020) and APMP Accredited Trainer (2024).



REBECCA LINK

Rebecca is a transformational leader, trainer, and orals coach with over 14 years' experience leading cross-functional teams in proposal management, technical writing, and strategic growth. An advocate for AI innovation, she blends best practice with a passion for team empowerment, driving corporate buy-in and successful outcomes. Rebecca is known for fostering high-performance cultures while supporting aggressive growth initiatives.



CHARLOTTE REES

Charlotte is Head of Pursuits (EMEA) at a global law firm, leading high-value, multidisciplinary bids that drive business growth. A former Bid and Proposals Apprentice, she has built and led high-performing teams, developed best practice frameworks, and championed diversity and wellbeing. As Founding Director of WIBAP, she shaped a global inclusion network. Charlotte is APMP Professional certified and a recipient of multiple awards, including APMP 40 under 40 and the BQ Innovation Award.



RITA MASCIA

Rita is a proven bid strategist with 25 years of experience turning proposals into wins. Working internationally and now fully remotely from Italy, she excels in guiding bid writing, bid management, capture, and contract negotiations across diverse sectors. Passionate about bringing clarity to complex RFPs, Rita helps clients win government and commercial contracts without sacrificing common sense.



MARTIN SMITH

Martin is passionate about helping clients win new business. With increasingly savvy procurement professionals, more competition and new technology changing the way we bid, it is his job as Managing Director to ensure Bid Solutions provides market leading people, tools, training and solutions to help you win more.



ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



NIGEL THACKER

Nigel has been a leader in our profession for over two decades and now runs Rebidding Solutions. He has published two books on rebidding and has presented at APMP events and conferences in the UK and USA. He has trained managers in bidding and wider management skills across the globe, created the online course 'Management and Leadership Skills for Bidders' under the mybidcareer branding and is a mentor on the APMP UK Rapport mentoring programme.



JON WILLIAMS

Jon and his team work with clients worldwide to help them establish winning proposal capabilities and to capture major deals. He has built and led numerous bid and proposal centres; managed, reviewed and benchmarked countless proposals; worked in over 35 countries; and trained many thousands of course participants.



LEONIE THOMAS

Leonie Thomas is a senior bid writer with over 20 years' experience working on high-value submissions across infrastructure and construction. She champions bid writing as a critical role in its own right. She chairs APMP's UK Bid Writing Focus Group, speaks regularly on the evolving future of bid writing, and is a leading voice on how AI can be used to sharpen strategy, increase efficiency and improve response quality.



DARRELL WOODWARD

Darrell Woodward is an award-winning consultant helping organisations unleash the full power of proposal automation to win more business faster. As a Bid Geek and coffee lover, he believes technology in bidding is about combining the right blend of content beans – compelling narratives, tailored solutions, and persuasive arguments – and the expertise of bidding baristas to craft the perfect proposal brew.



GEMMA WARING

Gemma has been a dynamic force in tendering and procurement for 20 years. Her commitment to excellence, determination to succeed and passion for empowering others has resulted in exceptional career achievements. She is a key player in the roll out of the Procurement Act 2023 and was a recent Runner Up in the APMP UK's annual awards in the Supplier of the Year category.

