
Speeding up the selection process

Why does selecting a supplier have to take so long? You want to be sure you are making the right selection in choosing a great supplier. But does that have to mean you need to take a great deal of time? Not necessarily.

Slow? No

Traditional selection processes are sequential, step by step – slow. The standard way is to spend time gathering requirements, issuing RFIs and RFPs, short-listing suppliers, making final selections, asking just about anything and everything that might be relevant along the way. It is heavy on paper and light on demonstration. A process that can take months.

There is another way, one that's more akin to agile rapid prototyping. One that takes weeks rather than months. A way that strikes a chord in our perpetual beta world, with its collaborative, iterative demo-heavy approach. The key to its value is that it is not only faster but also still gives you confidence that you are making the right selection. It's about increasing speed without compromising quality. Good decisions made quicker – what's not to like.

Agile supplier selection: making faster selections with confidence

There will be times when the old sequential selection process will be most appropriate, but it's well worth looking for opportunities to apply this new quicker approach. To help you, here are a few tips:

- Make sure you have a highly focused set of requirements that cover all the essentials, without straying into the overly broad or catch-all.
- Rather than a heavy document running to hundreds of pages, you are looking to create a brief for your potential suppliers to come in and add to. You want to make sure suppliers answer the critical questions well and quickly, rather than wasting time and effort exploring issues that are peripheral to what you are really looking for.
- The emphasis should be on early supplier conversations and demonstrations. This approach is relatively paper light and demo heavy.
- Focus on functionality and service levels - what you're going to get rather than how it is delivered. This is particularly true when you are looking at Software as a Service (SaaS).
- You do need to absolutely understand the requirements. But focus that understanding on setting out and enabling potential suppliers to come and demonstrate what they can do, as well as their fit with you.
- Remember, it's about culture and compatibility as much as capabilities, which is why turning up the volume on conversations and demonstrations during the selection process pays dividends.
- A typical approach could be to give a shortlist of suppliers your set of requirements and ask them to come back in two or three weeks to demonstrate which requirements they meet, which they partially meet and which they don't meet. In parallel, have conversations with them about their approach, how they will deliver the solution, how they will support you and other key aspects.
- Be prepared to work with the potential suppliers as they further develop and refine their solution, so you can build your understanding and confidence in order to make the right selection as quickly as possible.