

Case Study – Ascent Partnering through Procurement

Q: What was the challenge?

The Ministry of Defence is committed to updating the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS) to transform flying training for the three services over the next 25 years. It has been recognised that the only way to succeed in this ambition is for the MoD to partner with industry. In some senses this is not new – public/private partnerships have been commonplace in recent years. What is new is the recognition of the degree to which a successful relationship is dependent on effective Partnering. The procurement process evaluated bids on the basis of three criteria – with each granted equal importance – Technical, Commercial and Partnering.

An additional level of complexity is that all of the organisations seeking to win the contract for the provision of the training service were themselves Joint Ventures. Ascent (representing the collaboration of Lockheed Martin and VT Defence) was one of the three consortia remaining in the competition to be selected as 'Preferred Bidder'.

Q: How did we work together?

The fact that the UKMFTS tender assessment process was to attach as much importance to a Consortium's ability to Partner as it did to the quality of the technology provided and the value for money, provided a significant challenge to potential Training Service Partners to think differently about this programme. Ascent came to Questions of Difference for support in the development, demonstration and reporting of their Partnering approach. The key strands of Questions of Difference work included:

- Promoting Partnering behaviours within the Ascent team
- Establishing a Partnering Log, to learn from the existing examples of effective Partnering
- Conducting a Cultural Audit for Ascent as well as the two parent companies, to establish Partnering readiness
- Support to the team tasked with writing the bid documents to ensure that Partnering was consistently represented throughout
- Ongoing skills training and coaching support for bi-lateral meetings with the MoD

Q: Did the outcome meet expectations?

It was announced that Ascent won Preferred Bidder status in December 2006. Their capacity for effective Partnering was key in this decision. The Ministry of Defence and Ascent are now engaged in contract negotiations, building on the relationship established through the tender process. In addition:

- The Ascent parent companies recognise Partnering as essential for future competitiveness and have put strategies in place to address the issues raised in the cultural audit
- The Ascent team clearly exhibit their understanding of Partnering behaviours and no longer require the coaching services of the Questions of Difference team

Q: What did Ascent learn from the relationship with Questions of Difference?

- Partnering is not a model that can be uniformly applied to mechanistically driven action. It requires context specific consideration to deliver great value, achieve mutual benefit and promote continuous improvement
- Partnering is most effective when conflict is seen as a resource, as it creates opportunities to manage differences as a source of innovation and change
- Partnering capability cannot be developed in isolation. True Partnering will only be established when the different organisations and individuals work together to determine what Partnering has to mean to meet their diverse needs and ambitions.