



## **PASA's 2018 Theme: Improving Customer Experience**

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As has now become customary, PASA has set a theme for 2018. This theme will drive much of the content we produce through the year (both written and at some of our conferences) while also bringing a focus to our PASA Awards.

In developing a theme for the year I consider many of the core issues and challenges I have encountered in discussion with procurement professionals throughout the year.

This year, more than any previously, I have had the opportunity through PASA Connect round-tables to spend quality time with procurement leaders and senior members of their teams. A number of common issues have emerged.

So, our theme for 2018 – 'Improving Customer Experience' – is designed to address a number of these core issues.

In defining 'Customer Experience' we first need to identify who our customers are. I would argue that as a service function, which it is, all stakeholders that procurement comes into contact with could be regarded as customers – even our suppliers. While this may sound odd, we are providing services to both the buy and supply sides of the equation. Therefore, should we not treat our suppliers just as well as we do our internal customers?

And by serve, I do not mean we should be subservient. Rather, we should look to make the experience of working with procurement, with our business or government department, better for all.

So what are these issues that I see the theme addressing?

'Procurement agility' or 'agile procurement' are terms that have been increasingly used in recent years. How do we become more responsive to the needs of our customers/stakeholders? How do we increase the speed at which we serve while still ensuring appropriate governance and best commercial outcomes? Becoming more agile is all about improving our customer's experience.

'Digitisation' is another hot issue. How can we use technology to improve our customer's experience; whether by making it easier for them to buy, interact with suppliers, or by facilitating faster process and decision-making by procurement?

'Innovation' has been on PASA's radar for some time now; specifically procurement's role in driving innovation through the supply base. We use phrases such as 'becoming a customer of choice' to our suppliers. Improving our supplier's experience of how they interact with us and our business is essential to achieving this status. For instance, SME's are widely recognised as being the most likely source of innovation for larger organisations. How friendly are our procurement practices to SME's?

Finally – and frankly – procurement has a brand problem! Issues around stakeholder/customer understanding of the procurement value proposition are always high on the agenda.

Too often procurement is seen as a roadblock; a function to be bypassed or avoided. We will only change these perceptions by making the experience of dealing with procurement more positive. Complaining isn't going to help.

We need to better understand what our customer's value. Plus, we need to ensure we are delivering it in a way that makes them see us as the trusted advisors we believe we should be.

I am sure there will be other issues that we will identify through the year, but in the meantime there is plenty there to work on.