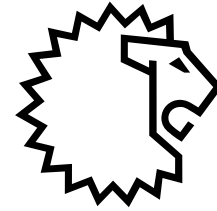


Outsourcing – reducing the risks



LION APPAREL

Lion Apparel's system of firefighting clothing maintenance has made it the choice of brigades and those who have considered outsourcing their equipment and clothing manufacturers



IN THE 21ST century many people feel a very negative association with the word 'outsourcing'. For some, it immediately brings to mind visions of foreign call centres and newspaper articles about staff layoffs. Yet for the emergency services and military sectors, outsourcing should have very different connotations. Rather than simply being about cost overheads, outsourcing is also about total focus on core competencies so that highly trained people are deployed to do the job they are trained for with the best quality equipment, whether that is to fight fires or fight battles.

Logistics

In 1999, James L Jones of the US Marine Corps said, "We must... take full advantage of outsourcing and privatisation functions that contractors can sometimes perform less expensively than federal employees and active duty personnel. We need to look at those functions that Marines perform in the supporting establishment and ask ourselves how many of those functions can be outsourced. My goal is to return as many of our Marines as possible to the operating forces".

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photo: Terry W Matlock / DoD

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The contract will deliver considerable savings to the customer, but of equal importance is the fact that 300 marines who were engaged in the management of clothing supplies are redeployed to active duty. Also, the US Marine Corps does not have to carry large stocks of expensive equipment, benefits from a robust system that has been tested commercially and is not liable for any possible failure.

Risk and liability

The Chief Officer of one UK Fire and Rescue Service that outsources its PPE to Lion says, "Risk and liability is a major issue for brigades when addressing their PPE needs. In these days of massive penalties for failures when litigation takes over, it is hard to put a price on the benefits of shared risk. Lion offered the brigade a fully independent risk assessment as part of the contract as well as full liability for garments."

"One of the key factors in the choices made

by staff was the care and maintenance of the garments. Within any brigade and probably every watch, it is possible to find that firefighters approach the care and maintenance of their kit in different ways.

"I have seen instances where one firefighter washes his kit after every shift and another once in a year. Both of them are wrong in their approach. The maintenance and laundry service that is built into TotalCare ensures that a consistent programme of care and maintenance is in operation across the entire brigade, and that it complies with the manufacturer's recommendation, ensuring that garments are performing in the way that they were designed."

Basic rules

For any organisation that is considering outsourcing, there are a number of basic rules that will ensure that over the life of a contract they will see genuine best value without any compromise on quality:

- Only consider a company that has a demonstrable track record, preferably with experience in emergency services or military contracts;
- Ensure that the companies being considered supply the very best equipment that is available in the market;
- Ensure that there is flexibility built into the contract. On occasions when outsourcing has failed to deliver the anticipated benefits it is invariably because the contract did not consider that the organisations needs may change during the lifetime of the contract; and
- Make sure that you work with the contractor to develop and agree a comprehensive risk assessment before the contract commences.

In a modern era where emergency and military resources are often being stretched to respond to more challenges, outsourcing can deliver real benefits. Rather than fearing outsourcing, organisations should make sure that they work to understand it fully and then evaluate if it is right for them.

If you think it all sounds too good to be true, then look to the experience of the German Federal Armed Forces, which has over a million people wearing Lion products and has saved 175 million euros in the first two years since it turned over the management of its clothing supply operation to the company.

CRJ