



The Current State of UK Capture

A practitioner perspective on what's really happening before the bid begins

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Focus Group

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About the author

This white paper has been authored by Georgina Wilson Ayilara, drawing on extensive practitioner experience and insights gathered through the APMP Capture Focus Group, industry events, and ongoing discussions with business-winning professionals across the UK. It reflects both personal perspective and a collective ambition to strengthen the role of capture in delivering successful outcomes.

Georgina is a value proposition leader and capture practitioner with over 13 years' experience leading and shaping business-winning strategies across defence, nuclear, energy, and government sectors.

She specialises in early engagement, capture strategy, and developing customer-centric value propositions that translate insight into competitive advantage. She sees capture as the critical bridge between business development and delivery turning opportunity into structured, winnable proposals that convert pipeline into revenue and margin.

She is passionate about advancing the maturity of capture practices in the UK and has greatly valued the insights, challenge, and shared experiences of the APMP community in shaping this perspective and driving the conversation forward.

Acknowledgements

This white paper reflects a collective view of the current state of capture, estimating, and pricing, shaped by real-world challenges and opportunities observed across the market.

Executive Summary

Organisations across the UK are investing heavily in improving how they write bids. But far less attention is given to how decisions are made before the bid even starts.” That is where performance is really determined.

Capture is understood in theory. It is referenced in frameworks, embedded in training, and recognised as good practice.

In reality, it is applied inconsistently, too late, or not at all.

Across sectors, the same pattern emerges:

- Capture starts at ITT or RFP release
- Customer insight is reconstructed under time pressure
- Solutions are shaped inside bid timelines
- Pricing is finalised late, often without a clear price-to-win position
- Decisions are made when there is little ability left to influence the outcome

“Winning should be intentional, not accidental.”

“Most losses and many poor wins are decided before the bid begins.”

“If you are pricing under pressure, you are no longer shaping the deal; you are reacting to it.”

The issue is not a lack of capability. It is a lack of:

- Early engagement
- Clear ownership
- Leadership discipline to make decisions before certainty exists

Improving capture does not require more process. It requires a shift in behaviour:

- Treating capture as a commercial discipline, not a pre-bid luxury
- Involving estimating and pricing early, not at the point of submission
- Aligning customer insight, solution design, and price-to-win from the outset
- Making deliberate decisions about how to win before committing to bid. When the ITT/Formal request for quote arrives, we should be able to answer the question: How are we going to win?

“The gap is not knowledge. It is timing, ownership, and commitment.”

“Capture does not need to be heavy. It needs to be early and deliberate.”

There is a clear opportunity for UK organisations to move from reactive bidding to intentional competing. To stop treating pricing as a late-stage calculation and start using it as a strategic lever during capture. To reduce avoidable risk, protect margin, and improve win outcomes.

Capture is not an optional enhancement to the bidding process.

It is where:

- win strategies are formed
- solutions are shaped
- and pricing decisions are made

Organisations that embed capture early, integrating estimating, pricing, and customer insight, will outperform those that continue to rely on late-stage optimisation. By the time the bid starts, the most important decisions have already been made.

Introduction: Why Capture Matters Now

Across the UK, organisations are under pressure to win more while delivering more, for less.

And yet, despite increasingly sophisticated bid processes, many organisations are still losing opportunities they expected to win.

The uncomfortable truth?

Capture is recognised. It appears in frameworks, training, and leadership conversations. But in practice, it is too often inconsistent, misunderstood, or simply performed too late to matter.

This whitepaper explores the current state of capture in the UK, drawing on practitioner experience and insight from the APMP UK community. It highlights a persistent gap between what organisations say they do and what actually happens under pressure.

Because capture is not just a missed opportunity. **It is one of the most significant, and most underutilised levers for improving win rates, protecting margin, and avoiding downstream delivery pain.**

What Good Capture Looks Like

“Capture is not extra work. It is the work that makes bidding effective and efficient.”

Capture is not a phase. It is not a workshop. And it is not something you “fit in” once the bid starts. It is a deliberate, structured approach to shaping whether and how you compete.

It happens before the bid, not just during it. In fact, the most important capture decisions are made when there is no formal procurement in sight.

Done well, capture:

- Aligns customer insight, solution thinking, pricing intent, and competitive positioning
- Forces early, sometimes uncomfortable decisions
- Creates clarity before pressure arrives

And when it is working, something subtle but powerful happens, as described in our first scenario:

Scenario: The opportunity that felt "strangely easy"

Six months before the ITT, a team invests time in understanding the customer:

- They map stakeholders properly
- They test solution ideas early
- They align internally on how they will win

When the ITT lands, there is no panic.

No emergency workshops. No scrambling to invent win themes.

Just execution.

The team submits a focused, confident bid and wins.

Nothing about the bid was extraordinary. The difference was everything that happened before it.

The Current Reality in the UK

Now for the reality. Across sectors, the same patterns repeat:

- Capture starts when the ITT lands
- "Capture" is rebranded bid planning
- Ownership is unclear or avoided
- Investment is fragile and easily cut
- Success relies on individuals, not systems

"Capture has not failed; it just started when it was already too late."

And perhaps most tellingly: Win themes are guessed. Stakeholders are inferred. Competitors are speculated.

It feels like progress.

It isn't.

Scenario: The ITT has landed - Now we Start Thinking

The ITT drops.

The bid team mobilises within 48 hours. Kick-off is efficient. Roles are clear. The machine starts moving.

Then someone asks:

“What do we actually know about the customer’s real priorities?”

The answer is uncomfortable.

There are fragments:

- Old relationships
- Assumptions
- A few recycled insights

So the team does what teams always do.

They try to reverse-engineer capture while writing the bid.

The Gap Between Theory and Practice

Ask any organisation what they value, and the answers are consistent:

- Early engagement
- Customer intimacy
- Differentiated solutions
- Price-to-win thinking

The gap is not knowledge. It is timing, ownership and commitment.

But observe what actually happens:

- Opportunities are pursued without a clear win strategy
- Solutions are built under time pressure
- Pricing is left until the final stretch
- Decisions are delayed until they no longer influence the outcome

“Familiarity creates confidence, but it does not create insight”.

Scenario: We Know This Customer

An incumbent goes into rebid mode.

The assumption:

“We know them. We’ve worked together for years.”

No structured capture is done.

What they miss:

- A shift in leadership priorities
- Quiet dissatisfaction
- A desire for change

The proposal reflects history, not direction.

A competitor less familiar, but more curious, wins.

Consequences of Weak or Late Capture

“Pricing is not an output of the bid. It is a decision that should already have been made.”

These patterns are not harmless.

They show up in ways every organisation recognises:

- “Strong bids” that still lose
- Pricing decisions that erode margin
- Bid teams pushed into unsustainable effort
- Delivery teams inheriting avoidable problems

Scenario: Pricing in the Last Week

The solution is finalised late.

Commercial is brought in: “Can you turn this into a price by Friday?”

There is no price-to-win strategy. No alignment between value and cost.

So a number is produced.

It is either too high or too low.

“The Bid was won, but the Capture was flawed, and delivery is now paying for it”.

Scenario: The Win That Should Have Been a Warning

The organisation wins.
Then delivery begins.
“Did we really commit to this?”
Assumptions unravel. Scope expands. Risks materialise.

What Needs to Change

“If you cannot explain how you will win before the bid, you are unlikely to win during the bid, and upon successful contract award, you are unlikely to win at delivery of the work.”

This is not about more process. It is about confronting a few uncomfortable truths:

- Decisions are being made too late
- Ownership is often unclear
- Time before procurement is not protected – organisations may not always have the luxury of a formal capture in the pre-bid phase. However, applying even a minimal early-capture discipline, such as a 30-minute opportunity review and win-shaping discussion, provides greater clarity, focus, and strategic alignment once procurement begins.
- Successful capture brings together the perspectives of bid writing, commercial, solution, engineering/technology, and procurement teams. Even where these functions are not formally present within the business, high-quality capture still depends on applying their mindset. This requires the team to consciously adopt the decision lenses of these disciplines: commercial rigour, solution viability, operational feasibility and supply chain realism. The resulting strategy remains complete, competitive and grounded in how the contract will ultimately be delivered.

Scenario: The Go Decision that was never made

An opportunity appears.
“We should go for it.”
No one defines how it will be won.
Halfway through:

- Weak positioning
- Limited access
- No real advantage

But it continues anyway.

Real change requires:

- Leadership sponsorship
- Clear accountability
- Early alignment of solution, price, and delivery

Capture maturity is not just about process. It is about behaviour and the discipline to act early.

Practical Actions for UK Organisations

Progress does not require perfection. It requires intent.

- Define capture clearly
- Set expectations early
- Assign ownership
- Introduce simple decision points
- Invest proportionately

“Capture does not need to be heavy. It needs to be early and deliberate.”

Scenario: The 48 hour "Capture Workshop"

Two weeks into the bid:
“We need to do capture.”
A workshop is run.
Slides are produced. Energy is high.
But nothing fundamental changes.
Limited access
No real advantage
But it continues anyway.

Capture wasn't done. It was simulated.

Call to Action

Everyone needs to understand the benefits of capture using its vocabulary.

For leaders:

- Ask when decisions are really made
- Challenge unsupported optimism

For practitioners:

- Stop trying to fix capture during the bid phase/timeline
- Start much earlier

The Current State of UK Capture



For the community:

- Share reality
- Be honest

The Opportunity Ahead

There is a real opportunity to create an environment in the UK where capture is:

- Understood and used
- Resourced
- Applied consistently
- Valued strategically

Because when capture improves so do win rates, decisions, and delivery. Organisations stop leaving success to chance.

Most organisations optimise bids.

Capture has the potential to design winning outcomes:

Reactive (Now)	Intentional Capture
Capture starts at ITT release	Capture starts before the client initiates their procurement process (even if light touch – a strategy that informs the team on “how are we going to win this”)
Customer insight is assumed or reconstructed	Customer insight is developed early and tested
Solution is built under bid pressure	Solution is shaped during capture
Pricing happens in the final stages	Price-to-win is defined early
Estimating reacts to a fixed solution	Estimating shapes the solution
Commercial risk is discovered late	Commercial risk is designed and priced in
Win strategy is unclear or implicit	Win strategy is explicit and agreed early
Margin is an outcome of the bid	Margin is designed during capture
Delivery inherits assumptions	Delivery is aligned from the start