State of Bid Management 2026 Report

Altura

Bid management is becoming more complex, yet less predictable.

Matthijs Huiskamp, Founder & CEO

More stakeholders. Growing requirements. Shrinking timelines. Today, bid teams are expected to deliver consistent quality across a higher volume of bids, navigating more tools and handovers than ever before. The result is a paradox: we have more connectivity, but less control. We have reached a point where the administrative burden of the process is actively cannibalizing the time needed for the decisions that actually drive win rates.

This year's State of Bid Management report is based on a survey of 75 bid professionals across European industries, complemented by in-depth interviews. The data reveals a fragmented reality: a typical bid now involves dozens of documents and a mountain of internal messages, spread across disconnected systems and nearly nine different tools per bid.

Effort is being absorbed by coordination, leaving little room for strategy or response quality.

AI is accelerating this shift, but it is also exposing the limits of these fragmented workflows. Many teams are adopting AI at a task level, for drafting or isolated analysis, while the broader process remains disconnected. Speed increases, but clarity does not. Decisions still depend on individuals, insights remain scattered, and improvements are difficult to scale across the team.

In the pages ahead, we share the forces shaping bid work in 2026, identify where teams experience the most friction, and highlight what high-performing teams do differently.

The conclusion is straightforward: Better bid performance does not come from more effort; it comes from decision clarity, clear ownership, and workflow orchestration. Data and AI only create value when they are embedded end-to-end into the bid process, supporting the right decisions at the right moments.

If bid management is becoming more critical to your organisation, the question is no longer whether you should use AI. The question is whether your process is ready to get value from it.

Altura

Table of contents

Make bids flow

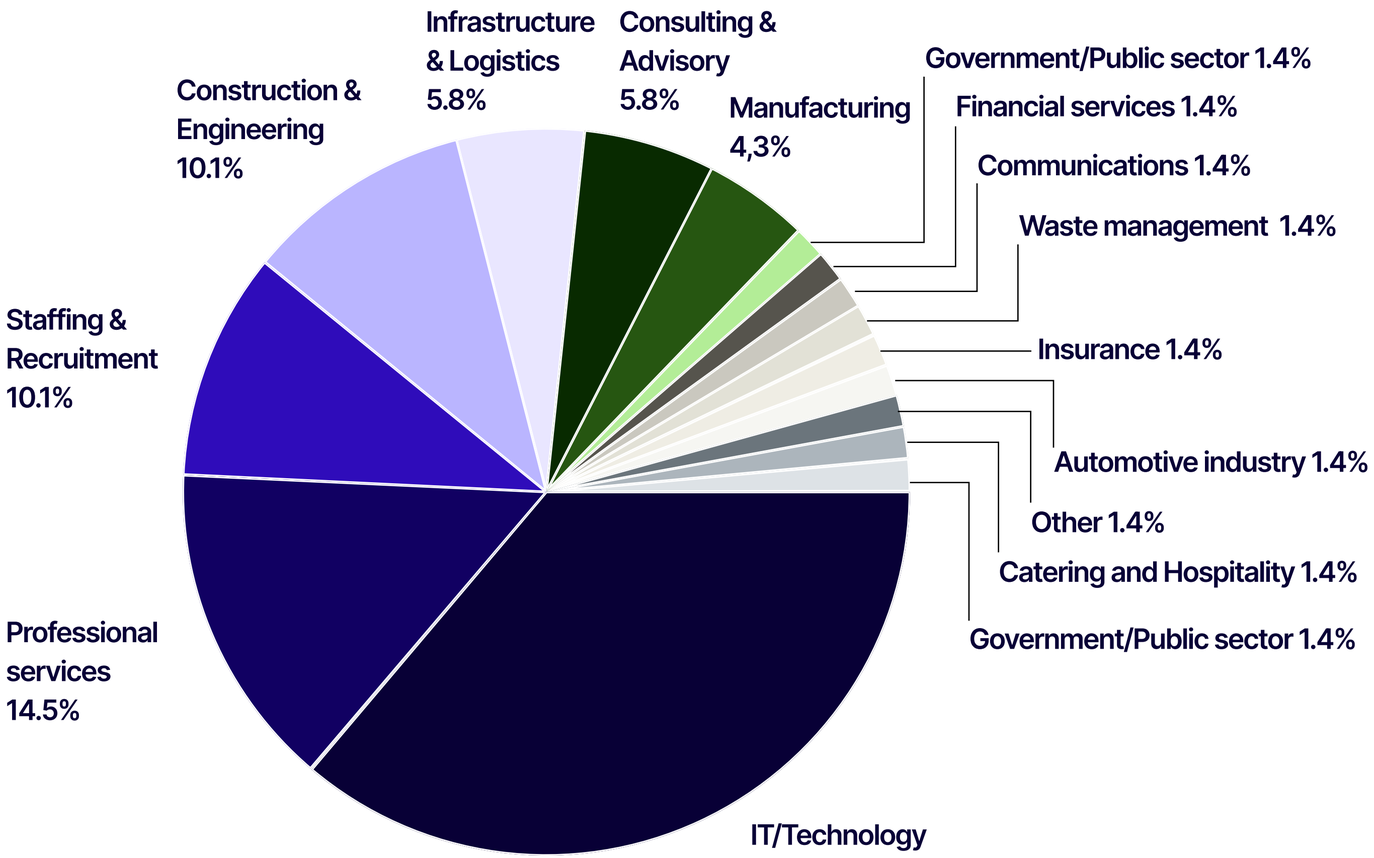
Bid management is increasingly expected to move beyond a document-driven activity towards a more controlled and coordinated way of working. In practice, many bid teams struggle to keep oversight as tenders grow in size, involve more stakeholders and change continuously throughout the process.

Requirements, documents and stakeholder input are typically spread across tools that were never designed to work together. As bids evolve, teams lose shared visibility on what has changed, what is final and where attention is needed. Control shifts from the team to the process itself, increasing coordination effort and reliance on individual experience.

Altura is built to help bid teams maintain shared control throughout the bid lifecycle. By providing a structured, end-to-end way of running bids, Altura keeps requirements, documents and inputs aligned as the tender evolves. This creates a continuously updated understanding of the bid, so teams can clearly see what matters and make informed decisions as changes occur.

With data and AI embedded across the process, Altura supports decision-making at key moments rather than only at the end. This reduces time spent catching up and coordinating, and allows bid teams to focus on shaping the bid and improving their chances of winning.

Altura



+

3 in-depth interviews

Who did we talk to?

We surveyed 75 bid professionals across multiple European industries and organisational sizes. To add qualitative context, we conducted in-depth interviews with experienced bid leaders. In addition, we reviewed a selection of real bid-related handover and qualification conversations to better understand how teams align, share information and make decisions during the bid process.

Altura

The Bid Management Maturity Model

Respondents were benchmarked across 6 growth pillars in the bid process. Together, these pillars form the Bid Management Maturity Model, which assesses how effectively organisations structure, execute and improve their bid activities.

Beyond maturity scoring, we asked detailed questions about time pressure, collaboration, tooling, data usage and AI adoption. This allows us to connect maturity outcomes with the operational reality of bid teams and identify where friction truly occurs.

Altura

If you must remember something, let it be this.

58% of respondents are not satisfied with their current win rate.

62% say losing a key bid professional would have a high to very high impact on bid continuity.

On average, **43%** of bid time is spent on administration and coordination rather than strategy and quality.

A typical tender involves **21 documents** and **139 messages,** highlighting the coordination effort required.

Bid teams collaborate across an average of **8.6 tools** per tender.

On the importance of human judgment when using AI:

“Everything AI produces sounds credible if you don’t have deep and up-to-date knowledge of the subject. An expert will spot the gaps immediately.”

Rens Zwakenberg, Proposal Manager BDO, Professional Services

Part #1

Challenges and goals for bid professionals

What is top of mind for bid managers?

Bid managers operate in an environment shaped by regulatory change, increasing bid complexity, talent shortages and rising expectations from the business. At the same time, stakeholder involvement and information volume continue to grow.

While AI is clearly on the agenda, the survey shows it is not the primary pressure bid managers experience day to day. Much of today's strain is operational rather than technological. Bid professionals spend a significant share of their time coordinating inputs, aligning stakeholders and managing information across tools.

As a result, critical activities such as early qualification, positioning and differentiation are often compressed into the final stages of the bid. In this section, we explore the challenges bid teams face today and the priorities they focus on to regain control over their bid process.

10 forces changing the bidding process in 2026

Knowledge stored in silos

Critical bid knowledge is often spread across people, folders and documents, making it difficult to reuse insights and creating dependency on individuals.

Source: Harvard Business Review

Fragmented workflows across systems

Bid work is executed across email, documents, shared drives, CRM systems, tender portals and collaboration tools, reducing visibility and control.

Source: Gartner

Rising administrative and coordination effort

Knowledge workers spend a significant share of their time on coordination rather than value creation, increasing pressure on bid teams.

Source: McKinsey

Higher expectations for proposal quality

Buyers expect tailored, consistent and compliant proposals, even as timelines shorten.

Source: Deloitte

Sustainability and regulatory requirements

Expanding sustainability and compliance rules increase documentation and coordination demands in bids.

Source: European Commission – Green Public Procurement

New EU and UK regulations to increase SME access

The introdcution of new measures make bids more accessible to SMEs, increasing competition and the need for clearer qualification and evaluation processes.

Source: European Commission / UK Cabinet Office

Persistent talent shortages

Experienced bid professionals remain scarce, increasing pressure on existing teams.

Source: Gartner

AI adoption without workflow integration

AI is increasingly used for individual tasks, but often without being embedded into end-to-end bid processes.

Source: McKinsey

Growing demand for data-driven decisions

Teams are expected to justify qualification and pricing decisions with data, even when that data is scattered.

Source: Bain & Company

Shift from execution to orchestration

Bid management increasingly requires coordinating people, information and systems rather than executing isolated tasks.

Source: MIT Sloan Management Review

Altura

Bid teams focus on these goals in 2026

Based on survey results, three priorities clearly stand out across industries.

1. Spend less time coordinating

2. Reduce dependency on individual bid managers and SMEs

3. Use data and AI to support bid decisions, not just writing

Altura

Why bid teams struggle to focus on what matters most

Bid teams spend a significant share of their time managing coordination rather than improving bid quality. On average, 43% of bid time is spent on administrative and coordination work, including chasing inputs, aligning stakeholders and managing versions.

A typical tender involves 21 documents, 139 messages and collaboration across 8.6 different tools. As bid volumes and stakeholder involvement increase, this coordination effort grows quickly and leaves limited time for early qualification, positioning and response quality.

Reducing coordination effort is not about working faster, but about automating how work flows through the bid process. Teams that manage to reclaim time are better able to focus on the decisions and content that actually influence outcomes.

Altura

The hidden risk of people-dependent bid processes

Bid teams rely heavily on individual experience and tacit knowledge. The survey shows that 62% of respondents say losing a key bid manager or subject matter expert would have a high to very high impact on bid continuity.

When knowledge is stored in people's heads, emails or personal folders, teams become vulnerable to absence, turnover and overload. This fragility increases pressure on remaining team members and makes it difficult to maintain consistency across bids.

Improving continuity requires making knowledge accessible and reusable across bids, so teams are less dependent on specific individuals and better equipped to scale their efforts over time.

62%

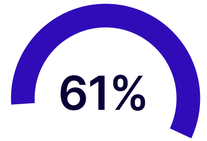
report a high risk on bid continuity when losing a key bid professional.

Altura

Moving beyond task-level automation

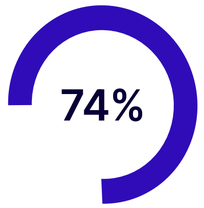
Many bid teams already use data and AI in some form, but their impact remains limited. In practice, AI is often applied to isolated tasks such as drafting or reviewing content, while key decisions are still made without structured support.

When data is scattered across tools and documents, insights fail to inform qualification, prioritisation and reviews at the right moment. As a result, AI may speed up parts of the process, but does not reduce overall effort or improve consistency.
The opportunity for bid teams lies in using data and AI to support decisions throughout the bid process, helping teams prioritise the right opportunities and focus their efforts where they matter most.



Use AI primarily for drafting or isolated tasks.

Say key bid decisions are still made without consistent data or insight.



Don’t consistently use insights during qualification, prioritisation or reviews.

Altura

Who can use the data you generate? Everyone.

These 18 data metrics can be really useful for everyone in your commercial organisation. Are you sharing them yet?

	MANAGEMENT	SALES / BID MANAGEMENT	PRODUCT MANAGEMENT	LEGAL, RISK & COMPLIANCE
1. Sales / tender pipeline & forecast accuracy (# active bids, value, probability)	✓	✓	✓	
2. Product & certification demand (most requested capabilities)	✓	✓	✓	
3. Bid outcomes (win, loss, no-bid rates)	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Bid risk exposure (commercial, legal, delivery risks)	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Go / No-Go decisions (decisions and rationale)	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Qualification feedback loops (patterns from past bids)	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Post-award customer feedback (delivery evaluations)	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Product–market fit signals (what is requested and won)	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Process execution (automated vs. manual steps)	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. New vs. existing business mix (customer and sector split)	✓	✓		
11. Contract value & duration (deal size and length)	✓	✓		
12. Bid profitability (margin per opportunity)	✓	✓		
13. Business review inputs (KPIs used in reviews)	✓	✓		
14. Bid volume & delivery scope (products or services sold)	✓	✓		
15. Competitive signals (win/loss drivers)	✓	✓		
16. Procedure types (RFP, RFQ, RFI mix)		✓	✓	
17. Team effort allocation (time per bid or phase)		✓	✓	
18. Customer evaluations (formal tender scores)		✓		

While the priorities are clear, the operating model is what holds teams back.

High performance starts with qualification and decision clarity

Many teams struggle to consistently decide what to bid on, why they should bid, and what “good” looks like before execution begins. Without clear go/no-go criteria, ownership and structured inputs, teams waste capacity on low-fit opportunities and enter bids too late to shape a winning position. Improving win rates requires earlier alignment and a repeatable decision-making approach that connects strategy, stakeholders and bid execution.

Scaling requires workflow orchestration, not more tools.

A significant part of bid time is lost to coordination: chasing SME input, managing approvals, tracking progress across channels, and keeping versions aligned. The survey points to recurring bottlenecks in ownership, handovers and information retrieval. Teams that scale successfully reduce this friction by standardising how work flows through the organisation and creating shared visibility across the bid lifecycle, so coordination becomes predictable instead of reactive.

Data and AI must be embedded into the process, not layered on top.

Many organisations have access to data and are experimenting with AI, but these capabilities often sit outside the workflow. When information is scattered and decisions happen across disconnected tools, insights don’t reach the right people at the right time. The opportunity is to turn bid data, knowledge and AI into an integrated operating layer that supports qualification, content creation, reviews and performance improvement end to end.

Altura

If you want to...	Tools & Data	Process	Growth	Team
Spend less time coordinating	**Work from a single source of bid information** Reduce time spent searching, updating and reconciling information by capturing bid data and documents in one connected place.	**Standardise how inputs and approvals are requested** Create predictable steps for reviews, approvals and SME input to avoid delays, ambiguity and last-minute rework.	**Create structured feedback moments** Regularly review what worked and what didn't across bids to reduce recurring coordination issues.	**Clarify ownership across the bid lifecycle** Make responsibilities explicit so coordination does not depend on informal handovers or individual availability.
Reduce dependency on individual bid managers and SMEs	**Make bid knowledge reusable across bids** Ensure insights, content and decisions from previous bids can be easily accessed and reused by the wider team.	**Document qualification and decision criteria** Capture how bid decisions are made so choices are consistent and not reliant on individual judgement.	**Plan capacity beyond individual availability** Anticipate peaks in bid volume and complexity to avoid overloading key people.	**Build shared ways of working** Reduce reliance on specific individuals by aligning the team on common processes and expectations.
Use data and AI to support decisions, not just writing	**Reduce reliance on individual bid managers and SMEs** Apply insights from past performance and patterns to inform what to bid on and where to focus effort.	**Embed insights at key decision points** Ensure data and AI outputs are available during qualification, reviews and prioritisation, not only after submission.	**Turn outcomes into input for future bids** Use bid results and feedback to continuously improve decision-making over time.	**Develop data literacy in the bid team** Help teams understand how to interpret and apply data and AI outputs in everyday decisions.

Part #2

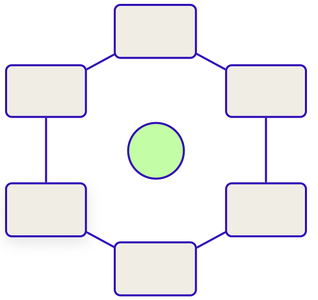
Performance comparison across industries

Altura

How did we come up with the scores in this report?

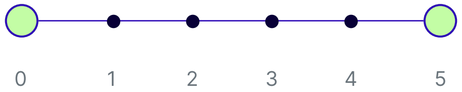
What did we ask?

The survey covered six bid maturity categories and key aspects of day-to-day bid operations.



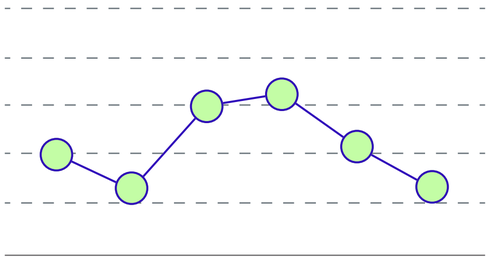
How did we score?

Each category was scored on a scale from 0 to 5, based on the maturity and consistency with which activities are executed across the bid process.



What did we do then?

We consolidated responses by industry and analysed patterns across maturity scores, execution bottlenecks and performance outcomes.



Altura

2.6/5

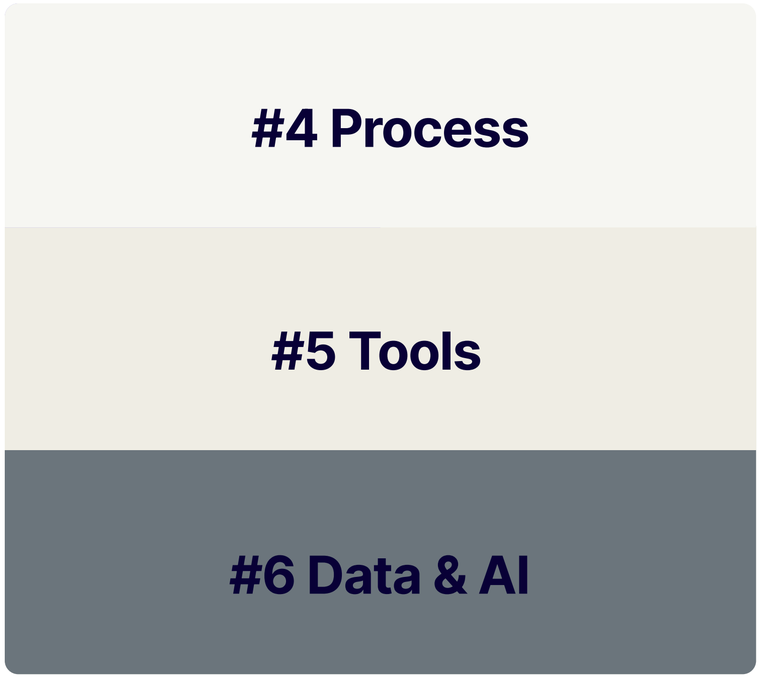
Average maturity score

Indicating that most organisations operate below a fully scalable level and rely on manual coordination and individual experience to keep bids moving.

Highest ranked maturity scores across all pillars with strategy as most mature.

Highest maturity scores

Strategy has the highest maturity score followed by knowledge and team. This indicates that capability and intent are not the primary bottlenecks.



Lowest ranked maturity scores across all pillars with data & AI as least mature.

Lowest maturity scores

The lowest scores are found where execution needs to scale. Data & AI remain the lowest score across al industries. Followed by tools and process.

Strategically strong, operationally complex

Bid teams in IT and software operate in highly competitive environments that require strong internal collaboration and clear strategic positioning. Teams generally perform well when it comes to aligning solution experts, sales and delivery teams around client needs.

At the same time, the bid process is characterised by high coordination complexity. On average, teams work with **16** documents and exchange **170** messages per tender, spread across **8.7** different tools. This makes it difficult to maintain oversight and momentum as bids progress.

While AI adoption is relatively advanced in this industry, its impact is often limited by fragmented workflows. As a result, teams spend a significant share of their time managing information and coordination rather than shaping the strongest possible bid response.

Average maturity score

2.4/5

Average win rate

46%

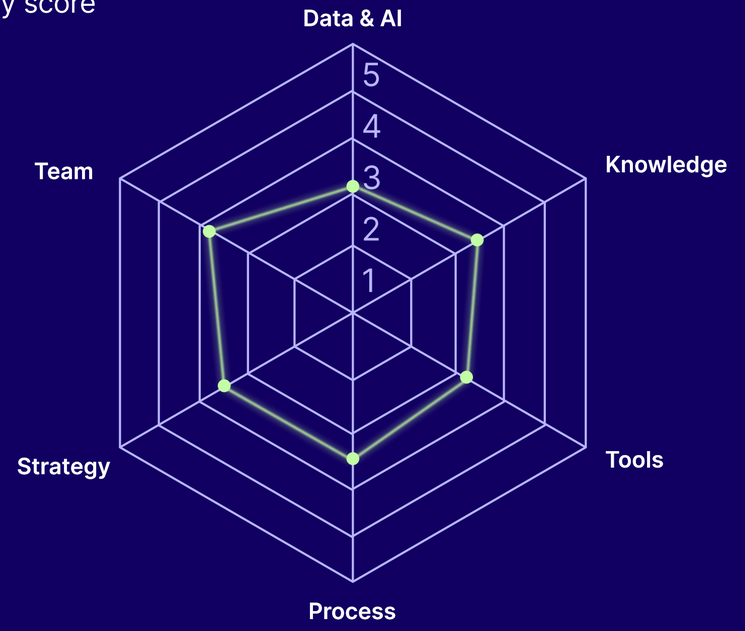
Highest maturity score

Team

Lowest maturity score

Data & AI

Overall maturity score



Knowledge-driven, people-dependent

Average maturity score

2.6/5

Average win rate

47%

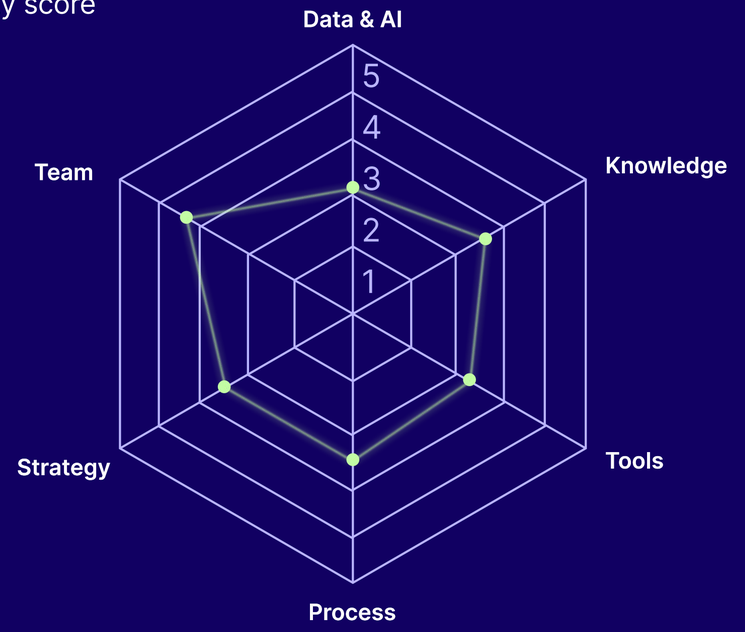
Highest maturity score

Team

Lowest maturity score

Data & AI

Overall maturity score



Bid teams in business consulting excel in domain knowledge, client understanding and competitive positioning. This expertise often resides with experienced individuals and is built up over time through projects and client work.

At the same time, knowledge is frequently stored in silos, making teams highly dependent on individuals. **43%** of respondents indicate that losing a key bid professional would have a high impact on bid continuity. Fragmented tools and workflows make it difficult to reuse insights efficiently, especially when teams operate across multiple accounts and sectors.

As a result, a significant share of effort is spent on coordination and analysis rather than early qualification and strategic positioning. Connecting knowledge to a shared workflow remains a key opportunity for improvement

Construction

High complexity, high dependency

Construction bid teams operate in environments defined by tight deadlines, strict compliance requirements and large volumes of documentation. On average, a single tender involves **45** documents and **154** messages, reflecting the complexity of managing information across disciplines and stakeholders.

The survey shows a strong dependency on individuals in this industry. **86%** of respondents say that losing a key bid manager or subject matter expert would be highly disruptive. Combined with the use of **10.3** different tools per tender, this creates fragility when teams are under time pressure.

Much of the effort in construction bids goes into coordination and administration rather than strategic decision-making. Improving continuity and reducing reliance on individual knowledge would help teams perform more consistently.

Average maturity score

2.9/5

Average win rate

48%

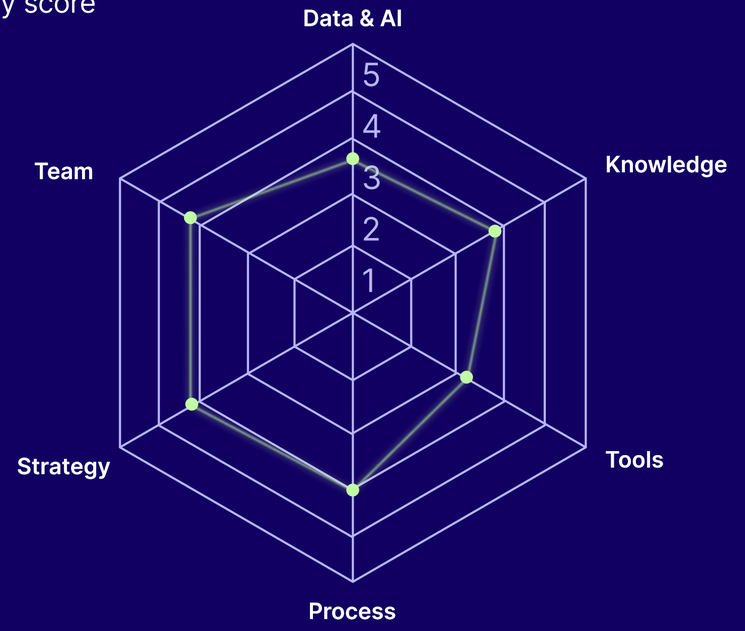
Highest maturity score

Team

Lowest maturity score

Tools

Overall maturity score



Human Resources & Staffing

Efficient execution, limited insight reuse

Staffing and HR bid teams show relatively efficient execution compared to other industries. They work with fewer documents (**14** per tender), exchange fewer messages (**57** on average) and use fewer collaboration tools (**6.3** per tender).

As a result, these teams spend less time on administration and coordination (**19%** of bid time) and are able to move quickly through the bid process. However, their average win rate (**39%**) is lower than in other industries.

This suggests that the main opportunity lies not in reducing complexity further, but in making better use of insights from previous bids, client feedback and competitive outcomes to improve qualification and positioning.

Average maturity score

2.5/5

Average win rate

39%

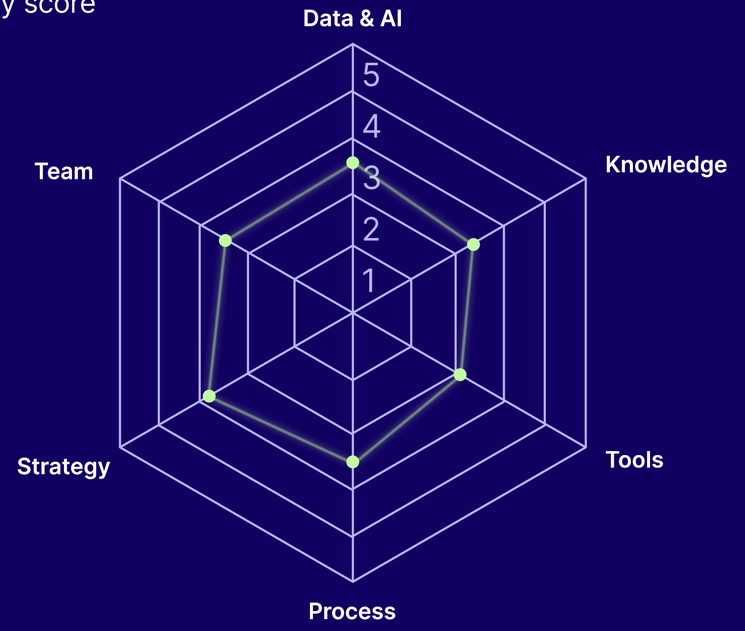
Highest maturity score

Strategy

Lowest maturity score

Tools

Overall maturity score



Infrastructure & Civil Engineering

Heavy coordination, limited room for strategy

Infrastructure and civil engineering bids are characterised by long timelines, complex stakeholder environments and extensive documentation. Teams report spending an average of **45%** of their bid time on administrative and coordination activities.

Despite strong technical and regulatory knowledge, execution is slowed by manual handovers and fragmented processes. Every respondent in this group indicates that losing a key bid professional would be highly disruptive, highlighting strong dependency on individual expertise.

High coordination effort leaves limited time for early qualification and strategic positioning. Reducing manual work and improving continuity across bids would help teams manage complexity more effectively.

Average maturity score

2.8/5

Average win rate

50%

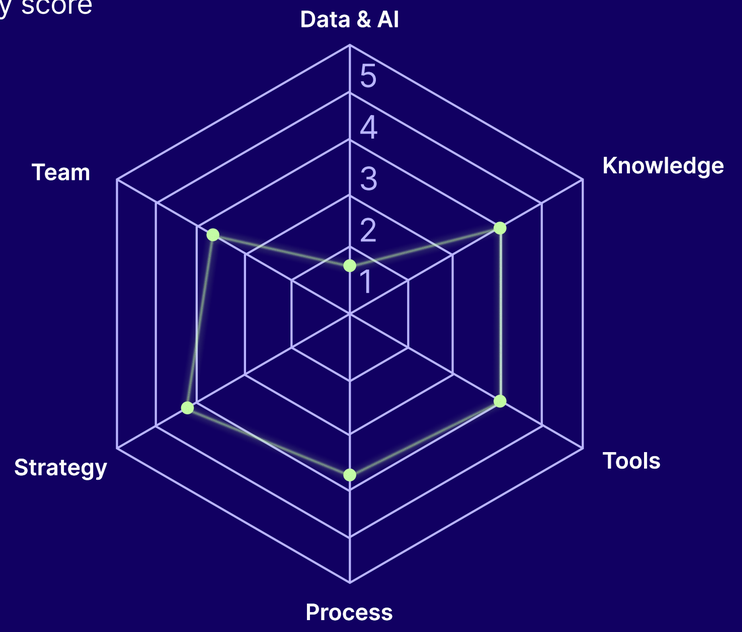
Highest maturity score

Strategy

Lowest maturity score

Data & AI

Overall maturity score



Data & AI consistently ranks among the lowest-scoring pillars

Across industries, bid teams struggle to embed data and AI into daily decision-making, limiting their ability to improve consistency and reduce risk.

Altura

What are the main roadblocks for bid teams to reach their goals?

Knowledge trapped in silos

Critical bid knowledge is often stored in individual documents, folders or people's heads. This makes it difficult to access insights quickly, reuse best practices and maintain continuity when team members change.

Fragmented workflows across systems

Bid teams collaborate across a wide range of tools, including email, documents, shared drives, CRM systems and tender platforms. This fragmentation increases coordination effort, reduces visibility and introduces risk throughout the bid process.

Chronic time pressure

Due to coordination overhead and fragmented workflows, bid teams spend a disproportionate amount of time on administrative tasks. As a result, there is never enough time for early qualification, strategic positioning and proposal quality.

Part #3

Interviews with bid professionals

Gelmer van den Noort

Manager Business Development

GovTech, IT services

xxllnc

Gelmer van den Noort is *Manager Business Development* at **xxllnc**, a European software provider delivering digital solutions for municipalities and public sector organisations, where he leads a five-person tender team responsible for public sector bids and market consultations. With a background in information science and over five years of hands-on experience in tendering, Gelmer remains closely involved in day-to-day bid work while also focusing on innovation, client strategy and market developments. His perspective reflects the practical realities of managing complex bids in a public sector context.

The role of AI: where it helps and where humans remain essential

According to Gelmer, the greatest value of AI in bid and tender work lies in the early, repetitive stages of the process. These are tasks that recur in almost every tender and consume a disproportionate amount of time.

“Especially at the start of a tender, a lot of effort goes into repetitive activities,” he explains. “Think of identifying and structuring risks in tender documents, or drafting questions for clarification rounds. These tasks follow similar patterns every time, yet they still require a lot of manual effort today.”

AI can assist to reduce this workload by supporting risk identification, document analysis and the preparation of clarification questions. The same applies to analytical tasks such as summarising large tender packs, bundling relevant data, or identifying recurring themes across documents.

Gelmer also sees clear potential for AI as a writing support tool, but not as a replacement for human authorship. AI can help retrieve relevant prior content, check consistency, and validate whether a draft actually answers the question being asked. In some cases, it may help generate an initial draft that can then be refined.

“Currently, I don’t see AI fully writing tender responses,” he says. “Its strength is in supporting the process, not taking it over.”

Human judgement, by contrast, remains critical in three areas. First and foremost, strategy. Decisions about positioning, differentiation, and where to take or avoid risk require contextual understanding that AI cannot yet replicate.

“Strategic choices around a tender are fundamentally human,” Gelmer notes. “AI can provide input, but it cannot fully grasp nuance, political sensitivity or the broader context.”

Secondly, humans are essential for identifying new or context-specific risks. While AI is effective at spotting known risks based on past data, each tender brings unique elements that require expert interpretation. Finally, human oversight remains indispensable in final quality control. Claims must be accurate, language must fit the organisation, and promises must be deliverable. “The real value lies in combining AI intelligently with a strong human layer on top.”

How AI is reshaping bid team structures and roles

Gelmer observes a clear shift in how bid teams allocate their time and expertise. As AI takes over repetitive and administrative tasks, both bid managers and subject matter experts can focus more on work that requires judgement and creativity.

“Right now, both bid managers and experts still spend time on generic risks, standard questions and reusing text,” he says. “AI can take over a significant part of that. That allows experts to focus on what is unique about a specific tender, instead of repeating the same points over and over again.”

This shift also affects the role of the bid or tender manager. Tasks that were previously handled ‘on the side’, such as strategic positioning and prioritisation, become central to the role.

“The bid manager increasingly becomes the strategic lead,” Gelmer explains. “Setting priorities, aligning the team, focusing on differentiation, and making sure attention goes to the areas where you can really make a difference.”

Importantly, this does not necessarily mean smaller teams. Rather, it means teams spend their time differently. Repetitive work is reduced, while collaboration, strategy and content quality gain prominence.

Collaboration under pressure: what really works

While AI can reduce pressure at the start of a tender by handling repetitive tasks, Gelmer is clear that effective collaboration itself remains a human and organisational challenge.

At the core is a shared goal. If contributing to a bid feels like a forced task for experts, collaboration breaks down quickly. Motivation improves when stakeholders understand how the bid contributes to their own objectives or to winning a customer they care about.

Equally important is early and structural involvement. Bringing colleagues in only days before a deadline creates friction and misunderstanding. In contrast, involving stakeholders immediately after publication sets clear expectations and builds ownership.

“People who are involved regularly know what is expected of them,” Gelmer notes. “Someone you bring in once needs everything explained from scratch. That costs time and increases the risk of misalignment.”

Clear, jointly agreed deadlines also matter. Deadlines imposed unilaterally rarely work. Instead, bid managers should align on what is realistic and ask for explicit commitment. Communicating deadlines in a visible and consistent way reduces friction and follow-up.

Finally, Gelmer strongly advocates for a shared kick-off at the start of a tender. A collective session creates alignment around scope, objectives and risks, and reinforces the sense that the bid is a joint effort rather than a series of isolated tasks.

Proof, authenticity and differentiation in complex bids

Gelmer sees a growing risk of commoditisation as AI becomes more prevalent on both sides of the tender process. If both buyers and suppliers increasingly rely on AI-generated content, proposals risk becoming generic and interchangeable.

“In that situation, the key question becomes: how do you still stand out?”

For Gelmer, the answer lies in authenticity and proof. Decision-makers want to see what genuinely makes a supplier different, not just that all questions have been answered correctly.

“Authenticity means showing what truly makes you unique,” he explains. “If everyone answers the questions well, that alone is no longer enough.”

Equally important is credibility. Buyers increasingly ask whether a supplier can realistically deliver what they promise. Concrete examples, references and evidence help answer that question.

“In the end, evaluators are asking themselves: can this party really deliver what they claim, or is it too good to be true?”

What will separate high-performing bid teams in the years ahead?

Gelmer identifies several factors that will distinguish successful teams.

First, a deliberate and focused use of AI. Using AI in itself is no longer differentiating; how and where it is applied is what matters. High-performing teams make conscious choices about where AI adds value and where it does not.

Second, strong, data-informed bid/no-bid decisions. Teams that reflexively respond to every opportunity waste capacity and dilute quality. Successful teams use data and experience to decide where to invest their time and are willing to say no.

Finally, there is a clear shift towards quality over quantity. Any time saved through AI should not be used to chase more bids, but to improve the bids that are pursued.

“If AI reduces repetitive work, that time shouldn’t be spent on doing more,” Gelmer concludes. “It should be invested in strategy, differentiation and increasing win probability.”

In an increasingly competitive and automated environment, teams that use AI to slow down, think strategically and focus on quality will outperform those that simply try to move faster.

Rens Zwakenberg

Proposal Manager

Professional services

BDO

Rens Zwakenberg is a Proposal Manager at BDO, a professional services firm providing audit, tax and advisory services to public and private sector organisations. He works in a central proposal team of six, supporting complex commercial proposals and European public tenders, particularly for government bodies and municipalities.

Unlike product-based bids, professional services proposals focus on people delivering expertise over time. Rens works closely with accountants and partners who provide deep domain knowledge and remain responsible for the content. His role focuses on process, coordination and strategy: involving the right experts, structuring the bid process around client needs, reviewing texts, and drafting initial versions for experts to build on. Under tight deadlines, he helps shape proposals that genuinely fit the client and their context.

AI in bidwork: useful for analysis, risky for authorship

Rens sees AI as a practical support tool, particularly in the analytical phases of bid work. It helps proposal teams process large volumes of information more quickly and add to what they already know about a client, rather than replacing that understanding.

“We mainly use AI to analyse the request and the client context,” he explains. “What’s important to them? What are they worried about? Where are the opportunities for this client, and how can we support them?”

This type of analysis is especially valuable when teams do not have deep, long-standing relationships with a buyer. AI helps surface signals from public documents, previous communications and broader market information that would otherwise take much longer to uncover.

However, Rens is cautious not to overstate AI’s value. He does not see it as a breakthrough that fundamentally changes bid work, nor as something to be relied on uncritically.

Where his scepticism becomes much stronger is in writing.

“AI-generated text seems perfect,” he says. “And that’s exactly the danger.”

When you are selling complex professional services, proposals are legally binding and highly scrutinised. Small inaccuracies or vague claims can have serious consequences. AI-generated content may read well, but without subject-matter expertise, it is difficult to assess whether it is actually correct.

“Everything AI produces sounds credible if you don’t have deep, up-to-date knowledge of the subject,,” Rens notes. “But an expert will spot the gaps immediately.”

For that reason, AI is never trusted to produce final proposal text. At most, it helps generate a structure or an initial draft. Those drafts are then rewritten multiple times and thoroughly reviewed by subject matter experts.

“AI might get you 70 or 75 percent of the way there,” Rens notes, “but to write a winning proposal, that last stretch has to be human.”

Roles, responsibility and the limits of generalisation

Rens is careful to stress that AI behaves very differently depending on the sector you work in. In product-based environments, proposal managers may be able to validate content themselves. In professional services, that is rarely the case.

“When you’re selling accountancy or advisory services, you’re selling expertise,” he explains. “I don’t have twenty or thirty years of accounting experience. I can’t be the one who signs off on content.”

That reality shapes how responsibilities are organised. Subject matter experts remain fully accountable for the substance of proposals. Proposal managers, by contrast, are responsible for guiding the process, challenging assumptions and making sure expertise is applied where it matters most.

AI does not change that division of responsibility. If anything, it reinforces it.

“What AI has changed,” Rens observes, “is how easy it has become for many organisations to produce a ‘good enough’ proposal.”

More firms can now submit proposals that look professional and structured, which raises the baseline quality across the market. That makes it harder to stand out and places more pressure on teams to decide where to invest real effort.

Not every opportunity deserves the same level of attention. Some bids are largely procedural, others are strategically critical. AI makes it easier to cover the basics everywhere, but it does not remove the need for careful prioritisation.

Organisational friction: trust, control and information overload

Introducing AI into proposal work also brings new organisational challenges. One of the most significant is quality control. Before AI, most proposal content originated directly from internal experts, limiting the risk of factual errors. With AI, that safeguard no longer exists by default.

“A proposal can look finished very quickly,” Rens says, “but that doesn’t mean it’s correct.”

This is especially risky when proposal managers lack deep subject-matter expertise themselves. AI output can easily be accepted at face value, even when it contains subtle errors or misleading claims. In legally binding tenders, that risk cannot be ignored.

At the same time, AI can generate an overwhelming amount of information. Analyses, ideas and suggestions multiply quickly, making it harder to focus on what truly matters.

“You can end up with a lot of interesting input,” Rens notes, “and still miss the core of the story.”

In that sense, the proposal manager’s role shifts further towards filtering, structuring and maintaining direction rather than purely producing content.

Clarity and communication are everything

Despite technological advances, Rens is clear that effective collaboration remains a human challenge. Hybrid working has changed how teams interact, and aligning busy experts under tight deadlines has become more difficult.

“Communication is everything,” he says simply.

Clear agreements on roles and responsibilities are essential, particularly when AI is involved. Teams need to know where AI has been used, what still needs expert input, and who is accountable for final decisions.

Proposal managers act as process owners, ensuring deadlines are met, dependencies are managed and the right people are involved at the right moments. Subject matter experts, in turn, retain ownership of content quality and credibility.

That clarity allows teams to move faster without compromising trust, even when time pressure is high.

The importance of adapting to buyer-side change

One of Rens’ strongest concerns lies beyond the proposal team itself. He believes many suppliers underestimate how quickly buyers and procurement teams are adapting to the rise of AI.

“In procurement, people are actively thinking about how to reduce the influence of AI,” he says.

He points to early experiments with alternative evaluation methods, such as on-site case sessions where teams are observed solving problems together without access to AI. These approaches aim to assess collaboration, judgement and real expertise rather than polished written responses.

“They want to see who they’re really going to work with,” Rens explains.

At the same time, Rens recognises that these methods introduce new challenges around fairness and standardisation. Written proposals are unlikely to disappear overnight, but he expects the balance to shift. “If you don’t follow how procurement is changing,” he warns, “you risk optimising for the wrong thing.”

What separates high-performing bid teams

Looking ahead, Rens does not believe high-performing bid teams will be defined by how advanced their use of AI is. In his view, AI increasingly helps teams reach a solid baseline, but it does not create real differentiation on its own.

“AI can get you to an eight,” he says. “The difference to getting to ten is by exceeding the expectations of the client.”

That final step is about understanding context. High-performing teams know what matters to a specific organisation, who is involved in the decision, and where added value genuinely lies. Rather than focusing on volume or speed, they shape proposals around fit, relevance and credibility.

For Rens, the strongest teams use AI to create space for better thinking, not to do more work faster. Teams that chase volume risk blending into a growing field of competent but interchangeable proposals, while those that invest in insight and specialisation are better positioned to stand out.

Arjen Stouw

Bid Manager

Waste management, environmental tech

vconsyst

Arjen Stouw is a Bid Manager at VConsyst, a provider of public space solutions such as underground waste containers, bins and bicycle storage systems. The organisation also delivers cleaning and maintenance services, adding extra specialist domains to the bid process. With a large share of revenue coming from public tenders, tendering is a core commercial driver for the business.

Arjen has been with VConsyst for four years and moved into bid management in early 2025 to help professionalise the organisation's tender approach. He leads a three-person tender desk and works with specialists across the business to bring the right expertise into each bid, aiming to be more selective in tender choices and more consistent in go/no-go decisions and delivery.

AI for repetitive tasks and summaries, humans for the added value

For Arjen, the value of AI in bid work is very clear and very practical. It is not about replacing expertise, but about removing friction in the earliest, most repetitive stages of the process.

One of the biggest gains he points to is tender summarisation. "Where a colleague used to spend a quarter to half a day summarising a tender," he explains, "we can now do that in five to ten minutes." That speed matters because it enables faster internal alignment and earlier decisions.

Crucially, Arjen does not expect perfection at that stage. "That summary doesn't need to be 100% right," he says. "It needs to be 80% right, so we can quickly share it with management and decide whether we want to invest time and capacity."

Beyond summarisation, he also uses AI to accelerate early drafting and assessment. He refers to AI-assisted initial versions of qualitative documents to get to a first structure quickly, and mentions using AI to process and evaluate material at speed. But across all use cases, Arjen keeps the same principle: AI supports, people decide.

A phrase he uses repeatedly is 'human in the loop'. In his view, AI can do the heavy lifting on repetitive work, while humans must remain responsible for shaping content, checking critical details, and making the proposal genuinely client-specific. "You can use AI very intelligently," he says, "but you can't rely on it 100% or follow it blindly."

That human oversight becomes especially important when the work shifts from drafting to differentiation. As Arjen puts it, the real added value of the team is "improving it, making it client-specific". AI can speed up the path to a first version, but it cannot replace the judgement required to decide what actually matters for this customer, in this context, right now.

He also highlights a practical safeguard that matters in bid environments: traceability. For him, it is essential that teams can always see where AI pulled information from. "You always need to be able to go back to the source," he explains. That is not just about quality. It is about governance, auditability, and confidence in what you submit.

From coordination-heavy to value-driven tender teams

As AI reduces repetitive work, Arjen expects bid teams to shift away from coordination-heavy roles towards more value-driven work.

VConsyst is a highly multidisciplinary organisation. Development, hardware, factories and service teams all play a role, and large tenders can easily involve ten to fifteen people. Historically, that means a lot of effort goes into alignment and chasing input.

The direction Arjen is working towards is different. “We’re building towards a model where we can handle about 75% of a tender independently as a three-person tender team,” he explains, “and then source the remaining 25% of specialist knowledge from the organisation.”

That changes the nature of the role. The tender team becomes responsible for structure, task ownership and timing, rather than constant coordination. “Our role becomes much more about setting structure, managing tasks, and following up on deadlines,” Arjen says.

At the same time, the work becomes more strategic. Instead of simply responding to requirements, the team focuses on filtering what truly matters to the customer. “Those hooks and anchors,” as Arjen calls them, are what differentiate a strong bid from a compliant one.

Forecasting beats firefighting

When it comes to collaboration between the tender desk, sales, and subject matter experts, Arjen’s answer is grounded in operational reality: alignment, communication, and expectation management. Under time pressure, bid work becomes fragile if inputs arrive late, responsibilities are unclear, or stakeholders feel surprised by deadlines.

He describes the familiar scenario: a tender appears, six weeks remain, and everyone scrambles. The most effective countermeasure, in his view, is forecasting. By working with sales to anticipate which tenders are coming, the organisation can decide earlier where to invest.

He points to tender forecasting as a way to create calm later in the process. By working with sales to look ahead at what tenders are likely to be coming, teams can make earlier choices and reduce last-minute scramble. “If we look ahead together at what we expect,” he explains, “we can already decide whether we will or won’t go for something. That creates a lot of calm later.”

Arjen owns that forecasting process and works closely with the sales manager, who then embeds it into the wider sales team. That clarity of ownership ensures alignment without ambiguity.

Operational basics still matter. “Good alignment, communication, clear deadlines that I actively follow up on,” he says. But the real shift is moving from reactive bidding to proactive planning.

Proof over polish in a more uniform market

As AI raises the baseline quality of proposals, Arjen sees a growing risk of uniformity. “Everyone will be able to produce a good-looking proposal,” he notes. “That creates a kind of sameness.”

That pushes buyers to look beyond the paper. Arjen sees decision-makers increasingly asking: how will this work in practice, not just in a document? You can make anything look strong on paper, but the concern shifts to delivery.

In that environment, he expects more emphasis on proof. He mentions certifications as concrete evidence that processes are in place: “ISO 27001, ISO 9001, ISO 14001”, and other forms of documented assurance. These are signals that the organisation follows standards and can be relied on operationally.

He also sees live demonstrations becoming more important, especially in his market. “The demo is already important,” he says, because it shows whether a solution is truly fit for purpose. For VConsyst that may mean demonstrating functionality and usability, not just describing it.

Finally, he notes the importance of the post-award phase. Decision-makers want confidence that quality will remain high throughout delivery, and that suppliers can manage and steer performance during the contract phase. In other words: not just winning well, but delivering well.

Across all of this, the underlying theme is verification. If written proposals become easier to produce, buyers will lean harder on signals that are difficult to fake: standards, proof, demos, delivery governance, and track record.

High-performing bid teams match the real need behind the documents

When asked what will separate successful bid teams from the rest, Arjen answers without hesitation: the ability to truly match what the customer wants. “For me it’s very simple,” he says. “It’s the extent to which you can genuinely align with the customer’s needs.”

He links that directly to collaboration with sales. If teams work well together and truly understand what customers value, they can respond in a way that resonates. But he also adds an important layer: tender documents are never the whole story.

Behind the formal requirements, there is context and there is politics. “On the surface it’s a set of documents,” he explains, “but in the background there’s politics. You need to know a customer really well to know what they actually want.”

In his view, that is where teams gain an edge. High-performing teams do not only respond to what is written; they interpret what sits behind it. They translate signals into positioning, and they craft proposals around the real intent rather than just the stated ask. If you “play that game well,” Arjen says, “you have an advantage.”

AI may raise the baseline, but it does not replace that insight. The teams that win consistently will be the ones that use AI to free capacity for better thinking, sharper selectivity, and stronger customer understanding, rather than simply producing more output faster.

On the changing role of bid managers:

“The bid manager increasingly becomes the strategic lead: setting priorities, aligning the team, focusing on differentiation, and making sure attention goes to the areas where you can really make a difference.”

Gelmer van den Noort, Manager Business Development xxllnc, IT / software

Want to know your bid maturity level?

Learn where you are today and what you can do to improve your bid process

Start the test here

Altura

Learn more