



Jacquie Hoornweg

Managing partner at Querencia Partners

Suppliers leading the way

Through the CANDU Owners Group (COG) supplier participant programme (SPP), suppliers have collaborated to develop an internationally-recognised approach to achieve stronger safety and quality culture, **Jacquie Hoornweg** reports

SIX TIMES A YEAR, A few dozen industry leaders, representing almost 30 Candu suppliers, gather for a one-day meeting at one of the participant’s facilities. These meetings are not about industry advocacy or business development. There is no golf.

Instead, the host sets the table for meaningful, outcome-oriented discussion on several topics core to the role of the supply chain in today’s nuclear environment where, increasingly, suppliers are taking on leadership roles in projects and operations working alongside their clients.

The purpose of the COG programme is to provide the supply community with a technical forum to manage knowledge. Its goal is continuous business improvement and innovation, like that COG utilities have achieved through the organisation for several decades.

“Over the past several years, through the COG programme, the supplier community has done a few important things that have really opened the doors for communication both amongst the suppliers and between the supply community and the utilities,” says Ian Trotman. He is the programme chair, and representative for Hatch, a global engineering and consulting company with several Canadian offices, including one in Port Elgin, near the Bruce Power nuclear plant.

Meeting topics include shared operating experience, strategies for strengthening safety and security of the supply chain, nuclear safety culture, quality control and leadership and human performance. There are also discussions on common challenges in the supplier-operator relationship and how to resolve them with a common voice. Since the meetings generally have participation by a few

senior utility leaders, for at least part of the day, there is also an opportunity for dialogue that can help all parties tackle the challenges head on, together.

“There has been a significant increase in the openness to sharing operating experience, both good and bad,” says Trotman. “This is not the norm as we think of it amongst competitors in an industry. Through the programme over the past several years, we have built trust and an understanding that when we work collaboratively on things like setting safety and quality culture, it strengthens the industry, and the opportunities, for all of us.”

COG is a member organisation founded in 1984 to pool resources, collaborative research and information exchange amongst Candu operators in seven countries. In 2004, a Supplier Participant programme was created. But it was in 2015 that the programme, then with eight participating organisations, really lifted off.

Given the increasingly integrated role suppliers were playing at Candu plants, including projects like Ontario’s \$26-billion refurbishment and major component replacements, there was recognition that utility success depended heavily on suppliers striving for the same high standards of human performance, product quality and nuclear safety culture as plant employees. “Achieving that requires the same level of leadership in every organisation involved from part manufacturing to assembly at site. The responsibility is not just on the one holding the operating licence,” says Fred Dermarck, COG’s president and CEO.

Dermarck notes there are requirements to be a member of the COG programme. Companies must meet a minimum business requirement to join. “It keeps the dialogue at an

Below left: **COG supplier participants**

Below right: **COG Supplier Participant Programme chair and representative for Hatch, Ian Trotman, with Glen Crawford of Rolls-Royce**





industry leadership level where the people meeting are the ones with sufficient influence to take the actions back and have their companies, and their own suppliers, implement them,” he says.

The expectation is that what is hatched and put into action in the programme meeting rooms is shared throughout the supply chain and that the collective senior supplier leadership is working on this with a common objective in mind.

Dissemination has also been helped by industry organisation collaboration, notes Dermarkar. Ron Oberth, president of the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries, attends the meetings and shares information through his approximately 250-member organisation.

In 2015, Trotman was an independent consultant working with COG. He was tasked with taking the sleeper programme and revitalizing it. Macit Cobanoglu took over the role in 2017, when Trotman moved over to Hatch. In his current role as chair Trotman sees the work evolving.

“It is encouraging to see that even as original SPP representatives move on to other roles, the companies are replacing them with knowledgeable and engaged individuals,” he says, adding, “This is crucial to maintaining the value of the interactions.”

The initial thinking for the revitalised supplier programme began with the project-focussed need and that drove the requirement for suppliers to adopt strong conventional and nuclear safety cultures. In the years that followed, the relationship between operators and suppliers evolved. New vendor-designed digital technologies, artificial intelligence and other operational innovations developed in

the supply chain have been integrated into operating plants. These make it more important that suppliers have a strong quality culture in their processes.

Operators need to have confidence that the supply chain can manage issues like managing counterfeit, fraudulent and suspect parts, that they have sophisticated quality assurance processes and that they are adopting the right cultures to instil safety and security requirements.

Cobanoglu has experience as a reactor designer and major service provider, as well as a nuclear construction services supplier. He spent several years as the director of joint projects and services at COG. He is excited by the progress he has seen since taking over the programme two years ago. The value of the collaboration model has been recognised. Early context-setting conversations have matured to include programme work and action plans, including developing supplier performance metrics and formalisation of opex sharing processes.

In 2019, COG introduced a first-line supervisor training programme tailored to suppliers, with elements similar to its long-running nuclear professional development seminar programme for emerging nuclear utility leaders.

Dermarkar says the model can provide a blueprint for utilities and supply chains worldwide. “We are happy to share our experience and to help others take the lessons for their own efforts,” says Dermarkar. “A strong nuclear industry where everyone has all the tools and skills for strong nuclear and conventional safety and quality work will further strengthen our collective performance. This in turn strengthens public confidence in our industry. That can only help everyone.” ■

Above: **Timeline showing growth of the COG Supplier Participant Programme and related industry events**

Below: **CANDU Owners Group recently introduced a first-line supervisor leadership training programme tailored to suppliers**

