



FOCUS ARTICLE

Cultural Alignment for Contractors: A Supply Chain Assessment

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Industry today is characterised by a complex web of interdependence, often involving lengthy supply chains. It is rare for large organisations to operate without the contributions of contracting companies in one form or another, and often these contributions require the presence of a contractor's employees on site. Since company culture resides in the behaviours and attitudes of individuals, in this scenario there is an interface between the "host" culture and the "guest" culture; its consequences - for safety, productivity, efficiency - depend on the similarity or divergence between the two.

Why Cultural Alignment Is Important

As might be expected, the "host" organisation assumes the greatest risk. In terms of legal responsibility, the owner of a site is liable for the safety of all those present, regardless of formal employment contracts. Even beyond safety issues, the site owner has a substantial stake in site activities, and the success of these projects depends in part on how well the "host" team and that of the contractor(s) cooperate.

Organisations today work hard to embed a strong safety culture throughout their workplaces. Cultural maturity is synonymous with fewer incidents and injuries, higher productivity and efficiency and healthier, happier employees. Investing in programmes that

reinforce safe behaviours and company values are worthwhile, as a robust safety culture is resilient and less vulnerable to breaches. Therefore, it is important that **safety training** and education extends to contract workers who influence performance, essentially functioning as employees on site and bringing their own cultural propensities to bear. But what if safety training is limited to internal workforce? And how do organisations know contractors fit into their safety culture before they come to site?

This is where cultural alignment comes into play. When two company cultures are aligned, projects are delivered without loss or harm to people, plant or productivity. Rather than relying on blind chance or a subjective feeling without an objective assessment to find an appropriate match, organisations can actively screen bidders

during the tender process to increase the likelihood that their contractors operate according to values and safety principles similar to their own. Additionally, both parties benefit when areas of incompatibility are identified so that accommodations can be made, or steps can be taken to improve their alignment.

How We Support our Clients

A case in point is ConocoPhillips (COP UK). As part of its continued focus on safety, the company recognised the role of contractors in supporting a safe work environment. They turned to DEKRA for advice on customising a **cultural alignment assessment** aimed at narrowing a field of 5 bidders in a tender process down to 2. In close consultation with COP UK, DEKRA OR designed a tailor-made assessment comprised of interviews and surveys to determine the degree of cultural alignment between

COP UK and its prospective contractors. Using the assessment results in tandem with other information gleaned from the tender process, COP UK was able to select two promising companies for the final round of bidding.

COP UK understood the difference cultural alignment could make in maintaining and reinforcing the progress it had achieved towards establishing a robust company culture. Finding suitable contractors who enrich rather than undermine efforts at embedding safe behaviours is a reasonable goal for any company wishing to preserve and sustain its cultural maturity and as part of any supply chain assessment. As noted, the benefits of alignment extend beyond creating a safe workplace, although this alone justifies the added energy and attention a cultural alignment assessment may require. Organisations also stand to gain in terms of productivity, quality and efficiency as well as learning more about themselves and their closest associates.

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Carlene Smith is Consultant, Assessment & Solutions at DEKRA Organisational Reliability Ltd. She has a master's in occupational psychology with a specific interest in helping organisations improve their performance, whether that is in regards to safety, productivity or the organisational culture. Carlene joined DEKRA in 2012 following her undergraduate degree in Psychology. Carlene's current role focuses on providing clients with cultural assessments and recommending and developing appropriate solutions to increase cultural maturity with the aim to create a culture of care.



DEKRA Organisational Reliability

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