Client and Contractor: Aligning Safety Cultures

Organizations serious about safety excellence focus on long-term value for both employees and contractors and place quality of life over cost reduction. Conductive cultures can be the most effective tool in achieving safety results. High-performance organizations realize alignment of safety cultures is becoming the core responsibility of not just the contractors, but those engaging them, as well.

In this time of strategic outsourcing, many companies utilize contractors to support various business operations. Whether short- or long-term, these contractors are a business necessity in several companies. As these organizations bring groups together representing different cultures around safety, new risks emerge. How well the cultural risks are identified and mitigated and desired beliefs and behaviors are improved will be the new competitive advantage in safety performance.

In your organization, are contractors being held accountable for maintaining certain incident rates or what they do to achieve? When contractors are selected, is it determined how well their culture would match and complement the company’s culture, or is more emphasis placed on whether they have the right programs in place? Is there uniformity in safety practices or are their different expectations for contractors and employees? How well aligned are the company and contractor safety excellence strategies?

Having a strategic framework in place that establishes accountability for culture, not just activities and results, is essential for continuous improvement in business results.

Organizational culture can be either a powerful tool or a hindrance to the results organizations need from their contractors. A contractor’s culture not only influences the beliefs and behaviors of their employees, but also the client’s employees. When the behavior of contractor personnel is observed by client employees, over time, this has an impact on the beliefs, decisions, and behaviors of client employees and the stories they tell one another. With recent unfortunate media-worthy events, it is hard to argue with the fact that contractor and client cultures affect each other.

Organizations leveraging contractors require a culture-conver-