

FNET Skills Share: Engaging the supply base – it's all about relationships



Action

Why

How

Tailor your approach

Companies have different shapes and characteristics (Tier 1/2/3, multi-national, SME) and your relationship is unique. Don't assume that companies will know or understand what you are talking about regarding human rights. Staff are busy, the issue may be low priority. Engage your supplier in general and not just on human rights issues. Some people may not engage, so identify and work with people who do.

Offer a tailored and flexible engagement options e.g. 1-2-1 vs groups, live (events/webinars), documentation such as codes or guides

It will take time

Individuals are important – build relationships, motivate and support, be directive when needed.

Speak the language of the supplier and tailor your communication to fit with the company's organisational structure and culture.

Inspire and collaborate

Don't underestimate the human element in your relationship with the supplier. Try to understand what might motivate and inspire someone to engage fully, as well as understand some of their challenges and exact predicament.

Suppliers may also be looking for real-life examples from similar situations to help motivate, or share learning on what is possible to achieve.

Suppliers may be interested by may not have much capacity. Assess what you can do to help support them.

Explore what you can do to inspire the people working for your supplier. Could you co-create actions, or support them to be creative and empowered to find solutions?

Organise peer networks or exchange opportunities so suppliers can share with each other. The information may be more tangible and better received.

Use FNET as a forum to share learning, inspiration and peer support and use existing materials and resources to avoid duplication.

Be clear and reduce complexity

It is important to be clear on why a supplier should engage and on what your expectations are as a company. Sometimes a supplier will be dealing with different individuals in your company so ensure that you are internally aligned and they are not receiving mixed messages from different teams.

- Give them knowledge so they are ahead of the curve, simple and clear communication on regulations.
- Provide clarity on expectations on business alignment and values and be clear about policies, reporting (what, by when, whom) and management.
- Set clear timeframes and expected actions in writing.
- Allocate resources where you can have an impact, don't just consider risk.