

CEP Magazine – December 2018

Bedouin compliance and the ethical supply chain

by Lori Baker

Lori Baker (baker.lori.a@gmail.com) is a Data Protection and Compliance professional with 12 years' experience in both fields and nearly 20 years' experience as a qualified attorney. She is qualified in the UK and the US, and is currently based in Dubai, UAE.

- [linkedin.com/in/loriheffelfingerbaker](https://www.linkedin.com/in/loriheffelfingerbaker)

Etiquette and ethics in the Middle East play a big role in daily life, steeped in tradition and almost interchangeable in meaning. Only rare exceptional circumstances allow for a deviation from the very clear steps required for mutually acceptable interactions between men, women, children, elders, and even for those outside of the tribe. Generosity of home and spirit is the foundation. Word is bond. Handshake, when permitted, is the seal. In many ways, going back not all that long ago, business was done in very similar ways. It is plainly evident that etiquette and ethics sprung from these very cultural foundations.

Why then are there more high-risk Middle Eastern countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index^[1] and the Basel Anti-Money Laundering Index,^[2] including both politically and economically sanctioned countries, and why are they peppered with politically exposed persons? Cultural etiquette and ethics that for hundreds and even thousands of years have seen Arabic empires rise and fall and rise again may be one reason, much to the chagrin of those in the region seeking to be the conduit between Eastern and Western business and trade. Places like Dubai, Muscat, Amman, and Riyadh are poised to be more than oil and gas trading posts, with free zones in some cities and in others a general conversion of how to approach business transactions in a more global way, providing a basis for big business as a:

- Platform for Middle East, Africa, and South Asia countries to continue emerging through real opportunities for financial inclusion.
- Technology meeting ground that brings together the brilliant IT developers of Southeast Asia and India with the shrewd idea generators of Shoreditch and Silicon Valley.
- Tourism-centric regional oasis offering seemingly endless entertainment and luxury.

However, even with all the globally sophisticated know-how, supported by ex-pats from all over the world who have assimilated the common core concepts of compliance controls to support business, the supply chain that underpins the region still in many ways operates in the esteemed Bedouin-Arabic way.

Bedouin 'compliance'

The Bedouin people are the indigenous people of the Middle East and the Levant region of North Africa.^[3] They have laws and courts of their own, which in many ways look and feel like those in Western culture. Laws develop as the tribe grows and new issues arise. Issues are resolved by reviewing past decisions or precedents and, in some cases, setting new ones. Justice is handed down by the wiser, more educated and experienced members of the group who have a long memory of where their people have been and where they are now both ideologically

and practically.^[4]

As with any system of regulations, compliance is key in Bedouin culture. Compliance in this case, however, is engrained in traditions, cultural niceties, trust, and — above all — generosity. A man without a tribe, for example, is welcomed into another tribe with open arms and gifts, food, company of others, and a place to sleep — all of this lavished upon him with more vigor than for that lavished on the highest sheikh of the tribe. When “business” meetings take place, such virtues play a key role. Gifts are exchanged as an expression of generosity and to indicate that giving one’s word that something will be done as agreed, or in line with prevailing standards and precedents, is assured. These things act as a contractual baseline against which to measure what we might recognize as user acceptance, and metrics are pats on the back, a kiss on each cheek, and a firm handshake. Refusal of the gifts or requesting proof (in writing or by some other collateral) of the other party’s word would be a huge breach that would in many ways resemble a regulatory or contractual breach. Non-compliance with ethical and political traditions like these that regulate business is a non-starter.

This document is only available to members. Please log in or become a member.

[Become a Member Login](#)