Post-Acquisition Organizational Culture Integration:
A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Scientific interest in mergers and acquisitions by multinational firms from various countries is growing. High merger and acquisition failures attributed to a lack of integration management remain an interesting topic at this point. It has been identified that most mergers and acquisitions fail, and some researchers point to cultural integration as one of the main contributing reasons. The paper intends to critically evaluate previous research on the impact of post-acquisition organizational culture on industry and develop a research agenda. Based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, a systematic review of the literature was conducted. After a search in the databases ProQuest, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Emerald, Scopus, and Manual Search, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 articles in English, published between the years 2017 and 2022, remained in the final analysis. The results allowed for the evidence of the methodologies, main themes, and theories used in cultural integration management. The search is limited to the 2017–2022 period to get the latest trends in post-acquisition organizational culture integration. Through a conceptual framework, this review aims to bring disparate viewpoints on the integration of corporate culture following acquisition together.

Keywords: *Cultural Integration; Management; Merger and Acquisition; Organizational Culture; Post-acquisition.*

1. Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions are terms used to describe the merger of two or more companies, with mergers occurring when one large company buys another in a friendly environment, aiming to achieve the best interests of the company. Acquisitions, on the other hand, can occur in hostile manners, but can also occur in friendly or hostile deals (Ebina et al. 2022). The main difference between mergers and acquisitions lies in the execution of the deal and the stakeholders' acceptance of the purchase deal. Both terms are mutually exclusive and do not differ contextually.

Post-merger and acquisition integration success requires managing soft factor issues such as creating a new vision and shared values, managing retention issues, developing an effective communication strategy, and establishing functional capabilities with an effective organizational structure. The field of merger and acquisition integration research has gained significant interest since its inception in the late 1980s. Mergers and acquisitions remain attractive due to their potential for growth in challenging economic times (Meglio & Schriber, 2023). However, high failures due to inadequate integration management remain a significant concern. Cultural integration is identified as a contributing factor to most mergers and acquisitions failures.

The 1998 merger of Daimler and Chrysler led to disastrous pre-merger performance, during the integration phase due to underrated social and cultural issues, incompatible management styles, and questionable communication. This led to discontent and resistance at Chrysler, a sharp decline in performance, and corresponding dissatisfaction at Daimler (Tuladhar et al. 2024). Consequently, Daimler sold Chrysler for a direct financial loss of $37 billion. Foundational theories, notably Schein's model of organizational culture and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, have long provided critical insight into the complexities of cultural integration during mergers and acquisitions. Schein's model emphasizes the role of underlying assumptions and shared values within organizational culture, while Hofstede's framework highlights how national cultural differences influence organizational behavior. Integrating these classic perspectives enriches contemporary analyses by grounding current challenges in well-established theoretical contexts.

These problems illustrate how structural and social phenomena influence the process and outcome of merger and acquisition integration. The post-acquisition integration phase is crucial in the merger and acquisition process, driving value development. However, strategists often overlook this stage, prioritizing other drivers and plans instead.

1.1. Post-acquisition typology

Post-acquisition integration strategies often involve four or five distinct strategies, incorporating cultural, psychological, and human resource perspectives. Nahavandi and Malekzadeh's conceptual framework focuses on combining organizational cultures at the post-integration stage, derived from Berry's research on conflict resolution. The framework identifies four acculturation styles: separation, assimilation, integration, and deculturation. Separation involves maintaining the target culture and practices while remaining independent, assimilation involves adopting identity, culture, practices, and systems, integration involves maintaining fundamental assumptions and beliefs while being integrated, and deculturation involves losing psychological and cultural contact between amalgamated organizations (Sam, 2024). This typology highlights potential acculturative stress experienced by employees in both businesses, but its weakness lies in its assumption that acculturative stress is negatively related to integration performance and overlooks how value can be created or captured. The organizational culture is depicted as static during integration, and structural or functional changes for individual companies are not considered.

According to, there are five post-acquisition integration approaches, contrasting the operational and cultural changes resulting from a merger. They propose five tactics: preservation, absorption, transformation, reverse takeover, and acquisition (Wu et al. 2023). Preservation involves maintaining the acquired corporate culture with minimal changes, absorption integrates the culture and organizational structure into the parent, transformation involves fundamental changes in culture and operations, reverse takeover involves an acquired company leading post-acquisition efforts, and acquisition involves the acquisition. The degree of change reflects the type of company.

1.2. Research questions

This article is a systematic review of research on corporate culture integration after acquisitions. It aims to explain how corporate culture is integrated and proposes directions for future research. The scientific interest in mergers and acquisitions by multinational corporations from diverse nations is growing (Bauer et al. 2024). The paper proposes a strategy for future research by critically assessing earlier work on the absorption of post-acquisition organizational culture in industries.

This article will discuss the following four questions:
1) What is a major theme in the current post-acquisition organizational culture integration literature?
2) What is the main theory used as a theoretical framework in the field of post-acquisition organizational culture integration?
3) What methods of approach are widely used for the integration of post-acquisition organizational culture?
4) What is the future direction of prospective research for the integration of post-acquisition organizational culture?

2. Methods

The PRISMA method guided this systematic review to ensure comprehensive, unbiased selection and analysis of relevant studies. The review process included defining clear research questions, systematically searching databases, screening articles based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, assessing study quality, extracting relevant data, and synthesizing findings into coherent conclusions. The process includes formulating research questions, conducting systematic literature review searches, screening and choosing appropriate articles, analysing and synthesizing qualitative findings, implementing quality control, and preparing final reports (Gusenbauer & Gauster, 2024). The primary data sources for this systematic review were selected after a thorough investigation of the literature. The steps of this procedure include gathering background and objectives, formulating research questions, searching for relevant literature, selecting criteria, developing data extraction strategies, evaluating the quality of primary studies, and performing data synthesis.

This article reviews articles published between 2017 and 2022 in prestigious academic journals on management, human resource management, merger and acquisition integration methods, and international business. It aims to provide the latest trends in post-acquisition organizational culture integration and brings diverse viewpoints on the integration of corporate culture following acquisition together.

2.1. Journal selection

The author focuses on peer-reviewed English language publications, excluding books, chapters, edited book series, and case studies, as they are considered valid sources of knowledge, a standard for theory development, and an excellent model for aspiring researchers (Lim et al. 2022). The literature search includes highly qualified journals and two reputable scientific practitioner journals, Harvard Business Review (HBR) and Thunderbird International Business Review (TIBR), which are relevant for research on cross-border mergers and acquisitions and post-acquisition integration.

2.2. Preview procedure

The author conducted a systematic review of post-acquisition cultural integration in mergers and acquisitions, using various electronic databases such as ProQuest, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Emerald, Scopus, and Manual Search. They gathered up to 3365 articles, focusing on terms like cultural integration, post-acquisition integration, cultural integration plan, and post-acquisition integration. The search process was modified to avoid bias and duplicate publications. The author does not include duplicate publications, dissertations, books, book chapters, theses, or conference papers in the selection of English-language research articles (Dwivedi et al. 2023). The integration of post-acquisition organizational culture is the main topic of the entire paper that was chosen for review of its abstract and published in international journals for the period of 2017–2022, which was indexed in the database used.

The chosen item was examined to gather relevant data. Meta-synthesis was used to analyze and synthesize data from articles, transforming qualitative research into new studies (Reed et al. 2021). Meta-analysis can help spread scientific knowledge and transform qualitative research into new studies. The implementation of a systematic review of cultural integration and post-acquisition is illustrated in Figure 1. The author uses double filtering to review 738 articles published between 2017 and 2022 on post-acquisition cultural integration. The title and abstract are used to filter out irrelevant articles, and the main body is filtered out of non-related passages. After examining the abstract, 118 articles were chosen for their content, followed by 24 papers using the systematic literature review method (Wiese et al. 2025). The author acknowledges that they may have overlooked some scientific publications, but hopes that any exclusion won't significantly alter the review's conclusion. The systematic literature review method ensures a comprehensive search for relevant articles.
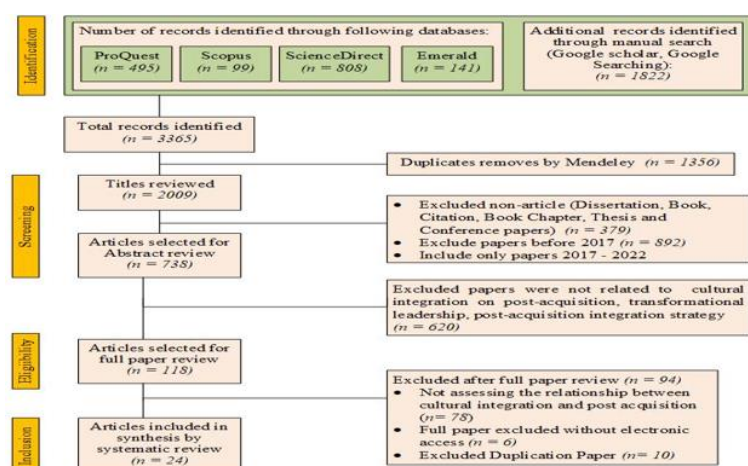
Fig. 1: Flowchart Illustrating the PRISMA Process for Selecting and Analyzing Articles on Post-Acquisition Cultural Integration (2017–2022).

2.2.1. Data extraction and synthesis

The study gathered information from 24 key articles to answer research questions. The interpretation of findings and conclusions may be influenced by evaluating the study's quality (Batten & Brackett, 2021). Data synthesis is a method used to compile data from specific studies to address research issues.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Descriptive analysis of the research

3.1.1. Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis is a multivariate approach that categorizes objects or cases based on their features. It involves clumping items with the closest similarities together into a single cluster. A cluster analysis was conducted on 24 articles using NVivo 12 Pro software, with 10 clusters processed (Lugner et al. 2021). The results showed that the clusters were similar, indicating a strong correlation between the articles (see Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Cluster Analysis of Thematic Correlations Among 24 Selected Studies Using NVivo 12 Pro Software.

3.1.2. Post-acquisition organizational culture integration themes grouping

The author uses Vos viewer to determine the number of clusters on the theme of organizational culture integration after acquisition, which helps identify dominant and non-dominant themes. The author provides an overview of the theme group with four clusters as shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Dominant Themes Grouping in Post-Acquisition Organizational Culture Integration Using Vosviewer.

Table 1: Themes Grouping of Organizational Culture Integration in Post-Acquisition

Cluster	Concept Points	Total
Cluster 1st (red)	Acquirer, acquisitions, corporate culture, cultural differences, cultures, failures, interests, knowledge, literature, mergers, organizations, organizational culture, performance, post-merger integration, success, variables	16
Cluster 2nd (green)	Acquisitions, changes, cross-border acquisitions, employees, impact, international acquisitions, leadership, M&As, mergers, papers, post-acquisition integration, post-acquisition performance, questionnaires, relationships	14
Cluster 3rd (blue)	Acquisition process, case, company, development, factors, integration, integration process, key factors	8
Cluster 4th (yellow)	Communication, cultural integration	2

Figure 3 and Table 1 reveal that the most dominant cluster in red is related to success, as discussed in, article Successful Horizontal Acquisition Process, where 27% of firms believe company cultural cohesion is crucial or unavoidable for successful acquisition (Zaman, 2023). An acquisition should consider various corporate culture elements, including strategy, decision-making procedures, management, organizational values, top management expectations, and standards 58% of businesses do not consider cultural concerns, and none of them have successfully implemented organizational cultural procedures. Despite understanding the importance of cultural integration, many struggle to implement practices.

The most important factors for the success of corporate culture and the acquisition process include organizational language, values, standards of conduct, underlying beliefs, corporate architecture, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and organizational language (Ponomareva et al. 2022). These components are ranked based on content and secondary analysis. The green cluster, primarily related to acquisition, is the most dominant (Ahsan et al. 2024). In, article, Cultural and Organizational Integration in Cross-border M&A Deals: The Comparative Study of Acquisitions Made by EMNEs from China and Russia, highlights the significant gaps in M&A literature, particularly in emerging markets, due to a focus on cultural compatibility rather than the consequences of cultural integration on acquisition outcomes.

In the third cluster, which is blue, the most dominant cluster is related to integration. One of the related articles is Cultural and organizational integration in cross-border M & A deals: the comparative study of acquisitions made by EMNEs from China and Russia (Siddiqi & Jamal, 2024). The article talks about cultural integration factors in cross-border M & A agreements, such as national culture, organizational culture, cultural perseverance, level and degree of integration, practices of leadership and management, employee satisfaction, employee motivation, shared identity, key employee retention, and employee communication.

In the fourth cluster, yellow, the most dominant cluster is related to communication. One of the related articles is Cultural and organizational integration in cross-border M & A deals: the comparative study of acquisitions made by EMNEs from China and Russia. he article talks about poor leadership and improper managerial practices leading to poor internal communication and, as a result, slow integration of culture (Buckley et al. 2022). Another article that also discusses communication is Dialogue as a source of positive emotions during cross-border

post-acquisition socio-cultural integration. The article discusses the use of dialogue in fostering positivity in socio-cultural integration, focusing on the stages of freezing, moving, and refreezing. It suggests that generating positivity can help manage collective emotions and foster social cohesion (Guo, 2025). The article also highlights the effectiveness of dialogue in addressing cross-cultural conflicts due to its collaborative and engaging nature.

The study conducted qualitative research on the'soft side of business' in the insurance industry, focusing on internal management and external advisory perspectives. Two major contributions emerged from their investigation. First, among other factors (leadership, timing, strategic planning Leso et al. (2022), communication, staff) the integration of organizational culture is the main driver to thesuccess of M & A and can be seen in Figure 4. related ten factors of cultural integration that can produce a successful M & A. Secondly and in contrast to the topical literature claims, they found that the perception of the importance of corporate culture was no longer ignored or underestimated by those involved in the M&A deal, but helplessness and lack of knowledge hindered cultural integration. They suggested that addressing these issues earlier in the pre-merger phase could help ensure successful M&A deals.

Fig. 4: Factors of Cultural Integration That Lead to M & A Success.

3.1.3. Post-acquisition organizational culture integration dominant themes

The dominant theme refers to the most prominent and influential topics among related topics, which are more prominent than all the topics found in the Vos viewer application, particularly in the integration of post-acquisition organizational culture. In Figure 5, the meaning of the word dominant is marked by the degree of thickness of the yellow colour which indicates that the thicker the yellow, the more dominant the themes found by the Vosviewer application from the entire article with the subject matter of post-acquisition integration of organizational culture. Two dominant themes related to post-acquisition organizational culture integration are success and knowledge Ullah et al., 2023), which clarifies that organizational culture is closely related to leadership, timing, strategic planning, communication, and staff factors that need to be adequately managed to lay the groundwork for M&A success. According to, organizational culture differences negatively impact post-acquisition performance and influence the relationship between knowledge and cross-border acquisition performance (Smeulders et al. 2023). Therefore, information transfer improves post-acquisition performance due to the mediating influence of organizational culture variations. The thicker the yellow colour, the more dominant the themes found.
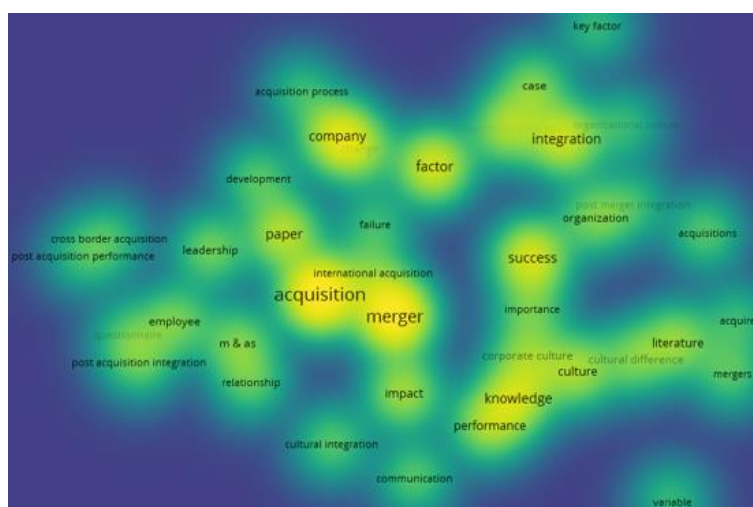
Fig. 5: Dominant Themes in Post-Acquisition Organizational Culture Integration.

The most frequently debated theories about the concept of cultural integration can be supported by analysing the language in the article. In Figure 6, the world cloud created using NVivo software displays the number of terms and their associations throughout the whole texts of 24 articles. When comparing the word acquisitions to the words cultural integration, performance, and culture, Figure 6's analysis reveals that the word acquisitions receives less prominence in the article's text (Chen et al. 2023). The study highlights the importance of cultural integration in enhancing post-acquisition performance in organizations. The terms cultural integration, performance, and culture are more closely related to phrases involving performance and culture. The word cloud indicates the degree of relationship between these terms and their frequency. The term acquisitions suggests a more tenuous connection between the elements listed in the article.

Fig. 6: Word Cloud of the Main Themes Presented in the Full Text of 24 Articles.

3.1.4. Post-acquisition organizational culture integration key theories

Dialogue theory emphasizes open communication as a vital mechanism for resolving cultural conflicts, fostering collective understanding, and promoting positivity among merging organizations. For example, Geely's acquisition of Volvo successfully employed dialogue practices, where regular cross-cultural exchanges significantly mitigated resistance to integration. Complementing dialogue theory, social network theory underscores the strategic use of informal communication channels and influential interpersonal networks to expedite cultural alignment—this approach notably proved effective in Google's integration of YouTube.

Research on post-acquisition organizational culture integration frequently incorporates theories such as the theory of cultural change and dialogue theory to assess sociocultural integration dynamics following cross-border mergers and acquisitions. These theories focus specifically on cultivating a positive environment and accelerating the integration process, thus refining the traditional three-stage model of cultural change (Diduc, 2022).

Previous studies have extensively applied agency theory, resource dependence theory, and stewardship theory to explore the influence of board characteristics on the success of cross-border mergers and acquisitions. As shown in Figure 7, the central theoretical frameworks identified include Cultural Integration, Corporate Culture, Integration, Dialogue, Cross-Border Post-Acquisition, Post-Acquisition Integration, Social Networks, and Knowledge. Leadership theory and social network theory are particularly significant when examining leadership's impact on corporate cultural integration.

Additionally, the theory of knowledge, highlighted within the green cluster, underscores that inadequate knowledge and skill deficiencies can significantly impede effective strategies for capturing, analyzing, and assessing organizational culture (Assoratgoon & Kantabutra, 2023). Comparing Figure 7 and Figure 8 reveals noticeable differences in the variety and frequency of theories referenced within the selected 24 articles, with Figure 7 explicitly detailing key theoretical frameworks pivotal to understanding cultural integration processes.

Fig. 7: Key Theories in Post-Acquisition Organizational Culture Integration.

Fig. 8: Word Cloud for the Main Theory Presented in the Full Text of 24 Articles.

The analysis of theories using Vosviewer, which can only read abstracts, keywords, and titles of articles, yielded only a few main theories. However, many main theories were found in Figure 8, including acculturation, agency theory, contingency theories, dialogue theory, knowledge, leadership, organizational behavior, cultural integration, resource dependence theory Kirby, 2023), resource-based view, socio-ocultural theory, stewardship theory, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership. This was due to the use of NVivo software for data analysis, which can read data in the form of *.pdf so that the author can further explore some of the desired theories.

Table 2: Summary of Key Studies on Post-Acquisition Cultural Integration

Study	Methodology	Key Findings
Zaman (2023)	Qualitative Case Study	Cultural cohesion significantly affects acquisition success.
Siddiqi & Jamal (2024)	Comparative Analysis	Leadership practices directly impact cross-border M&A outcomes.
Ponomareva et al. (2022)	Mixed-Methods	Organizational values and language are critical integration elements.
Guo (2025)	Qualitative Interviews	Dialogue fosters positive emotions, aiding socio-cultural integration.

3.1.5. Post-acquisition organizational culture integration approach methods

Previous researchers have utilized various methods to integrate post-acquisition organizational culture, including case studies, qualitative methods, and quantitative methods (see Figure 9). Data collection techniques include interview techniques, secondary data, depth interviews, and questionnaire distribution to respondents, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. A qualitative case study was used to study sociocultural integration, using interviews, employee satisfaction questionnaires, and participant observations as primary data. Secondary data was gathered from internal corporate documents (Teerikangas & Colman, 2019). The study found that changes in organizational culture positively impacted post-acquisition performance using quantitative methods, including linear regression models generated using bootstrap tests.
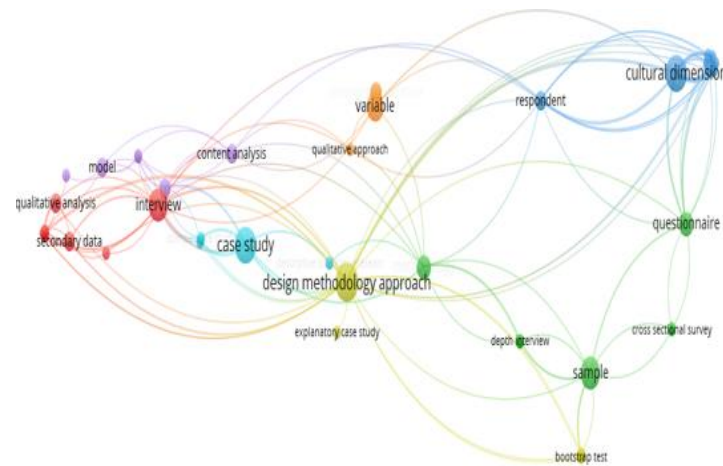
Fig. 9: Approach Methods in Post-Acquisition Organizational Culture Integration.

3.2. Future research agenda

The study suggests that future research should focus on themes of cultural similarity, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and trust building (see Figure 10). The research was conducted in Germany and aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese mergers and acquisitions (Gautam, 2022). The findings also highlight the importance of top executives in the German target company's strategic decision-making process, which significantly impacts post-acquisition management and organizational behavior. Future research could include additional hierarchical levels to add more data to this field. The study contributes to the literature on "Building Trust" in the context of developing country companies acquiring businesses from rich economies.

The study research reveals that corporate culture influences mergers and acquisitions decisions. By examining similarities in CSR characteristics, the study found that companies with similar cultural characteristics are more likely to join. Future studies should prioritize investigating the role of digital transformation tools in facilitating cultural integration, specifically assessing the impact of virtual collaboration platforms, AI-driven cultural analytics, and online training modules on post-acquisition integration success.

Fig. 10: Determining Themes That Need Further Research in the Future.

3.3. Managerial Implications

Management can develop a structured cultural integration plan after the acquisition. This plan should include concrete steps to incorporate the values, norms, and cultural practices of both organizations. This plan can help avoid cultural conflict and facilitate employee adaptation to change. Management can seek out or develop leaders who can understand, respect, and integrate diverse cultures in the new organization. Moreover, policymakers can benefit from this research by developing regulatory frameworks requiring cultural due diligence as part of mandatory pre-acquisition assessments, especially in cross-border transactions, to reduce integration risks and enhance long-term corporate governance.

Effective communication during the integration process is essential. Management needs to design a transparent communication strategy to explain goals, expected cultural changes, as well as long-term benefits for the organization and employees.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the process of cultural integration is very important. Management needs to measure the extent to which the integration was successful and whether the organization's cultural objectives have been achieved.

4. Conclusions

This study aims to find out the main themes and theories, methods of approach, and future age in literature studies related to the topic of post-acquisition organizational culture integration. The results show that the dominant themes associated with post-acquisition organizational culture integration are success and knowledge. the main theories have been found several theories such as acculturation, agency theory, contingency theory, dialogue theory, knowledge, leadership, organization behavior, cultural integration, resource dependence theory, resource-based view, sociocultural theory, stewardship theory, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership. The widely used approaches to post-acquisition organizational culture integration are: case studies, qualitative methods, and quantitative methods. For a prospective future, research on post-acquisition organizational culture integration focuses on themes of cultural commonality, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and trust building.

Recommendations

For further research, before the acquisition, conduct a thorough assessment of the cultural landscape of the acquiring and target organizations. This assessment can provide a foundation for identifying potential areas of alignment and dispute, assisting in the development of strategic integration plans. Ensure that leadership teams from both organizations are aligned in their vision for an integrated culture. Transparent and consistent communication from top leadership is essential to building common goals and direction. The object of research can be extended to several sectors of the public, the oil and gas industry, education, and other sectors.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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