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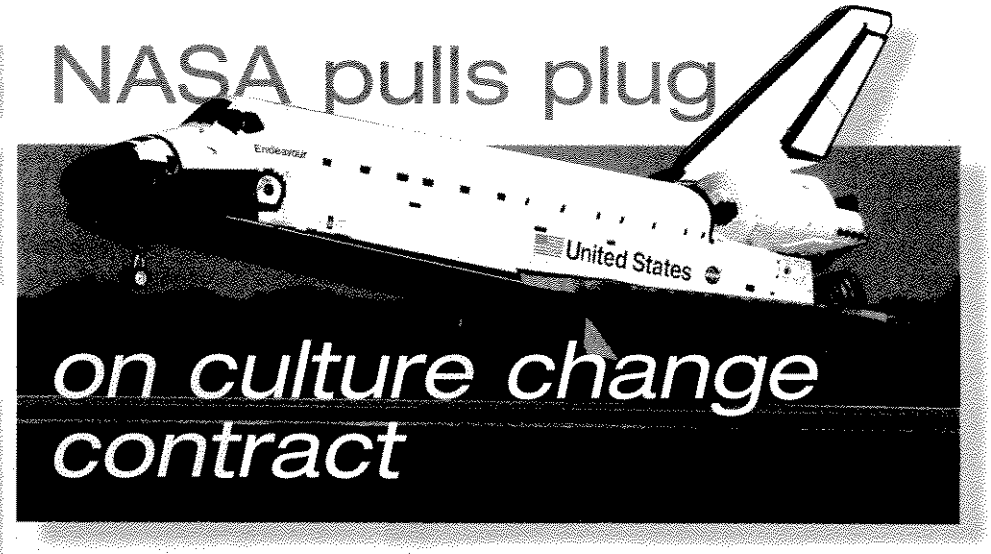
NASA pulls plug on culture change contract



Behavioral Sciences Technology's (BST) five-year contract to assess and improve NASA's safety culture, worth up to $10 million, was terminated effective the end of June, according to NASA and BST.

BST began work with NASA in February 2004. After an initial assessment, a six-month pilot culture change phase was conducted. Based on positive results, according to BST, NASA asked the consultants in January 2005 to expand culture change efforts to parts of the agency not yet addressed. That work was underway and had not yet reached most NASA personnel, according to a posting on BST's web site.

A new NASA Administrator, Mike Griffin, came aboard in April 2005 and quickly decided his agency no longer needed BST to analyze managers' behavior and retrain them to do a better job of seeking out, listening to and acting upon employees' concerns.

Training was not complete. BST's work with safety managers and shuttle inspectors at the Kennedy Space Center ended about halfway through the process, according to a report by *Florida Today*.

NASA's decision was not a reflection of any dissatisfaction with BST, according to the company.

Still, BST co-founder and chairman Tom Krause told *Florida Today* he was "shocked" by NASA's announcement.

"There were some items and ideas they had that were solid, but a lot of these things we can do in-house," Dean Acosta, Griffin's spokesman at NASA headquarters in Washington, told the paper.

Krause fears cutting off the training will cause some shuttle employees to believe NASA managers disagreed with BST's lessons or methods. "It sends a very mixed message. It's a worry," Krause said, because behavior change was occurring and perceptions were changing.

"This is clearly a case where a new leadership team wants to do things its own way," one observer told *ISHN*.