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## Food safety and quality culture excellence

The importance of culture is becoming increasingly recognised in assisting with the effective implementation of food safety best practices and in helping to prevent food safety incidents and quality issues. This white paper discusses some of the challenges you might face when trying to improve the culture of your business and how you might overcome them. In particular, it examines the importance of root cause analysis when it comes to understanding why somebody behaved in a particular way as well as the impact that the nationality and generation of the workforce can have on culture. It provides some practical examples of how different nationalities respond best to feedback, communication, leadership styles and other key issues and includes some useful resources to help you understand the differences in attitudes and behaviours.

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Improving food safety culture was named as the top training goal by almost 80% of food and drink manufacturers and processors surveyed in the [fourth annual global survey of food safety training](#).

Companies are interested in understanding how they can improve their food safety and quality culture for a number of reasons:

- To be audit-ready at all times to cope with the rising number of unannounced audits
- It's a next step following a top audit score
- It's a way to improve, generally
- They understand that it is a critical success factor
- To gain trust and support earned recognition with/by their clients or authorities

You can only improve things effectively if you can measure them. When it comes to a “fluffy” concept like culture, it can be quite challenging.

In our [previous white paper](#), we introduced our Culture Excellence assessment tool which enables companies to characterise their food safety culture. The programme was developed in partnership with TSI and is being used across the whole food chain - from farm to retail/food service - in Europe, Middle East, North America and Australasia.

We have extended the capabilities of the Culture Excellence Programme so it can also measure quality culture and from October, Health & Safety culture. It is now available in over 20 different languages and has the option of asking specific questions to employees in different positions. It also has a new web-based platform which enables companies to analyse the data in many different ways to gain a deeper insight into their particular strengths and weaknesses.

You can try our free demo to see what sort of data it provides and how you can analyse the data by grade, location, length of service, department and more.

To access the demo visit <https://platform.cultureexcellence.com> and use the following log in details:

Username: Demo

Password: Demo

The Culture Excellence mapping framework which helps to understand the multi-layered and multi-dimensional elements involved, has recently been expanded. It is now as follows:

Dimension	Categories	
<b>People</b>	Empowerment	Empowering people to take appropriate food safety and quality actions
	Reinforcement	The reinforcement of food safety and quality practices
	Teamwork	The effectiveness of food safety/quality and HACCP teams
	Training	The effectiveness of food safety and quality training
	Communication	The effectiveness of communications related to food safety/quality (new)
<b>Process</b>	Control	The effectiveness of food safety/quality management control
	Co-ordination	The co-ordination of food safety/quality across the company
	Consistency	The level of consistency and agreement in food safety and quality
	Infrastructure	The level of fitness for purpose of premises, equipment, buildings...(new)
	Systems	The effectiveness of Food Safety/Quality Management Systems
<b>Purpose</b>	Vision	The role of food safety/quality in the long term vision of the company
	Values	The inclusion of food safety/quality in core company values
	Strategy	The strategic direction and plans for food safety/quality
	Objectives	Setting and managing food safety/quality objectives
	Metrics	The effectiveness of food safety/quality related Key Performance Indicators and metrics (new)
<b>Proactivity</b>	Awareness	Awareness of external food safety/quality influences and issues
	Foresight	Having foresight in relation to food safety/quality risks
	Change	The level of change, innovation and investment in food safety and quality
	Investment	Decision making process related to capital expenditure and investment related to food safety/quality (new)
	Learning	Enabling organisational food safety/quality learning

Food Safety Culture is getting more attention globally from governments, standards agencies and companies. Here are a couple of items that I spotted recently which you might also be interested in:

The US FDA is providing training to FDA inspectors and compliance staff to ensure the uniform application of the new FSMA standards and inspection model. This training includes an introduction to food safety culture and systems thinking.

<https://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/UCM436594.pdf>

Food Standards Australia New Zealand has produced a useful poster on

["What does a strong food safety culture look like?"](#)

	Who?	What?	How? (examples)
<p><b>Strong leadership</b></p> 	<p>Business owners, board members, general managers, site managers</p>	<p>Senior leaders show the way, openly commit to making safe food the top priority throughout your business</p>	<p><i>I make sure there is a regular meeting or get-together where we report and discuss our food safety performance</i></p> <p><i>I personally follow up on things we decided need to be done (e.g. assign time, people or money to specific tasks, make sure corrective actions are done).</i></p> <p><i>I review our food safety performance and budget with my team as part of our overall business performance at least once month.</i></p>
<p><b>Committed managers</b></p> 	<p>Production managers, field supervisors, store supervisors, maintenance managers</p>	<p>Managers show their commitment to food safety through dedicating time and effort</p>	<p><i>I communicate and follow up on my expectation that all staff spend 10 minutes each week in team meetings discussing and solving our food safety challenges.</i></p> <p><i>I schedule and lead a regular event (e.g. team meeting, webinar, safety demonstration) where I personally speak to my teams about food safety.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure my leadership team discusses and acts on suggestions about improving food safety at least monthly.</i></p>
<p><b>Everyone contributes</b></p> 	<p>Produce pickers, truck drivers, factory workers, shop assistants, restaurant waiters, as well as managers and senior leaders</p>	<p>Everyone in the business believes making safe food is important and everyone plays a part</p>	<p><i>I speak up and correct anyone's behaviour if I see something wrong (if it goes against our food safety practices or principles).</i></p> <p><i>I offer suggestions I think could improve the business's food safety performance.</i></p> <p><i>I ask questions if I don't understand why food safety practices are changed.</i></p>
<p><b>Everyone's accountable</b></p> 	<p>All people at all levels in the business</p>	<p>Everyone understands that they are held responsible for ensuring food is safe</p>	<p><i>I understand my role and responsibilities in food safety and that if I do not take them seriously consumers could become ill or die and the business could be harmed.</i></p> <p><i>I help new colleagues and share my pride in what our business expects and achieves when it comes to food safety.</i></p>
<p><b>Knowing and acting</b></p> 	<p>All people at all levels in the business</p>	<p>More than training people – making sure they know the risks and do the right thing, every time</p>	<p><i>I assign time and budget for staff to receive food safety training, as well as regular updates or refresher sessions.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure there is a plan for everybody to be involved in food safety observations (e.g. food temperature, equipment sanitation), so we are all checking that we know and do what is expected.</i></p> <p><i>I actively encourage and reward people/ teams who have shown a strong commitment to food safety.</i></p> <p><i>I always speak up and/or take action if I see something (e.g. a food safety observation) is wrong.</i></p>
<p><b>Continual improvement</b></p> 	<p>All people at all levels in the business</p>	<p>Be proactive – monitor what goes on, look for ways to improve, prevent problems happening in the future</p>	<p><i>I discuss findings from food safety observations with my team at a pre-set and regular time so we can find better ways to do things and remove obstacles.</i></p> <p><i>I am encouraged to bring ideas about improving food safety to my supervisor and often do this.</i></p> <p><i>I see my supervisor and the business as a whole taking my comments and suggestions seriously. This makes me feel proud and valued.</i></p>

The poster reminded me of a project the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned in 2012 to develop [a tool for enforcement officers to diagnose cultures in food business operators \(FBOs\)](#).

## **Common challenges in food safety and quality culture**

Here are some of the issues and challenges we see when working with clients to improve their food safety and quality culture and to ensure that their staff do the right thing at all times – not just when their manager is watching:

## **Importance of root cause analysis of poor performance/unacceptable behaviour**

When unacceptable staff behaviour or poor performance is being investigated by a company, someone always asks “Why on earth did he do that?” Typically, for one of two reasons:

1. He did not know what was the right thing to do because...
  - a. Not trained/educated (new, agency, overdue refresher, new kit...)
  - b. Trained, but did not understand (too complex, language, training ineffective...)
  - c. Nobody else doing it
  
2. He did know what was the right thing to do, but...
  - a. Too much hassle (too difficult, too long...)
  - b. Conflicting priorities (need to get stuff out...)
  - c. Not physically capable of doing it (no time, kit not fit for purpose...)
  - d. Was OK last time, so should be OK now...
  - e. Not confident (peer pressure, fear of consequence, self belief...)
  - f. Perceived cost/benefit to him and consequences
  - g. Forgot, distracted
  - h. Not bothered

So you end up, potentially, with quite different root causes which would require completely different corrective actions. Training is not always the answer.

**When training is the corrective action....it needs to stick!**

Here are my Top 10 from Frank Yiannas' book Food Safety = Behaviour (30 Proven Techniques to Enhance Employee Compliance) to ensure your training is as effective as possible:

1. Story rather than facts and statistics
2. Commit in writing at the end of session
3. What employees wear matters
4. Important to show desired behaviour as the social norm
5. Teach what right looks like but also consequences of doing it wrong
6. Give specific personal objectives for accountability
7. Select who delivers message carefully
8. Keep messages short and rhyming to make them memorable
9. Picture rather than text
10. Make it fun

### **Impact of “deep” culture on a site culture**

As highlighted by Gert Jan Hofstede at the recent GFSI Global Food Safety Conference in Houston, it is imperative to take into account the deep culture (nationality, where they were brought up) of your employees. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the Lewis Model and Erin Meyer's Culture Maps are very useful to identify some of the challenges you might face when trying to improve the culture of your business. It will also help you understand why an employee has behaved in a particular way.

For example, when it comes to:

- Communication: some deep cultures prefer precise, simple and clear messages taken at face value (e.g. Germany or USA); others prefer more nuanced messages and reading between the lines (e.g. Japan or Korea; I love Erin Meyer's expression: “kuuki yomenai”)
- Giving feedback: some prefer direct and blunt feedback (e.g. Netherlands); others prefer private softer feedback (e.g. Japan)
- Persuasion: some prefer a practical approach with executive summary and facts (e.g. US or UK); others prefer to cover the theory/concept first then move to the facts (e.g. France or Italy)
- Leading: some prefer a flat organisation (e.g. Denmark or Sweden); others prefer a clear formal hierarchical structure (e.g. Japan or Korea). This would have an impact on the level of autonomy and ownership felt by those working for the company, and their authority to deal with potential food safety or quality problems; so achieving “empowerment” might be more challenging for some.
- Decision making: some deep cultures prefer consensus which might take a while to achieve (e.g. Japan or Sweden); others prefer the decisions to be made by the boss – it can be much quicker but then time will be needed to get everybody else on board!

(e.g. China or India)

- Scheduling: some prefer clear time-bound deadline for each activity (e.g. Germany or Switzerland); others prefer a more flexible multitasking approach (e.g. India or China)
- Rewarding: some prefer individual reward and recognition (e.g. USA and UK); others prefer team reward (e.g. China or Mexico)

## Impact of generations on culture

The workforces of most sites now span three or four generations and can include boomers, millennials and everything in between. The generations have different attitudes and behaviours and this has implications for managing a site's culture. It's predicted that by 2020 the UK food and drink industry will need more than 170,000 new employees to meet demand and replace retiring workers. With more young employees joining the workforce, it will become increasingly important to understand the differences in attitudes and behaviours between different generations.

There are a wide range of studies and blogs highlighting the challenges, including:

[Millennials aren't difficult to manage, you just have to know what they are looking for](#)

[Opinion: Are you ready for generation Z?](#)

[Gen Z and Millennials collide at work](#)

[The multigenerational workforce the new fault line](#)

[What can millennials teach us about supporting learning in the workplace?](#)

If you are not familiar with the Beloit College Mindset list; it is a good sense check!

<https://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>

Each August, Beloit College releases [this list](#), providing a look at the cultural touchstones that shape the lives of students about to enter college. It is a useful insight as they are coming to your business soon! More at [www.themindsetlist.com](http://www.themindsetlist.com)

## Find out more

If you are interested in finding out more about food safety and quality culture, we are holding a [Food Safety and Quality Culture Excellence conference](#) on **7<sup>th</sup> December 2017**, at Campden BRI, Chipping Campden, UK. Led by Dr. Joanne Taylor, several representatives/practitioners from a range of companies in the Culture Excellence Programme will share their experience and learning.

For more information and to book, go to the [event website](#)

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