

## Food Safety Culture Excellence

“Culture matters... Failure to understand culture and take it seriously can have disastrous consequences for an organization.” Edgar H. Schein, 1999.

“You can have the best documented food safety processes and standards in the world, but if they’re not consistently put into practice by people, they’re useless”. Frank Yiannas, 2009.

The importance of food safety culture has become increasingly recognised in the past few years, as has the role of psychology and the importance of behaviour-based approaches to food safety management. Within the food industry, food safety culture can be described as the “prevailing attitudes, values and practices related to food safety that are taught, directly and indirectly, to new employees” (Taylor, 2011). Some of these are easy to observe, such as the facilities and equipment, posters and paperwork, and the visible behaviours of staff. However, some are harder to see, such as underlying values and priorities, unspoken rules, and the way things are done when no-one is looking. This makes the clear identification and evaluation of food safety culture very challenging.

This white paper discusses a newly emerging approach to reinforce the culture of food safety.

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Analysing food safety culture first requires a clear model of what an effective food safety culture actually is, including its technical, managerial and psychological aspects. The Culture Excellence Model below provides a theoretical framework for understanding the multi-layered and multi-dimensional elements involved.

	Dimension	Explanation
People	Empowerment	Empowering people to take appropriate food safety actions
	Reinforcement	The reinforcement of food safety practices
	Teamwork	The effectiveness of food safety and HACCP teams
	Training	The effectiveness of food safety training and communications
Process	Control	The effectiveness of food safety management control
	Co-ordination	The co-ordination of food safety across the company
	Consistency	The level of consistency and agreement in food safety
	Systems	The effectiveness of Food Safety Management Systems
Purpose	Vision	The role of food safety in the long term vision of the company
	Values	The inclusion of food safety in core company values
	Strategy	The strategic direction and plans for food safety
	Objectives	Setting and managing food safety objectives
Proactivity	Awareness	Awareness of external food safety influences and issues
	Foresight	Having foresight in relation to food safety risks
	Change	The level of change, innovation and investment in food safety
	Learning	Enabling organisational food safety learning

Evaluating food safety culture then requires an in-depth, unbiased mechanism of understanding where a company stands in relation to the model.

The benefits of such an assessment include:

- Pinpointing strengths and weaknesses in food safety culture,
- Providing insight into staff experiences, attitudes and values,
- Identifying the most important targets for resource allocation,
- Evaluating the return on investment of budget and effort,
- Measuring the impact of training, systems and other initiatives.

“Our new associates always say how strict we are on food safety, but I always wondered if we are as good as we think. With Marriott having a deep and long culture, in food safety as well as other brand values, I really wanted to put it to the test... The Culture Excellence Program has helped us in validating the strengths in our systems, and highlighting a few areas where we can improve. Since receiving the report, and by making a few simple changes, we can already see the impact it has had”. Aurelia Caccamo, Director of Food Safety & Environmental Services, JW Marriott Marquis, Dubai, UAE.

### *Cultural assessment methods*

An assessment of culture must look beneath the surface of an organisation and draw out the attitudes and values of a wide range of people working in different departments and at different levels. For the early research, in-depth psychological interviews were developed and used with great success. However, in response to industry feedback during the testing phase of the Culture Excellence Model, an online data-gathering tool was developed for faster and more easily quantifiable data. It was necessary to create a set of survey questions that would be clear yet subtly probing, simple yet meaningful and could achieve a similar level of depth to the interview approach in a shorter time, with higher sample sizes, and at a distance. The online tool allows a large number of employees within a company to be surveyed, anonymously and confidentially, and cross-referenced quickly and easily in a wide variety of ways. Questions were carefully designed to facilitate objectivity and openness, and probe in-depth issues across the spectrum of 16 cultural dimensions.

“We have undertaken global culture surveys in the past but these didn’t seem to get to the depth I felt we needed as most are pretty top line. What attracted me most (to the Culture Excellence Program) was the ability to delve beyond the elements we typically see and dividing each into more distinct dimensions that enabled us to look at each one through a wider lens... What we (Site Leadership Team) quickly realised was that by tackling some specific areas we would not only improve the food safety culture but we should see benefit across other specific elements of our business... We are not a full year in yet but can already ‘feel’ some change. This hasn’t happened by itself but has taken time and commitment from the full team and the cooperation of our employees. I’m really excited about the next stage of our journey and am confident we should see a shift in our current scoring with the next survey”. Angie Sharp, QRO Manager, General Mills Berwick Ltd., UK.

### *Where did the Culture Excellence Model come from?*

The Culture Excellence Model is built on over 15 years of research from across a range of academic disciplines and industry sectors. It started in 1999 at the University of Central Lancashire, when Dr Joanne Taylor began an investigation into psychological barriers to the implementation of food safety management systems in food manufacturing businesses. From 2002 this was broadened to include an in-depth study of catering businesses during her work on a large research project for the UK Government Food Standards Agency at the University of Salford. These research studies showed that regardless of business sector or size, there were a large number of knowledge, attitudinal and behavioural dimensions that could prevent or facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a safe food operation.

From 2006 onwards, during her time teaching organisational culture and HACCP on two separate Masters programs at the University of Salford, Dr Taylor investigated the parallels between the two subjects. Building on the original barriers model with input from organisational culture theory, she finalised the ‘Food Safety Culture Excellence Model’, structured around four categories (People, Process, Purpose and Proactivity) and incorporating 16 psychological and management dimensions. The Model and its assessment tool have been widely reviewed and piloted, and extended to include modules on quality and assess a broader range of organisations.

Working in partnership, in 2014 Taylor Shannon InternationalSI and Campden BRI launched the Culture Excellence Program, which includes assessment, analysis, reporting and on-going support to food

businesses of all types and sizes. The Program has been implemented with great success in small, medium and large food businesses in manufacturing, farming, catering and food service. In 2015, a new set of quality questions were developed and piloted, allowing measurement of both food safety and quality culture.

### *Common areas requiring improvement*

Based on the research studies that have been conducted, and data from the Culture Excellence Program so far, the following three examples show common areas for improvement.

1. **Reinforcement:** While most companies have established reward and incentive schemes, not all are specifically linked to food safety or sufficiently transparent to be perceived as attainable by all employees. Reinforcement of positive food safety attitudes and behaviours must be consistent, clear, timely, fair and well communicated in order to be most effective.
2. **Training:** While most companies provide food safety training for their employees, not all has a direct impact on behavior or is perceived as enjoyable and worthwhile. It is important that training programs are carefully designed to incorporate clear and measurable objectives, and that training methods are sufficiently dynamic, varied and practical to make a lasting impact on food safety knowledge, attitude and behaviour.
3. **Risk foresight:** Over the past 15 years the general level of risk awareness has been seen to increase in the food industry, but the challenge of understanding how to prioritise and focus based on the significance of particular hazards still remains. In some companies, there is also a gap between the priorities of the individual and those of the company. It is important for companies to both develop and also communicate risk-based approaches in order to reduce the likelihood of mistakes with serious consequences. It is also beneficial to assess individual and organisational risk perception to identify potential gaps and inconsistencies.

### *New developments*

The most recent development in the Culture Excellence journey has been the expert review and adoption of the Culture Excellence Audit by BRC Global Standards, one of the world's leading safety and quality certification programmes, used by over 23,000 certificated suppliers in 123 countries. BRC Global Standards has incorporated the Culture Excellence Audit into a Voluntary Module that is offered alongside its BRC Food Safety Standard, providing companies with the opportunity to have their food safety culture assessed alongside their on-site food safety audit.

Alongside this development is the start of a new research project to compare data gathered from onsite audits with data gathered online, in order to provide further insights into both types of food safety audit.

Additional research will investigate the links between organisational culture and traditional business Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

For further information see a video at [www.cultureexcellence.com](http://www.cultureexcellence.com)

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