



**A BEST PRACTICE
GUIDE TO PRODUCT
SAFETY CULTURE**

Introduction

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

Over the last 10 to 15 years, the food, consumer products and transportation industries have come to realise the critical role played by an organisation’s culture in ensuring the effective implementation of product safety management systems, and in helping to prevent product safety incidents.

It is now well documented that to ensure people always do the right thing, even when under pressure and when no one is watching, a business must have a strong product safety culture. A poor culture will prevent objectives being achieved and waste the time, effort and resources put into achieving them. Worse, it will create the conditions where product safety breakdown may occur, causing potentially devastating consequences for customers and consumers as well as for the business itself.

The necessity for a positive product safety culture has been recognised by globally significant standards setting authorities such as Codex Alimentarius, GFSI, BRCGS and ISO, as well as national governments, and it is becoming a key part of product safety audits.

- The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), an industry-driven global collaboration dedicated to advancing food safety, published a position paper in 2019 on embedding and maintaining a positive culture of food safety in any business, regardless of its size or focus.
- In 2020, this was followed by an update of the GFSI benchmarking requirements to include food safety culture. This new addition meant that all the recognised Certification Programmes/commercial standards benchmarked to GFSI (e.g. BRCGS, IFS, SQF, FSSC 22000) had to include this new requirement on food safety culture in their commercial standards, which are used extensively around the world.
- Issue 8 of the BRCGS Global Standard Food Safety was the first certification programme to include a requirement on food safety culture even before it was included in the GFSI benchmarking 2020 requirements.
- In September 2020, the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted a revision of its global standard for general principles of food hygiene (CXC 1-1969) and introduced the concept of food safety culture.
- In March 2021, the European Union (EU) followed suit and included these new requirements in EU Regulation 2021/382, amending the annexes to Regulation (EC) No. 853/2004, the legal basis for food safety in the EU.

Best practice requirements based on these standards includes the following actions:

1. Include senior management commitment to product safety culture in a documented policy.
2. Include product safety culture in senior management review meetings.
3. Create and implement a product safety culture plan, to include communication, training, feedback from employees, behaviour changes required to improve, performance measurement, and an action plan.
4. Include the review of product safety culture plans in internal audits.

Culture is something that naturally develops in an organisation whether it is managed or not – it is something that an organisation ‘is’ rather than something that an organisation ‘has’. It is therefore vital that business managers and executives become familiar with the concept of product safety culture and how to manage it.

This book is for business managers, auditors, and anyone with an interest in product safety culture in the food, consumer product and transportation industries. It will be particularly helpful for businesses who want to better understand and improve their product safety culture, and to demonstrate their commitment to customers and auditors.

The structure of the book

1. An introduction that looks at:
 - what product safety culture is and why is it important
 - how to improve product safety culture

2. A practical ten-step plan that incorporates best practice from change management, project management and culture change theory.
3. A practical case study to bring the theory to life. The fictional case study is based on real industry experiences. Using the example of a food company who are at the beginning of their product safety culture journey, it narrates the reasons behind their interest, how they first measured their product safety culture, and how they used the results to create a plan for change.

A checklist to use for evaluating a culture assessment tool

Even well-established companies can experience issues as a result of a failure within the organisation to understand the importance of a good product safety culture. Real case studies are included to show what happens when an organisation's culture fails.

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