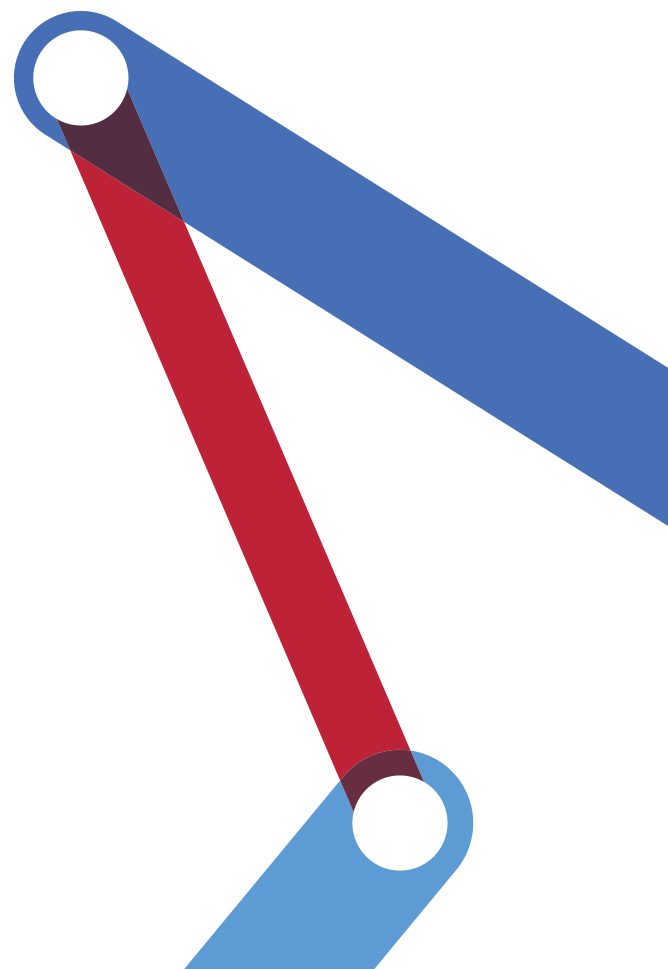# A CULTURE OF FOOD SAFETY

A POSITION PAPER FROM THE GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVE (GFSI)

SUMMARY V1.0 - 4/11/18

This short document is based on the content of the GFSI full position paper "a culture of food safety". It includes the key definitions and a short description of the dimensions and critical components of food safety culture developed in the full paper. This may therefore be a helpful aide-memoire.

Crucially, the full paper places emphasis on:

1. The essential role of leaders and managers throughout an organisation, from CEO to farm, field and shop floor supervisors, from local 'Mom and Pop' grocery stores to large franchise restaurant organisations.

2. Why regular communication, education, metrics, teamwork and personal accountability are vital to advancing a food safety culture.

3. How learned skills including adaptability and hazard awareness move important safe food practices beyond a theoretical conversation to live in "real time."
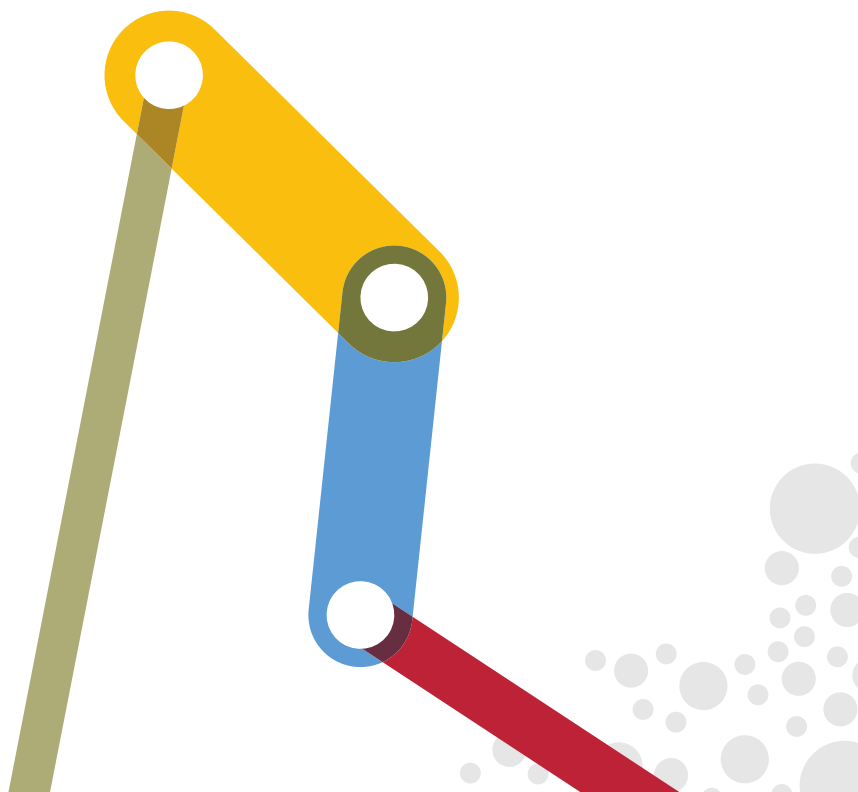
Food Safety Culture

The GFSI TWG defines food safety cultures as, **"shared values, beliefs and norms that affect mind-set and behaviour toward food safety in, across and throughout an organisation."** The definition is derived from existing literature on organisational and food safety culture and made practical and applicable through the group's work.

Shared Values, Beliefs and Norms
Culture of any kind lives not in individuals, but in groups. Values are shared with new members of the company and operationalised in groups through norms and behaviours. This sets formal systems apart from culture, in that what is "written" goes through human translation within the group to become norms – good and bad – which subsequently are shared and learned by new members of the group. This is one of several reasons why culture is perceived as hard to change. We are not changing formal systems, but rather the underlying norms and behaviours that are in many cases unwritten and sometimes unspoken.

Affect Mindset and Behaviour
Psychologically, our beliefs, mindsets and behaviours are impacted by multiple factors including our national culture, upbringing and life experiences. In a work environment, we are affected by the group we identify with, including our department, co-workers, our role and position, job security, formal and informal authority, and our own habits and consciousness around the job at hand. So, when we seek to not only understand how mature our food safety culture is but also how to sustain and further strengthen it, we should understand how the company's overall values and mission affect the thinking of the individuals within their respective groups. For example, are each person's functions, roles and expectations clearly understood, and have they been a part of defining these roles? Do they understand how their roles contribute to the organisation's mission or purpose? These are examples of questions whose answers affect how groups and individuals view senior leaders' commitment to food safety. They are essential to any organisation's food safety culture.

Across and Throughout the Organisation
A food safety culture is not a "one size fits all" proposition. Making it a reality means that throughout the organisation, food safety has been defined for each member and department in terms and expectations that are both relevant and clear to them. What is required of the purchasing department, for example, is different from that of the maintenance team. Purchasing should understand the importance of selecting suppliers that are both economically viable and deliver on the company's food safety requirements, not one or the other. Similarly, a maintenance leader should look out for the condition of the equipment to maximise up-time as well as food safety performance. For smaller organisations, the owner/operator leads by example and influences food safety culture significantly. A mature food safety culture is one in which the company vision and mission have been broken down into the finer details of expectations for every department and person throughout the organisation.

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Cultural Dimensions

Remember that culture of any kind is shared and affects everyone throughout the company, and that one dimension on its own cannot strengthen a food safety culture. Instead, these dimensions must be viewed as integrated and in some cases working against each other, e.g., displaying a strong commitment to systems while remaining nimble enough to integrate change.
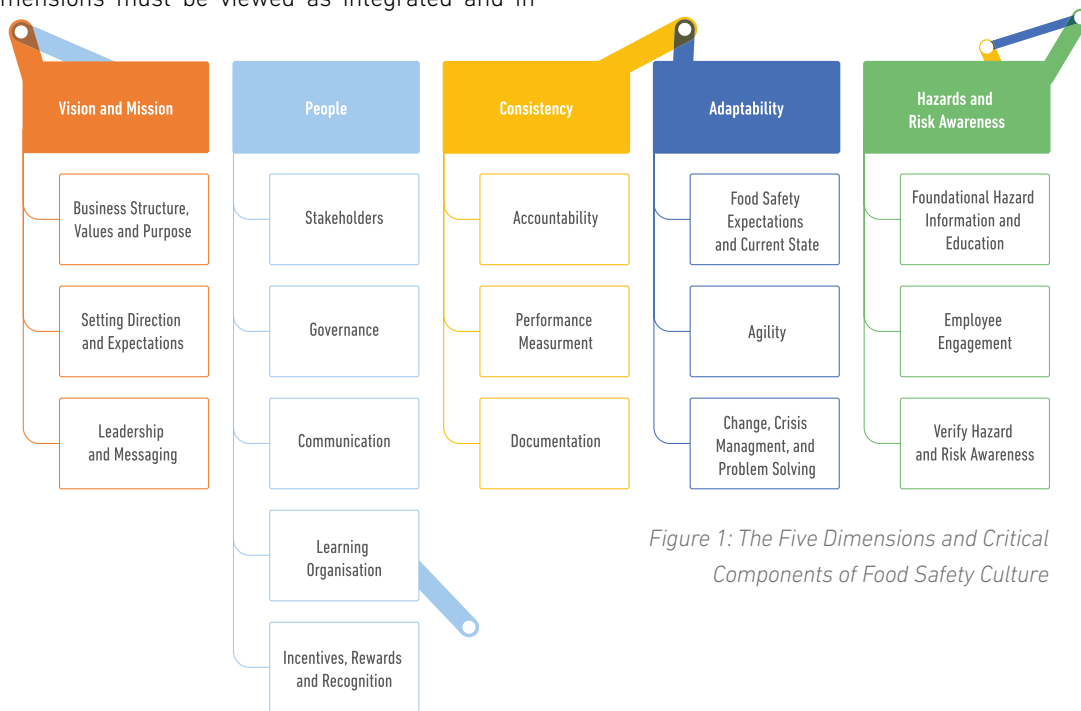

Vision and Mission	People	Consistency	Adaptability	Hazards and Risk Awareness
Business Structure, Values and Purpose	Stakeholders	Accountability	Food Safety Expectations and Current State	Foundational Hazard Information and Education
Setting Direction and Expectations	Governance	Performance Measurment	Agility	Employee Engagement
Leadership and Messaging	Communication	Documentation	Change, Crisis Managment, and Problem Solving	Verify Hazard and Risk Awareness
	Learning Organisation			
	Incentives, Rewards and Recognition			

Figure 1: The Five Dimensions and Critical Components of Food Safety Culture

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⬆ Vision and Mission

Vision and Mission communicates a business's reason for existence and how it translates this into expectations and specific messaging for its stakeholders.

Guiding Questions
1. How do your senior leaders engage with food safety?
2. How is your messaging used to communicate food safety expectations to all employees?
3. Is your company's vision and mission clearly expressed so that both are understood by all staff?

👥 People

People are the critical component of any food safety culture. Our behaviour and activities, from processes on the farm to practices in the kitchen, as well as consumer habits prior to eating the food, contribute to the safety of food and potentially decrease or increase the risk of foodborne illness.

Guiding Questions
Individuals throughout an organisation with an effective food safety culture should be able to answer the following questions:
1. When was the last time you or someone on your team raised a food safety concern?
2. How do you contribute to food safety in your organisation?
3. When was your last food safety training and what did you learn?
4. To what level are people committed and acting in accordance with food safety expectations?
5. How is your food safety performance measured?

Consistency

Consistency refers to the proper alignment of food safety priorities with requirements on people, technology, resources and processes to ensure the consistent and effective application of a food safety programme that reinforces a culture of food safety.

Guiding Questions

1. Are you confident that all employees know their responsibilities and are held accountable for their food-safety-related tasks, and that accountabilities are well-connected?
2. How does what you measure (e.g. customer complaints; compliance to procedures, productivity, etc.) influence your food safety culture?
    - Are your measurements related to volume/efficiency at the expense of food safety measures?
3. Is your documentation designed to support employees' food safety decisions and behaviours?
4. Are employees engaged in the design and improvement of food safety-related protocols and instructions?

Adaptability

Adaptability refers to the ability of an organisation to adjust to changing influences and conditions and respond within its current state or move to a new one.

Guiding Questions

1. Can you articulate your company's food safety expectations and how they are applied to every decision?
2. Does your strategy enable you to respond quickly and effectively, with appropriate oversight to ensure the right decisions are made?
3. How do you anticipate, manage and respond to change, learn from the past and prepare for the future

Hazard and Risk Awareness

This dimension differentiates food safety culture from the broader organisational culture. Recognising actual and potential hazards and risks at all levels and functions represents a key element to building and sustaining a food safety culture. Basic scientific and technical information should be accessible and understandable to everyone. As a company, it is important to keep current on the latest industry intelligence including market incidents, changes to food safety legislation, significant new technology and analytical advances. This will broaden awareness and understanding of potential risks and hazards.

Guiding Questions

1. How do you educate staff to understand why the hazard and risk management controls in their areas are so important, and what would be the consequences of not following them?
2. How do you review your "near-misses" and use this information to drive improvements in your food safety system?
3. Can you identify examples of where using industry intelligence has helped identify potential hazards or risks to your business?

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