# Food safety and quality culture

Real commitment drives real returns



**bsi.**

# Why worry about a food safety and quality culture?

A culture of food safety and quality is a major component of resilience in food businesses. It helps deliver sustainable, competitive advantage because a strong culture can take more controlled risks and more easily shift to new working patterns in today's rapidly evolving and disruptive environments.

Food retailers and manufacturers are focussing more closely on their culture because a food safety and quality culture can improve productivity and quality of output, reduce employee turnover and provide greater customer satisfaction. This can translate into less waste, lower costs, improvements in brand reputation and ultimately into competitive advantage and increased profitability. A good culture is even more important these days as consumers are scrutinizing products more closely and have ready access to online information and reviews about the provenance, safety and quality of these products.

Organizations with strong cultures will be best placed not only to survive but to capitalize on the challenge of change for sustainable competitive advantage because they will be more agile and can adapt to a new business model quickly.

## Components of culture

An organization's culture is made up of tangible and intangible components. Tangibles such as pay, work and working conditions are all important, as are training, development and reward. However these things can be in place and an organization's culture may not reflect a high level of respect for food safety and quality. This is because more intangible aspects like self-motivation, trust, teamwork and recognition are equally important.

*"A leader doesn't get the message across. He IS the message."*

Warren Bennis, leadership guru

## Good vs bad culture

Just as every organization has its own mission, values and vision, every organization has a unique culture. However, organizations that have positive cultures tend to share these common characteristics:

- Clear company vision and values
- Like-minded employees who work in teams and cross-functionally
- A relatively flat structure where the leadership team is constantly interacts with employees
- Good pay and benefits
- Employees are empowered to make decisions
- Promotion on merit alone
- Personal training and development

In contrast, poor or dysfunctional cultures often feature:

- hierarchical structures
- employees doing repetitive jobs with little responsibility
- a 'blame' culture and defensiveness when mistakes are made
- different functions working in silos and a rules-led environment

In this kind of atmosphere mistakes can be made by poorly motivated employees and swept under the carpet. It's likely they will also have high employee turnover as people don't want to work in an environment where their contribution isn't valued.

Poor culture can impact the bottom line. High employee turnover is costly. A study carried out by Oxford Economics and Unum in 2015 reported that the cost of staff turnover for British businesses reaches at least £4.1 billion each year as new employees take on average up to eight months to be truly productive. On average, a departing staff member costs £30,000 to replace; £5,000 for recruitment and onboarding and £25,000 in wages while the new worker reaches optimum productivity.

Many costly issues—from food poisoning incidents to workplace injuries—are directly related to human behaviour. For example, in the UK the top contraventions that are found in the catering/retail sector by local authority environmental health inspectors include issues with:

- the cleaning of kitchen equipment
- the cleaning of kitchen structure
- the shelf life of food
- record keeping
- defects or damage to kitchen structure or equipment

These are all people issues. People not doing their job properly for whatever reason (lack of time, lack of training, lack of motivation). The bottom line is that these tasks were not understood as a high enough priority because the directors and managers don't communicate their importance clearly enough. Psychologists confirm that it is proper understanding that most effectively brings about compliant behaviours.

Stable supplier relationships also underpin culture. Ethics and values are equally important. When a buyer-supplier relationship is purely transactional and price-based, and suppliers are changed frequently, it's not possible to develop the kind of relationship that fosters safety and quality.

"Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish."

[Sam Walton, Wal-mart]

In the UK, The Food Standards Agency classifies different food safety cultures in business into five groups:

**Calculative non-compliers** intentionally breach regulations for the sake of financial gain, disputing or disregarding the potential impact on consumers – without assessing the potential impact on people and making decisions without due deliberation or consideration of regulations or other requirements.

"I never bother wasting time on something that will cost me time but not make me money."

**Doubting compliers** doubt the significance of the hazard posed by food safety and hygiene and the effectiveness of food hygiene regulations and requirements in managing these hazards.

"We've never had a problem in all the time we have been trading."

**Dependent compliers** wait for advice or instruction from regulators and other third parties to make improvements, they view food safety and hygiene as something driven by third parties.

"Just give me a list of what you want me to do and I will do it."

**Proactive compliers** understand that hazards posed by poor food hygiene and poor process controls are significant and accept that requirements are effective and necessary.

"We encourage all staff to take ownership and responsibility for food safety and we challenge non-compliance."

**Leaders** view food safety and hygiene as critical business issues that must be tightly managed because of their potential business benefits. They provide visible leadership by continually reviewing food safety and improving food hygiene.

"We pride ourselves on the safety and hygiene practices of our business."

The FSA has developed a free Food Safety Culture Diagnostic Toolkit for Inspectors. Food businesses can use some of the exercises included to determine what level of food safety culture exists in their organization. (If you're reading this in hard copy, enter 'food safety culture diagnostic toolkit for inspectors' into your preferred search engine to access it online.)

# Developing a culture of food safety and quality

A good culture, whether focused on food quality safety or airline travel, doesn't happen by accident. Even the first steps, defining a culture and planning for it, take commitment and hard work. Culture requires constant attention – it must be nurtured and adjusted to be relevant and reflective of an organization's operating environment.

# The requirements of a food quality and safety culture

- Senior level management must be engaged, on-board and committed.

It's essential that senior executive teams engage with and own food safety, reinforcing the importance of management policies and protocols and communicating the right values and responsibilities to staff. Food safety and quality assurance should be represented within senior management and made part of the regular executive agenda.

- Create a clear food safety and quality strategy and supporting policies and communicate them clearly. The strategy and policies must be aligned to company priorities. All team members also have to have a clear understanding of their role and its importance within the organization so they understand why doing it correctly is important. This also applies to suppliers and their suppliers, as they are core to the safe delivery of products. Companies with a clear strategy and a strong culture can embrace change more easily.

- Clearly defined employee roles and responsibilities. This will empower them to make decisions and accountability for them as well as provide KPIs that are aligned to company strategy and priorities.

- Integrated and open management, feedback and teamwork. This involves ensuring that different teams understand the work and priorities of other teams in the business and are prepared to work together to resolve

issues. Employees should be encouraged to give feedback, including whistle-blowing, through established mechanisms knowing that they will not be blamed or ignored. It's important for senior management to ensure that middle management buys into the same vision and priorities or a disconnect can occur because the right messages are not conveyed to staff.

- Provide the right tools and equipment for employees to do the job. This may seem obvious, but surprisingly it's not often the case. An example is hand washing where simple things like sufficient basins, hot and cold water and hand drying facilities are not correctly supplied by management, making it impossible for workers to adhere to standards, regulations and/or company policy.

- Recognize good work and implement clear sanctions for contraventions. Recognizing a job well done as well as establishing the consequences of not following the rules helps to foster a climate of trust and reinforces company priorities.

- Identify the causes of employee turnover. Maintaining a consistent staff will help to develop a more stable and trusted workforce and reduces the costs associated with the recruitment and on-boarding of new workers.

- Implement measurements. What is measured gets done. Standards and audits play an important role. To deter the perception that audits are a hurdle to overcome, help workers understand that their key purpose is to double-check everything is performing well. Also make sure the right things are being measured. What gets measured should align with company strategy and all employees should understand why these aspects are important and, therefore, why they're measured. What's measured can also evolve over time; involve employees by asking them for new things that could be measured to help make them part of the process.

- Regular review and feedback mechanisms. This ensures the right priorities and messages are getting through to all staff. An opportunity to provide feedback can also be extended to suppliers and/or customers as people outside of the business may be able to identify things that internal employees might miss because sometimes distance can provide a different perception.

# The role of technology

Technological advances like the Internet of Things will enable benefits across the entire food industry. Aspects of food safety that have previously been manual tasks, like fridge temperatures and shelf life, can now be automatically recorded and instant alerts provided when limits are exceeded.

Automation in the food industry will undoubtedly improve accuracy, quality, productivity and consistency. This may also improve job satisfaction and motivation as employees can be upskilled to handle the machines which are doing the jobs they previously held.

# Looking to the future

In these fast moving times, all businesses need to be horizon scanning for consumer and industry trends, new technologies and even environmental and geo-political factors that may affect them in order to understand developing opportunities and challenges. As company strategy evolves, priorities and working practices will shift. It's important that all employees evolve and shift with the business. Clear communication and understanding why things are changing are absolutely essential to ensure the change occurs without disrupting a food quality and safety culture.



"People want guidance, not rhetoric. They need to know what the plan of action is, and how it will be implemented. They want to be given responsibility to help solve the problem and authority to act on it."

Howard Shultz, Starbucks

# Why BSI?

The food industry impacts every person on the planet. Though what the world's population may eat may differ depending on the geography, wealth, age, gender and availability of goods, no other sector plays such a vital role in all of our day-to-day lives and culture. Economically, food represents 10% of Global GDP (valued at US$48 trillion by the World Bank).

But the food sector also faces significant challenges. Each year, food-borne illness makes one in ten people ill and is the cause of death for millions around the world. Population growth projections and an increasing middle class suggest that the demand for food will increase 70% by 2050. And, consumers are increasingly conscious about what goes into their food, how it's made, its impact on ecosystems and where it comes from.

BSI believes the world deserves food that is safe, sustainable and socially responsible. We support the food sector by developing and publishing standards of best practice, supply chain solutions as well as training and certification to not only the most popular food safety standards, but other business improvement standards that work together to make organizations more resilient.

Working in 172 countries, we pride ourselves on the expertise, integrity and professionalism of our people. Our mission is to help our 80,000 clients, ranging from high-profile global brands to small local companies, survive and prosper in today's world.
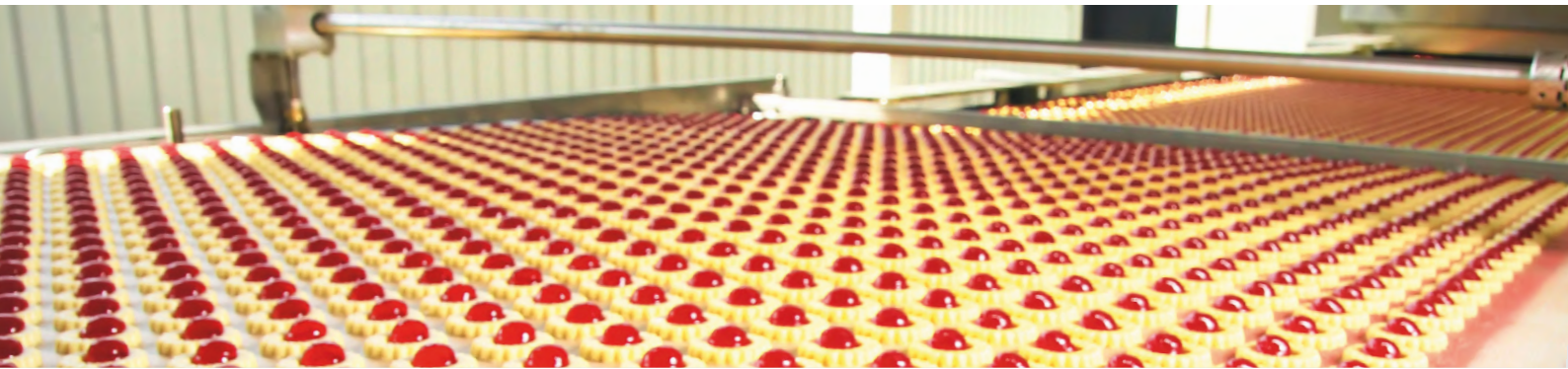


# Our products and services

## Knowledge

The core of our business centres on the knowledge that we create and impart to our clients.
In the standards arena we continue to build our reputation as an expert body, bringing together experts from industry to shape standards at local, regional and international levels.
In fact, BSI originally created eight of the world's top 10 management system standards.

## Assurance

Independent assessment of the conformity of a process or product to a particular standard ensures that our clients perform to a high level of excellence. We train our clients in world-class implementation and auditing techniques to ensure they maximize the benefits of standards.

## Compliance

To experience real, long-term benefits, our clients need to ensure ongoing compliance to a regulation, market need or standard so that it becomes an embedded habit. We provide a range of services and differentiated management tools which help facilitate this process.

For more information on improving your organization's business continuity practices,
visit **bsigroup.com/en-ae**
or email **bsi.me@bsigroup.com**

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