FOOD SAFETY CULTURE AT THE HEART OF MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

How would you define food safety culture?

It's about people's perception, people's attitude, and how people behave towards food safety. It is set by attitudes and values prevailing, connected to food safety practices.

Why is food safety culture important today?

It ensures the protection of public health. Emerging food safety issues such as food fraud, malicious contamination, and an increasing number of foodborne illnesses have demonstrated that there is a big gap between the rules, policies, legislation, and standards and their interpretation. With the increasing globalization of the food supply chain and the potential for contamination, a strong food safety culture is more than ever necessary to prevent foodborne illnesses and outbreaks. Its importance also extends to customer trust, legal and regulatory compliance, brand reputation, and employee engagement and empowerment.

What is the starting point for a strong food safety culture?

A robust food safety culture led by leadership, with a clear vision while engaging people, is the pillar for food safety today. It can mean to carry out a task with the right attitude and behaviour.

What role does leadership play in fostering a positive food safety culture within an organisation?

Leaders are responsible for setting the tone and expectations regarding food safety within the organisation. By visibly prioritizing and emphasizing the importance of food safety, leaders set an example for employees to follow. They communicate and reinforce the message that food safety is a non-negotiable priority.

Leaders prioritize strong food safety culture because it's a value, not a priority (Yiannas, 2009). Priorities can change; values should not (Geller, 2005). These are our mottos.

What are challenges organisations face when creating a strong food safety culture?

One challenge is obtaining commitment from all levels of the organisation, including top management. Else, ensuring consistent adherence to food safety protocols throughout all operations and departments. Changing employee behaviour and fostering a culture of continuous improvement can be a significant hurdle.

Can you advise organisations on improving food safety culture?

It's important for organisations to establish a clear vision and expectations regarding food safety. This vision should be communicated effectively to all employees. Providing thorough training and resources to employees is crucial. Organisations must assess food safety often to find areas for improvement and take corrective actions.

What steps to improve food safety culture in an organisation?

An organisation can start by assessing the current state, set measurable goals, educate and train employees, foster open communication, carry out regular inspections, audits, and internal evaluations, leveraging technology to enhance monitoring processes and provide feedback

and recognition, encourage continual improvement. The golden rule is to 'Lead by example'.

Are there standards which promote food safety culture?

The CODEX Alimentarius 2020 version mentions culture as part of the responsibility of food business operators. The GFSI standards have integrated it as a requirement in their standards. ISO 22000 implies it in the food safety policy. FSSC 22000 and BRCGS require the senior management to define and maintain a clear plan for the development and continuing improvement of food safety and quality culture in food chain categories. BSI has developed and published PAS 320:2023, a guide for developing and sustaining a mature food safety culture.

Food Safety Culture by Gaytree Bhurut

Does Change ACT provide support and training related to the above?

Change ACT has been working in food safety culture in various areas since 2018. We have two levels of training, one specifically at senior management level for a duration of two hours and another one of six hours namely developing a positive food safety culture. We worked with the management of food processing, hotels, and we have an assessment tool to determine the level of the food safety culture.