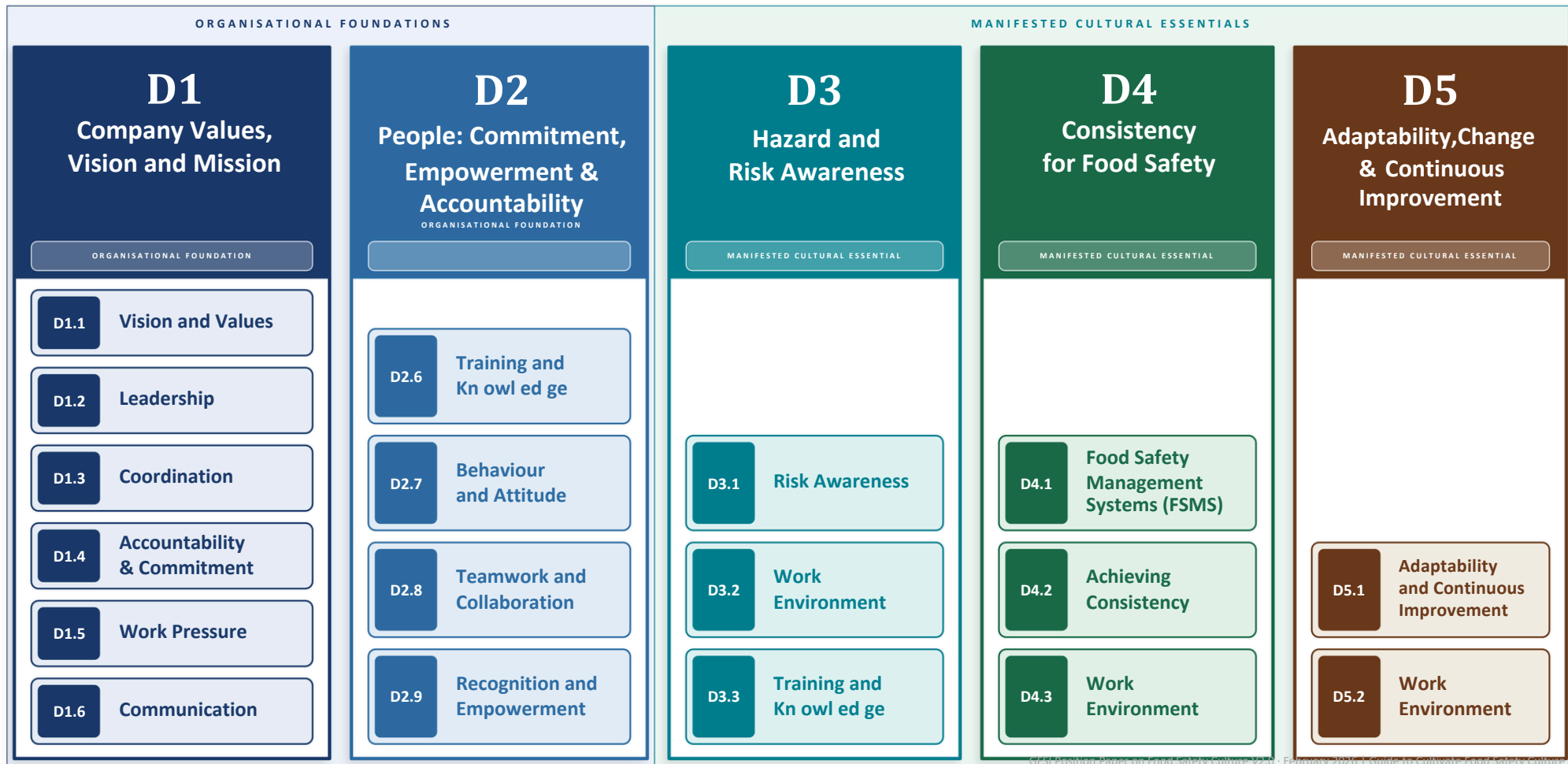


GFSI V2.0 — The 5 Dimensions of Food Safety Culture

Each dimension and its Critical Components (Sub-Dimensions)

GFSI Position Paper V2.0 · Feb 2026



D1

Company Values, Vision and Mission

Organisational Foundation — All Critical Components

D1.1 Vision and Values

PROMOTE

- Share the organization's values (include food safety) in onboarding, annual training, and visible workplace communications
- Frame food safety as a life-saving purpose (SLO mindset) in all internal messaging
- Ensure top management visibly lives food safety values in daily decisions, not only in formal reviews

MONITOR

- Alignment between stated values and actual practices (spot-check audits, worker interviews)
- Frequency with which food safety is mentioned in board/senior leadership communications
- Number of decisions reversed or questioned on food safety grounds by any level

DEVELOP

- Conduct a values alignment workshop with top management and shop floor to identify gaps between stated and lived values
- Create a one-page Food Safety Values Charter co-developed with workers at all levels
- Review job descriptions to embed food safety values as a behavioural expectation for every role

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

The senior leadership team for all organisations, which depending on the nature of the business may include the business owner and board of directors, establish values, vision and purpose for the organisation. These core values transcend all aspects of the business and inform the food safety culture. This means that food safety and consumer protection should be front and centre of the company's stated values so that they are understood as important and acted on by all personnel, whatever their role. This will involve appropriate communication and education approaches and involvement of all personnel, as well as continuous reinforcement through living the values at all hierarchical levels. Food safety values should be reflected in the company's communications and the way that it does business in the food supply chain.

D1.2 Leadership

PROMOTE

- Implement a top management and employee development programme focused on food safety leadership behaviours — not only technical knowledge
- Ensure senior leaders are visibly present on the shop floor, asking about food safety, not just receiving reports in meetings
- Define clearly what acceptable and unacceptable food safety behaviours look like at every level of the organisation, starting with leaders themselves
- Establish a confidential food safety reporting system so workers can raise concerns without fear of reprisal

MONITOR

- Frequency of senior leader participation in food safety walks, briefings, and training sessions
- Worker survey: 'Do leaders in this organisation demonstrate that food safety is a genuine priority through their actions — not only their words?'
- Number of food safety issues escalated and resolved through leadership decision within agreed timeframes
- Autonomy given to employees designated to act when food safety may be compromised (observed and surveyed)

DEVELOP

- Hold a Food Safety Leadership Day aligned with World Food Safety Day: senior leaders facilitate awareness activities, share success stories, and publicly commit to specific food safety culture improvement actions
- Introduce food safety leadership simulations: present leaders with realistic deviation scenarios and evaluate and debrief their reaction and decision-making
- Build food safety culture leadership into the senior management performance review — leaders are evaluated not only on results but on how they model and reinforce the culture
- Develop a Food Safety Leadership Maturity Profile for the organisation: where are leaders now, and what behaviours define the next level?

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

This critical component highlights both the essential role of senior leaders in setting the direction and tone for a company's food safety culture, and the importance of consistent, engaged food safety leadership throughout the company's organisational structure. Leaders' roles are essential to driving culture change and maturity, including demonstration of leadership commitment, defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, and modelling and communicating expectations regarding safe food production and processing so that they cascade through the entire organisation.

D1.3 Coordination

PROMOTE

- Hold regular cross-departmental food safety alignment meetings (production, quality, maintenance, HR, procurement) – Beyond Food Safety team members
- Define food safety roles and responsibilities across all departments explicitly in writing
- Include supply chain partners in food safety coordination through shared expectations and regular touchpoints – including regulatory authorities, CBs and scheme owner

MONITOR

- Number of cross-functional food safety meetings per quarter
- Instances of non-conformities caused by handover failures or interdepartmental misalignment
- Perception gap between front-line and management scores on the same culture dimension (Level 1 vs Level 2 divergence)

DEVELOP

- Map all food safety handover points (shift changes, supplier intake, delivery) and define a formal protocol for each
- Create a cross-functional Food Safety Coordination Group with rotating membership from each department
- Integrate food safety coordination checkpoints into existing production planning and management review cycles

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Coordination is the alignment of roles, responsibilities, and communication across departments, shifts, and sites to support safety outcomes. Alignment of goals across departments is important and this is fostered through collaborative sessions, cross-functional project teams and effective communication. It is important to note that coordination with internal and external food safety governance structures and integration with supply chain partners also support this critical component.

D1.4 Accountability and Commitment

PROMOTE

- Define food safety accountability explicitly in every job description — not only for the quality team
- Recognise publicly when workers demonstrate accountability (reporting an issue, stopping a process)
- Establish 'red lines' — non-negotiable food safety actions every worker can take without consulting a manager

MONITOR

- Rate of food safety issues reported voluntarily by workers (leading indicator of accountability culture)
- % of corrective actions owned and closed by the responsible person within agreed timeframes
- Instances where workers exercised their authority to stop a process for food safety reasons

DEVELOP

- Conduct an accountability mapping exercise: for each food safety control point, identify who is accountable and whether they know it
- Introduce a Food Safety Accountability Review into the annual performance review process for all roles
- Create a simple escalation matrix so every worker knows who to contact and what action to take at each level

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Members of the workforce need to be accountable for food safety outcomes that fall within their remit. This requires effective coordination, communication and education to engender the necessary understanding and commitment as well as awareness of work pressures and resourcing within the organisation.

D1.5 Work Pressure

PROMOTE

- Routinely assess whether production schedules allow adequate time for food safety controls and cleaning to be completed properly
- Ensure peak production seasons are proactively resourced (consider audit periods may also impact resources needed)
- Create a mechanism for workers to flag when workload compromises food safety compliance — without fear of reprisal

MONITOR

- Food safety non-conformities correlated with peak production periods, audits, or staff shortages
- Worker survey responses on whether they have enough time to complete food safety tasks correctly
- Absenteeism and overtime rates as proxy indicators of sustained work pressure

DEVELOP

- Review staffing models during peak periods specifically against food safety control requirements
- Establish a 'Food Safety First' protocol: any worker can request a process pause when resources are insufficient
- Include work pressure risk in the food safety management system's context of the organization and define actions to mitigate the risk. Review this risk at management review.

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Work pressure can be managed through planning, scheduling production and ensuring adequate resources at all times, including personnel, equipment, ingredients and materials. Consideration needs to be given to the impact of external factors such as audits and external visits on workloads and work pressures and plans made to overcome challenges and barriers.

D1.6 Communication

PROMOTE

- Institute a mandatory food safety briefing and debriefing between shifts — food safety status is always on the agenda
- Establish a routine where top management asks daily about food safety: 'Have you asked how food safety is doing today?'
- Ensure food safety communication uses language, formats and channels appropriate to the audience — visual for the shop floor, data-led for management
- Create safe, confidential channels (anonymous reporting, dedicated hotlines) for workers to raise food safety concerns

MONITOR

- Number of food safety team meetings and cross-departmental food safety meetings per quarter
- Non-conformities where lack of communication was identified as a contributing cause
- Worker survey: 'Do you feel comfortable communicating a food safety concern to your colleague / manager / top management?'
- Adequacy of communication assessed by workers: is it clear, specific to their role, and in a language/format they understand?

DEVELOP

- Create an internal network for food safety communication (intranet, group chat, shift board) that is two-way — workers can ask questions and receive responses, not only receive broadcasts
- Develop a Food Safety Culture communication calendar: planned messages, themes, and events aligned to the organisation's food safety improvement priorities
- Include food safety communication responsibilities in every job description — not only those of the food safety team
- Conduct regular interviews with shop floor workers to verify that food safety expectations, risks and responsibilities are understood — and act on the gaps found

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

GFSI Culture Essentials

Communication needs to be open, proactive and two-way, with checking of understanding through two-way feedback loops an integral part of the process. It is important to consider language, use of appropriate tools and materials, appropriate communication channels and how to overcome communication barriers and establish trust. To ensure effective communication, top down, bottom up, and across organisation, communication needs to be planned and designed as well as communication methods and channels with external stakeholders. Safe, confidential communication channels are also needed.

D2

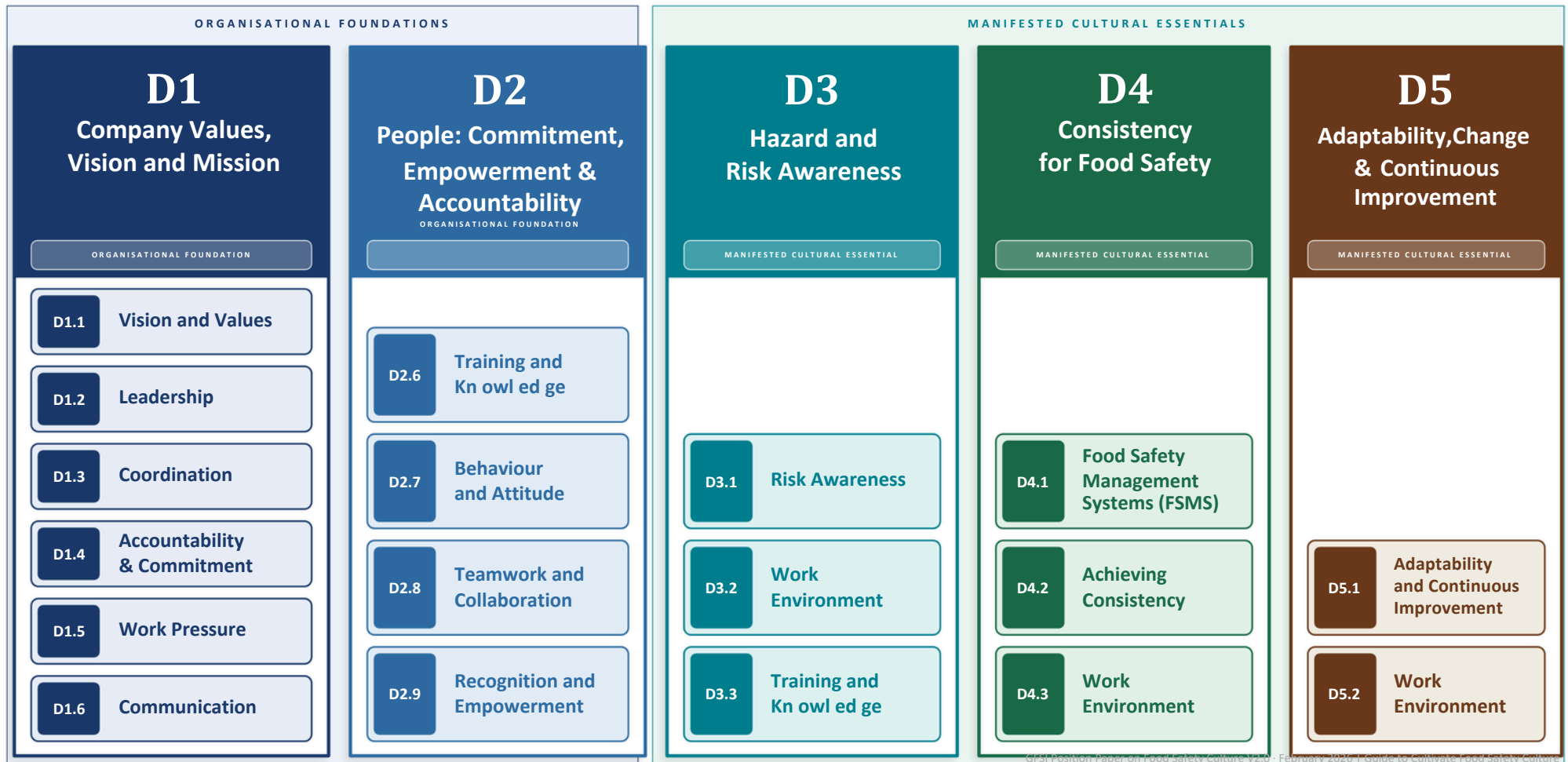
People: Commitment, Empowerment and Accountability

Organisational Foundation — All Critical Components

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D2.6 Training and Knowledge

PROMOTE

- Design training interventions that are specific to the hazards, controls, and food safety responsibilities of each role — never generic, never one-size-fits-all
- Use participatory training methods: co-create training content with the workers who will receive it, so it reflects real working conditions
- Include food safety culture topics in all induction and annual training — not only technical hygiene and HACCP compliance
- Ensure training reaches all levels, including top management: leaders need food safety training tailored to their decision-making role

MONITOR

- Training effectiveness measured before and after each intervention — not just attendance registers but knowledge and behaviour change
- % of workers in food safety-critical roles with up-to-date documented competency evidence
- Number of non-conformities where the root cause was identified as a gap in training or knowledge transfer
- % of employees able to state the key food safety expectations relevant to their specific role (assessed via interview or quiz)

DEVELOP

- Build a Training Needs Analysis process that maps training to both FSMS requirements and food safety culture dimensions — so training investment addresses both systems and culture gaps
- Introduce a co-creation approach: invite workers to help design training content and materials for their own area — this both improves relevance and increases engagement
- Create a competency verification system that goes beyond written tests: include on-the-job observation, peer assessment, and supervisor sign-off for food safety-critical tasks
- Establish a food safety knowledge baseline for each role and track whether the organisation is moving forward, using training data as a culture maturity indicator over time

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Training and Knowledge efforts are essential to support both culture and FSMS initiatives. Specific training interventions need to be effectively planned to meet the needs of the trainee groups and one-size-fits-all should be avoided.

GFSI Culture Essentials

D2.7 Behaviour and Attitude

PROMOTE

- Use storytelling and real incident case studies to shift attitude from compliance to genuine care
- Address optimistic bias directly — share concrete statistics (600M sick/year, 420,000 deaths/year) to counter 'it won't happen here'
- Celebrate and make visible positive food safety behaviours, not only the absence of non-conformities

MONITOR

- Behavioural observations during unannounced audits (are food safety practices followed when no one is watching?)
- Attitude survey results — gap between what workers say they believe and what is observed in practice
- Number of near-miss reports per period (a high number is a positive indicator of proactive attitude)

DEVELOP

- Train line managers to recognise and respond to both positive and negative food safety behaviours in real time
- Introduce peer observation programmes where workers observe and give feedback to colleagues on food safety behaviours
- Use attitude pulse surveys (3–5 quick questions) quarterly to track attitude trends and respond to shifts

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Positive attitudes to food safety and food safety culture are important and mismatches between attitudes and behaviours need to be avoided. Food safety culture interventions and food safety training can provide positive effects on attitude and behaviours, but all interventions should be monitored to establish effectiveness. Continuous engagement is necessary for sustained and consistent engagement and to drive internal culture change.

D2.8 Teamwork and Collaboration

PROMOTE

- Frame food safety as a shared team goal, not a quality department responsibility
- Create cross-functional Food Safety Culture Ambassador teams with members from production, logistics, maintenance and HR
- Use team-based food safety improvement projects to build collaborative problem-solving habits

MONITOR

- % of food safety improvements that originated from cross-functional teams vs. quality team alone
- Number of inter-departmental food safety collaboration initiatives active per quarter
- Worker survey: 'Do your colleagues support you in following food safety practices?'

DEVELOP

- Facilitate an annual cross-functional food safety improvement sprint: form mixed teams to solve a real food safety challenge
- Include a teamwork and collaboration score in the food safety culture self-assessment
- Recognise and reward teams (not only individuals) for food safety culture contributions

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

There is no doubt that collaboration and teamwork are important to food safety culture, and it has been reported that each impacts the other. Organisations need to develop plans to strengthen teamwork and collaboration through food safety management and culture initiatives. Team-based learning and participatory methods can help to inculcate improved teamwork and working together with other critical components of food safety culture across the dimensions, such as Training and Knowledge, Communication, Coordination, Behaviour and Attitude, Recognition and Empowerment, Risk Awareness, and understanding of Work Pressures supports an environment for effective teamwork and collaboration.

D2.9 Recognition and Empowerment

PROMOTE

- Establish a visible, regular recognition programme for food safety behaviours — peer nominations, team meetings, notice boards
- Give every worker explicit authority to raise a food safety concern and stop a process if necessary
- Invite workers to co-design food safety procedures and controls relevant to their role

MONITOR

- Number of food safety recognitions given per period (by level and department)
- Worker survey: 'Do you feel empowered to act when you identify a food safety risk?'
- Number of worker-initiated improvements to food safety processes per quarter

DEVELOP

- Create a Food Safety Champion identity programme (e.g. SLO champion) where workers formally take on a culture ambassador role
- Review whether recognition is distributed equitably across all levels, shifts, and departments
- Introduce a 'Red Button' protocol: a named process any worker can invoke to pause operations for food safety reasons, with guaranteed no-blame follow-up

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Recognition and empowerment are positive factors impacting food safety culture development and approaches including training and employee/team participation have been highlighted as important. Some tools are available to assist with understanding the current level of autonomy so that strategies for increased empowerment can be developed. Promoting safe, open dialog and recognising employees who step forward are key to building more empowered teams.

D3

Hazard and Risk Awareness

Manifested Cultural Essential — New Dimension

D3.1 Risk Awareness

PROMOTE

- Define a minimum 'Level 0' risk awareness standard: the hazards relevant to each role, the controls in place, and what to do if a control fails
- Use visual tools (risk maps, illustrated hazard cards by work area) to make hazards visible and tangible at the point of work
- Share real incident and near-miss stories to make abstract hazard awareness emotionally concrete

MONITOR

- % of workers who can correctly identify the top three food safety hazards relevant to their role (assessed by interview or quiz)
- Number of non-conformities where root cause was identified as lack of hazard awareness
- Results of unannounced audit interviews: 'Can you explain the food safety risk of this step and what you do to control it?'

DEVELOP

- Conduct role-specific risk awareness workshops for all job families — hazard-specific for each area, not generic food safety training
- Create a Hazard Knowledge Map: which hazards are present, which roles are exposed, what controls are required
- Introduce a formal Risk Awareness Verification process: annual competency check for all workers in food safety-critical roles

GFSI Culture
Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

It is clear that risk awareness is central to both effective control of food safety hazards through food safety management systems and programmes, and that this both supports and may be the outcome of a mature food safety culture. Organisations need to take steps to assess the level of risk awareness in their workforce and apply appropriate education and communication tools to maintain and increase risk awareness suitable for the product sector where they operate.

D3.2 Work Environment

PROMOTE

- Conduct regular hygiene and layout walkthroughs with mixed teams (food safety + production + maintenance + top management) to identify environmental barriers
- Make the connection explicit: a poor environment normalises poor practices and erodes food safety culture
- Ensure adequate lighting, labelling, waste management, and equipment maintenance so that doing the right thing is the easiest option

MONITOR

- Number of environmental non-conformities identified per audit cycle
- Worker survey: 'Does your working environment make it easy or difficult to follow food safety practices?'
- Frequency of preventive maintenance completion vs. schedule and number of pest/cleaning/sanitation non-conformities

DEVELOP

- Conduct a 'Food Safety Environment Audit' annually with front-line worker participation — their daily friction points are the most valuable input
- Create a visual standard (photo-based) for acceptable vs. unacceptable conditions in each work area
- Establish a rapid response protocol for environmental issues: any worker can report a problem and receive a response within a defined timeframe

GFSI Culture
Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

The work environment needs to be of a good hygienic standard with facilities and finishes that support food safety practices and allow the workforce to do their jobs effectively and comfortably. Literature confirms that the environment impacts behaviours, compliance and culture and the lack of good environmental standards had been linked to culture in outbreaks.

D3.3 Training and Knowledge (Risk context)

PROMOTE

- Ensure training content is specific to the hazards and controls relevant to each role — not generic food hygiene
- Train workers on CCPs, OPRPs and Prerequisite Programmes relevant to their specific tasks
- Make the link between worker knowledge, hazard control, and consumer health explicit in every training session

MONITOR

- % of food safety-critical roles with up-to-date documented competency evidence
- Number of non-conformities where training was identified as a contributing factor
- Training effectiveness scores (pre/post knowledge assessments) and % of new starters completing risk-specific induction before working unsupervised

DEVELOP

- Develop role-specific competency frameworks defining what every worker in a food safety-critical role must know and demonstrate
- Introduce on-the-job verification: supervisors observe and sign off on key food safety tasks as part of competency confirmation
- Create a 'hazard library' — a documented, accessible record of hazards, controls and consequences for each area, available to all workers

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Training and Knowledge efforts are essential to support both culture and FSMS initiatives. In the context of the Hazard and Risk Awareness Dimension, this will include foundational information for understanding and assessing hazards and risks and the need to verify hazard and risk awareness at all levels of the organisation. Essential training and knowledge here relate to hazards and risks relevant to the business and being managed through the food safety management systems, and the specific methods being used to control and monitor CCPs, PRPs and preventive control measures (e.g. OPRPs). In particular, people need to know, understand and be accountable for their specific role and any related procedures — what to do to maintain control and what to do when monitoring indicates loss of control.

D4

Consistency for Food Safety

Manifested Cultural Essential — New Dimension

D4.1 Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS)

PROMOTE

- Communicate how the FSMS (HACCP, PRPs, OPRPs, CCPs) serves the culture — not as bureaucracy but as the operational expression of food safety values
- Involve workers from all relevant areas in FSMS review and improvement cycles, not only the food safety team
- Ensure the FSMS is practical and usable at the point of work — documentation should help workers, not obstruct them

MONITOR

- % of FSMS procedures reviewed and updated within the scheduled review cycle
- Number of deviations from FSMS procedures identified during internal audits
- Worker understanding of the FSMS elements relevant to their role (assessed by interview)

DEVELOP

- Conduct a FSMS Usability Review: ask front-line workers whether existing procedures, records and controls are practical — update based on their input
- Map the FSMS against the GFSI culture dimensions: identify where cultural gaps are creating FSMS compliance weaknesses
- For each recurring non-conformity, apply a cultural lens: ask 'is this a system design problem or a culture problem?'

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

The FSMS needs to be well designed and developed and effectively implemented and maintained. The importance of interactions between FSMS with food safety culture has become better understood as more work and understanding of cultural dimensions has developed through research. Emphasis on planning how the approaches will support each other in any improvement project or cycle will allow appropriate actions to be taken.

D4.2 Achieving Consistency

PROMOTE

- Set clear, written food safety behaviour expectations for every role and communicate them during onboarding and regular training
- Establish structured shift handover protocols that include food safety status as a mandatory agenda item
- Share food safety performance data regularly with all workers — not only management — so everyone understands the current state

MONITOR

- CCP and OPRP monitoring completion rates (% of scheduled monitoring completed on time and correctly)
- Number of repeat non-conformities (same issue recurring in successive audit cycles)
- Trend analysis of non-conformity data: is the organisation improving, stable, or deteriorating?

DEVELOP

- Introduce a Performance Review Rhythm: monthly at team level, quarterly at department level, annually at organisational level
- Create a Food Safety Trend Analysis report reviewed at management review — including leading indicators, not only lagging ones
- Establish a Documentation Currency Audit: annually verify all food safety records, procedures and training materials are current and understood

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

Consistent and correct food safety behaviours are essential at all levels. Additional important aspects are Performance Measurement, Documentation and Records Systems and their use in Trend Analysis. Performance measurement, e.g. through monitoring CCPs, allows the business to check that it is meeting defined food safety requirements as well as to acknowledge good performance and identify performance issues. Metrics need to be carefully chosen and will normally include both lagging (reactive) and leading (proactive) measures. Appropriate Records Systems are needed for results, which should be transparent and communicated within the organisation, suitable for Trend Analysis to enable input to continuous improvement as well as providing useful information for training and supporting the food safety culture.

D4.3 Work Environment

PROMOTE

- Establish and communicate a minimum physical standard for food safety-relevant areas: hygiene, temperature, pest control, equipment condition
- Include physical environment standards in onboarding so workers understand the expected standard from day one
- Ensure the work environment makes food safety the path of least resistance: disposal points, hand washing facilities, PPE accessible at the point of need

MONITOR

- Environmental status results: temperature, humidity, pest activity, ATP swab results
- Frequency of environmental non-conformities per area
- Worker survey: 'Does the physical environment in your work area support consistent food safety practice?' and % of planned preventive maintenance completed on schedule

DEVELOP

- Conduct an annual Environment vs. Culture correlation analysis: where physical environment scores are low, assess whether culture scores are also low
- Create a Physical Environment Improvement Plan driven by worker observations, audit findings, and culture survey data
- Introduce a hygiene and environment visual standard (photo-based SOP) for each work area, co-developed with the workers who use it

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

The work environment needs to be of a good hygienic standard with facilities and finishes that support food safety practices and allow the workforce to do their jobs effectively and comfortably. Literature confirms that the environment impacts behaviours, compliance and culture and the lack of good environmental standards had been linked to culture in outbreaks.

D5

Adaptability, Change and Continuous Improvement

Manifested Cultural Essential — New Dimension

D5.1 Adaptability and Continuous Improvement

PROMOTE

- Create a culture where near-misses are celebrated as learning opportunities, not hidden
- Establish a structured near-miss reporting system with guaranteed no-blame follow-up and visible action
- Communicate regulatory and industry food safety changes proactively to all workers — not only the food safety team

MONITOR

- Number of near-miss reports per quarter (a rising number signals growing psychological safety and proactive attitude)
- Time from identification of a food safety issue to root cause analysis and corrective action
- Culture maturity score progression across successive annual self-assessment cycles

DEVELOP

- Introduce a formal Near-Miss Review Process: monthly team meeting to review near-misses, identify patterns, and implement preventive actions
- Conduct an annual Food Safety Culture Continuous Improvement Review: compare self-assessment results year-on-year and set improvement targets
- Run a Crisis Simulation exercise annually: test the organisation's ability to respond quickly and correctly to a food safety emergency

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

The critical component Adaptability and Continuous Improvement can be further broken down into several essential topics. Agility and Adaptability are linked concepts; agility is the ability to react, move and change quickly and easily in response to a stimulus, while adaptability is about considering all the options and opportunities, and planning the way ahead. Both are important to an organisation's ability to respond and adapt to changing circumstances and this ability can impact food safety culture. Problem Solving and Crisis Management are also essential topics that are particularly important in crisis resilience but can also be preventative tools when used with information on near misses. Continuous Improvement of food safety culture enhances culture maturity and food safety performance.

D5.2 Work Environment (Continuous Improvement context)

PROMOTE

- Communicate that investment in the physical environment is an investment in food safety culture — not only a compliance requirement
- Involve workers in identifying physical environment improvements: they see daily friction points that management does not
- Celebrate physical environment improvements as team achievements and explain how they contribute to food safety

MONITOR

- Year-on-year trend in environmental audit scores
- Number of worker-initiated environment improvement suggestions per quarter
- Correlation between physical environment investments and culture maturity score changes in subsequent assessments

DEVELOP

- Create an annual Environment Improvement Cycle: assess → prioritise → invest → verify → communicate results to all workers
- Establish a mechanism for workers to submit environment improvement suggestions with a guaranteed response and feedback loop
- Track whether physical environment improvements translate into measurable reductions in environment-related non-conformities and improvements in worker survey scores

GFSI Culture Essentials

Source: GFSI Position Paper V2.0, Feb 2026

In the context of adaptability, change and continuous improvement, the quality of the work environment, including finishes, tools, equipment and services necessary for food safety are necessary not just for adherence to food safety requirements but also for engendering a culture of continuous improvement.