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# The "A" in Culture: A Toolbox to Drive Positive Food Safety Behaviors



**E**nsuring the safety of food products for consumers is a key goal of a food safety culture, and food companies are increasingly challenged to manage a robust food safety culture that consistently delivers safe food.

Getting things wrong can have devastating effects not only to the business (e.g., cost of rework, recalls, handling consumer complaints, fines, reputation loss, etc.) but also to consumers (e.g., illness, death) and society (e.g., cost of health services). Every day, new cases seem to be emerging.

Consider food recalls as a measure of food safety. In data published by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) examining the root cause of food recalls,<sup>1</sup> about 26 percent of food recalls were the result of improperly following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and 32 percent were caused by inadequate training. More recently, a global food safety training survey found that 67 percent of food safety respondents agreed that "Despite our efforts, we still have employees not following our food safety program on the plant floor." The extent to which all employees internalize and apply consistent food safety behaviors is influenced by their

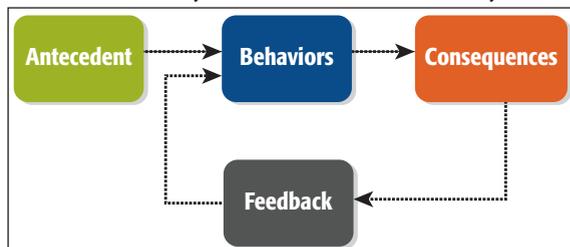


Figure 3.1. The ABC Model<sup>2</sup>

own cultures, attitudes, values and beliefs, training effectiveness, as well as those of their peers and their business.<sup>2</sup>

These factors, among others, are examples that fit into what is called the ABC model<sup>3</sup> and stands for Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence (Figure 3.1). It is a simple and powerful model when trying to understand and change behaviors, and it a useful tool that can be used to strengthen an organization's food safety culture. Ultimately, managing behaviors within the workplace will reinforce and ensure the safety of the food being grown, transported, manufactured, or served.

An **antecedent** is something that comes before a behavior and is required for an individual to understand what is expected and how to perform a behavior, for example, stimulus, policy, stated expectations, training, job aids, circumstances, event, and past experience. A practical example could be a policy and procedure communicated to employees on proper handwashing techniques.

A **behavior** is anything an individual does and is observable. A practical example could be washing hands using the procedure that has been taught to me, all the time, every time.

A **consequence** is something that follows the behavior and is caused by a behavior. There is a feedback loop into the behavior, as what happened last time you behaved in a particular way will have an effect on how you will behave the next time. Depending on the consequence, you will either sustain or change your behavior. A

### THREE TAKE AWAYS

- Set the right conditions to drive and sustain the right food safety behavior.
- Expand your use of additional antecedents from the toolbox provided in this article to address your employee behavior gaps.
- Garner strong management support to get the needed support for you to implement the tools.

practical example of a consequence could be positive feedback from a supervisor because you showed a colleague the right way to washing hands and why it is important all the time, every time.

In this article, we are focusing on the "A" or antecedent to provide you with examples of how what we know drives what we do and how antecedents connect to helping us better understand what is expected and how to deliver on these expected behaviors.

We need to do what we do better and smarter to optimize the return on investment and effort; for example, we need to apply the learnings from the health and safety arena that have gained a lot of experience in the use of behavior-based approaches to drive compliance.

We also want to share some specific challenges related to training as an antecedent and how we think you can get more out of your training investments.

### Importance of Managing the Antecedents Effectively

As part of this effective management, and to choose and set the "right" and most effective antecedents for your company, it is critical to undertake a robust root cause analysis in a case of poor performance or unacceptable behavior, or when needing to introduce a new behavior.

#### *Potential findings of your root cause analysis*

Typically, when analyzing why a group or person behaved in a particular way, there are two generic cases: They did not know what to do or they knew what to do. For each case, there are several root causes. For case 1, I am not trained and I am new to the company; I was trained but it was complex and boring, and I lost interest. For such situations, antecedents

like dedicating time and scheduling training consistently for new hires or conducting a training needs analysis to better understand the learning need, learners, etc. will help to correct wrong behaviors caused by 'I did not know.' It is essential to perform robust training needs analysis for each employee based on the job they are expected to do and develop a competency framework detailing the knowledge, skills, and behaviors expected for each job role.

For case 2, 'I do know what the right thing to do was...,' root causes could be I was not physically able or I did not bother. For each, there are again antecedents that would help drive the wanted behaviors. For example, are the tools for the job actually fit for purpose? Is there a rewards and recognition program specifically designed to motivate and inspire teams and individuals to behave in the expected manner?

As illustrated, the root cause analysis can lead you, potentially, to quite different root causes that would require completely different corrective actions. Traditional classroom training/retraining is not always the answer, and you must select your antecedents based on a detailed root cause analysis and needs assessment. When selecting, designing, and implementing your antecedents, you should also consider in your needs assessment a couple of key factors: national cultures and impact of generations.

#### *National cultures and impact on antecedents*

It is imperative to take into account the deep culture (nationality, where they were brought up, religious beliefs, ethics) of your employees. Hofstede's national cultural dimensions,<sup>4</sup> the Lewis Model,<sup>5,6</sup> and Meyer's Culture Maps<sup>7</sup> are very useful for the identification of some of the chal-

lenges you might face when trying to improve the culture of your business. It will also help you understand why an employee has behaved in a particular way:

- **Communication:** Some deep cultures prefer precise, simple, and clear messages taken at face value (e.g., Germany or U.S.); others prefer more nuanced messages and reading between the lines (e.g., Japan or Korea).
- **Giving feedback:** Some prefer direct and blunt feedback (e.g., Netherlands); others prefer private softer feedback (e.g., Japan).
- **Persuasion:** Some prefer a practical approach with executive summary and facts (e.g., U.S. or UK); others prefer to cover the theory/concept first then move to the facts (e.g., France or Italy).
- **Leading:** Some prefer a flat organization (e.g., Denmark or Sweden); others prefer a clear formal hierarchical structure (e.g., Japan or Korea). This would have an impact on the level of autonomy and ownership felt by those working for the company and their authority to deal with potential food safety or quality problems; achieving "empowerment" might be more challenging for some.
- **Decision making:** Some deep cultures prefer consensus that might take a while to achieve (e.g., Japan or Sweden); others prefer the decisions to be made by the boss—it can be much quicker but then time will be needed to get everybody else on board (e.g., China or India).
- **Scheduling:** Some prefer clear time-bound deadlines for each activity (e.g., Germany or Switzerland); others prefer a more flexible multitasking approach (e.g., India or China).
- **Rewarding:** some prefer individual

rewards and recognition (e.g., U.S. and UK); others prefer team rewards (e.g., China or Mexico).

*Impact of generations on food safety culture and effectiveness of antecedents*

As already mentioned, antecedents like training should be designed by use of a needs analysis to understand the learning objectives and the specific characteristics of the learner generations. The workforces of most sites now span four generations [Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials (Generation Y), and the new Generation Z!]. The generations have different values, aspirations, attitudes, and behaviors. This has implications for managing a site's culture. One antecedent might not have the same effect on all.

Differences between the generations mean that interpersonal relations, teamwork and collaboration, and effective communication can be affected. Different techniques might be required to drive engagement and loyalty for each group.

For example, the Millennials and Gen Z employees are true digital na-

tives (addicted to their devices) with the ability to multitask and embrace new technologies quickly; but they are often described as self-centered, impatient, immature (finding hard to manage others), and less focused; craving regular feedback and recognition, they seem to be more concerned about values and are more sensitive.

**Antecedents: Your Toolbox!**

Antecedents need to address all the specific root causes that you uncovered in your analysis. This will increase the performance of your overall food safety plan and create a better connection between why the company sets expectations around food safety behaviors. We have listed some of our favorite antecedents for you to consider (Figure 3.2). We also strongly recommend that you have a look at your health and safety (H&S) activities and pick up useful tips from them. In fact, industry food safety leaders are partnering with their colleagues in H&S, Operations, Human Resources, Maintenance, etc. to collectively determine the appropri-

ate employee behaviors required to achieve the business goals and objectives.

**1. Senior Leaders and Managers**

Need to show their clear and consistent commitment to making safe food, which includes dedicating time and effort to train and educate staff, and ensure that all people involved in food production (e.g., staff, contractors, agencies, etc.) realize that they play a part in food safety and that they are accountable.

This covers on-boarding of new staff, agency staff, and contractors, and ensuring timely refreshers and relevant training following the installation of a new piece of equipment.

**2. Trust and Openness**

Need to have a trusting and open environment that empowers employees to speak up if they feel that food safety is being compromised and corners are being cut for production's sake.

**3. Hazard and Risk Awareness**

The company needs to be aware of all relevant hazards and risks that might have a food safety impact on its business and communicate this to their staff in an effective manner, with regular updates. Consider applying some of the techniques used by the H&S team.

**4. Communications and Messaging**

Good communication ensures that a company's food safety strategy and expectations are received consistently and understood by all employees within the organization. The goal is to educate, inform, and raise awareness among all new and existing employees of safe practices so they assume ownership of their role in ensuring consumer safety and brand protection.



Figure 3.2. The Antecedent Toolbox

It must occur regularly, be tailored to the organization's various audiences, accessible wherever the desired behavior should occur and measured for effectiveness (e.g., via online surveys and employee focus groups).

Examples of available food safety communication channels include: posters, meetings, briefings, videos, phone calls, conferences, huddles, digital coaching, mentoring, feedback/suggestion processes, company intranet and message boards, corporate website, competitions, buddy program, gemba kaizen circle meetings, awards and recognitions, and consequences, including disciplinary actions up to termination.

Consider leveraging the functional expertise of industry experts and your colleagues in marketing to help to segment the workforce and develop targeted food safety messaging taking into account deep culture, generations, job type, etc. Fonterra, a large dairy cooperative in New Zealand, has been using this approach of "internal customers profiling" to great effect, as highlighted by Joanna Gilbert of Fonterra at a Campden BRI/TSI Culture Excellence Webinar in October 2016.

When a supervisor is able to have a two-way conversation with an employee, bad habits, poor training, and misinformation can be identified and corrected.

## 5. Simple Procedures

The tasks to perform and the SOPs to follow should be as simple and easy as possible, and the amount of effort and time required to execute them should be optimized. For example, forms to complete should not be too long and complex. Consider use of pictures rather than text for instructions or specifications.

## 6. Decision Making

Consider creating an independent

escalation path that allows the food safety team to report directly to senior leadership rather than senior operations staff, so that food safety is not compromised when the production and/or commercial teams are under pressure and "cutting corners" is on the table and in conflict with business objectives.

## 7. Measures

The key performance indicators used across the business should not drive the wrong behavior that might compromise food safety.

## 8. Tools and Equipment

Employees need to have fit for use/fit for purpose clothing and equipment, and work in fit for purpose premises/buildings.

Have we provided each employee with the appropriate environment to achieve success? For example, one company had an employee in receiving who was inaccurately assessing produce condition. Only after a discussion and evaluation was it discovered that the employee was colorblind and physically unable to distinguish red- and green-colored produce. Another employee job was to empty ingredients into a hopper without touching the edge of the hopper with the ingredient box exterior. Her supervisor observed the employee routinely leaning the ingredient box onto the hopper and would write up the employee for the behavior deficiency. Finally, after some discussion with the employee, the supervisor realized the ingredient boxes were too heavy for the employee to consistently meet this food safety procedure, and the process was re-engineered. Companies intent on enhancing their food safety culture understand the value in actively soliciting routine employee feedback to insure the employees have the ability and the tools neces-

sary to execute the appropriate food safety behaviors.

## 9. Investment

Need to commit to a decision-making process related to budget, capital expenditure, and investment that does not compromise food safety, thus ensuring the right level of resources and fit for purpose/use of equipment.

## 10. Time

Need to ensure that employees have enough time to do their task properly and are not forced to take shortcuts to keep up.

## 11. Expectations

Employee should understand that they are accountable and responsible for ensuring food is safe; they should know the risks and the right thing to do as a matter of course at all times. They should not be able to get away with unacceptable behaviors.

This should be achieved via training and education but also reinforced by an effective reward system. Also consider buddy or team approach where one or several employees look out for each other so no one can operate "in the dark" (e.g., CCTV cameras); important to show desired behavior as the social norm.

## 12. Competency

How do you define the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that workers need to perform their food safety roles effectively? How do you know if they are qualified and competent for the job/task?

You need to define a competency framework that includes the set of competencies required for each role in your business to be performed effectively. Benefits experienced include:

- Employees are clearer on what

is expected of them

- Clearer accountability
- More effective recruitment and new staff selection
- More effective performance evaluation
- More efficient identification of skill and competency gaps
- Helps provide more customized training and professional development
- More effective succession planning
- More efficient change management processes

When you develop these frameworks, make sure you understand the roles fully and get input from the job holder, supervisors, and also and crucially HR. Your HR colleagues can provide support, expertise and tools that will be invaluable.

### 13. Training

Training is essential to ensure that the employee is competent. It includes a range of learning opportunities, such as education, experience/on the job, coaching and mentoring, networking, workshops and conferences, job shadowing, standardization, and others, *not* just the dreaded PowerPoint, classroom, once a year talk! Consider using training needs analysis/cycle and competency-based learning systems. Make sure your human resources team is fully engaged and supporting you.

### 14. Confidence

Coaching and mentoring as well as having a buddy system are good ways to improve confidence (assuming that the employee is competent and capable). It is vital to determine how well people both understand and have confidence in the training and education they receive. Only through complete comprehension and confidence are they likely to implement

safe-food behaviors and influence others around them to do likewise. Having a structured approach to provide consistent feedback, coaching, recognition, and corrective actions enhance two way communication.

Wrong fit: If all fail, employee should be redeployed!

### 15. Reinforcement

Reinforcement relates to the use of rewards, incentives, and disincentives to shape and manage correct behaviors. Rewards, when paired with fair and transparent recognition programs, can help management guide desired food safety behaviors. Such programs should be designed to accommodate cultural differences and different personalities within the organization. Your human resources colleagues should be able to provide you with valuable support to design effective reward systems. Clear accountability and compliance foster commitment, empowerment, and ownership. Companies can use various incentives and deterrents to achieve consistent compliance, including:

- Positive and negative feedback
- Sharing best demonstrated practices
- Learnings from failures
- Recognition programs
- Individual and team awards
- Corporate, peer, and self-recognition
- Monetary and time compensation, praise
- Incentives to report failures and near misses
- Promotion and demotion

### When Training Is Needed, It Needs to Stick!

As food safety professionals, we commonly focus and rely on food safety training as a key antecedent to drive the appropriate food safety behaviors we expect from our em-

ployees to support our food safety protocols and procedures. Considerable time and resources are devoted to food safety training each year, but we don't often consider whether we are presenting the right content, with an effective delivery, to achieve measured, correct employee behaviors.

So, how are we executing on this key antecedent? Even though 83 percent of global companies reported positively on their ability to drive consistent food safety behaviors, 67 percent responded that despite their best efforts, they still have employees not following the food safety program on the plant floor.<sup>2</sup> The question becomes "Have we just come to expect inconsistent employee behaviors as the norm?"

Companies that are driving a strong food safety culture within their organization have expanded the traditional classroom training toolbox to include additional tools to more effectively drive consistent employee food safety behaviors. For example, 46 percent verify that training is applied correctly on the plant floor, while 36 percent of the innovative respondents acknowledged they were actively measuring employee performance or behaviors.<sup>2</sup> A small but growing number of companies recognize the value of measuring employee behaviors to the effectiveness of training so that correction actions can be applied. Assessing and observing employee behaviors allow for a two-way conversation between a supervisor and an employee to address incorrect behaviors. Reasons mentioned why employees did not follow food safety programs consistently include bad habits (62%), preference in doing things the old way (54%), and following other employees' directions (34%).<sup>2</sup>

Lack of engagement (30%) was also cited as one reason employees do not

consistently follow food safety protocols. An astounding 51 percent of the American workforce is *not* engaged.<sup>8</sup> Companies focused on improving their food safety culture recognizes this challenge and applies many different antecedents to improve employee engagement, including food safety communication campaigns using digital signage, supervisor huddle guides, posters, and incentive programs. These different campaigns are all designed to keep food safety top of mind days, weeks and months after the initial classroom training. This food safety reinforcement drives food safety awareness and indicates the continued importance of food safety throughout the year. Green Valley Pecan Company, one of the world's largest growers and processors of pecans, deployed a communication campaign and experienced a 17 percent increase in knowledge retention across all employees and a 36 percent increase in correct knowledge recall among their employees who needed it the most—those who did not initially perform well in the knowledge pre-test. Deborah Walden-Ralls, co-owner and vice president of risk management for Green Valley Pecan Company, noted that the program "helped us improve the overall quality of our product."

Sometimes, training program shortcomings may not be what training you are providing but *how* that training is provided. Are you training employees on your allergen program do's and don't's, your critical control protocols, receiving procedures, personal protective equipment program, and the list of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) each January and then wonder why you see GMP violations by June? To aid our food safety culture, we must acknowledge that our employees, many of them millennials, learn in short chunks, and tailor

our training event in shorter timeframes, 20 to 30 minutes, throughout the year.

Are you conducting training at the end of 10-hour shifts, before holidays, or on the weekends when employees are tired and less engaged? Some companies found that moving their training time to mornings or mid-week, and recognizing those employees that demonstrate their comprehension of the training, helps employees stay more focused and receptive to food safety education.

Are you delivering training in English, even though over 50 percent of your workforce has English as their second language? Bigelow Tea, a family owned company, has 70–80 percent Spanish-speaking employees and wanted to make sure that all employees received the same quality training. By adopting a training platform that provided training in multi-languages and was able to be customized for their different departments, Bigelow was able to insure "everyone knows how they are critical to Bigelow's success" per Bruce Ennis, vice president of human resources for Bigelow.

It is worth remembering and highlighting that "training" includes a much larger list of learning opportunities that happen both inside and outside of the training classroom, as listed earlier. An effective "training cycle" (Figure 3.3) follows a model much like

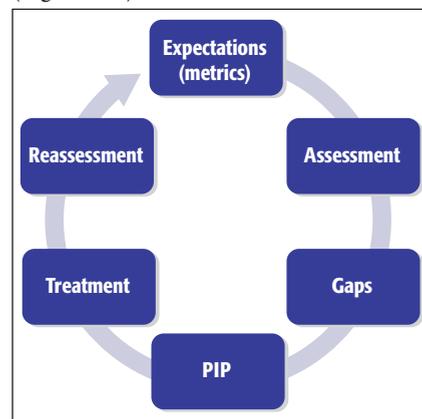


Figure 3.3. Training Cycle

the ABC model with opportunities along the way for assessments and performance improvement programs.

We also find that the most mature organizations use approaches based on competency-based learning. Competency-based learning systems focus on front-end analyses to determine the desired knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary for high-level job performance. Such systems emphasize the use of assessments to determine the level of competence against desired outcomes and focus learning and developmental efforts on helping the individual determine a learning path and identifying the learning experiences that help the individual attain the desired competencies. The instructional design methodology known as ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation), coupled with stakeholder input, learning experience review, and support systems make the system robust, efficient, and effective.

## Conclusion

The ABC model is a useful model when trying to understand and change behavior in order to strengthen the food safety culture of an organization.

To achieve a strong food safety culture, you need to manage the antecedents effectively in order to drive and sustain positive food safety behaviors.

Key success factors include not only robust training needs analysis and cycle, competency/capability framework, and root cause analysis when an employee has not behaved in the right way, but also involves strong leadership. Senior leaders and managers need to show their clear and consistent commitment to making safe food, which includes dedicating and investing resources, time and effort to train and educate staff, and

establishing an effective system of rewards and key performance indicators. They need to ensure that all people involved in food production (e.g., staff, contractors, staffing agencies) realize that they play a part in food safety, that they are accountable, and that they are empowered to take action to prevent a food safety failure. Employees need to have fit for use/fit for purpose clothing and equipment, and work in fit for purpose premises/buildings. They need to be aware of all relevant hazards and risks that might have a food safety impact on their business and communicate this to their staff in an effective manner, with regular updates.

To keep food safety top of mind and engage employees fully, senior leaders as well as food safety and technical people need to leverage the functional expertise of peers in other functions, including:

- H&S, to pick up on tips and techniques, as they have a lot of experience in behavior-based approaches to drive compliance.
- Marketing, to help to segment the workforce and develop targeted food safety messaging taking into

account deep culture, generations, job type, etc.

- HR, to help with developing and managing the continuing professional development of each employee, the competency framework, and the various training and learning activities required.
- HR usually has access to dedicated software packages and tools, as opposed to battling your way through an Excel spreadsheet when you can squeeze it in your busy schedule. HR support is also valuable when designing effective reward system to reinforce desired food safety behaviors.

We need to do what we do better and smarter to optimize the return on investment and efforts. As Benjamin Franklin said, by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail. So, by getting the antecedents right, we are setting the optimum conditions to get things right first time and be as efficient as possible.

This is a continuous improvement journey; as the conditions and antecedents adapt to changes in the business, the toolbox provided in this article will be particularly useful. We

are here to support you. Over to you!

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