

→ buyers guide

# How to find the right whistleblowing solution for your organisation

With free preparation questions and a software checklist

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# Foreword

The message is clear: organisations must be held accountable for their social and environmental footprint. It's refreshing to see that speaking up could become the next social norm for so many countries around the world.

The EU seems to be especially determined to improve conditions, both inside and outside of its boundaries. The well-known Directive for the Protection of Whistleblowers, as well as the upcoming Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive are both proof that social and environmental organisational commitments are the only way forward.

Are you looking to identify and implement a whistleblowing solution for your organisation? Great timing! The global whistleblowing software market is blooming. It has been experiencing significant growth and is expected to surpass US\$ 170bn by 2028.

One could say that because of all the traction, finding the appropriate mechanisms for your organisation should be relatively easy to do. However, the hype around the topic is exactly why finding the right solution is becoming harder and harder.

Due to the high-growth position of the industry, new and unproved solutions are popping up every day. These are in fact cloaking the true essence of whistleblowing: establishing speaking up as the normal thing to do so that organisational misconduct can be identified and prevented.

This buyer's guide explains what a good whistleblowing tool is all about and helps you find your match in three simple steps:

1. Understanding your organisation
2. Qualifying the market
3. Comparing your options

# What is a whistleblowing solution truly about?

## Whistleblowing vs speaking up

The European Commission defines whistleblowers as “persons who report (within the organisation concerned or to an outside authority) or disclose (to the public) information on a wrongdoing obtained in a work-related context, help preventing damage and detecting threat or harm to the public interest that may otherwise remain hidden.”

Therefore, blowing the whistle is only possible after an inappropriate behaviour has been experienced or witnessed. Whistleblowing is contingent on misconduct. What if instead of waiting for misconduct to occur to take corrective action, you proactively start creating a culture of speaking up?

Correct policies and effective mechanisms can help organisations establish speaking up as the normal thing to do. This is where your whistleblowing solution comes in. If employees know how to- and dare to voice concerns as soon as these surface, then misconduct can eventually be prevented, rather than mitigated.

**No one needs to blow any whistle because everyone dares to speak up.**



## Therefore, finding the right whistleblowing solution is about:

### Culture

Speaking up should be a fundamental element of the organisational culture. No whistleblowing solution in the world can save you from scandals or reputational damage if no one dares to use it and if the action flowing from it is not real. This is why prioritising a healthy, open, and transparent company culture is key in identifying what the best whistleblowing tool will be.

### Openness

Before someone decides to speak up, they will have to overcome the whistleblower's dilemma: a trade-off between loyalty and fairness. This is exactly why simple and straightforward whistleblowing mechanisms are the most powerful. Initiating a dialogue needs to feel effortless so that blowing the whistle is not experienced as a hefty, unpleasant task. Consequently, your whistleblowing tool should allow people to report in their mother tongue. The most effective tool is one that can be accessed and used by anyone, anywhere.

### Anonymity

Oscar Wilde says, "Give a man a mask, and he'll tell you the truth." A controversial topic, anonymity is in fact mandatory for effective whistleblowing to take place. There is often the fear that it can serve as a mask that anyone determined to make false accusations can hide behind. Nonetheless, anonymity is the ultimate way to create feelings of safety. The most effective whistleblowing tool does not simply promise whistleblower protection; it guarantees it.

# How to find your match?

Due to how trending this topic has now become, new inexperienced providers are popping up every day. This can often overwhelm compliance teams in search for the right whistleblowing mechanism.

It is important to acknowledge that a whistleblowing mechanism is not something that you can (or should) change often. The buying process alone can take months; and this is excluding implementation, communication campaigns, and adoption. More importantly, you must realise that the mechanism's effectiveness is completely dependent on its successful adoption which is not only time-consuming, but also uncertain.

To find the best solution for your organisation, you must spend time understanding your organisational culture and needs. Your goal in this project is not to identify which tool checks the most boxes, or which one is less of a hassle or costs less money.

A whistleblowing solution is not a short-term compliance patch. Having a whistleblowing solution should feel like having a trustworthy and dependable ethics advisor who can securely host your sensitive data, help you strengthen your company culture, and effectively support you in fighting misconduct.

Therefore, before you start qualifying market offerings, it's necessary that you peep inside. Take a deep dive into your organisation's current situation and think long-term.

Follow these three steps to make your project succeed:

1. Understand
2. Qualify
3. Compare





## Step 1: Understand

The first thing you need to do is to study your organisation in terms of culture, people, and project needs. This might sound like unnecessary work, yet a proper understanding of your organisation's current environment will significantly cut down your efforts during the buying process and accelerate all the steps to follow.

### Organisational culture

By organisational culture we want to refer to anything that can, positively or negatively, affect whistleblowing within your organisation. This includes your current code of conduct and other policies.

Think about your current approach to whistleblowing. What does your code of conduct say about speaking up? For a successful adoption, your tool must be embedded in a culture that encourages openness. So, if you don't have a speak up policy in place, start working on one. You also want to look at any risks you might be facing and identify other parts of your organisational culture that can be improved.

### Reporter scope: A 360° approach

Second, you should have a clear picture of your whistleblowing tool's 'target audience'. The first and most important group is your organisation's employees. By employees, we invite you to consider the entire workforce: full-time and part-time employees, freelancers, interns, as well as former employees.

Next to your employees, you must consider any other third parties that might be affected by your operations. The upcoming EU Due Diligence Corporate Responsibility Directive (also known as the EU Supply Chain Act) will soon call organisations to identify and mitigate risks down their entire supply chain.

You also want to consider setting up speak up lines dedicated to partners and clients. Although through looser bonds, these groups can still be affected by your operations and cause reputational damage. In fact, client speak up lines seem to be becoming a best practice, especially among large multinationals.

Once you recognise that your reporter scope is far wider than the organisation's direct labor, you realise why selecting a whistleblowing mechanism which is easy to use is of paramount importance. By looking at the true extent of your reporter scope, you can also identify the language requirements for your whistleblowing mechanism. Which tools facilitate communication in all the required languages and can guarantee a qualitative and GDPR-proof interpretation for your case-handlers?

Next to language, you should consider people's familiarity with technology, a direct indicator of their communication preferences. For instance, if your reporter scope is mostly white collars, then a whistleblowing mobile application or web form is probably enough; but if your scope contains blue collars, then an offline reporting channel might be necessary.



## Organisational capacities and project needs

The third element that you need to be familiar with are your current capacities and project needs. Maybe you already have a system in place which is inefficient. Why is that? Identifying current hurdles will save you the trouble of switching to a different solution with similar limitations.

It could also be that you do not have any experience with whistleblowing mechanisms. Starting from scratch can sometimes be better as it comes with certain amounts of freedom and flexibility. Ask yourself, what do you need to get this up and running? Think about the people whom you might need assistance from and get them on board. It's also useful to start figuring out how to handle the tool and incoming messages. Who will be responsible, and for what?

In a similar manner, think of any stakeholders you might need approval from. Most organisations tend to involve compliance and HR departments, while others must get approval from IT or go through procurement. In some countries, you might also encounter other local procedures and requirements (e.g., works council in Germany).

Last but not least, do not neglect your project's timeline. When does the whistleblowing mechanism need to be live? Keep in mind that the sales cycle and implementation procedure might last from one to six months (sometimes up to a year depending on the size of the organisation). Solid planning will help you prepare against unpredictability and unwanted delays, and maintain control over strict deadlines.

## Step 2: Qualify

Once you have a clear understanding of all the things mentioned above, it will be much easier to start qualifying solutions. For example, if Step 1 helps you realise that the hotline approach (call centres) does not suit your culture, then in Step 2 you can simply eliminate all hotline-based solutions.

Of course, besides being a cultural or budgeting match, your selected solution should meet some non-negotiable requirements and whistleblowing standards. Therefore, during the qualification stage, we invite you to qualify solutions in terms of privacy, security, and compliance.

### Privacy

Data privacy is a discipline intended to keep data safe against improper access, theft, or loss. As your whistleblowing mechanism will host data of the most sensitive nature, make sure to explore providers with proper privacy protocols in place. Try to find information on anonymisation and encryption practices. If it's a cloud-based solution, where is it hosted? If you can't find the information online, ask. This is extremely important for respecting the GDPR, especially for whistleblowing tools which offer translation.

A good example of qualifying solutions according to privacy is a European organisation disqualifying American whistleblowing providers. US legislations (e.g., the Patriot Act) could put your sensitive data in jeopardy. →



## Security

Information security refers to the methods, tools, and personnel used to defend an organisation's digital assets. If possible, try to find information on the provider's approach towards security threats. They should be able to demonstrate that strict security protocols are in place. Aim for providers who can discuss and demonstrate adherence to the following internationally accepted information security and privacy standards:

### ISO27001:

Standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMS)

### ISO27002:

Standard for Information Security, Cybersecurity and Privacy Protection — Information security controls

### ISO37002:

Whistleblowing Management Systems — Guidelines

Be aware that these certificates are usually bi-annual or tri-annual. This means that once obtained, they don't mean much in terms of the provider's day-to-day operations. This is why it is important to consider only providers

who conduct regular audits and can prove uninterrupted adherence to the standards. The highest international audit standard currently offered by whistleblowing providers is the ISAE3000 Type II. Comparable to the American SOC2, it can guarantee privacy and security excellence in all areas of operation.

## Compliance

Even though compliance should only be seen as a hygiene factor of a speak up culture, it is of course necessary. What would be the benefits of implementing a non-compliant whistleblowing mechanism? Look for solutions that help you comply with the following EU laws:

- The GDPR
- The EU Whistleblower Protection Directive
- The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive

Depending on your countries of operation, you might also need to investigate some local legislations such as the Sapin II (FR), the Lieferkettengesetz (DEU), or the Public Interest Disclosure Act (UK).

The goal of the qualification stage is to help you eliminate the inadequate and risky solutions on the market. Use the advice to qualify, not to narrow your focus on these topics. Compliance does not equal adoption or effectiveness. →

## Step 3: Compare

Once you've qualified the whistleblowing tools which can help your project succeed in a fully compliant manner, you are ready to start comparing. Use Step 3 to select only but a few providers to proceed to a demonstration with.

Remember: Compliance is important, but it cannot guarantee adoption and effectiveness. In the comparison stage, you can start focusing a little bit more on the provider's background and philosophy. Whistleblowing is a subtle topic. Therefore, providers with a proven track-record are more likely to be able to understand and respond to your organisation's particular requirements. The years of experience, the variety of clients, and the overall approach to whistleblowing can be good indicators of the provider's level of service.

Steps 1 and 2 of the buyer's guide will set you up for a thorough comparison of your selected providers. At this stage you have a clear understanding of your organisational and project needs. You have identified the solutions which can help you comply, and you have narrowed them down to two or three that seem to be a good match. It is now time to initiate discussions and have providers demonstrate their solutions.

### Tips for making the most out of system demonstrations

#### 1. Come prepared.

Demonstrations can be time-consuming, so start thinking about your whistleblowing process before the call. Prepare questions tailored to your case-handling team's needs. This will help you ask the right questions about access rights and workflows. It will also help the provider demonstrate the system's capacities better.

#### 2. Involve important stakeholders.

You do not have to go through these calls alone. Make sure that the stakeholders which need to be convinced are in the call with you. These could be people from management teams, IT, or procurement. This will save you the hassle of going back and forth between the provider and your DMU.

#### 3. Collect the right information.

Use these calls to gather everything you need for a proper comparison. Focus on these six key areas: communication, issue-handling, technical requirements, privacy and security, compliance, and support.

# Getting started!

SpeakUp has been helping organisations implement whistleblowing processes for 20 years. We know what makes- and what breaks speak up culture. Selecting a whistleblowing tool for your organization is not an easy task, but if you do it right, you only need to do it once. The steps suggested in this buyer's guide can help you get there.

To help you move faster, we've put together a preparation sheet with the main questions for your tool evaluation for Step 1, and a software checklist for Step 2 and 3, [that you can download here](#).

## Get the tool evaluation templates

Download here →

→ Creating a speak up culture

### Get started FAQ

What is our reporter scope?	Are difficulties?	SpeakUp®	Other
		✓	
How many locations do we operate in and which languages do we need?		✓	
		✓	
		✓	
How many channels do we need?	Who controls?	✓	✓
		✓	
		✓	
Which channels will work best for our reporter scope(s)/phone/approach?		✓	✓
		✓	
What is our current approach to speaking up? How can we improve?		✓	✓
		✓	
		✓	

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