



→ e-book

# How to create a speak up culture

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# Introduction: Speaking up leads to growth.

Speaking up is a hard thing to do.

For many people, there are good reasons not to speak up. We've all heard the stories. How whistleblowers often end up unemployed, experience retaliation, or even worse, become a black sheep within their community.

Beyond the likely tragedies at the individual level, improperly handled reports of misconduct can do a lot of harm to an organisation. Failure to speak up, or the improper care of those who do, can damage an organization's reputation, lead to legal consequences, and create a toxic work culture.

This is the whistleblowing dilemma—the difficult decision one must make to either speak up or stay silent.

At SpeakUp, we believe the courageous individuals who do speak up deserve better. We also understand how hard it is for organisations to have meaningful conversations and strengthen ethical behaviour when they are strictly checking off compliancy tick boxes. They need help too.

We know that in a world where honesty and transparency are encouraged, individuals and organizations thrive.

Whether you are an organisation looking to enhance employee engagement, a leader aiming to cultivate an inclusive environment, or an individual passionate about making a difference, building a speak up culture where open communication is encouraged can do all these things.

That's why SpeakUp created this whitepaper—to share a wealth of knowledge and practical strategies for building a speak up culture, creating stronger relationships, building trust, and going beyond compliance. In this whitepaper, we will also explore the benefits of fostering a culture of honesty and transparency and delve into the challenges that come with building a speak up culture and practical ways to overcome them.

Join us on this journey of discovery and learn how to improve your organization's communication, trust, and compliance today.

# What is a speak up culture?

A speak up culture is both a moral concept that acts as a backbone to all communication policies at an organisation and an environment that's actively nurtured. In a speak up culture, employees feel comfortable and empowered to speak up about all issues or ideas they might hold. It is characterized by a lack of fear or consequences for voicing opinions, and the promotion of active listening, respect, and constructive dialogue among all members of the organization. This culture encourages collaboration, trust, and accountability, ultimately driving positive change and growth within the organization.

A speak up culture also extends to the reporting of misconduct. In a well-maintained speak up culture, employees should feel there are very few boundaries between seeing something wrong and saying something about it.

## What are the benefits of building a speak up culture within an organization?

A speak up culture encourages open communication and empowers employees to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns without fear of retaliation. This fosters a collaborative and inclusive work environment where innovative solutions can be shared, and problems can be addressed proactively. Additionally, a speak up culture promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility among employees, as they feel valued and heard, leading to increased engagement and productivity.

Building a speak-up culture is crucial to preventing and addressing misconduct effectively. By encouraging open communication and creating a safe space for employees to voice concerns, organizations can foster transparency and accountability. Implementing clear reporting channels, providing training on ethical behaviour, and actively addressing reported misconduct are essential steps in establishing a speak-up culture that promotes integrity and safeguards the well-being of both individuals and the organization.

# What keeps people from speaking up?

There might be several reasons why an employee might feel too nervous to speak up about misconduct. In this case, it is important for organizations to create a safe and non-retaliatory environment where employees feel comfortable reporting misconduct without fear of negative consequences. Additionally, organizations should actively encourage and reward whistleblowing, ensuring that those who come forward with information are protected and supported throughout the process.

Here are some of the main challenges that keep people from speaking up within an organisation.

1. **Fear of retaliation or backlash** from colleagues or superiors can be a significant barrier to reporting misconduct. Employees may worry about negative consequences such as being ostracized, demoted, or even losing their job. Additionally, a lack of trust in an organization's commitment to addressing misconduct can further discourage employees from speaking up.
2. **Lack of trust in the reporting process** can also hinder employees from speaking up about misconduct. If employees do not believe that their concerns will be taken seriously or that appropriate action will be taken, they may choose to remain silent. This lack of trust can stem from past experiences where misconduct was not properly addressed or from a general inclination for others to remain silent within the organisation.
3. **Perceived futility of reporting** can also discourage employees from speaking up. If they believe that reporting misconduct will not lead to any meaningful change or consequences, they may feel that their efforts are in vain. This feeling can be reinforced if they have seen earlier reports being ignored or if there is a lack of transparency in the disciplinary process. Ultimately, the perceived futility of reporting can contribute to a culture of silence and hinder the organization's ability to address and prevent misconduct effectively.
4. **Language barriers can also contribute to silence.** If employees do not feel comfortable or confident in their ability to effectively communicate their concerns due to language differences, they may be less likely to come forward. Additionally, if the organization does not have adequate resources or support in place to address language barriers, employees may feel that their reports will not be properly understood or taken seriously. This can further discourage them from reporting misconduct and perpetuate a culture of silence within the organization.
5. **Bad tools can also lead to a reluctance to speak up.** If employees are provided with outdated or inefficient tools for reporting misconduct, it can create frustration and make them less inclined to come forward. Furthermore, if the reporting process is complicated or time-consuming and asks too many questions, the employee might be further discouraged.

# Building a strong speak up culture in your organisation.

So, we've seen the many challenges that organisations face when trying to create a speak up culture. Now that those challenges have been shown, you might be wondering—what can I do to overcome these obstacles and nurture a healthy culture of communication?

These might seem like broad and far-reaching issues, but there are three key ways you can focus your efforts to begin building a speak up culture that will get people talking.

1. **Training and education**
2. **Leading by example**
3. **Supplying the right tools**

Here's what these efforts look like and how they take practical form.

## Training and education

Training and education are all about giving your employees and management the knowledge they need

to avoid common mistakes. But what kind of training and education do they really need? Here are two easy-to-implement initiatives:

1. **Conduct regular training sessions on recognizing and reporting misconduct.** Supply educational materials, such as online courses or informative videos, to enhance employees' understanding of diverse types of misconduct and how to report them effectively. Workshops or seminars led by experts in the field can further educate employees on the importance of speaking up and the potential impact their reports can have on supporting a safe and ethical work environment.
2. **Create programs that emphasize the benefits and importance of reporting misconduct.** These benefits could include protecting the well-being of colleagues and preventing further harm to the organization. Showing that your organisation understands the importance of reporting will assure employees that they can step forward without consequence. →

## Leading by example

Leadership is a vital part of a healthy speak up ecosystem. They set expectations for what an employee can and cannot do when reporting misconduct. Here are two ways that leadership can provide vital input:

- 1. Encourage leaders to model the desired behaviour and hold them accountable for their actions.** When employees see their leaders consistently practicing and promoting ethical behaviour, it sets a strong example for the rest of the organization to follow. This can foster a culture of integrity and encourage employees to make ethical choices in their own work.
- 2. Hold leaders accountable for addressing reported ethical violations and taking appropriate action.** This includes conducting thorough investigations, implementing disciplinary measures when necessary, and ensuring transparency throughout the process. Holding leaders accountable sends a clear message that unethical behaviour will not be tolerated at any level of the organization. This helps to develop trust and confidence among employees, as they know that their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.

## Supplying the right tools

Employees are more likely to speak up when they have ideas or concerns when they have easy-to-use tools that help facilitate those conversations. Here are some things to consider when choosing the right speak up tool:

- 1. Implement a confidential reporting system** that allows employees to report misconduct anonymously, ensuring their safety and encouraging more individuals to come forward with their concerns. Ensuring anonymity is crucial in creating a safe environment for employees to report misconduct. Implementing strict confidentiality measures, such as limiting access to reported information and conducting thorough investigations discreetly, can help protect the identity of whistleblowers. Additionally, organizations should set up a non-retaliation policy that reassures employees they will not face any negative consequences for reporting misconduct.
- 2. Offer multiple communication channels for reporting misconduct.** This can include anonymous hotlines, web portals, and mobile reporting. By offering multiple channels, employees are more likely to feel comfortable coming forward with their concerns, knowing that their identity will be protected if desired. Additionally, providing clear guidelines and resources on how to report misconduct can further empower employees to speak up when they witness unethical behaviour.
- 3. Make the barriers for reporting as low as possible with the tools you provide.** The reporting process should be simple, without complicated questions or waiting time. Questionnaires with probing questions can scare potential reporters off. By ensuring a user-friendly and accessible reporting process, organizations can create a safe environment for whistleblowers to disclose misconduct without unnecessary obstacles or delays.

# SpeakUp can help.

Having the right whistleblowing software can make the transition from a compliance culture, or one where misconduct is met with silence, into a culture in which speaking up is the norm.

SpeakUp, our industry-leading platform, offers many highly customizable features that are suitable out of the box for enterprise applications. Here are some of our standout features:

## **Fully anonymous**

Our platform allows reporters to file complaints of misconduct in full anonymity. No one needs to know the reporter's identity unless they decide to come forward.

## **Free-form intake**

Our simple, customizable intake form reduces anxiety for the reporter by letting them decide how much information they share at each stage of the reporting process.

## **Language support**

SpeakUp is available worldwide, 24/7/365. Our platform allows reporters and case managers to communicate with each other in 70+ languages. We do this by offering instantaneous machine translation and human translation for more sensitive cases.

## **Multi-device availability**

Reporters can communicate with case managers via voice mail, web browser, or the SpeakUp app, ensuring that an option is almost always available and at the convenience of the reporter.

## **Investigation management**

Users can configure their case management structure by defining teams, creating custom workflows, and setting access rules across channels. SpeakUp's case management system also allows companies to investigate third-party issues, such as at the supply chain level, and more.

## **Auditable and compliant**

Cases are fully auditable and compliant with a variety of regulations. Each case creates automated auditing trails and offers secure evidence storage. Users can also import cases from other channels, set reminders, acknowledge receipts, and more.



# Conclusion: Better conversations matter.

A speak up culture acts as a moral backbone to all communication policies at an organization and as an environment that actively nurtures it. It encourages open communication, empowers employees to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns without fear of retaliation, and fosters a collaborative and inclusive work environment.

Building a speak-up culture is crucial to preventing and addressing misconduct effectively. By encouraging open communication and creating a safe space for employees to voice concerns, organizations can foster transparency and accountability. Implementing clear reporting channels, providing training on ethical behaviour, and actively addressing reported misconduct are essential steps in establishing a speak-up culture that promotes integrity and safeguards the well-being of both individuals and the organization.

## Find out what works best for your organisation

With a tool like speak up, you can make the transition to a speak up culture. Interested in seeing SpeakUp in action? Simply contact us via [speakup.com/contact](https://speakup.com/contact).

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