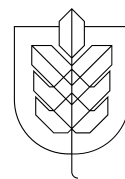


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Speaking truth to power at work

How we silence ourselves and others
- Interim survey results

Megan Reitz Viktor O. Nilsson Emma Day John Higgins

Summer 2019

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ISBN: 978-1-910025-31-4



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The survey and its context

Encouraging employees to speak up has become an organisational imperative in order to identify misconduct and malpractice at an early point and to garner innovative ideas in a competitive marketplace. It is also a personal imperative; our choices about what to say at work determine our reputation, career progression, engagement and personal fulfilment.

The Speaking Truth to Power survey forms one aspect of a wider programme of research that began in 2014, led by Professor Megan Reitz at Hult Ashridge and John Higgins at The Right Conversation.

It builds on the March 2017 Hult Ashridge report: **Being silenced and silencing others: developing the capacity to speak truth to power**¹, numerous articles for journals such as the Harvard Business Review² and Megan and John's book with Financial Times Publishing: **Speak up: Say what needs to be said and hear what needs to be heard**³.

In these publications we have explained that speaking up is both relational and systemic rather than simply a matter of individual courage; it is influenced by having someone we believe will listen and a culture of psychological safety. Our choices to speak and listen are influenced by our perception of relative power, status and authority and sit within socially constructed systemic patterns of 'labelling' ourselves and others.

The focus of this report is the findings from an on-line survey carried out between April 2018 and January 2019. The survey is ongoing and this report provides a first, interim analysis of results. The 1,751 survey respondents were multi-sector and represented multiple organizational levels. In the two-month period since undertaking the analysis contained in this report, nearly 2,000 further respondents have completed the survey. It is our intention to provide an updated report in 2020.

¹ Available at hult.edu and at www.meganreitz.com

² See <https://hbr.org/2017/03/the-problem-with-saying-my-door-is-always-open>, <https://hbr.org/2017/04/5-questions-to-ask-before-you-call-out-someone-powerful> and <https://hbr.org/2018/04/do-you-have-advantage-blindness>

³ Available on Amazon and see www.meganreitz.com and <http://www.therightconversation.co.uk/>

Summary of the findings

Findings are offered in ten key areas:

1. Are you speaking up?

- Raising an issue of malpractice or unethical activity is the most common scenario when respondents perceive they would speak up in the workplace (as compared to challenging ways of working and offering ideas).
- The more senior the respondent, the more they think they would speak up, and the more junior the respondent, the more they think they would remain silent.
- Respondents' self-perception is higher than their perception of others; regardless of level, they think they would speak up more than even their senior managers.

2. Are others speaking up?

- Respondents expect senior colleagues to speak up more across all scenarios than junior colleagues.
- The more senior the respondent, the more 'optimistic' they are (i.e. the more they believe – often wrongly) that those junior to them are speaking up.

3. When are people guarded or open?

- Respondents feel the most guarded during formal work meetings.
- Females report being more guarded than males across all types of interaction.
- The more senior the respondent, the less guarded they reported feeling.

4. What creates a fear of speaking up?

- The fear of being perceived negatively and the fear of upsetting or embarrassing others are the strongest reasons people stay silent.
- Fear tends to stop females from speaking up more than their male colleagues.
- Junior employees report that fear stops them from speaking up more frequently across all categories than more senior respondents.

5. What do we do with secrets and ideas?

- 8% of people surveyed know something that may harm the company they work for and have either decided not to say anything or are deciding whether to speak up right now.
- 73% indicate that they could assist their organization's performance with an idea, but 38% of these have not spoken up via official channels, therefore, many ideas are never heard.

6. What are the consequences of speaking up?

- The highest proportion of respondents indicate they think it likely that they would be supported if they spoke up about a risk. However, a considerable proportion of respondents perceive there to be a likelihood that they would be ignored or suppressed.
- 17% of junior employees indicate that they think they would be punished if they spoke up about a risk in their organisation.
- Executive board members and senior managers think positive consequences are more likely if they speak up with an idea compared to middle managers and junior employees.

7. What is the impact of line manager approachability?

- The boss's approachability is negatively related to employee's guardedness and to the likelihood of the employee thinking they will face detrimental consequences as a result of speaking up.

8. Do we listen and feel listened to?

- Respondents report that they listen most frequently when people speak up about malpractice or unethical behaviour, followed by when they offer new ideas or suggestions, and lastly when they challenge ways of working.
- The more senior the respondent, the more they think that they listen to others, and the more they think those above them listen. Junior employees disagree.

9. Whose opinion do we value?

- Respondents value their peers' opinion in their daily work more than the opinions of those junior or senior to them (whose opinions they value least of all).
- Female participants report valuing the opinions of their peers, those junior to them and those senior to them, more than male participants.

10. What biases affect our speaking up and listening up?

- Very few respondents perceive themselves as scary to their work colleagues.
- The most commonly reported social bias that respondents perceive affects the way they listen to others is job title, followed by age. Reported social bias on the grounds of race and gender is virtually non-existent.
- Not a single Executive board member respondent thinks that they 'usually' to 'always' have social biases towards either race or gender that affects the way they listen.
- Females recognise gender bias more than males.

Discussion

1. **We suffer from ‘superiority illusion’ and this has severe consequences for cultural change.**
 - Respondents see themselves as being superior to everyone around them at both speaking up and listening up. The more senior the respondent, the higher their opinion of their listening skills. In practice these perceptions can mean people regard problems in communication as predominantly the responsibility of others.
 - Speaking up and listening up at work must be understood as a social, relational activity, where we are all, to varying degrees, responsible and accountable for conversational habits that form and are maintained.
2. **There’s a hierarchy to speaking up...and the more senior we are, the easier we think it is for everyone else.**
 - The more senior you are, the more likely you are to think (wrongly) that those junior to you are speaking up – and being open and honest when they do. This becomes a problem when senior leaders make decisions off the back of this assumption and fail to give sufficient consideration to the issue of psychological safety in their workplace.
3. **Speaking up is STILL gendered.**
 - Challenging those who benefit from the status quo (who are often blind to their advantage) and encouraging recognition that there is a collective responsibility to change it, is not easy to do.
4. **Your relationship with your boss is fundamental in shaping your ‘conversational habits’.**
 - As with Gallup’s seminal research on engagement⁴, line manager relationships appear to be instrumental in encouraging or suppressing speaking and listening up more widely in the organisation.
5. **We are most guarded during the meetings that we spend so much time in.**
 - We spend an enormous amount of time in meetings at work and we often rely on these to discuss issues and determine actions, yet our survey shows formal meetings are when we are at our most guarded. This holds serious consequences for the quality of our decision-making.

⁴ <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/182792/managers-account-variance-employee-engagement.aspx>

Recommendations

6. **It is likely that there are some deep dark secrets and some wonderful ideas that you don’t know about.**
 - A significant number of people know something of value to their organization and don’t know what to do with that knowledge, or have decided to do nothing, or have only raised it informally. This represents a significant untapped resource.
 - The more junior people may have unique sight of what needs to be done, but they are the least likely to raise things. They are the ‘secret keepers’ and helping them to speak up could reduce malpractice and increase innovation.
 7. **We believe or pretend social bias doesn’t exist which makes it unlikely that we can begin to counter its negative impact.**
 - People will admit to being influenced by someone’s job title and age (somewhat), but hardly ever by someone’s ethnicity or gender.
 - Those that do acknowledge they have unconscious biases, often do not feel equipped to judge and mitigate their impact.
- We recommend various practical interventions including suggestions for:
- Developing our awareness of our own and others’ perceptions of power and the effect that has on our speaking and listening.
 - Giving feedback to others about how they speak and listen and receiving it ourselves.
 - Reducing power distance, particularly questioning our experience of formal meetings in this regard.
 - Continuing to seek to reduce gender differences in speaking and listening.
 - Ensuring our response to those who speak up is productive and encourages further speaking up.
 - Focusing on developing transparent manager-direct report relationships.
 - Learning about unconscious bias and its effects, inquiring collectively around what ‘labels’ convey status and authority in our workplaces with a view to limiting discriminatory practices.

Context

Context

The imperative to speak truth to power

As identified in the Hult Ashridge report of March 2017⁵, a lack of organizational transparency results in damaging headlines and can even cost lives. The emissions scandal at Volkswagen, the financial scandal at Wells Fargo, the doping scandal at the International Association of Athletics Federations and the Gosport NHS scandal in the UK are all examples where some employees knew what was going on but did not feel able to speak up, or spoke up and were not heard. In addition, silence results in lost opportunities for businesses and institutions around the globe as innovative ideas are suppressed.

Widely acknowledged as an issue of organizational importance, the popular solutions to this problem have been partial in their success.

While ‘whistleblowing’ initiatives and employee workshops on ‘courageous conversations’ have at least brought the matter to management attention, they have failed to address the wider challenge of developing open, ethical, productive organisational dialogue.

Our research (published in a new book *Speak Up: Say what needs to be said and hear what needs to be heard*⁶) has set out to explore the complex decisions we make around speaking and listening up, with the ambition of raising our levels of awareness and consequently the possibility that we might alter our habits of conversation for the better.

The wider research project

This wider research project has, since 2014, included:

- Approximately 200 one-to-one interviews
- Ethnographic studies within 12 different organisations
- Over 100 research application workshops
- Two year-long co-operative inquiry groups
- First person action research
- An initial ‘diagnostic survey’ with 500 respondents
- The survey which this report is based upon, which, at the time of writing, has over 3,600 responses
- A comprehensive review of the literature on speaking up

⁵ Being silenced and silencing others: developing the capacity to speak truth to power by Reitz, M. & Higgins, J.

⁶ Reitz, M. & Higgins, J., July 2019, FT Publishing

The TRUTH framework

Through this process, we identified that how and whether people speak up is deeply influenced by five inter-related factors that pay attention to the relational context of organizational conversations, where there is someone with something to say and also someone who is willing to listen. We refer to this as the 'TRUTH' framework:

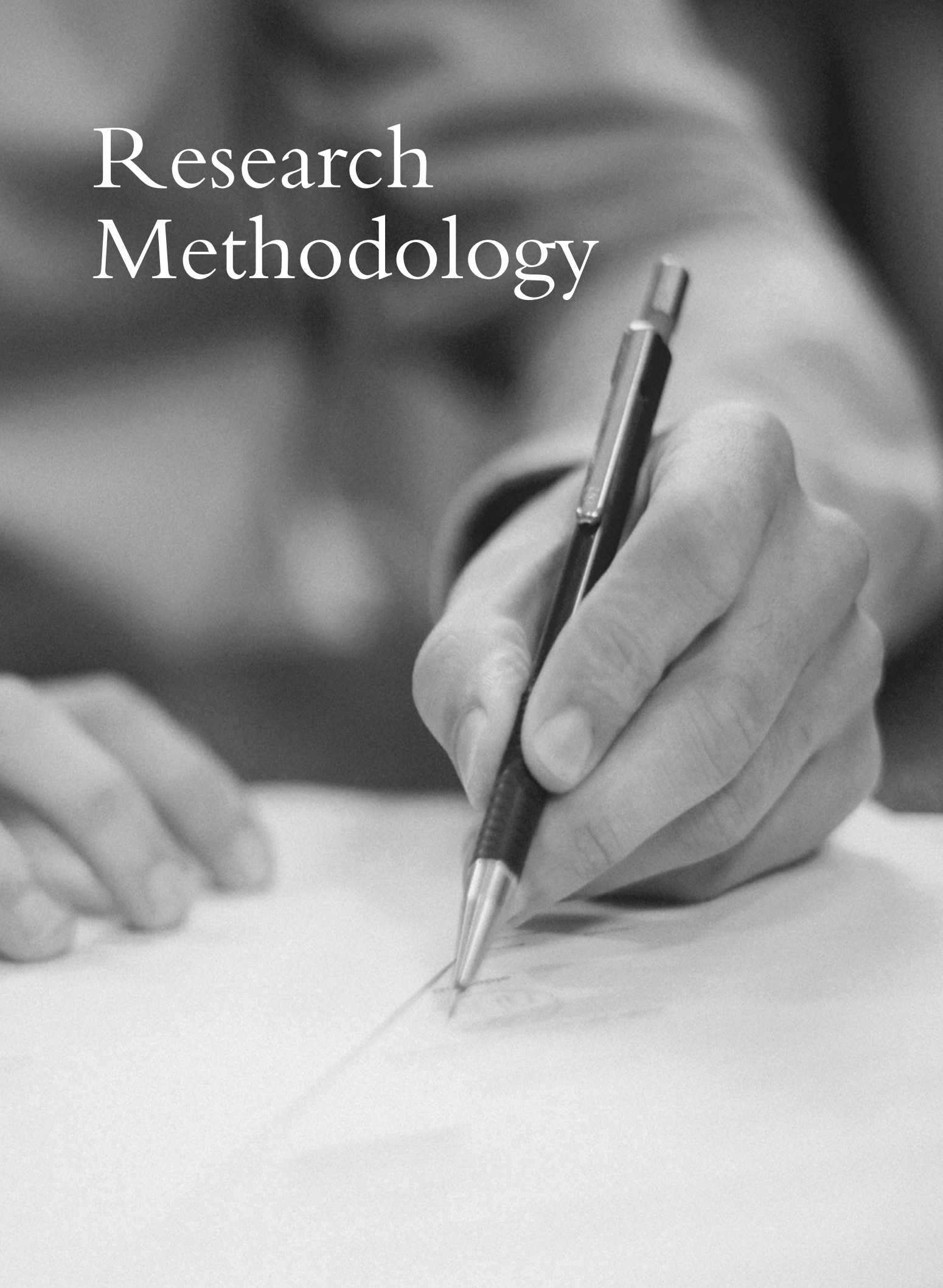
- How much do you **TRUST** the value of your opinion and the opinions of others'?
- What are the **RISKS** involved when you or others speak up?

The survey aims

The survey, upon which this report is based, seeks to:

- Explore quantitatively and qualitatively these five aspects of speaking and listening up.
- Raise respondents' awareness of their habits of conversation (often prior to attending a workshop or conference relating to the subject).
- Provide findings which stimulate conversations about speaking up and listening up – and thereby provide inspiration for productive personal and organisational change.

Research Methodology



- Do you **UNDERSTAND** the politics of who says what to who... and why?
- Are you aware of the **TITLES** and labels we attach to one another – and how they shape what gets said and heard?
- Do you know **HOW** to choose the right words at the right time in the right place...and how, skilfully, to help others to speak up through what you say and do?

The insights captured in this research project emerged from analysing data from an online survey that was distributed to a working population around the world. The online survey, at the time of writing, continues to run, with the intention of gathering more information across several regions, types of organisation, job levels and age. Updated results will be reported in 2020.

A large proportion of the respondents were recruited in advance of participating in open and customised leadership programmes at Hult Ashridge. Participants were also recruited in advance of conference talks given by Megan. In both these cases, respondents were given a code to enter at the start of the survey which identified the programme / conference they were attending. Anonymised results were then collated for each event and the responses from each group were fed back during the talks. Additionally, participants were recruited using social media campaigns through Hult Ashridge and through Megan and John's personal profile and network.

The findings from this report are based on all data captured between April 2018 and January 2019. During this period, 2,198 respondents filled out the online survey. 447 of these responses were however excluded from the analysis due to dropouts, lack of consent or questionable response patterns. This yielded a final sample of 1,751 responses.

Of these, 60% were female and due to the location of Hult Ashridge, a large majority of the participants were based in the United Kingdom (79%) or in another European country (12%). The respondents self-described their position in their organisational structure as junior (18%), middle (35%), senior manager (26%) or executive level (7%). Fourteen percent self-described themselves as being 'other' and not belonging to the four job level options.

A full breakdown of demographics can be found in appendix B.

The online survey contains both quantitative and qualitative questions, based on findings and interest areas emerging from previous research. The focus was to explore:

- Whether, why, how often and about what respondents speak up,
- Whether, why, how often and to whom they listen,
- Perceptions of the degree of speaking and listening up in the workplace, according to different content and different hierarchical levels,
- What helps and hinders both speaking and listening up.

Table 1 shows exemplar questions and the full survey is detailed in appendix A.

Section	Question	Scoring
Speaking Up	Would you speak up in order to challenge current ways of working/thinking?	Never – Always, 6-point Likert scale
Guarded-Openness	How open or guarded are you during one-to-ones with your 'boss'?	Very guarded – Very open, 4-point Likert scale
Barriers	How often do the following things stop you speaking up – Fear of being perceived negatively	Never – Always, 6-point Likert scale
Outcomes of Speaking Up	Imagine you were aware of a risk or problem in your organisation. How likely do you think these things will happen to you if you spoke up about it? – I will be ignored	Extremely unlikely – Extremely likely, 4-point Likert scale
Listening	How often do you think those in senior roles in your organisation listen to others when they are reporting malpractice or unethical behaviour?	Never – Always, 6-point Likert scale
Signals	How often do you consider yourself to be 'scary' to the following people – Those junior to you?	Never – Always, 6-point Likert scaler plus a N/A alternative
Social Biases	How often do the following forms of social bias affect the way you listen to others – Gender	Never – Always, 6-point Likert scale

Table 1: Example questions from each section and the alternative answers.

Quantitative questions

Twenty-one quantitative questions addressed perceptions of when we speak up at work, how open we are, barriers to speaking up, perceived outcomes of speaking up, when we listen at work, signals we send and receive, and social biases. Participants were asked to self-report on their own behaviour regarding speaking up and listening, they were also asked how they perceived the speaking up of others at different job levels as well as their perceptions of their manager.

Qualitative questions

Respondents had the opportunity to elaborate on their responses in six areas; barriers to speaking up, why they have not spoken up, what they do to change the way they come across to others, issues that affect why they speak up and listen up, and general comments.

Analysis

In order to respond to the research questions, the data was analysed using descriptive statistics to compare the findings between demographic variables that contained data points of more than 100 participants. All questions were analysed based on the complete data set and split based on gender (male-female), job level, and age. There was not enough data across regions, ethnicity, or non-binary gender at this stage of the analysis to do statistical comparisons. We hope this will be included in the next report.

Correlation analysis of job level was conducted using Spearman correlations due to the ordinal format of the job-level data.

Qualitative responses were coded under each question heading and emergent themes were identified. A full overview of the codes and sub-codes, the prevalence of each and exemplar quotes are available on request⁷.

⁷ Please contact emma.day@ashridge.hult.edu

Findings



This section summarizes the survey findings by responding to the following ten questions:

1. Are you speaking up?
2. Are others speaking up?
3. When are people guarded or open?
4. What creates a fear of speaking up?
5. What do we do with secrets and ideas?
6. What are the consequences of speaking up?
7. What is the impact of line manager approachability?
8. Do we listen and feel listened to?
9. Whose opinion do we value?
10. What biases affect our speaking up and listening up?

Are you speaking up?

The survey examines people's self-identified willingness to speak up in three different scenarios:

- Challenging current ways of working and/or thinking,
- Raising an issue of malpractice or unethical activity, such as speaking up about something illegal or negligent,
- Offering new ideas or suggestions.

The results indicate that **raising an issue of malpractice or unethical activity is the most common scenario when people believe they would speak up in the workplace**, with 82% reporting they either 'usually' or 'always' speak up. In close second, is offering new ideas (81%), while people feel they are least likely to speak up to challenge current ways of working (66%).

However, while the majority of respondents state that they would speak up, it is not perceived to be a viable option for everyone with 34% hesitant to speak up to challenge current ways of working, 19% to offer new ideas and 18% to report malpractice or unethical activity.

There is a clear relationship between a person's seniority in an organization and their likelihood of speaking up - **the more senior the respondent, the more they think they would speak up, and the more junior the respondent, the more they think they would remain silent**. For instance, 4% of executive board members and 7% of senior managers report they would remain silent on an issue of malpractice or unethical activity, compared to 34% of junior employees. Similar trends are observed regarding the offering of new ideas and challenging current ways of working (Figure 1). Strikingly, most of the junior employees state they would 'never', 'rarely' or 'only sometimes' speak up to challenge current ways of working or thinking.

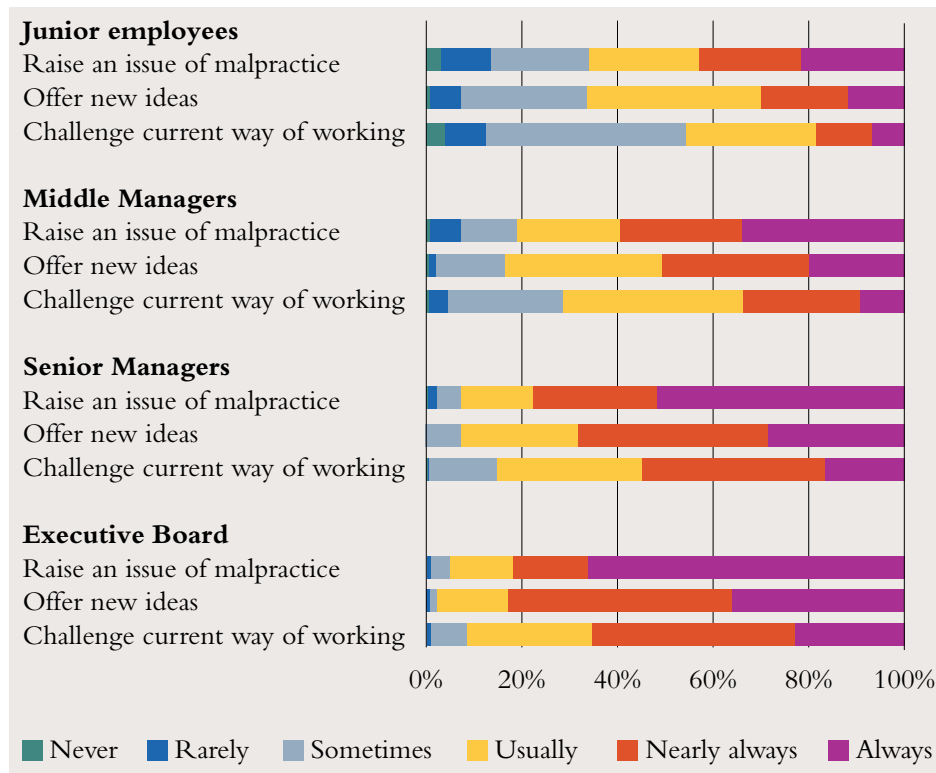


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of how often junior employees, middle managers, senior managers and executive board members report they would speak up across three scenarios.

Qualitative responses offer some insight into what encourages employees to speak up in their organization, with participants highlighting the necessity of finding the right space and time and crucially understanding the communication dynamics within a team. One Female Executive wrote:

“I think I can really speak up most of the time. It is a question of HOW to say things and the intention/objective. When you know people it is easier...”

This Executive feels comfortable in speaking up, but she manages the ‘how’ of doing so, referencing the importance of her intentions and ultimately her relationships with people. As discussed later in this report, the relationship between manager and employee can be both a facilitator and an inhibitor to speaking up.

Are others speaking up?

All participants in the survey were asked to rate how they think junior, middle and senior employees in their organisation would speak up across the three scenarios. **The common perception is that others (regardless of hierarchical level) would speak up to raise an issue of malpractice more than they would to offer new ideas and challenge current ways of working.**

Respondents expect that **the more senior the colleague, the more likely they would be to speak up across all three scenarios.** Interestingly, senior management believe that junior employees speak up much more than junior employees themselves report their peers speaking up, in other words, **the more senior the respondent, the more ‘optimistic’ they are that those junior to them are speaking up** (see Figure 2).

Similarly, executive board members and senior managers believe that those junior to them speak up more when it comes to reporting an issue of malpractice than junior and middle managers believe other junior employees and middle managers do.

65% of executive board members believe junior employees speak up to raise an issue of malpractice compared to 45% of junior employees. 72% of senior managers report that they believe middle managers speak up compared to 64% of the middle managers themselves.

Middle managers are more convinced that other middle managers would speak up to offer new ideas and challenge current ways of thinking than senior and junior respondents, who are less convinced that middle managers would speak up in this regard.

Overall, **respondents’ self-perception is higher than their perception of others; they think they would speak up more than their senior managers.** For example, 82% of the respondents indicate that they would speak up to offer new ideas, however only 73% feel their senior managers would do the same.

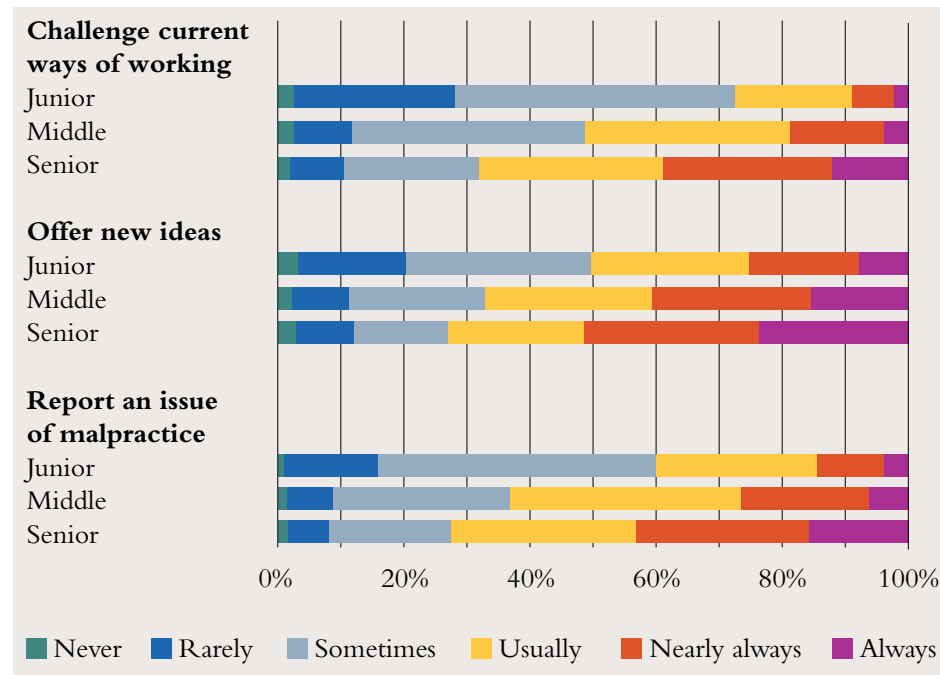


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of reported likelihood that other junior employees, middle and senior managers would speak up.

When are people guarded and open?

Participants were asked to rate work occasions where they feel guarded and open. The findings indicate **people feel the most guarded during formal work meetings** (39% 'guarded' rather than 'open') compared to informal interactions at work (18%) and one-to-one occasions with their boss (24%).

The gender of the participant impacts the distribution slightly; **females report being more guarded across all types of interaction.**

As shown in Figure 3, males report interactions at work (84% compared to 82%) and most of all, formal work meetings (69% compared to 57%).

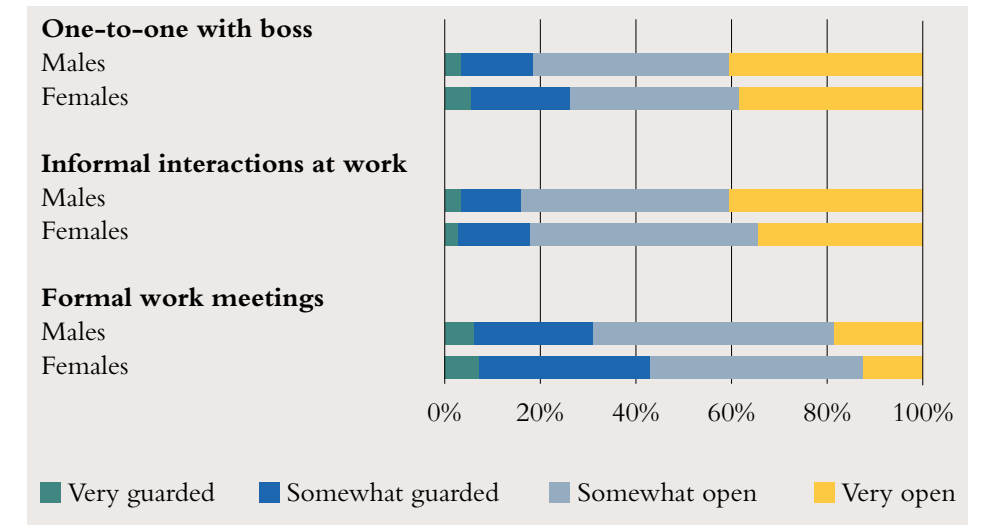


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of reported guardedness and openness between genders across three different types of interaction

The survey results indicate that there is a trend between hierarchy and openness at formal work meetings and one-to-ones with bosses. **The more senior the respondent, the less guarded they report being.** For example, 54% of junior employees indicate that they feel 'somewhat guarded' to 'very guarded' at formal work meetings compared to 26% of senior managers.

Juniors report that their openness increases considerably when they are interacting informally at work. Less than half of the junior employees (46%) report being open during formal work meetings, compared to 82% during informal interactions at work (see Figure 4).

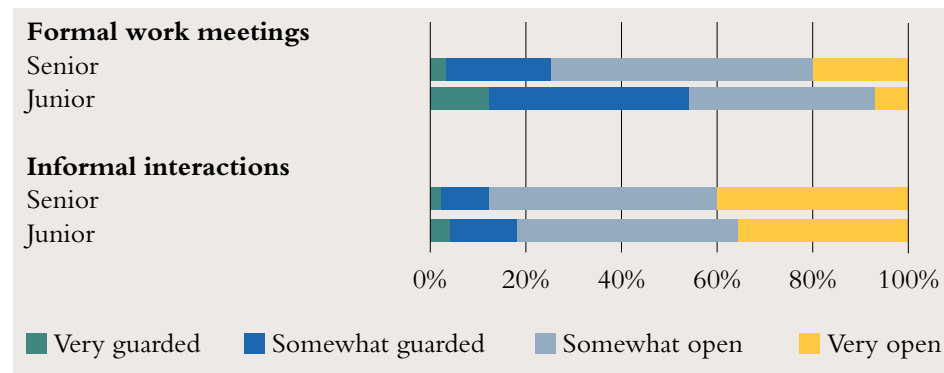


Figure 4: Percentage distribution of reported guardedness and openness between Senior managers and Junior employees across formal and informal work interaction

Qualitative data elucidates the experiences behind this reluctance to speak up in formal settings, as one female senior manager, reflecting on her struggles with speaking up in meetings, notes:

“I self-censor quite a lot and find it frustrating. I also take a long time to formulate my thoughts, check I think it isn't stupid, think about the phrasing...and the moment has gone. When I do speak up, I can then sometimes replay the meeting/conv[ersation] and think how stupid I must have sounded.”

Even in her senior position she reports finding it difficult to articulate a thought and deliver it in a timely fashion during the often fast paced and agenda-packed meeting. Her perception of her own input, at times when she has been able to speak up, also prevents her from feeling truly comfortable offering a contribution.

For others, the formal meeting presents the potential risk that they might inadvertently embarrass or upset a colleague, something that one male senior manager carefully avoids:

“You need to read the situation – this is, it may be more prudent to raise an issue away from a meeting and others, therefore not embarrassing individuals.”

To counter this fear of upset or embarrassment, many find times when they can speak with their colleagues in a more informal setting, although this is not without its challenges as one male middle manager notes:

“The things which might stop me speaking up tend to be about who else is in the room – for example, I may not challenge a boss about their behaviour in front of a group of other people, because that feels wrong and unfair to the person being challenged. A major problem though is that a huge amount of time, the person at the top of our organisation isn't available to speak to 1:1 and frequently cancels meetings, or other meetings overrun so she doesn't turn up. Makes it difficult to have a conversation about important things in an environment where the boss also feels safe.”

Respondents report a desire to protect both junior and senior colleagues alike from harm or embarrassment in formal settings. This fear of upsetting others is a key barrier to speaking up across all levels of seniority, as we discuss in the next section.

What creates a fear of speaking up?

There are two basic human fears that stand out as barriers to speaking up: the fear of being perceived negatively (regularly influencing 37% of respondents) and the fear of upsetting or embarrassing others (31%). These two are perceived as stronger barriers compared to lack of confidence (18%), fear of impacting promotion or pay opportunities (16%), or fear of legal consequences (13%).

Fear tends to stop females from speaking up more than their male colleagues, particularly; fear of being perceived negatively, fear of upsetting others and lack of confidence in their own views. The percentage difference between females and males on these items are 11%, 8% and 11% respectively (see Figure 5). One theme that emerges in the qualitative data is the fear of looking or feeling silly.

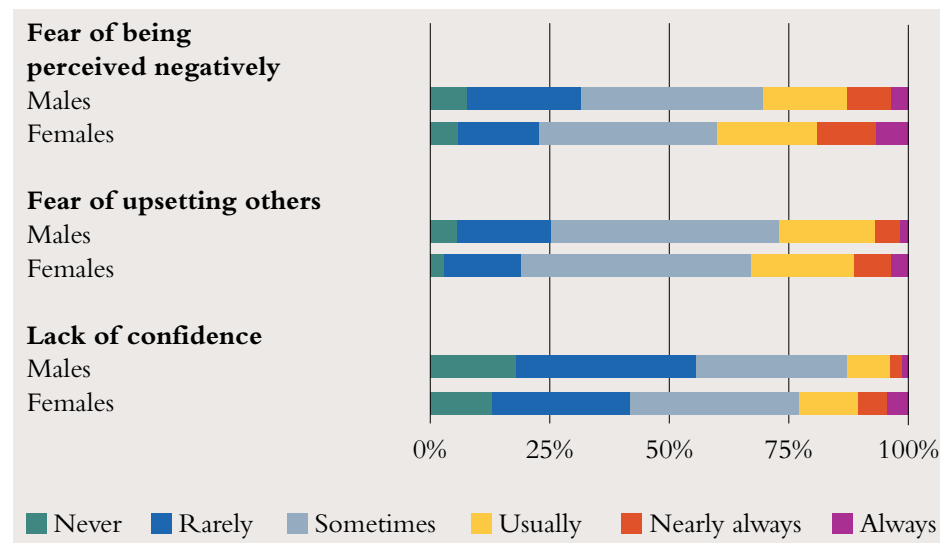


Figure 5: Percentage distribution of barriers to speaking up, split between males and females.

This theme is exclusively populated by quotes from female employees. As one respondent notes:

“Sometimes there can be people in the meetings that make you feel as if your question is ‘silly’, as if you should have known the answer yourself.”

Others mention of a ‘fear of saying something stupid’, suggesting self-doubt and fear of critical judgement is particularly inhibiting for female employees.

Junior employees report that fear stops them from speaking up more frequently across all categories. Half of the junior employees report that the fear of being perceived negatively stops them from speaking up compared to 25% of senior managers. Moreover, 39% of junior employees report fear of upsetting others as a barrier compared to only 18% of executive board members. Junior employees also report lack of confidence and fear of legal consequences as a barrier to speaking up more frequently compared to all other job levels.

Fear of being perceived negatively is widely referenced by the participants who provided qualitative responses. One female middle manager expresses this:

“Speaking up to challenge those in senior positions would not impact my pay – however being perceived negatively by my senior leadership team has already prevented promotion opportunities for myself and colleagues and a negative perception impacts the amount of autonomy, trust and opportunities for development you receive in your existing role.”

While she acknowledges that her formal pay will not be impacted by a decision to speak up, she recognizes that the indirect impact of speaking

up has been detrimental to her career progression. This type of previous negative experience of being punished is detailed extensively in the qualitative responses, as one female middle manager recounts:

“I recently raised concerns with senior management regarding a senior employee’s inappropriate behaviour, i.e. bullying, and an observed somewhat cavalier approach of some individuals regarding working according [to] legal requirements, which in my opinion could put the company at risk of producing non-compliant products in a strictly regulated market and putting the company’s reputation at risk. The response of the company has been to hand me my notice and offer me a settlement agreement, under the condition of keeping silent...”

This account is one of several that reference the loss of a job or a managed move, suggesting the fear that surrounds speaking up is sometimes grounded in material reality.

What do we do with secrets and ideas?

Respondents were asked if they know something important that could negatively impact their organization and, if they do, what they have done with this knowledge. As shown in Figure 6, results indicate that one in five know something that could negatively impact their organisation and another 19% may know something harmful. Out of these 39%, 21% have not done anything about it either because they are unsure what to do or have made a decision to do nothing.

Furthermore, 26% indicate that they have raised this knowledge informally but not via any official channels. Therefore, **8% of people that were surveyed know something that may harm the company they work for and have not done anything about it.** A further 10% know something and have spoken up about it informally, but not officially.

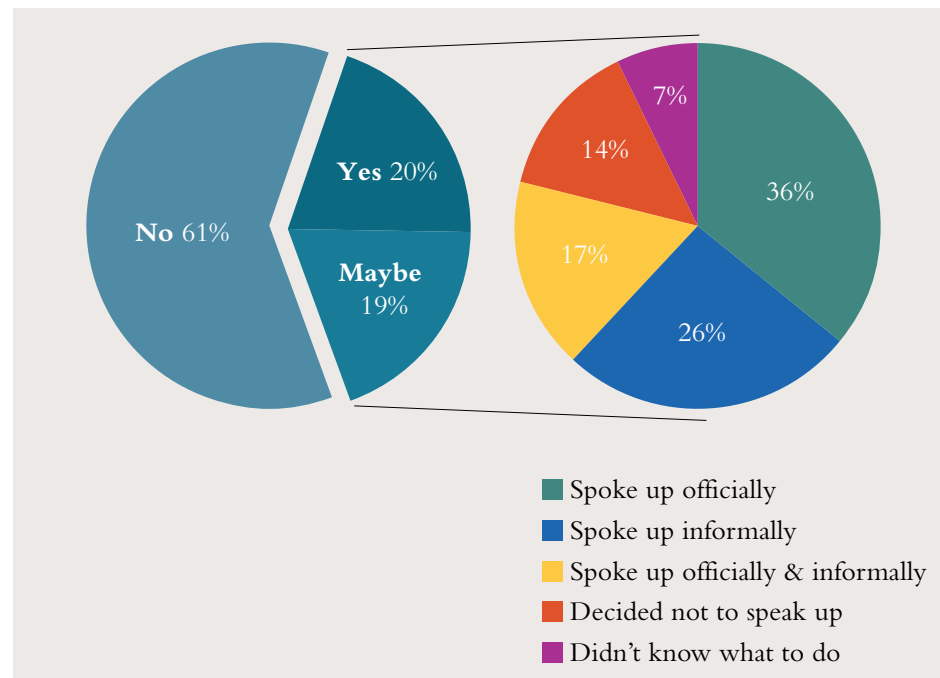


Figure 6: Proportion of respondents that indicate that they know or may know something that could negatively impact their organisation.

When splitting this data by job level, it is not surprising to see that a larger proportion of senior managers (46%) and executive board members (43%) know or may know something important that might negatively impact their organisations compared to junior employees (36%) and middle management (38%).

The follow-up analysis of what they have done with this knowledge reveals that a significant number have not spoken up. 11% of senior managers indicate that they either do not know what to do or have decided not to do anything, and 24% of senior managers have only spoken up informally. These numbers increase when middle managers and junior employees are included. 25% of middle managers and 33% of junior employees have either decided not to speak up or do not know what to do with the problem they perceive.

In addition to knowledge of risks and problems, participants were asked if they have ideas or suggestions that could assist their organisations' performance. **73% indicate that they could assist their organisation's performance with an idea, but 38% of these people have not spoken up via official channels, therefore, many ideas are not being heard** (see Figure 7).

Interestingly, junior employees are more likely to talk about their ideas informally (42%) compared to middle managers (31%), senior managers (26%) and executive board members (21%). However, junior employees are more likely to decide to do nothing (9%) or be in a position where they don't know what to do (4%).

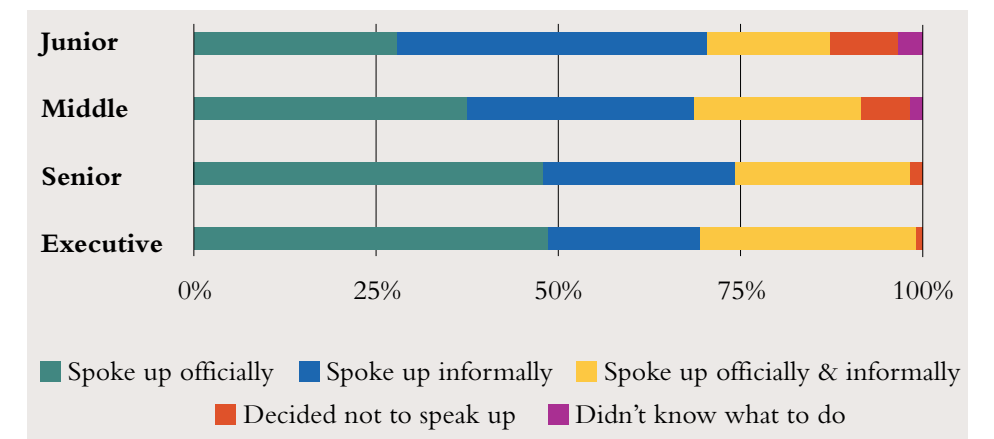


Figure 7: Proportion of what employees have done with ideas that could benefit their organisation.

What are the consequences of speaking up?

Participants were asked what the expected consequences were if they spoke up about a risk or with an idea (see Figures 8 and 9). **The highest proportion of respondents, 68%, indicate that they think it likely they would be supported if they spoke up about a risk. However, they also perceive a considerable likelihood that they would be ignored (38%) or suppressed (26%).** This perception is particularly prevalent among junior and middle managers where 32% of juniors think they would be suppressed if they spoke up about a risk and 44% of middle managers think they would be ignored. Alarmingly, **17% of junior employees indicate that they think they would be punished if they spoke up about a risk in their organisation.**

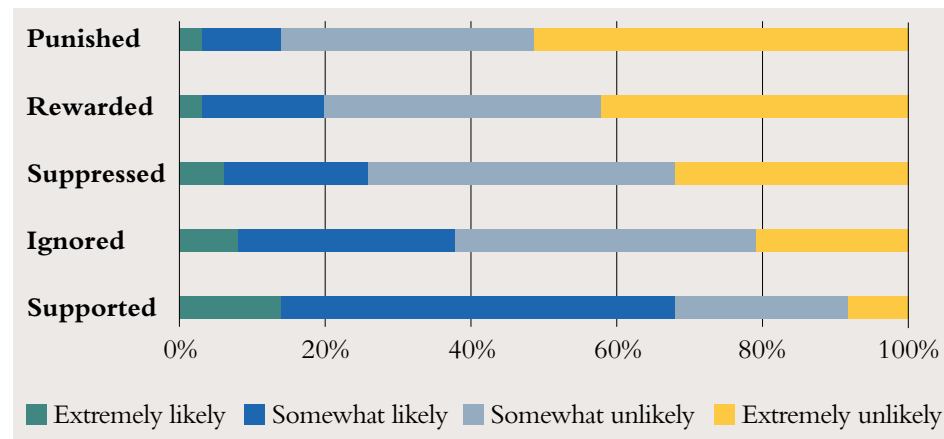


Figure 8: The percentage distribution of the perceived consequences of speaking up about a risk

Similar trends emerge when analysing the perceived consequences of sharing an idea (see Figure 9). The three most likely consequences are perceived to be; being supported (71%), ignored (34%), and rewarded (32%). **Executive board members and senior managers think positive consequences are more likely if they speak up with an idea compared to middle managers and junior employees.** 46% of executive board members indicate that they are likely to be rewarded if they speak up with an idea compared to 30% of middle managers and 26% of junior employees.

Qualitative responses evidence some of the reasons employees feel unable to share information about something that could negatively impact their organization. One prevailing theme is a lack of trust in those listening, one female middle manager reports: “Lack of trust in the ethics of management and decision makers” Others echo this sentiment stating, ‘senior management always protect each other’, and ‘I have little confidence in my senior management’, suggesting a disconnect between

managers and their employees has a stifling effect on willingness to speak up. The most widely reported theme is a fear that speaking would be detrimental to them or their career, as one female middle manager succinctly summarized: “Revenge would follow” This employee’s alarming statement would understandably inhibit any desire to speak up.

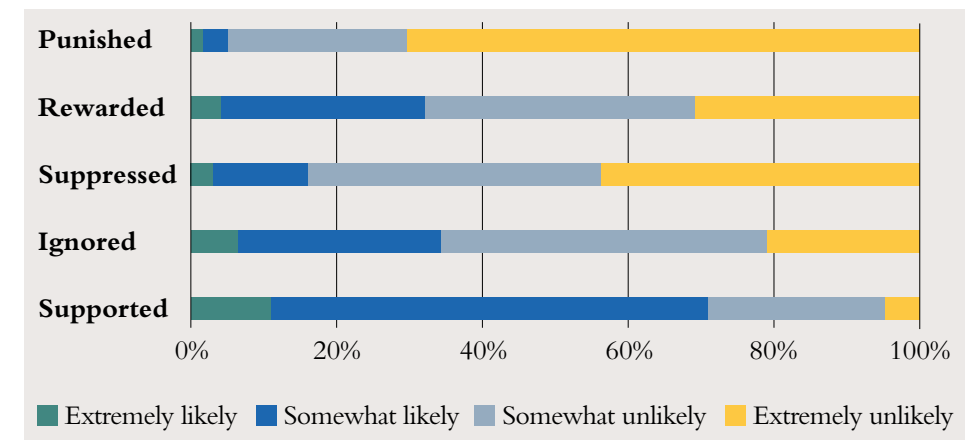


Figure 9: The percentage distribution of the perceived consequences of speaking up with an idea

Sadly, the same responses were evident when participants were asked why they would not speak up about an idea or a suggestion. The fear of negative consequences and the belief that no one is interested are the most commonly documented responses, as one female middle manager states:

“Me, like many others in my position, think there is no point. No one listens unless you are already in a position of power where people are already paid to listen to you, even if your ideas are nonsensical. No one publicly disagrees with stupid ideas; we just go along with the monumental waste of Council funds.”

This view that there is no point in offering ideas because no one is willing to listen is reflected in many of the accounts, with frequent references to the belief that ‘nothing will be done’, ‘it will be ignored’ and ‘nothing will change’. There is very limited qualitative data that speaks to the benefits of speaking up, or the belief that they would be supported in doing so.

The impact of the boss’ approachability

The survey results indicate that only a small number of respondents experience their boss as scary (11%) or as sending more ‘shut up’ signals than ‘speak up signals’ (16%), however, for those respondents, the impact of their boss’ behaviour was notable.

Correlation analysis indicates that **the boss’ approachability is significantly negatively related to employee’s guardedness and to the likelihood of the employee thinking they will face detrimental consequences as a result of speaking up** (see Table 2 for correlation coefficients and p values).

The more the respondent perceives their boss as scary, the more they feel guarded during one-to-ones and formal work meetings. The more they perceive their boss as scary and/or sending ‘shup up’ signals, the more they fear promotion or pay opportunities would be negatively impacted and the more they think they would be perceived negatively. It is also more likely that they expect to be ignored, punished, or suppressed if they speak up about a risk. Conversely, those that do not perceive their boss as scary indicate that they think they will be supported if they speak up with an idea.

	Boss being ‘scary’	Boss sends ‘shut up’ signals
Guarded – Open. One-to-one with boss	-.45***	-.45***
Guarded – Open. Formal work meetings	-.30***	-.27***
Impacting promotion	.34***	.29***
Perceived negatively	.31***	.29***
Risk – ignored	.23***	.32***
Risk – punished	.31***	.40***
Risk – suppressed	.34***	.40***
Ideas – supported	-.26***	-.38***

Pearson’s correlation coefficients. * = <.05, ** = <.01, *** = <.001

Table 2: Correlation analysis between the approachability of the boss, the employee’s guardedness and the consequences of speaking up

One male senior manager speaks of his efforts to downplay his perceived scariness to help his colleagues feel more comfortable in approaching him:

“[I] try to pride myself on being “self-aware” but I am often told I can be scary (by my wife and close friends not staff) and I can be very overbearing. Change the mood of a room by the way I present when I walk into that room - whilst I feel happy or content those around sense something else. So, I know this means I’m not as self-aware as I think. Still learning I suppose.... ongoing self-development. :)”

This reflection on his demeanour and how he is perceived by others highlights the challenges faced by those perceived as ‘scary’. The respondent is able to understand and observe that, although he may think he is approachable, others might find him scary (this self-awareness is apparently rare – see the discussion section). He recognises that he influences the emotional mood of a room and is seemingly attempting to ensure that this influence is used consciously.

This awareness is reflected more widely by participants’ responses to the question, what do you do to make it easier for people to speak with you? The most common responses relate to adapting communication style, (mirroring language, matching formality), adjusting speech patterns

(changing speed, tone and accent), amending dress code to match seniority, and being approachable and kind (smiling, maintaining an ‘open door’ policy). One female middle manager wrote:

“I always have an ‘open door’ (even though we are open plan). I respond positively when someone comes to speak to me. If I am busy, I will make a decision as to whether I need to stop what I am doing to listen or whether I can arrange a later time when we can speak. I always reinforce the message that I am available to listen to team members.”

These responses suggest that managers are aware of the need to be seen as approachable, and many of them report they mediate their behaviour, language and dress to appear more welcoming. Despite this reportedly open, casual, and smiling leadership, a disconnect persists between the managers that believe they provide the environment for speaking up and their direct reports who remain reticent to do so.

Do we listen and feel listened to?

Respondents report that they listen most frequently when people report malpractice or unethical behaviour, followed by when they offer new ideas or suggestions, and lastly when they challenge current ways of working. The trend remains the same when participants were asked how those who were senior to them listen to others.

Interestingly, **the more senior the respondent, the more they think that they listen to others, and the more they think those above them listen. Junior employees disagree however;** they report that those senior to them listen less well, suggesting a disconnect between how senior colleagues perceive themselves and are perceived by junior staff (see Figure 10).

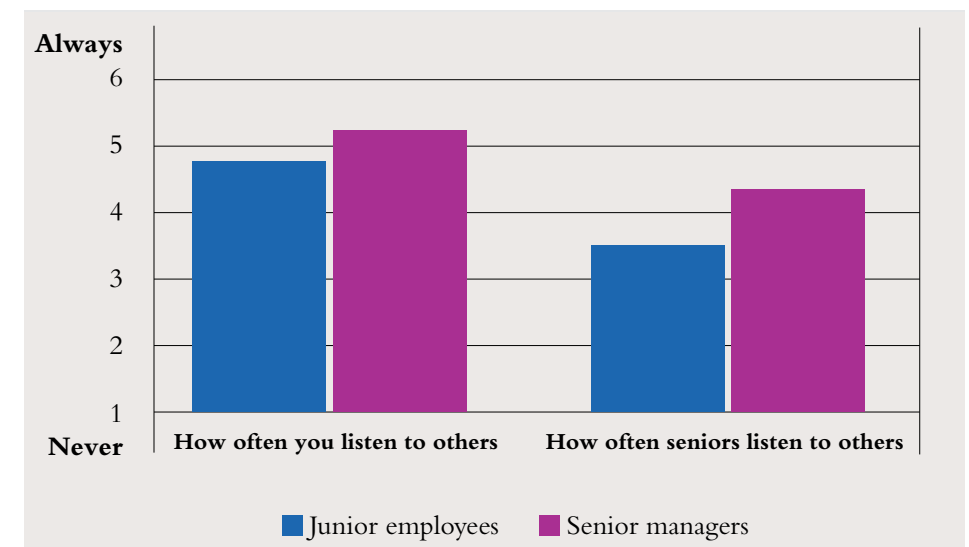


Figure 10: Mean differences between junior employees and senior managers regarding perceived frequency of how they and those senior of them listen to others

Overall, lack of time is cited as the most common reason that ‘usually’, ‘nearly always’ or ‘always’ prevents respondents from listening to others (22% of executive board members, 31% of senior managers, and 30% of middle managers).

However, data indicates that junior employees perceive a greater challenge with 40% reporting that a lack of forums prevents them from listening to others in their organisation (see Figure 11).

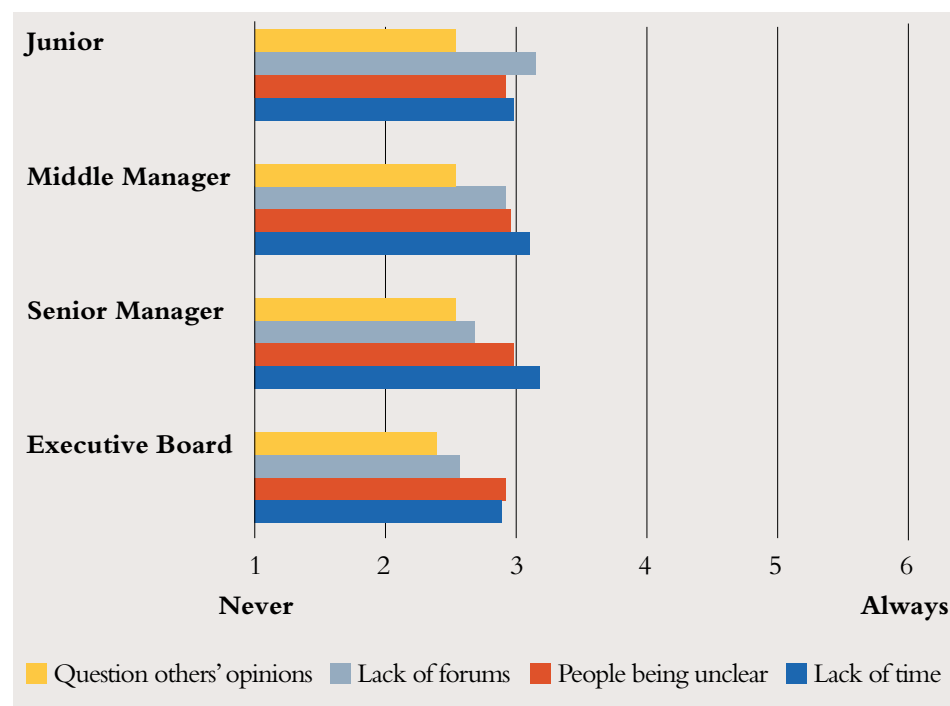


Figure 11: Mean differences between job levels regarding barriers to listening to others

Whose opinion do we value?

Respondents value their peers' opinion in their daily work more than the opinions of those junior or senior to them (whose opinions they value least of all). 91% indicate that they ‘usually’ or ‘always’ value the opinions of their peers compared to 84% of those junior to them and 76% of those senior to them.

Junior employees value the opinion of those senior to them the least, with 27% reporting that they ‘never’, ‘rarely’ or ‘sometimes’ value those senior to them compared to 17% of senior manager respondents.

Overall, **female participants report valuing the opinions of their peers, those junior to them and those senior to them more than male participants.**

What biases affect speaking up and listening up?

Very few respondents perceive themselves as scary to their work colleagues. Only 3% report that they consider themselves to be scary to their peers and those senior to them. 5% indicate that they think they come across as scary to those who are junior to them. The more senior the respondent, the more they thought they could be perceived as scary to those junior to them (7% of executive committee members thought they could be perceived as scary, 5% of senior managers, 4% of middle managers and 3% of junior employees).

Not a single Executive board member reports that they ‘usually’ to ‘always’ have social biases towards either race or gender that affects the way they listen, compared to 2-3% of the other job levels. **Females recognise gender bias more than males,** with 66% of the females reporting that gender never impacts the way they listen to others compared to 72% of males.

In the qualitative data, there is evidence that some respondents are seemingly aware of the impact unconscious bias has on their ability to listen. The most prevalent theme suggests that while people consider they may hold unconscious biases, they do not feel well equipped to judge and mitigate the impact. One male middle manager noted:

“This is a very difficult one to judge objectively... my answers are what I THINK but as a white middle-class middle-aged male in a senior position. I will have unconscious bias of course.”

The most common reported social bias that respondents perceive affects the way they listen to others is job title, followed by age. Reported social bias on the grounds of race and gender are virtually non-existent.

9% of respondents indicate that job title ‘usually’ to ‘always’ affects the way they listen to others. This is slightly more common among junior and middle managers, (12% and 10% respectively) than executive board members (4%) and senior managers (7%). See Table 3 for percentage distribution across all scenarios split by job role.

Discussion and Recommendations

Others make more explicit mention of the types of bias they observe, admitting to a preference for those with more experience, those with more amenable personalities and those with clear delivery styles, as one female senior manager states:

“I do not have a problem with race, but I find it difficult to understand (and hence listen [to]) people who speak heavily accented English, particularly if their English is also poor.”

While wanting to assert her neutral stance on race generally, this senior manager goes on to offer an example of how employees who speak English as a second language may be overlooked when speaking up due to a perceived or actual language barrier.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Nearly always	Always
Race						
Junior	77.1%	13.5%	6.9%	1.3%	0.3%	0.9%
Middle	66.2%	24.4%	7.2%	1.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Senior	67.7%	22.1%	8.7%	0.9%	0.4%	0.2%
Executive	61.7%	26.1%	12.2%	0%	0%	0%
Gender						
Junior	74.9%	14.4%	8.2%	1.9%	0.3%	0.3%
Middle	65.2%	23.9%	9%	0.8%	0.7%	0.3%
Senior	66.7%	23.6%	8.7%	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Executive	65.2%	25.2%	9.6%	0%	0%	0%
Job Role						
Junior	41.1%	18.5%	28.8%	7.8%	2.8%	0.9%
Middle	33.4%	23.3%	33.4%	6.7%	1.6%	1.5%
Senior	31.4%	29.7%	31.6%	5.6%	1.3%	0.4%
Executive	38.3%	27.8%	29.6%	3.5%	0%	0.9%
Age						
Junior	52.7%	20.4%	18.2%	6%	2.2%	0.6%
Middle	43.3%	27.2%	25.2%	3%	1%	0.2%
Senior	44.2%	32.7%	20.1%	2.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Executive	47%	28.7%	23.5%	0%	0%	0.9%

Table 3: Percentage distribution of how social bias impacts the way respondents listen to others, by job role.



This section discusses seven implications drawn from the findings which we noted as unusual, surprising or impactful:

- We suffer from ‘superiority illusion’ and this has severe consequences for cultural change.
- There’s a hierarchy to speaking up...and the more senior we are, the easier we think it is for everyone else.
- Speaking up is STILL gendered.
- Your relationship with your boss is fundamental in shaping your ‘conversational habits’.
- The meetings that we spend so much time in are when we are at our most guarded.
- It is likely that there are some deep dark secrets and some wonderful ideas that you don’t know about.
- We believe or pretend social bias doesn’t exist which makes it unlikely that we can begin to counter its negative impact.

We suffer from ‘superiority illusion’ and this has severe consequences for cultural change

The survey indicates that respondents see themselves as being superior to everyone around them at both speaking up and listening up. It also indicates that the more senior the respondent, the higher their opinion of their listening skills. In practice these perceptions can mean people regard any problems in communication as being predominantly the responsibility of others.

This ‘it’s them not me’ perception can be seen as a consequence of an asocial, non-relational, non-systemic and individualistic approach to people’s development and a particular aspect of wider Western cultural norms. From a communication theory point of view, it mistakenly regards people as isolated units transferring packages of data between each other in a largely unproblematic way. If each individual unit transmits efficiently then there is no problem, but if there is a problem and I see myself as well-functioning unit, then the problem must lie elsewhere.

In other publications⁸, we have argued that **speaking up and listening up at work must be understood as a social, relational activity where we are all, to varying degrees, responsible and accountable for conversational habits that form and are maintained.** Communication is a dance, not a transfer of bits and bytes. To challenge the popular view, shown in the survey, where individuals see themselves as superior, is to ask people to see themselves as active participants in creating a living cultural experience – and therefore as responsible and accountable for the cultural norms that emerge, both positive and negative.

Recommendations:

- We need to ‘look in the mirror’ before we jump to blaming others for poor communication in our organisations. We can ask ourselves ‘if they aren’t speaking up, what is my role in exacerbating that?’ ‘If they aren’t feeling heard, how might I listen (even) better?’
- To guard against an inflated perception of our own abilities, we need to seek feedback, skilfully, to determine whether how we see ourselves is how others see us.

There's a hierarchy to speaking up...and the more senior we are, the easier we think it is for everyone else

We have often argued against the popular belief that hierarchy and power can be disappeared (such as in the so-called 'flat organisation' or with those that claim 'we're all equal around here'). We argue that the denial and disappearance of power and hierarchy is one of the factors that makes shifts in organizational transparency so hard to achieve, or even to talk about.

For the people who are most senior (or powerful), the challenge of speaking up is experienced as less onerous, if onerous at all, when compared to how the world looks to those who occupy more junior (or less powerful) positions who anticipate negative consequences. The survey shows that **the more senior you are, the more you are likely to think (wrongly) that those junior to you are speaking up – and being open and honest when they do. This becomes a problem when senior leaders make decisions off the back of their assumption that they've heard all the relevant information.**

It is also an issue if those who are powerful fail to consider the issue of psychological safety⁹ in their workplace because they are blind to the way others perceive risk. It can be difficult for people who occupy senior positions at work, whose self-image is frequently that of an approachable human being, to realise that this is not how others see or experience them. It may be more challenging still to begin to understand that junior people might simply be saying what they think senior people want to hear¹⁰.

Recommendations:

- Those in powerful positions need to become more aware that they may be perceived as 'scary' and consider how they might reduce power distance in order to invite others to speak up.
- Those in senior roles must challenge their own perceptions of psychological safety. They must consider the 'stories' that circulate in their organisation around what happens when you speak up – and work to ensure that their response to those who speak up with both problems and ideas is seen as positive and welcoming.

⁹ Psychological safety can be defined as the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. See Amy Edmondson's book on The Fearless Organization (2018)

¹⁰ See Megan's TEDx talk 'How your Power Silences the Truth' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sq475Us1KXg&t=50s>

Speaking up is STILL gendered

Female respondents report that they are more guarded in formal meetings, informal interactions and one-to-ones with the boss than their male counterparts. They are more fearful than men of speaking up across all reasons (being perceived negatively, upsetting others, legal consequences, pay / promotion, lack of confidence). They expect negative consequences (being ignored, punished, suppressed) more than males. This suggests that the old 'joke', told and retold in many settings, continues to be alive and well. In its cartoon version a group of people are sitting around a table in a workplace meeting. The male chair makes a comment in response to something one of the women has said, to the effect of: 'That was an excellent insight from Miss Smith. Would one of the men like to make it so it can be heard?'

When Megan and John shared with others the persistence of social bias, particularly when it came to women's experience of speaking up and being heard, two responses stood out: Firstly, a male leader, suggested that 'speaking up' would make a useful input into a women's leadership programme, supposing that the issue lay with women needing to learn the skills rather than with the environment or culture they worked in. Secondly, again primarily from men, was that this was 'old news' – and, in fact, a fairly boring finding.

However, John and Megan have also learnt that raising this as an issue remains contentious – as they discovered when engaging with the feedback to their 2017 Harvard Business Review article on 'Advantage Blindness', co-authored with Ben Fuchs¹¹. **Challenging those who benefit from the status quo (often blind to their advantage) and raising it as something that is their responsibility as much as those who are disadvantaged by the way things are, is not easy to do.** It is deeply shameful to discover that your success is not just down to your best efforts but has also come about because you're playing a game with dice loaded in your favour. We are dealing with a deeply systemic pattern, where we all – whatever our gender or background – have a responsibility for paying attention to the obvious and seeking change.

Recommendations:

- We need to prioritise reducing gender advantages and disadvantages in the workplace (still) if we wish to improve transparency.
- We need to avoid putting responsibility for addressing social biases onto those groups who are most disadvantaged. Those who are socially advantaged have to recognise their role in creating relational patterns that favour themselves.

¹¹ 'Do you have Advantage Blindness?' <https://hbr.org/2018/04/do-you-have-advantage-blindness> (Fuchs, B., Reitz, M. and Higgins, J. 2017)

Your relationship with your boss is fundamental in shaping your ‘conversational habits’

The survey indicates that one of the most important factors in whether or not people speak up is their perception of their boss. **As with Gallup’s seminal research on engagement¹², line manager relationships appear to be instrumental in encouraging or suppressing speaking and listening up more widely in the organisation.** If the respondents perceive their boss to be scary and sending ‘shut up signals’ rather than ‘speak up’ ones, then they are more likely to stay silent and to fear the consequences of speaking up.

A clear priority emerges for organisations who want to improve their speak-up culture: focus on how people experience their relationship with their immediate boss. It might be a reasonable assumption to make that if an organisation’s manager – direct report relationships are generally transparent, then that organisation is more likely to be in good shape.

Unfortunately, frequent restructuring, a focus on targets (to the detriment of relationships) and the ensuing pressure, busyness and stress can deplete these relationships with far reaching consequences.

Recommendations:

- The importance and skills of listening up, so that the speaker feels heard and valued, should form a key aspect of management training and performance management processes.
- The quality of manager – direct report relationships, specifically in the area of speaking up, should be monitored and experiments undertaken to reflect, learn and improve on this aspect of management.

¹² <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/182792/managers-account-variance-employee-engagement.aspx>

The meetings that we spend so much time in are when we are at our most guarded

We spend an enormous amount of time in meetings at work, with one study suggesting that executives spend an average of 23 hours in them a week¹³. But our survey suggests formal meetings are when we are at our most guarded.

This is for various reasons – in particular, we are afraid of looking silly in a group, afraid of upsetting others, we feel most ‘on the record’ and therefore exposed and we are under the assumption that the most senior people should be speaking the most.

If our meetings are where we make many of our crucial decisions, then it is clearly of concern if issues are not being voiced thoroughly – we are making decisions on often partial understandings of the situation.

8% of the workforce in your organisation may currently be sitting on issues that could harm your organisation. 50% of your employees may have ideas that they have not voiced formally yet.

Many of our best ideas come from junior employees who are often at the frontline, closest to the customer and seeing first-hand potential issues and possibilities¹⁴. However, junior employees are the most likely to stay quiet.

This can have a devastating effect on innovation as well as customer service and health and safety.

Recommendations:

- We should consider carefully our reliance on formal meetings and acknowledge the limitations of these as decision making forums.
- We should attempt to reduce ‘power distance’ in our meetings in order to enable others, in particular those more junior (who are most guarded), to speak up.

Recommendations:

- We need to inquire, together, persistently and patiently, into the reasons people stay quiet in our own organisations (the ‘TRUTH’ framework can help this process¹⁵).
- We need to increase the forums (especially the ‘informal forums’) available to employees as long as they are perceived to be fruitful. We must seek to make formal meetings more open and ensure the consequences of speaking up are perceived to be positive to junior employees in particular.

¹³ <https://hbr.org/2017/07/stop-the-meeting-madness>

¹⁴ See for example <https://hbr.org/2012/04/listen-to-your-frontline-emplo.html>

¹⁵ See ‘Speak Up: Say what needs to be said and hear what needs to be heard’, Reitz, M. and Higgins, J. (Financial Times Publishing, 2019)

We believe, or pretend, social bias doesn't exist which makes it unlikely that we can begin to counter its negative impact

Overall, 90% of participants think race and gender 'never' or 'rarely' impact listening. Research studies from across the world tell us this is very unlikely to be the case¹⁶ – the vast majority of us are influenced by race, gender, age and numerous other forms of bias and these have a clear impact on our relationships, our perception of the world and our decisions.

A few respondents stated they were 'offended' at even being asked the question. **This persistent blindness of unconscious bias stops dialogue in its tracks** because if we refuse to acknowledge it is present then we are unlikely to be prepared to examine our own bias with a view to learning and mitigating negative consequences.

Recommendations:

- We need to stop asking whether bias affects listening and speaking up and start asking how. This can only be done if the environment feels psychologically safe enough to have this conversation.
- We need to learn about unconscious bias and its effects and inquire collectively around what 'labels' convey status and authority in our workplaces with a view to limiting discriminatory practices.

Implications for Future Research



Limitations of this research

The decisions we make about whether to speak and listen up are multi-faceted, dynamic and contextual in nature.

It is our view that they often defy simple linear cause-effect explanations or remedies, and this therefore has consequences on how we research the phenomena and draw conclusions from the research.

A survey is inevitably partial and restrictive in its ability to describe and explain the phenomena of speaking and listening. It is recommended therefore, that the findings in this report are positioned and examined within the much broader research methodology and findings of our overall Speaking Truth to Power project.

If we focus exclusively on the survey aspect of the project however, it is useful to highlight the following limitations:

- The survey represents perceptions and not necessarily 'reality'. For example, reporting how many people say they would speak up about malpractice does not tell us how many would in reality.
- The terms within the survey are general and subjective and will inevitably be interpreted in different ways by different respondents with different native languages. For example, 'scary', 'malpractice', 'junior', 'senior' and 'usually' mean different things to different people.
- This report's interim findings are based upon a predominantly British, female population and we caution generalisations beyond these specific respondents.

Recommendations for further research

Given the findings of the survey and acknowledging its limitations, we recommend further lines of inquiry:

- Widening the demographics of the respondents to include, for example, greater cross-cultural and ethnic variety to allow for comparisons to be usefully made. It is our intention to focus on this over the coming year and publish updated findings in 2020.
- Research exploring interventions which may change conversational habits in the workplace. For example, Megan is studying how mindfulness practice might facilitate changes to our choices of speaking and listening up. A cautionary note here is that we receive many requests for recommendations for interventions based on 'best practice'; there is an assumption that there is some form of universal gold-standard that can be applied without reference to time or place. We do not consider this to be the case, however, at the same time, some organizations do this better than others and the research challenge is to find what it is that makes the difference and that could make a difference in other contexts.

- Exploration into the critical relationship that exists between employees and their immediate boss and how this affects speaking up at individual, team and organisational levels. This relationship is infused by experiences of, and attitudes to, how more powerful others are seen. For example, in John's work into how people construct their relationship to power¹⁷ these influences are seen as multi-faceted. These facets include the political and religious culture people grew up and live in, family and school experiences, the values of their professions and how much of their identity is invested in their authority. It would be of considerable value to explore how, in practice, organizations equip leaders and followers to notice and work with their unconscious and learnt relationship towards power. This is in contrast to approaches that 'disappear' power, as much popular work in the field of self-management often does.
- Research which takes a fresh and practical look at social bias in the workplace, specifically, how do we talk about and acknowledge that which we wish was not there? How do we live with both the best and worst aspects of ourselves? This is a considerable and fundamental job of work.

Concluding Remarks

Concluding Remarks

Our choices, and the choices of those around us to speak up, stay silent, listen or ignore what is going on have a profound impact on our lives. In the workplace, as we grapple with understanding and navigating power and status differences, we inevitably develop habits around what is okay to say and what is not, who we should and need to listen to and who we do not. These habits then affect the survival of our organisations, our engagement at work and whether we feel proud or ashamed of ourselves.

Research which seeks to inquire into the complexity of these habits, and which provides a foundation upon which individuals, teams and organisations can inquire collectively to improve psychological safety and transparency is therefore of upmost importance.

This report highlights some critical areas that require close examination if we are to intervene in our organisational systems to help speaking up. It is our sincere hope that it, along with the wider, ongoing research project on 'Speaking Truth to Power', contributes towards this aim.

Appendices



Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Would you speak up at work in order to...						
	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Challenge current ways of working/thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raise an issue of malpractice or unethical activity (i.e something improper, illegal or negligent)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offer new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you think junior, middle and senior employees in your organisation would speak up in order to...

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Junior employees						
Challenge current ways of working/thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raise an issue of malpractice or unethical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offer new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Middle managers						
Challenge current ways of working/thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raise an issue of malpractice or unethical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offer new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior employees						
Challenge current ways of working/thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raise an issue of malpractice or unethical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offer new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following questions ask about how guarded or open you are during your conversations at work, where **'guarded'** means you are cautious and wary with what you say, and **'open'** means you feel free to say whatever you think and feel.

How open or guarded are you during the following occasions?

	Very guarded	Somewhat guarded	Somewhat open	Very open
One-to-ones with 'boss' (or if you do not have a 'boss', someone you see as 'senior' to you)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal work meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal interactions at work (e.g. having a coffee, lunchtime, having a cigarette/ evening drink)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do the following things stop you speaking up?

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Fear of impacting promotion or pay opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of upsetting or embarrassing others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of being perceived negatively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of legal consequences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of confidence in own views or opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add any further comments in the box below:

Do you know something important, that if known about more widely could negatively impact your organisation?

Yes Maybe No

As you have answered yes or maybe, to the previous question, please tell us what you have done with this idea or suggestion:

I have spoken up about it to someone officially who could do something about it (either in person or written form)

Spoken up about it informally

I have decided not to speak up about this information

I am not sure what to do with this information

Please could you briefly explain why you have decided not to share this information?

Please could you briefly explain why you are not sure what to do with this information?

Imagine you were aware of a risk or problem in your organisation. How likely do you think these things will happen to you if you spoke up about it?

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
I will be rewarded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be ignored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be punished	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be supported	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be suppressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have an idea or suggestion, that could assist in your organisation's performance?

Yes
 Maybe
 No

As you have answered yes or maybe, to the previous question, please tell us what you have done with this idea or suggestion:

I have spoken up about it to someone officially who could do something about it (either in person or written form)

Spoken up about it informally

I have decided not to speak up about this information

I am not sure what to do with this information

Please explain why you have decided not to speak up about your idea or suggestion

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Please explain why you are unsure of what to do with your idea or suggestion

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Imagine you had an idea or suggestion in your organisation. How likely would you expect the following to happen to you if you spoke up about it?

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
I will be rewarded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be ignored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be punished	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be supported	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be suppressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you feel your 'boss':

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Is 'scary' (i.e you feel you need to be careful with what you say to them?)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sends more 'shut up' signals than 'speak up' signals? (i.e they send verbal and non-verbal signals that close you down rather than encourage you to speak up.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The last few questions are about **listening up** - how you invite others to speak up with their ideas and opinions.

Consider how you typically listen to others at work.

How often do you generally listen to others in your organisation when they are...

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Challenging current ways of working/ thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reporting malpractice or unethical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you think those in senior roles in your organisation listen to others when they are...

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Challenging current ways of working/ thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reporting malpractice or unethical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering new ideas or suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What stops you listening to others at work?

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Lack of time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People being unclear when they speak	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I question the value of others opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of forums where I get to hear what others think	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often are the opinions of these groups of people valuable to you in your day-to-day work?

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always	N/A
Those senior to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Those junior to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you consider yourself to be 'scary' to the following people? (in other words, how often might they feel they need to take care with what they say to you)

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always	N/A
Those senior to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Those junior to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you think you send more 'shut up' signals than 'speak up' signals to your colleagues? (i.e do you send verbal and non verbal signals that close down rather than encourage them to speak up)

Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly always	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you tend to go to the same trusted person or group when you are looking for ideas/opinions?

Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly always	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do the following forms of social bias affect the way you listen to others:

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Usually	Nearly Always	Always
Race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job title	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Age	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Survey Demographics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	1056	60.3%
Male	667	38.1%
Non-binary	4	0.2%
Prefer not to say	24	1.4%

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	65	3.7%
26-30	93	5.3%
31-35	173	9.9%
36-40	214	12.2%
41-45	257	14.7%
46-49	227	13.0%
50-55	360	20.6%
56-60	238	13.6%
61-65	84	4.8%
66-70	29	1.7%
71-75	4	0.2%
Over 75	2	0.1%
Missing data	5	0.3%

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
White/Caucasian	1368	78.1%
South Asian	91	5.2%
Other	61	3.5%
Black	56	3.2%
Prefer not to say	48	2.7%
Mixed	46	2.6%
East Asian	32	1.8%
Caribbean	16	0.9%
Middle Eastern	15	0.9%
Latino/Hispanic	13	0.7%
Missing data	5	0.3%

Job level	Frequency	Percentage
Executive board	115	6.6%
Senior management	462	26.4%
Middle management	610	34.8%
Junior	319	18.2%
Other	245	14%

Area of work	Frequency	Percentage
Government agency, public administration and defence	587	33.5%
Human health and social work	517	29.5%
Education	148	8.5%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	98	5.6%
Information Technology (IT), communication, media, PR and marketing	91	5.2%
Administrative and support service activities	68	3.9%
Wholesale and retail trade	43	2.5%
Financial and insurance	39	2.2%
Manufacturing	37	2.1%
Electricity, gas, oil, air conditioning	23	1.3%
Transport and storage	20	1.1%
Accommodation and food services	16	0.9%
Third sector/ charity	15	0.9%
Construction	14	0.8%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	12	0.7%
Real estate activities	10	0.6%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	9	0.5%
Mining and quarrying	4	0.2%

Region	Frequency	Percentage
UK	1376	78.6%
Continental Europe	217	12.4%
Australia, New Zealand and rest of Oceania	40	2.3%
Africa	24	1.4%
North America	24	1.4%
Middle East	22	1.3%
Eastern Asia (China, Hong Kong, Macao, Japan, Korea)	20	1.1%
Rest of Asia	13	0.7%
Southern Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)	10	0.6%
Central & South America, Caribbean	5	0.3%

About the authors

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Megan is Professor of Leadership and Dialogue at Hult Ashridge, where she speaks, researches, consults and supervises on the intersection of leadership, change, dialogue and mindfulness. She is on the Thinkers50 radar of global business thinkers and is ranked in HR Magazine's Most Influential Thinkers listing. She has

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She is mother to two wonderful daughters who test her regularly on her powers of mindfulness and dialogue.

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John Higgins

John is a researcher, tutor and coach specialising in how people use and abuse power at all levels in the workplace and society. He is widely published and has written and researched extensively alongside the faculty and students of the Hult Ashridge Executive Doctorate and Masters in Organizational Change.

His work is greatly informed by a long-term personal engagement in Jungian psychoanalysis and the experiences of his wife and daughters living in a gendered world. He is Research Director at The Right Conversation and Research Partner at Gameshift.

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ISBN: 978-1-910025-31-4

