



“How to enable a Culture in which Employees feel Free to Speak up?”

THINK TANK RESULTS (3 April 2019)

Following earlier Think tank that identified the need to break the circle of silence we focused this one on “How to enable a culture in which employees feel free to speak up?”

With a small but active group, we had a lively and productive discussion. The chart on the right illustrates the three enablers of a ‘speak-up culture’ in the view of the participants. **Company culture/management style** plays a leading role. Respondents talked about a culture of trust, respect, transparency and empowerment as well as the absence of fear, blame and gossip. Another enabler is the development of **skills and competencies** such as learning to address issues in a non-confrontational way, adopting open (non-defensive) attitudes and developing interpersonal skills that support teamwork and collaboration. The third enabler concerns **roles and responsibilities**. Management has to ‘walk-the-talk’ by encouraging feedback and using it positively. Employees need to take responsibility for speaking up.

Interestingly, **only 50%** of the respondents claimed to be (very) comfortable with speaking up at work, which means **there is still significant room for improvement**.

The table below with quotes of top and high synthetrons illustrates this in more detail

NEXT THINK TANK Wednesday 12 June 2019, 17-17.50 CET

The subject will be “How to turn around the factors that can kill a ‘speak up culture’ such as **fear, blame and gossip**”.

Register [here](#) or book the [link in your calendar](#)

THINK TANK Outcome Importance Graph 3 Enablers of a "Speak up Culture"

(by importance, # votes agree on topic)

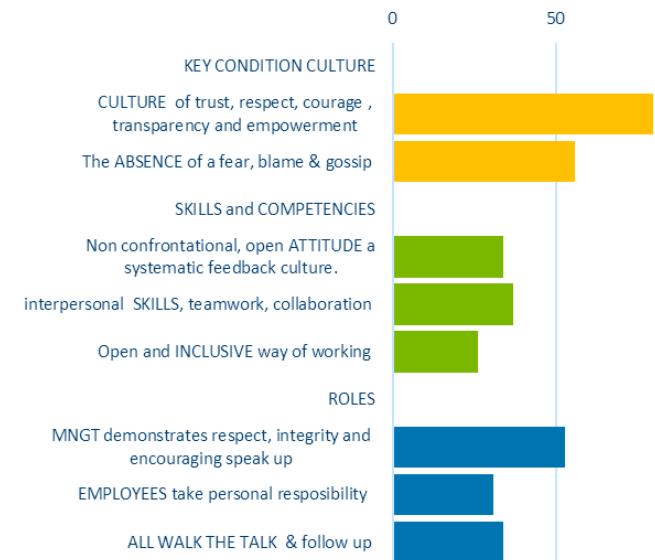


Table 1 Highest syntheurons from the think tank discussion *(text in italic)*

KEY CONDITIONS to put in place	SKILLS and COMPETENCIES to develop	ROLES to take
<p>1. MANAGEMENT STYLE/COMPANY CULTURE that encourages trust, respect, courage , transparency and empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Honest and transparent</i> <i>being open is all about trust - what are the possible repercussions</i> <i>#values: trust, transparency, respect</i> <i>#values respect fair- play support</i> <i>If you do not unconditionally put trust first on the table, nothing will change. Trust is a PRE-requisite</i> <i>#leadership active listening, delegation without removing responsibility, empowerment</i> <i>#value courage</i> <i>A culture of trust and respect</i> <i>#mytakeaway - 2. value respect for one another</i> <i>Authenticity at all levels</i> <p>2. The ABSENCE of a fear, blame and gossip mentality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>#rules no sanction for someone who spoke up</i> <i>#not everybody dares to be opened in an organisation</i> <i>#negative Fear culture</i> <i>#limits defensive culture : people always being in defensive mode, not 1. learning to listen and not taking things personally</i> <i>#limits - gossip and badmouthing behind people backs - Elaborates on: #limits when people don't speak up in meeting and use other channels to speak up afterwards</i> <i>#limits when people don't speak up in meeting and use other channels to speak up afterwards</i> <i>#values - everyone stops/intervenes backbiting, bullying, gossiping about others, undermining</i> <p>.... and things can change (cynical remark is rejected)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Disagreesyntheuron: bosses are always trying to assign blame...speaking up helps understand what went wrong, and assigns blame</i> 	<p>1. ABILITY to address issues non-confrontational, attitudes that are open and not defensive, a systematic feedback culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i># rules: encourage team feedback on each project</i> <i>#values the ability to address topics in non-confrontational style</i> <i>#limits leaders that says the like a free tone but do not accept critics</i> <i>#comfortable - I feel like my boss can handle suggestions and is open to change</i> <p>2. Interpersonal SKILLS that support team work, collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>#teamwork open and collaborative organisation</i> <i>#helped Giving the example myself and starting with a check-in. And ending with a check-out. How do people feel at the beginning of a meeting or conversation. gets you on a human level.</i> <i>#values moving out of internal competition</i> <i>#mytakeaway encourage personal involvement across teams</i> <p>3. Open and INCLUSIVE way of working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>#helped to let everybody speak in my team, freely and sustain there own opinions</i> <i>#positive individual contribution valued to encourage involvement</i> 	<p>1. MANAGEMENT to lead by demonstrating respect and integrity and encouraging employees to speak up without risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>#mytakeaway - Sr Mgt needs to above all else - have integrity, for people to respect and trust them</i> <i>#comfortable but it depends on the organizations and on the management</i> <i>#mytakeaway: this is both about staff and management, not either-or</i> <i>#lmytakeaway leading by promoting good examples</i> <i>Management that shows it really has no bad consequences to speak up</i> <i>#lmytakeaway best practices sharing to motivate people to innovate</i> <p>2. EMPLOYEES to take responsibility. This often requires a personal transformation and a helping open attitude</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>personal responsibility</i> <i># values responsibility</i> <i>#helped What helps me today is to have an objective, remind myself of the objective when I speak, and avoid judgment</i> <i>#helped change starts with individuals not organisations</i> <i>#mytakeaway: this is both about staff and management, not either-or</i> <p>3. ALL Consistently to WALK THE TALK & follow up if people speak up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Trust is gained through being consistent in what we do, it is not something we can just say we do</i> <i>#mytakeaway By walking the talk as a leader</i> <i># limits if nothing is done with the ideas employees have given - this discourages them from speaking up and contributing with ideas</i> <i>#mytakeaway make sure there are no contradicting messages in the organization between saying everybody is free to speak up and actions by management or other aspects of the culture</i>