



How to contain the elements that kill a 'Speak-up Culture'?

THINK TANK RESULTS (12 June 2019)

Two earlier think tanks confirmed the need to break the circle of silence and identified the enablers of a 'speak-up' culture. In this think tank, we focused on **HOW to contain the elements** (fear, blame, gossip and defensiveness) **that kill a 'speak-up' culture?**

We had a very lively and productive discussion (message per minute were significantly above our reference norm) with 22 participants from Europe and North America.

Participants identified not only the triggers that stifle a 'speak-up' culture but also the way forward to an open culture. The chart on the right illustrates the typical triggers and way forward viewed by the participants. The main **triggers** that kill openness are identified as: experiencing aggressiveness, ego & power and lack of respect.

The way forward has four enablers. First, **Values** of openness, inclusive listening supported by a code of conduct are prerequisites. However, living these values, **walk the talk**, and having 'people' key performance indicators is even more important. Participants expect a lot from leaders here. Yet, they confirm it is a **joint** responsibility for employees and management. A third enabler is about attitudes of **learning**: learn from mistakes, learn to communicate respectfully and learn to ask feedback. The fourth enabler is about the importance of **rewards** and praise that reinforce the values; but **addressing** non-compliance should not be forgotten!

Interestingly, **only 14% hardly ever** observed a situation where fear, blame or gossip killed a person's ability/inclination to speak up while 28% observed or experienced this often to very often. The table below with quotes of top and high synthetrons illustrates this in more detail.

THINK TANK Outcome Importance Graph

HOW to contain the elements that kill a 'speak-up' Culture?

(such as fear, blame, gossip and defensiveness)
(by importance, # votes agree on topic, = sum of reach)

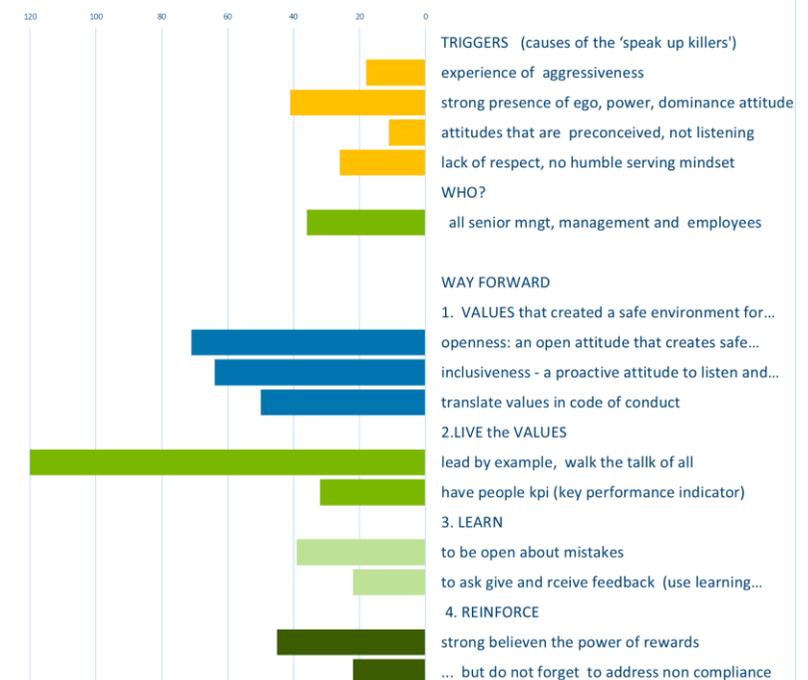


Table 1 Highest synthetrons from the think tank discussion per topic *(original- quote text in italic)*

KEY Triggers killers of a 'speak-up' culture	KEY Values to contain the killers of a 'speak-up' culture	ENABLERS to turn around killers of a 'speak-up' culture
<p>1. Experiencing aggression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#triggered when a personal attack occurs</i> • <i>#triggered person was rudely interrupted by other person speaking and no one supported the original speaker to finish her point.</i> <p>2. Strong presence of ego, power, dominance attitude present creating fear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#who mostly the person with the power ...It occurs on several levels, also on employee level where informal leaders not accept other opinions than the group opinion</i> • <i>Fear of promotion when speaking up about lack of time/resources to get a job done</i> <p>3. Attitudes that are preconceived, not listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#triggered- Not being seen for who I am, the fact that they assume the gossip is the truth instead of asking...</i> <p>4. Lack of respect, no humble serving mindset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#triggered EGO before EQ</i> • <i>#common cause lack of respect and appreciation, fixed mindset as opposed to growth mindset. A culture where people compete rather than collaborate</i> <p>WHO? all leaders, management and employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#triggered the attitude of senior management</i> • <i>It's not a management problem! Also within employees (sub)groups you see this behaviour!</i> • <i>exactly, a joint issue</i> <i>Elaborates on: It's not a management problem! Also within employees (sub)groups you see this behaviour!</i> 	<p>1. OPENNESS : open attitude that creates safe environment at all levels in an organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>learned: be open, positive. learn, make shared values about this and practice them</i> • <i>Put up your core value of openness</i> • <i>I feel like a lot of leaders are very capable, but they can use some coaching or training on how to do this. It is not easy creating a safe culture.</i> • <i>it is the most senior staff around that determines if there is openness and room for all to express themselves.</i> <p>2. INCLUSIVENESS - a proactive attitude to listen, engage and include others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#framing make an open culture part of your core company values</i> • <i>1. Understand the power dynamics within the organisation. Is everyone being heard (especially the minority - women, young people, ethnic minorities). Allow their voices to come through - through several channels.</i> • <i>creativity in finding solutions for the problem under discussion disappeared immediately</i> • <i>Focus more: 'invite' - how do I create an environment around me that people feel the room to speak up. At all levels.</i> <p>3. CODE of CONDUCT that creates a safe environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#worked well: #best being transparent and be a leader in letting everybody speak up... creating a safe place</i> • <i>#framing - setting the values and then openly and explicitly living after these</i> • <i>agree, but internal rules should be clear in the organisation as well</i> • <i>#common cause makes sure all persons involved in the discussion are being heard, and getting the opportunity to express themselves. This may need silencing of dominant persons and challenging the shy ones!</i> 	<p>2.LIVE the VALUES</p> <p>lead by example, walk the talk of all leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i># Real leadership that promotes people that walk the talk regarding "speak up"</i> • <i>#best - A CEO who leads by example, makes an effort to get to know staff well, who is honest, and helps reinforce values.</i> • <i>#... Don't say we want to hear your opinion and then don't listen</i> • <i>I am happy to read there seems to be a lot of agreement on the need from good examples from the top</i> • <i>Lead by the speak up example / Coherence and walk the talk</i> <p>.. and by management and employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>not only the top, it is a shared responsibility in my view</i> • <i>as a manager: give a good example / exactly, a joint issue</i> <p>have 'people' KPIs (key performance indicators)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#worked well create not only business KPIs but also people KPIs where you focus on the employee's wellbeing and speak up "level" they experience</i> • <i>... Also in the yearly evaluation of management and employees.</i> <p>3. LEARN</p> <p>learn to be open about mistakes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Instead of hiding (especially leaders), be open about mistakes. No cover up!</i> • <i>#worked well create safety, accept failures, encourage experimenting (rewards),</i> <p>feedback and learning attitude/formats/communication skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ask for feedback from your team</i> <p>4. REINFORCE</p> <p>strong belief in the power of rewards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recognise and award those who speak up. This is common for safety in Oil and Gas, and Aviation.</i> • <i>#framing Leading by fear is old school /#sanctions - better rewarding than sanctions, where you put the focus will grow</i> <p>... but do not forget to address non-compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>#sanctions: I think we believe mostly. Have a strategy to set values and engage all in them - we forget too often to address non-compliance with sanctions</i> • <i>#measures confronting staff with their behaviour, be very clear in that communication</i>

ADDENDUM

All synthecons per moderator question & weight (original- quotes text in italic)

Level	text
	Welcome to the business Think Tank. Today, we will be discussing how to contain and control the factors, such as fear, blame, gossip and defensiveness, that kill a 'speak up culture'.
low	<i>Clear! Thank you!</i>
	In the past year at work, how often have you observed a situation where fear, blame or gossip killed a person's ability/inclination to speak up and created a "harmful silence"?
medium	<i>Fear of promotion when speaking up about lack of time/resources to get a job done</i>
medium	<i>creativity in finding solutions for the problem under discussion disappeared immediately</i>
low	<i>What happened was that the person stopped sharing her things and even decided to quit the job</i>
low	<i>Co-workers did not dare to speak their minds</i>
low	<i>Whenever a colleague needed feedback in order to continue working on something, and got negative feedback instead of constructive, this would completely block out any willingness to continue the task ending in poor results</i>
low	<i>"Everybody knows" and nobody says it</i>
	Think back on your own experience or stories you have heard about when a "speak-up" culture was killed by someone using fear, blame or gossip. What typically triggered this situation of "harmful silence"? Start your sentence with #triggered
high	<i>#who - mostly the person with the power ...It occurs on several levels, also on employee level where informal leaders not accept other opinions than the group opinion</i>
medium	<i>#triggered The attitude of senior management</i>
medium	<i>#triggered when a personal attack occurs</i>
medium	<i>#triggered EGO before EQ</i>
low	<i>#triggered - person was rudely interrupted by other person speaking and no one supported the original speaker to finish her point.</i>
low	<i>Focus more 'invite' - how do I create an environment around me that people feel the room to speak up. At all levels.</i>

low	<i>a policy is only a start, it should be lived by action Elaborates on: #commoncause Have an anti-harassment policy and training.</i>
low	<i>Be open to listening. At all levels.</i>
low	<i>#commoncause lack of respect and appreciation, fixed mindset as opposed to growth mindset. A culture where people compete rather than collaborate</i>
low	<i>#common cause- get full support from upper management and from the team members</i>
low	<i>#triggered Not being seen for who i am, the fact that they assume the gossip is the truth instead of asking...</i>
low	<i>#triggered - no environment was created. Although good behavior and conduct was preached, practice was far from intention; management was not leading, only managing</i>
low	<i>#common cause - make sure all persons involved in the discussion are being heard, and getting the opportunity to express themselves. This may need silencing of dominant persons and challenging the shy ones! Elaborates on: #me did not feel good (afterwards) but achieved what I wanted... Elaborates on: #me wanted to reach a certain goal/conclusion at any cost....</i>
low	<i>very often one dominant person taking the floor all the time... Elaborates on: Management/leadership team forcing their view/solution/way of working upon everyone else, not listening to ideas of staff.</i>
low	<i>#triggered management had already made their mind up, and was not really interested to hear other's opinion; therefore become forceful</i>
low	<i>#commoncause Allow mistakes and courageous conversations</i>
low	<i>Non Violent Communication (Rosenberg)</i>
low	<i>#commoncause lack of humble and serving leadership at the top</i>
bottom	<i>#triggered - the absence of awareness of others that they were killing the speak up culture.</i>

What are the best ways to turn around the factors such as fear, blame and gossip that can kill a 'speak-up' culture? What have you observed that worked well?

top	<i>Instead of hiding (especially leaders), be open about mistakes. No cover up!</i>
top	<i># Real leadership that promotes people that walk the talk regarding "speak up"</i>
top	<i>#best - A CEO who leads by example, makes an effort to get to know staff well, who is honest, and helps reinforce values.</i>
top	<i>#worked well #best being transparent and be a leader in letting everybody speak up creating a safe place</i>
top	<i>#worked well create not only business KPIs but also people KPIs where you focus on the employees wellbeing and speak up "level" they experience</i>
high	<i>#well be clear about values and walk the talk. Don't say we want to hear your opinion and then don't listen Elaborates on: #best - A CEO who leads by example, makes an effort to get to know staff well, who is honest, and helps reinforce values.</i>
high	<i>I feel like a lot of leaders are very capable, but they can use some coaching or training on how to do this. It is not easy creating a safe culture. Elaborates on: #worked well #best being transparent and be a leader in letting everybody speak up creating a safe place</i>
high	<i>#framing Leading by fear is old school</i>
medium	<i>#framing make an open culture part of your core company values</i>
medium	<i>#framing setting the values and then openly and explicitly living after these</i>
medium	<i>Recognise and award those who speak up. This is common for safety in Oil and Gas, and Aviation.</i>
medium	<i>#worked well - create safety, accept failures, encourage experimenting (rewards),</i>
medium	<i>#framing make sure upper management leads by example and share this with the employees/team</i>
medium	<i>#sanctions: I think we believe - have a strategy to set values and engage all in them and forget too often to address non-compliance with sanctions</i>
medium	<i>#measures confronting staff with their behavior, be very clear in that communication</i>
medium	<i>#framing #sanctions: better rewarding than sanctions, where you put the focus will grow Elaborates on: #management Take action against bullies, even if this means firing them.</i>
low	<i>#sanctions rewarding good behaviour is more effective than sanctions</i>

open and trusting are key words here

Elaborates on: To me, this might not always be realistic, but there should at least be transparency about the decisions that are being made. Elaborates on: #best inclusive management: make sure all participate when a decision is being made

low

agree, but internal rules should be clear in the organisation as well

Elaborates on: #framing Leading by example tops internal rules Elaborates on: #measures - admit the problems, commit to doing better, emphasise that it takes time and keep working at it

low

#failuremngt Where people who are overly focused on KPIs to the detriment of team members/other employees' wellbeing

low

I think as a leader you need to create an atmosphere of trust by not judging, listening, not show your frustration too early.

low

#management look for the wisdom of the crowd. Be open to feedback

low

#measures a code of conduct openly promoted by leaders, and they show behavior accordingly

low

#Sanctions indeed name and shame is very negative and will not have the required effect Elaborates on: #sanctions - am not a fan of openly blame and shame; correct employees ftf in a private room by leaders

low

#organisation take ten minutes at the end of a meeting to reflect on the openness in that meeting and provide each other with useful feedback

**Take a minute to reflect on our short discussion - what surprised you, what did you learn from the others in this conversation, or what do you maybe not feel sure about....
What is the most effective way to contain the killers of "speak-up culture"?**

		medium	not only the top, it is a shared responsibility in my view Elaborates on: I am happy to read there seems to be a lot of agreement on the need from good examples from the top
		medium	Coherence and walk the talk
		medium	as a manager: give a good example
		medium	Make it part of your mission/strategy and policies. Also in the yearly evaluation of management and employees.
top	learned: be open, positive. learn, make shared values about this and practice them		
high	Lead by example	medium	It's not a management problem! Also within employees (sub)groups you see this behavior!
high	I am happy to read there seems to be a lot of agreement on the need from good examples from the top	medium	exactly, a joint issue Elaborates on: It's not a management problem! Also within employees (sub)groups you see this behavior!
high	Put up your core value of openness		
high	it is the most senior staff around that determines if there is openness and room for all to express themselves.	low	it takes courage and perseverance in case the senior management is the problem.....
high	Lead by the speak up example	low	Let me speak up by saying I liked the session
high	Ask for feedback from your team	low	Listen to and understand your culture and context. Then approach it in a safe way, so people can adjust, learn and grow into the new way of working.
medium	1. Understand the power dynamics within the organisation. Is everyone being heard (especially the minority - women, young people, ethnic minorities). Allow their voices to come through - through several channels.	low	big lever: sanctioning, condemning, intervening, speaking up when things go wrong to protect others...

Synthetron legend

Quantification

synthetrons

Synthetrons are messages that receive a certain consensus, the more important ideas the participants collectively identify. Synthetrons are selected by the group, based on the cumulated average score attributed by individual participants that is above a specific threshold set by the moderator. Synthetrons are passed on to more participants as long as they keep a high cumulative average score. They can express a cumulative agreement or disagreement.

The higher the message's reach, the more important the message has been deemed by the group. The classes are defined in the following order (Synthetron Level): top: > 90% reach, high: > 70 %, medium: > 40%, low :> 15% and bottom: < 15%.

Reach Percentage

It is the relative indicator of viral strength; i.e. the importance of the synthetron. Technically it is the percentage of participants that saw and scored the message before the message's average score fell below the scoring threshold.

Viral Reach

It is the absolute indicator of viral strength; i.e. the importance of the synthetron.

Sum of reach

It indicates the importance of certain themes or clusters of ideas. It is the sum of the viral reach of all synthetrons that express the same or similar opinion.
