One speak up program, many voices

Bridging generational, cultural, and organizational divides

A practical field guide for compliance professionals

How to use this workbook

This workbook is your thinking space, your planning tool, and your takeaway, all in one. Alongside our live workshop, this guide is designed to help you:

Understand why different groups experience compliance programs differently

Sharpen and tailor your compliance messaging

Map how these message travels through your organization

Plan what you'll do differently starting tomorrow

Work through each section during the workshop. Be honest. No one else needs to read this. The more specific your answers, the more useful this becomes when you're back at your desk on Monday.

Why people don’t speak up

Before we can improve a speak-up program, we need to understand what's actually getting in the way of its effectiveness.

Silence is rarely apathy. It's almost always a rational response to a perceived risk.

The three divides: generational, cultural, and organizational, each produce different versions of that risk calculation. A 22-year-old worker in Manila is not doing the same math as a 55-year-old finance director in Munich. Your program needs to account for both.

Work through each module. For each one, push past your assumptions about your "average" employee, because the average employee doesn't exist.

The generational divide

Different generations were shaped by different institutions, technologies, and workplace experiences. That shapes what they expect from a speak-up program.

	Gen Z born 1997–2012	**Millennials** born 1981–1996	**Gen X** born 1965–1980	**Boomers** born 1946–1964
Relationship to authority	Skeptical, expects transparency	Questions authority, values purpose	Self-reliant, low trust in institutions	Respects hierarchy, prefers formal channels
What builds trust	Visible action + digital access	Proof that reports lead to outcomes	Consistency and confidentiality	Senior leadership endorsement
Preferred channel	Anonymous app or digital tool	Online portal or ombudsperson	Direct conversation or email	Formal hotline or manager
Biggest fear	“It’ll be shared on Slack before Monday”	“Nothing will change”	“I’ll be labeled a troublemaker”	“I’ll damage my legacy here”
Red flag in your program	No mobile access / no anonymous option	No feedback loop after reporting	Inconsistent outcomes across teams	No visible executive involvement

> Tip: Most organizations have all four generations simultaneously. Your program needs to work for all of them.

Your turn

1. Which generation is most underserved by your current program?

2. What does your program currently do that works against that generation?

3. What is one thing you could change in the next 90 days to better reach them?

Notes

The cultural divide

Culture shapes whether speaking up feels like integrity or betrayal, and many programs unintentionally encourage one more than the other. Two dimensions matter most here. You don't need to memorize the theory, but you should recognize how they show up in your workforce.

Power Distance

How comfortable are people challenging or reporting someone above them in the hierarchy?

High power distance → Reporting a manager feels dangerous, disloyal, or simply never happens. Anonymous channels are critical. Peer reporting is rare.

Low power distance → People are more willing to challenge up. Direct reporting feels more natural. But they still need to see it work.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

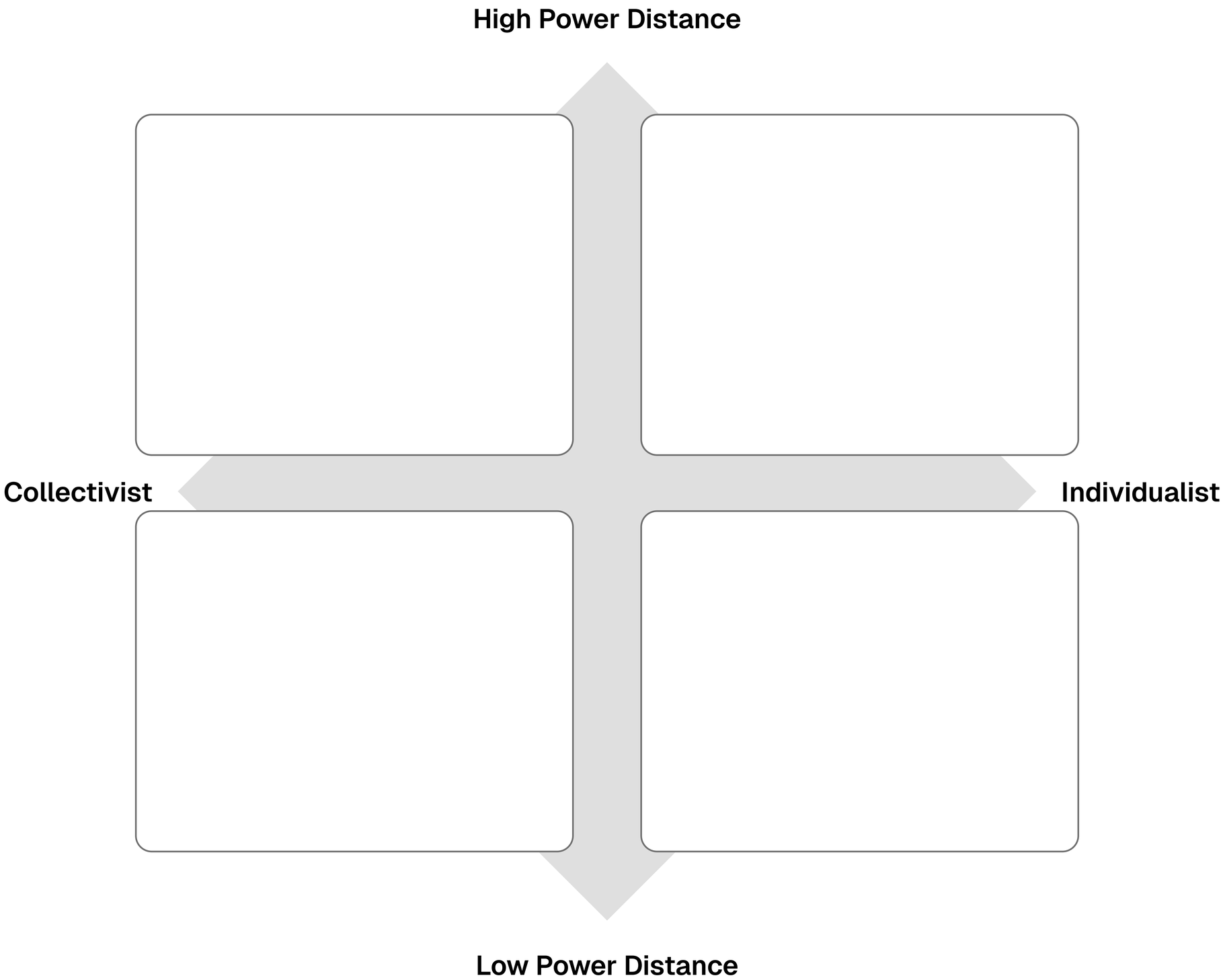
Does speaking up feel like a personal act of integrity, or a betrayal of the group?

Collectivist cultures → Loyalty to the team or family unit is paramount. Reporting a colleague can feel like destroying something sacred. Framing speak-up as protecting the group rather than exposing an individual is essential.

Individualist cultures → Personal ethics and individual accountability feel more natural as motivators. "Do the right thing" resonates. But it can underestimate peer pressure.

Your turn

Write your top 3 geographies or cultural groups in the quadrant where they roughly belong.



1. What does your current speak-up program assume about this dimension?

2. Which of your locations has the biggest gap between that assumption and reality?

3. What would you need to change for your program to work there?

> Tip: You may not be able to answer these questions right now, and that's okay. More important is your consideration of these factors and how they influence program improvements.

The organizational divide

Where someone sits in your organization shapes how they experience your speak-up program. A frontline worker and a senior executive, for example, face fundamentally different barriers.

	Frontline / Hourly	Mid-level Manager	Senior Leader / Executive	Other
Primary fear	Job loss, shift changes, peer ostracism	Being seen as disloyal to their team	Reputational damage, peer judgement	
Trust in anonymity	Low — “They’ll figure out it was me”	Medium — depends on track record	Low — “Everyone will know anyway”	
Relationship to the hotline	Often unaware or skeptical	Aware but may not use	May not think it applies to them	
What motivates reporting	Protecting themselves or colleagues	Protecting their team from fallout	Institutional integrity, legacy	
What leadership looks like	Immediate supervisor	Department head	C-suite, board, shareholders	

Tip: Use the last column to add a group that’s specific and important to your organization.

Your turn

Identify your 3 highest-risk employee groups — the ones most likely to witness misconduct and least likely to report it.

Group	Key barriers to speaking up	Does your program address this?
		Yes / Partially / No
		Yes / Partially / No
		Yes / Partially / No

For the group with the biggest gap, what would it take to earn their trust?

Segment your workforce

Considering everything that makes people unique, list your 5 most distinct employee groups and their key attributes.

#	Segment	Location	Role Type	Risk Exposure
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

> Tip: Go beyond job titles. Think about cultural background, tenure, location, and access to technology.

Put yourself in their shoes

For each segment, consider what would make you hesitate to speak up if you were in their shoes.

#	What they value	What they fear	What builds trust	What breaks trust
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

> Tip: When you're done, ask your favorite AI tool to test your assumptions and add considerations you might have missed.

Core compliance message

A good speak-up program starts with a core message that resonates with the entire company. If you had just 15 seconds, what would you say? Work through these steps to build a message that employees will understand, remember, and trust.

1. Start with the outcome, not the policy.

If our speak-up program works perfectly, employees will feel _____

and become _____ .

1. Identify the fear you must address.

Identify the fear you must address. If this fear is ignored, the message will not land.
What is the #1 hesitation employees have about speaking up?

Retaliation	Nothing will happen	Confidentiality concerns
Being labeled as difficult	Cultural discomfort	
Manager backlash	Something else?	

3. Define your promise.

When someone speaks up at our company, we promise to: _____ .

4. Define the shared responsibility.

We expect employees to: _____ .

5. Combine into the signature formula:

At _____ , speaking up is how we _____ so that

_____ . When you raise a concern, we commit to _____

and we ask you to _____ .

Testing the message

Does your message build a culture of integrity or simply enforce compliance?
Test it with these five filters.

1. **The 22-year old test:** Would an early-career, frontline employee understand your message immediately? If not, how could you simplify it?

2. **The skeptic test:** Would someone who distrusts management believe you? What would they find unrealistic?

3. **The fear test:** Does your message directly acknowledge the fears you identified earlier?

4. **The 15-second test:** Can your leadership team deliver this message naturally, without reading it?

5. **The integrity test:** Is this what you actually do... or what you hope to do?

Final impact

Put some finishing touches on your core message.

1. **Check for jargon:** If you removed words like “compliance” and “policy,” would your message still make sense?

2. **Cut the fluff:** Can you cross out 30% of your sentence? Short and simple is often most effective.

3. **Final check:** Can someone grasp the message in one read?

Now, finalize your core compliance message:

> “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” — Albert Einstein

Notes

Reaching your entire audience

A powerful message delivered through the wrong channel, by the wrong person, at the wrong moment is no message at all.

Communication channels at a glance

Category	Core strength	Primary gap it addresses
Traditional	Universal access; no technology required; legally established	Frontline, deskless, and low-tech workers
Digital & technology	Scalable; trackable; 24/7 availability; evidence capture	Office, hybrid, and mobile-first workers
Social & collaborative	Meets employees where they already communicate	Younger employees; informal-culture organizations
Human-centered	High trust; culturally adaptable; relational	High power-distance cultures; employees who fear digital systems
Creative & emerging	Normalizes speak-up as habit; reaches underserved segments	Preventative culture-building; global workforces

Messenger types at a glance

Type	Core strength	Primary gap it addresses
Senior leadership	Signals organizational priority; sets tone from the top	Low perceived commitment to speak-up culture
Direct managers	High daily trust; closest to employee experience	Frontline and desk-less workers; teams in high power-distance cultures
HR & compliance	Process credibility; confidentiality expertise	Employees unsure of formal reporting procedures
Peer advocates	Relatable; no authority threat; informal influence	Younger employees; skeptical or disengaged teams
External / third-party	Neutrality; psychological safety from outside the organization	Employees who fear retaliation or distrust internal channels

> Tip: Is your channel mix is driven by convenience for compliance, or by what actually reaches your workforce?

Communication methods

Here’s a long (but non-exhaustive) list of communication channels.
Check the ones you currently use and circle the ones you’d like to add into your program.

Traditional channels

Classic methods that are still relevant for formal compliance communication

- [ ] Email communications
- [ ] Printed materials
- [ ] In-person meetings
- [ ] Training sessions
- [ ] Newsletteres

Digital & online channels

Modern, scalable ways to reach employees across locations

- [ ] Intranet portals
- [ ] Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- [ ] Internal chat/messaging platforms
- [ ] Corporate social networks
- [ ] Video communications
- [ ] Webinars / Live streams
- [ ] Digital signage

Interactive / engagement-focused channels

Designed to increase engagement, retention, and behavior reinforcement.

- [ ] Gamification
- [ ] Scenario-based tools
- [ ] Mobile apps
- [ ] Surveys & polls
- [ ] Peer-to-peer programs

Creative / out-of-the-box channels

Surprise employees and make compliance feel more approachable

- [ ] Storytelling and micro-content
- [ ] Infographics & visuals
- [ ] Podcasts / internal audio
- [ ] QR codes
- [ ] Interactive kiosks
- [ ] Office nudges / physical prompts
- [ ] Social-style campaigns
- [ ] Escape rooms / simulation games

Executive & leadership channels

Critical for top-down influence and modeling behaviour

- [ ] Executive videos / CEO messages
- [ ] Leadership Q&A sessions
- [ ] Policy endorsement

External / stakeholder channels

Compliance communication isn’t just internal

- [ ] Vendor & partner portals
- [ ] Third-party newsletters
- [ ] Workshops & seminars
- [ ] Regulatory alerts

Reinforcement & feedback channels

Channels that support continuous improvement

- [ ] Anonymous reporting tools
- [ ] Metrics dashboards
- [ ] Follow-up communications
- [ ] Recognition programs

Add your own

What other communication methods do you use?

- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____

Who, what, how?

For each of your employee segments, what adjustments need to be made to your core message? What are the most useful channels for reaching them? Refer to your thoughts on pages 8-9 and copy those segments here.

#	Segment	Key messaging considerations	Most useful communication channels
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Tip: If the same message needs to reach different groups, consider creating 2–3 variations rather than one compromise.

Notes

Campaign briefing

You’ve thought of your audience. You’ve refined your message. You’ve even found a few new ways to share that message. The last step is a smart plan.

Below is a marketing-style campaign brief, designed to help you think through the steps needed to launch a successful communication initiative. Recreate this in a system that works well for you so that you can fill in the blanks and launch new campaigns easily and effectively.

1. Title and description
Describe the overall campaign in a few words.

2. Purpose
Describe why this campaign is important to the organization.

3. Objectives
Define clear goals and outcomes you plan to achieve.

4. Target Audience(s)
Define one or more clear audience segments, knowing each may have unique needs.

5. Messaging and tone
Add a few bullet points about the message you want to get across. Include multiple variations based on different audience segments.

6. Assets and deliverables
Think through everything that will need to be created for this campaign: writing, emails, printed assets, meetings, etc.

7. Stakeholders
Who is involved in the execution of this campaign? Note those responsible, accountable, consulted and informed (RACI).

8. Budget
What do you realistically need for this campaign to be successful, and who will need to approve the budget?

9. Timeline
Create a reasonable timeline considering preparation, approval, and delivery.

10. Distribution process
List the various steps, methods, and people needed to get your campaign into the right hands.

Once you’ve thoughtfully completed this briefing the work becomes easy. You can hand this to writers, designers, team members, or your favorite AI helper to improve and execute!

> Tip: Use the communication cadence planner on the following sheet to plan and execute a long-term campaign that sticks.

Communication cadence plan

Below is a simple yet useful template for helping plan long-term communications.
Recreate this in a system that works well for you, and review it with your team at least monthly.

1. Use the top row for a cadence that works well for you: weekly, monthly, or quarterly.
2. In the left column, list the main communication channels you plan to use (see earlier examples).
3. Now, fill in key communication activities.

	Quarter 1			Quarter 2		
	January	February	March	April	May	June
Main Focus						
Email						
Meetings						
Trainings						

> Tip: Some channels are used more frequently than others. Let usage patterns guide the density.

Accountability plan

Top gaps

List the top 3 gaps in your current program:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Three-month action plan

For each of your top program gaps, what one thing you can do:

By day 30	By day 60	By day 90
Alone, no budget	With your team	With stakeholders

One commitment

“By _____, I will _____ so that _____ employees feel

_____ about speaking up.”

_____

Signature & date

Accountability

Who holds you accountable? Have you met someone at this workshop you can check in with in 30, 60, and 90 days and compare notes? Write their contact information below.

_____

_____

_____

> Tip: Some channels are used more frequently than others. Let usage patterns guide the density.

Notes

Thank you for taking part in our workshop

About SpeakUp

SpeakUp is a leading provider of ethics and compliance technology, designed to simplify the way organizations manage risk and foster transparent workplace cultures. The platform enables employees to easily understand, report, and disclose ethics and compliance matters, while offering compliance officers a centralized system to manage daily workflows.

Learn more

speakup.com

SpeakUp®

Doing right,
made easy