

# 7 Mistakes That Undermine Your Speak-Up Program

How reporting gaps,  
slow investigations and  
weak follow-through  
erode employee trust



# Introduction



A strong speak-up culture doesn't happen by accident.

Employees raise concerns when they believe their voices matter, their reports will be handled fairly and leadership will take action. When trust is high, organizations gain valuable insight into risk, misconduct and cultural challenges before they become larger problems.

But trust is fragile.

Even well-intentioned programs can lose credibility when investigations drag on, communication breaks down or employees fear retaliation. Over time, these gaps erode trust, discourage reporting and reduce visibility into the issues that matter most.

The good news? Most of these challenges are fixable.

In this guide, we'll explore seven common mistakes that undermine speak-up programs and practical steps organizations can take to build stronger employee trust.

Mistake 1

Letting investigations drag on

Slow investigations send the wrong message

When employees report a concern, they expect action. If weeks turn into months without resolution, confidence in the process begins to fade.

Employees may assume their report was ignored, leadership doesn't care or the organization isn't equipped to respond effectively.

Why it matters

- Trust erodes when cases remain unresolved
- Backlogs increase compliance and legal risk
- Serious issues can escalate while investigations are pending
- The investigation process sets the tone for the resolution

What leading organizations do differently

Organizations with healthy speak-up cultures treat responsiveness as a priority by.

- Establishing clear investigation timelines
- Defining ownership for every case
- Regularly reviewing aging investigations
- Escalating high-risk matters quickly
- Maintaining visibility across all open cases
- Keeping reporters informed throughout the process

NAVEX Whistleblowing & Incident Management helps teams streamline investigations with centralized case management, automated workflows and visibility into aging cases, making it easier to resolve concerns promptly and consistently.



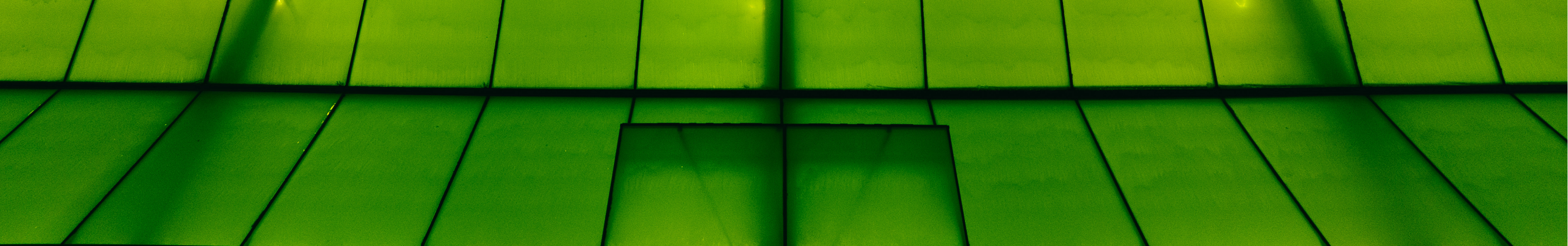
Data spotlight

33%

The increase in case closure time from 2024 to 2025

Quick self-check

How many open investigations in your program are older than 30, 60 or 90 days?



Mistake 2

Going silent after a report is submitted

No news is rarely good news

One of the fastest ways to lose employee trust is failing to communicate after a report is received. Employees don't expect every detail of an investigation, but they do expect to feel that someone is listening.

Without updates, reporters often assume nothing is happening.

Why it matters

- Lack of follow-up and ongoing communication discourages future reporting
- Silence creates frustration and skepticism
- Anonymous reporters may disengage, potentially leaving out valuable information
- Reporter experience influences overall program credibility and extends beyond the individual experience

What leading organizations do differently

They make communication part of the process by:

- Setting expectations immediately after intake
- Providing regular status updates when appropriate
- Enabling secure two-way communication
- Training investigators and managers on reporter communication practices
- Using consistent communication workflows
- Monitoring engagement and follow-up activity

NAVEX solutions supports secure two-way communication, including anonymous follow-up, helping organizations keep reporters informed while maintaining confidentiality.



Data spotlight

42%

of managers do not consistently know how to handle or escalate employee concerns

Quick self-check

If you filed a report today, would you know what happens next?

Mistake 3

Treating retaliation as a policy instead of a risk

Policies don’t prevent retaliation, people do

Most organizations have anti-retaliation language somewhere in their policies – the challenge is what happens after a report is filed.

Employees are far more likely to speak up when they believe the organization actively monitors for retaliation and responds quickly when concerns arise.

Why it matters

- Fear suppresses reporting
- Subtle retaliation often goes unnoticed
- Trust can disappear after a single negative experience
- Managers need ongoing reinforcement and guidance

What leading organizations do differently

They view retaliation prevention as an ongoing responsibility.

Effective organizations:

- Follow up with reporters after investigations close
- Monitor employment actions involving reporters
- Train managers regularly
- Reinforce anti-retaliation expectations year-round
- Investigate retaliation concerns independently
- Track retaliation trends over time

NAVEX combines Whistleblowing & Incident Management with Ethics & Compliance Training and Policy & Procedure Management to help organizations reinforce anti-retaliation expectations and monitor concerns throughout the reporting lifecycle.

Data spotlight

51%

of compliance professionals say negative career consequences are the biggest fear preventing employees from speaking up.

Quick self-check  
What happens after a case closes to ensure the reporter remains protected?



Mistake 4

Assuming employees know how to report concerns

If employees don't know where to go, they won't speak up

Many organizations launch reporting channels and assume awareness will take care of itself, but unfortunately, awareness fades quickly without consistent communication.

Employees need regular reminders about when, where and how to report concerns.

Why it matters

- Reporting channels require ongoing promotion
- Employees prefer different reporting options
- Frontline workers may have different accessibility needs
- Awareness directly impacts reporting activity

What leading organizations do differently

They make reporting visible and accessible by:

- Promoting reporting channels year-round
- Offering multiple reporting methods
- Including reporting information in onboarding
- Reinforcing expectations through training
- Integrating reporting guidance into policies and codes of conduct
- Measuring employee awareness regularly

NAVEX helps increase awareness of reporting channels through accessible reporting tools, employee training and policy communications that reinforce when and how to speak up.



Data spotlight

1.06  
vs  
2.36

Reports per 100 Employees for organizations that track web and hotline only, versus those that track all sources.

Quick self-check

Would a new employee know exactly how to report a concern on their first day?



Mistake 5

Leaving third parties out of the conversation

Risk doesn’t stop at your employee population

Suppliers, contractors, vendors and business partners often see risks employees never encounter.

If they don’t have a way to raise concerns, organizations lose valuable visibility.

Why it matters

- Third-party ecosystems continue to expand
- External stakeholders may identify issues earlier
- Regulatory expectations around third-party relationships are increasing
- Third-party reporting strengthens due diligence efforts

What leading organizations do differently

They extend reporting access beyond employees to include third-parties.

Leading organizations:

- Offer reporting channels to third parties
- Communicate expectations during vendor onboarding
- Include reporting guidance in supplier materials
- Monitor third-party reporting trends
- Integrate reporting into due diligence processes
- Provide globally accessible reporting options

NAVEX whistleblowing solutions provide reporting access for employees and third parties, helping you gain greater visibility into risks across their extended business ecosystem.



Data spotlight

10%

of whistleblowing reports were submitted by third parties in 2025.

Quick self-check

Can your suppliers and contractors easily report concerns today?



# Measuring volume instead of impact

## More reports don't automatically mean success

One of the most common reporting metrics is total report volume. Though useful, volume alone tells only part of the story. Healthy programs focus on what happens after a report is received.

### Why it matters

- High volume isn't always positive
- Low volume isn't always negative
- Root causes often reveal larger issues
- Outcomes provide a clearer picture of program effectiveness

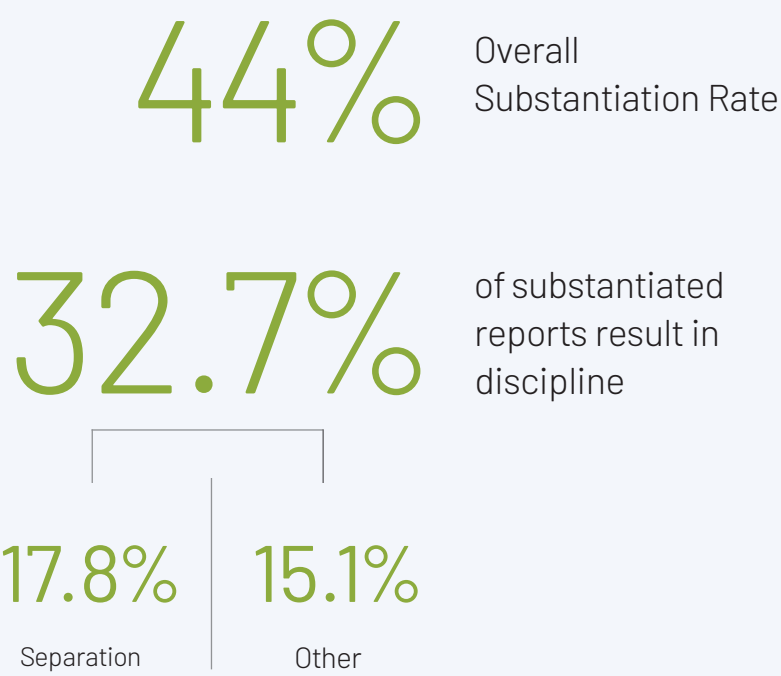
## What leading organizations do differently

They look beyond intake numbers. Effective organizations are able to use their data to tell a story by:

- Monitoring substantiation rates
- Tracking investigation outcomes
- Conducting root cause analysis
- Analyzing trends by location and risk category
- Using reporting data to improve training and policies
- Benchmarking performance against peers

NAVEX Analytics & Benchmarking provides insight into reporting trends, substantiation rates, outcomes and peer benchmarks, helping you move beyond report counts to evaluate program effectiveness.

## Data spotlight



### Quick self-check

Can you explain how reporting data has improved your culture over the last year?

Mistake 7

Treating your speak-up program like a compliance requirement

Speak-up programs are culture tools first

Organizations sometimes view reporting programs as a way to satisfy regulatory expectations, but employees view them differently.

For employees, reporting systems reflect their company's values, and how concerns are handled sends a powerful message about accountability, fairness and trust.

Why it matters

- Leadership behavior shapes speak-up culture
- Employees pay attention to outcomes
- Strong cultures surface risks earlier
- Reporting systems can drive organizational learning

What leading organizations do differently

They connect reporting to culture. Leading organizations:

- Position speaking up as everyone’s responsibility
- Encourage leaders to model ethical behavior
- Reinforce the value of raising concerns
- Use findings to improve policies and training
- Connect reporting insights to risk management efforts
- Regularly assess employee trust and perceptions of fairness

NAVEX One brings together everything you need to run an effective ethics, risk and compliance program to help you strengthen trust, accountability and speak-up culture across the enterprise.

Data spotlight

70%

of senior leaders are seen to encourage ethical behavior, yet only 50% persist in their commitment in the face of competing business objectives.

Quick self-check

Do employees see your reporting program as protection for the company or support for the people within it?



# Conclusion



## Strong speak-up cultures are built one action at a time

The most effective speak-up programs share a common foundation: trust.

They make reporting easy, investigate concerns promptly, communicate consistently and monitor for retaliation. And they use reporting insights to strengthen culture, not just satisfy compliance requirements.

The result is a workplace where employees feel confident raising concerns and leaders gain the visibility they need to manage risk proactively. Company values are only felt if they are practiced

Improving a speak-up culture is not a one-time project. It's an ongoing commitment to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Ask yourself:

Which of these seven mistakes poses the biggest risk to your program today?

## How NAVEX can help

Creating a strong speak-up culture requires more than a reporting channel. It requires connected processes that support reporting, investigations, accountability and continuous improvement.

NAVEX solutions help organizations:

- Increase visibility into employee and third-party concerns
- Streamline investigations and case management
- Support anti-retaliation efforts
- Strengthen reporting awareness and accessibility
- Identify trends through analytics and benchmarking
- Connect reporting insights to broader risk and compliance initiatives

With integrated solutions for Whistleblowing & Incident Management, Ethics & Compliance Training, Policy & Procedure Management, Risk & Governance, Third-Party Risk Management and more, NAVEX helps organizations build trust and strengthen speak-up culture across the enterprise.



NAVEX is trusted by thousands of customers worldwide to help them achieve the business outcomes that matter most. As the global leader in integrated risk and compliance management software and services, we deliver our solutions through the NAVEX One platform, the industry's most comprehensive governance, risk and compliance (GRC) information system.

For more information, visit [NAVEX.com](https://navex.com) and our [blog](#). Follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

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