



Attitudes to Whistleblowing

A study into how different generations perceive and engage with whistleblowing across the United Kingdom.



Supported by



Contents

1. **Introduction**
2. **Terms and definitions**
3. **Willingness to speak up**
4. **Internal whistleblowing**
5. **Reporting via social media and the press**
6. **Trust and workplace culture**
7. **Key recommendations**

Introduction

The world of work has changed irretrievably in recent years. Globalisation, the rise in new digital technologies and the rapid shift to remote working and flexible work arrangements, accelerated by the Covid pandemic, have not only altered how people interact with their employers but also how they perceive their roles within an organisation and the broader ethical responsibilities that come with it.

So what does this mean for those entering the workplace now and those who have been working for many years? Expectations around what work means have changed considerably now we do not expect to sit at a desk or be tied to a line manager permanently. How does this impact the workplace when things go wrong or where problems arise?

The concept of whistleblowing is not new, but it has evolved considerably over the past few decades. The perception is that the older generation of workers entered workplaces with hierarchical structures and limited transparency. In contrast younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, have grown up in an era of rapid technological change, social movements (such as Black Lives Matter and MeToo), and a greater emphasis on corporate social responsibility, potentially making them more inclined to report unethical practices.

This briefing explores the shifting generational attitudes toward whistleblowing in the UK, focusing on several key themes. We will look at how the barriers to speaking up, including fears of retaliation and damage to career prospects, differ by age and stage of career. As ever the perception of the employer, whether they are seen as supportive or

retaliatory, plays a pivotal role in determining whether staff feel comfortable raising concerns.

In this briefing, we will examine how these factors have evolved in the post-pandemic era and what they reveal about generational differences in the UK workforce. Through this analysis, we aim to better understand the dynamics of whistleblowing in the contemporary workplace and provide recommendations for organisations looking to foster a culture of openness and accountability.

Key Themes

Do the different generations prioritise issues in the same way?

Are younger workers more likely to blow the whistle on behaviour, while older employees are inclined to report fraud or financial mismanagement?

Is there a shift from formal channels (such as reporting through HR, the whistleblowing team or a designated hotline) to informal (such as speaking directly with a colleague or manager)?

Is there a generational difference in whether staff are willing to blow the whistle via social media and the press?



Foreword by Bryn Parry-Jones

**Lloyds Banking Group (LBG) Group
Conduct Investigations (GCI) Director**

As one of the United Kingdom's largest financial services organisations, Lloyds Banking Group is dedicated to fostering a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability. We believe that speaking up is vital for maintaining a healthy workplace culture, thereby building trust within our organisation and with the customers and communities we serve. This principle aligns with our purpose of 'helping Britain prosper' by ensuring we operate in a way that is fair, responsible, and inclusive.

We value our relationship with Protect and are proud to have signed the Protect Members' Pledge as a demonstration of our commitment to promoting openness and taking our responsibilities seriously. Protect's expertise spans sectors including finance, healthcare, education, government, and the charity sector. Through their guidance, training, and advocacy, Protect plays a vital role in strengthening whistleblowing frameworks nationwide by supporting individuals who raise concerns, ensuring they feel heard and protected. Our shared ambition is to help shape workplace cultures where speaking up is regarded as a strength, and where ethical behaviour is actively championed.

We also recognise that attitudes towards whistleblowing are influenced by numerous factors, such as personal experiences, organisational culture, and generational perspectives. We are therefore proud to support Protect's research, which explores how the UK workforce views whistleblowing today. This study provides valuable insights into the barriers that may hinder individuals from raising concerns, the types of issues they are most likely to report, and the preferred channels for reporting. It also highlights how these perspectives vary across distinct stages of professional experience, reflecting the diverse expectations and realities faced by workers.

These findings offer actionable guidance for organisations striving to cultivate inclusive, psychologically safe environments, where speaking up is naturally integrated into the culture. By understanding these differences, employers across all industries can take significant steps to strengthen their speak up cultures. Whether it involves improving awareness of reporting channels, addressing fears of retaliation, or facilitating open conversations, this research provides a timely and practical foundation for action. We hope it inspires reflection, dialogue, and progress - because when individuals feel safe to voice their concerns, everyone benefits.

Terms and definitions

Definitions

Whistleblowing/Speak Up

We define whistleblowing or 'speaking up' as a worker raising a concern with someone in authority – internally and/or externally (e.g. to regulators, MPs or the media) – about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice that affects others. This briefing uses the terms 'whistleblowing' and 'speaking up' interchangeably.

Open concerns

Where the whistleblower is unconcerned about their identity being connected to the raising of the concerns.

Confidential concerns

Where the organisation makes assurances and efforts to protect the whistleblower's identity.

Anonymous concerns

Where the organisation has no information regarding the identity of the whistleblower.

The UK legal protection for whistleblowers

It is unlawful to treat a whistleblower detrimentally or dismiss them under the Employment Rights Act. As a result, a whistleblower has a legal remedy if they are treated detrimentally or dismissed for raising whistleblowing concerns. This can apply whether the disclosure is made internally – to their employer – or externally – to a regulator, MP or the media (although different legal tests apply).

Generation age brackets

Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964
Generation X	1965 to 1980
Millennials	1981 to 1996
Generation Z	1997 to 2012

Research Methodology

YouGov survey

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2121 adults, including 140 aged 18-24. Fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd - 3rd June 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Focus Groups

Participants were recruited using a national recruitment agency. They all work for employers with 1000+ staff. The focus groups were moderated by an independent facilitator following the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. We organised two groups, the first with participants aged 20-35, and the second with participants aged 40-60. Each focus group was made up of five participants, they were conducted between 3rd – 5th June 2025. Where focus group participants are quoted in this briefing, their names have been changed, to make them anonymous.

Willingness to speak up

Ensuring staff are confident to speak up is the cornerstone of any effective whistleblowing programme. In general, all age groups in our survey said they would speak up if they witnessed wrongdoing or malpractice in the workplace with the majority (61%) opting to speak to their line manager or supervisor about it. But some generations were more willing to speak up than others. The research found that both the type of concerns witnessed, as well as the age of the person were factors in whether the concern would be raised.

“For me whistleblowing almost feels like something you would do to expose something kind of external to the company. It feels very formal. Whereas just speaking out is like anyone can talk.”

– Rebecca, age 33

“Speaking out on patient safety, you know that is paramount. [...] Safety is paramount for us [...] But we are also, you know human beings that we can potentially become patients if we're not looked after.”

– Zain, age 41

Willingness to speak up is dependent on age

It is significant that across every area of potential wrongdoing – from health and safety to fraud and bullying – the younger workers (18-24 year-olds) said they were less likely to raise a concern with their employer compared to every other generation. This could come down to the fact this age group is relatively new to the workplace and the concept of whistleblowing or speaking up. Compared to more experienced colleagues, this group may not know about the type of issues that can be raised and how to raise them, and they may face additional barriers to speaking up which we explore below.

Remarkably the survey results showed that for a fifth of the oldest age group (55+), there is nothing that would hold them back from raising whistleblowing concerns.

Table 1

Question: Which, if any of the following would prevent you from raising whistleblowing concerns at work?

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Not applicable – nothing would prevent me from raising whistleblowing concerns at work	8%	14%	10%	15%	22%

Willingness to speak up is dependent on the concern that has been witnessed

We found a clear difference between the generations on the type of wrongdoing that would trigger reporting. In the survey when we asked what whistleblowing concerns respondents were likely to raise, 86% of those aged 55 and over said health and safety concerns compared to only 56% of the 18–24 year-olds. The biggest area of concern for the youngest workers was addressing sexual harassment with 67% saying they would raise it if they witnessed it at work.

Table 2

Question: Which, if any, of the following issues/concerns you are likely to raise if you witnessed the incident in the workplace?

<i>Respondents ticked all that applied</i>	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Someone's health or safety being put in danger	56%	70%	77%	80%	86%
Someone stealing or defrauding money from your employer, customer or service user	59%	64%	71%	75%	79%
If I believe someone is covering up wrongdoing	36%	51%	58%	58%	60%
The company breaking the law (for example does not have the right insurance)	43%	51%	56%	55%	59%
Actions that risk or actually damage the environment	39%	47%	48%	47%	46%
Breach of company policy	29%	35%	38%	40%	36%
Discriminatory behaviour	55%	66%	67%	67%	64%
Sexual harassment	67%	76%	77%	77%	78%
Racial harassment	62%	68%	70%	72%	71%
Bullying	60%	69%	72%	76%	80%

Barriers to raising concerns

When it comes to looking at the barriers to speaking up – a key determinant to the success of internal whistleblowing arrangements – our survey asked what would prevent people from raising whistleblowing concerns at work.

Unsurprisingly job security and treatment at work were the dominant factors for most people: when the age groups were combined, 44% identified fear of job loss as the biggest barrier to raising concerns. But we saw a decline in concern over damage to career as people got older – with 40% of 18-24s selecting this compared to 20% of the 55+ group. The older someone is, the more senior and settled they are likely to be. The fact that they may also have had the time to build a network of allies and feel valued in their job can all lessen the worries of damaging a career.

Table 3

Which, if any of the following would prevent you from raising whistleblowing concerns at work?

<i>Respondents ticked all that applied</i>	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Fear of reprisals	41%	28%	33%	47%	50%	41%
Fear of job loss	44%	45%	48%	45%	45%	40%
Damage to my career	32%	40%	39%	40%	25%	20%
Damage to my mental health	29%	25%	27%	37%	29%	22%
Worry that my identity would not be protected	39%	35%	42%	39%	42%	36%
If I thought nothing would happen after reporting it	36%	26%	36%	40%	36%	36%
Thinking that someone else should be the one to report it instead	7%	16%	8%	6%	3%	5%
Fear of risking other people's jobs	20%	34%	20%	20%	18%	17%
Not applicable – nothing would prevent me from raising whistleblowing concerns at work	14%	8%	14%	10%	15%	22%

“For me, [issues that I think would be important to call out] are all sorts of bullying in the workplace, sexism.”

– Rebecca, age 33

“The correct process would be for my team to come to me as the first port of call. If I can't help to rectify it, then I would turn around and say: What do you want to do with this?”

– James, age 33

Barriers that impacted particular age groups

The survey data and the focus group research highlighted barriers which were particular to different generations.

- For Millennials (35-44 year-olds), damage to mental health was a key concern (37%), more than any other age group.
- The youngest age group (18-24 year-olds) were much more concerned about risking other peoples' jobs than the other age groups – 34% of 18-24 year olds compared to 17% of the oldest age group (55+).
- The youngest age group also had the highest proportion of those who would not report a concern, "thinking that someone else should be the one reporting it instead" – 16% compared to 7% of all age groups combined (and significantly higher than the 3% of the 45 to 54 year-olds).

Conclusions

Knowing what your staff are more or less motivated to speak up about will help organisations craft appropriate messages and address specific worries. From both the survey data and the focus groups, the older generations seem more confident about speaking up. Newer, less experienced members of staff seem to need more assistance, particularly in understanding the type of concerns that can be raised through whistleblowing. Clear messaging that organisations want and expect their staff to report concerns, and reassuring staff that raising concerns is the best way to safeguard the organisation and the public who use the organisation's services, is especially important for younger staff. The newest recruits in a workplace, the freshest pairs of eyes, are usually more likely to spot issues than those who have become accustomed to embedded behaviours. It is therefore especially important that employers communicate clearly on whistleblowing when on-boarding new staff and regularly review their whistleblowing arrangements to build trust and confidence.

"So you might just be like, okay, well, at the end of the day it's not affecting me personally. Is it worth raising? Is it that important at the end of the day? Because it's like, okay, even if that person does end up, you know, being held accountable for it, do you want to be involved in that kind of thing?"

– Yousuf, age 26



Internal whistleblowing

Having effective whistleblowing arrangements relies on a number of factors but starts with having clear and accessible ways for staff to raise concerns. This research looks at methods of raising whistleblowing concerns to ascertain whether preferences and differences emerge between the generations. Our survey asked what action people would take if they witnessed wrongdoing or malpractice in the workplace that affected others. Across all age groups the highest scoring/most popular response was talking to a line manager/supervisor (61%) followed closely by following the employer's whistleblowing process – with 42% of respondents selecting this option.

Table 4

If you were to witness wrongdoing or malpractice in the workplace that affected others ...Which, if any, of the following actions would you take?

<i>Respondents ticked all that applied</i>	Total	18-24	24-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Nothing – I would just ignore it	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	1%
Leave and find a new job	4%	8%	5%	6%	4%	3%
Follow my employer's whistleblowing process	42%	27%	36%	44%	42%	47%
Tell my manager/supervisor about it	61%	61%	63%	63%	59%	59%
Tell someone else – friends, family etc	22%	33%	26%	21%	22%	19%
Tell your union rep	18%	21%	15%	13%	14%	22%
Post about it on social media	2%	5%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Go to the press/media	3%	13%	2%	2%	5%	1%

“You can always go up to your line manager and speak to them and get advice before you raise it. It depends on severity of the issue. But you can always have the conversation with your line manager, and they're pretty open to it.”

– Yousuf, age 26

Raising concerns with family or friends

What stood out from the data is that a third of the youngest age group (18-24 year-olds), and a quarter of the young Millennials (25-34) said they would tell someone else, a friend or family member. This can potentially be seen as an indicator of their lack of experience in the workplace and the need to run things past someone else – someone independent that they trust. This option was also a factor for other age groups but to a lesser degree.

For employers, this finding should prompt some consideration as outside influencers can just as easily dissuade potential whistleblowers from speaking up as encourage them to do so. There is a risk of essential information being buried rather than shared with whistleblowing teams allowing wrongdoing to continue unchecked. Making sure staff understand the purpose of your Speaking Up programme and the issues you want to hear about at the earliest opportunity could help alleviate their need to sense-check with people outside your organisation. Equally, access to independent advice, whether through Protect or a trade union, or a trusted colleague, could give staff more confidence to raise concerns.

Raising concerns openly, anonymously or confidentially

We also wanted to understand the different ways age groups may want to raise concerns: openly, confidentially, or anonymously. When asked how people would prefer to raise concerns, our survey found that half of respondents would want to remain confidential, with very few happy to speak openly. Looking at the age groups, Millennials were split between remaining anonymous and confidential disclosures, while the older Gen X and Baby Boomer respondents predominantly opted for confidential disclosures.

Table 5

Please imagine if you were to raise whistleblowing concerns... In which ONE, if any, of the following ways would you prefer to raise those concerns?

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Openly (not minding who knows your name)	10%	9%	8%	7%	9%
Confidentially (asking that your name only be shared on a need-to-know basis)	43%	43%	37%	46%	57%
Anonymously (keeping your name completely hidden)	44%	45%	51%	43%	30%
Don't know	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%

Traditional and technological ways of blowing the whistle

Traditionally, whistleblowing concerns are raised via email, telephone, advertised on posters, and the intranet. In our focus groups, participants said they were aware of their employer's phone lines, dedicated email accounts and internal teams that they could speak to.

Our survey revealed some stark differences between the generations in the routes they would prefer to take when blowing the whistle. For older Millennials and the Gen X cohort, the most popular option was calling an employer-run whistleblowing reporting line, while the Gen Z and younger Millennials had a stronger preference for an external reporting website and a direct email address. When it comes to innovation in reporting mechanisms it was only the Gen Z respondents, over other age groups, who expressed a preference for scanning a QR code or using encrypted messaging platforms (WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, etc..).

In contrast to the survey results however, our focus group participants expressed a level of distrust and wariness with new tech and digital platforms. We would recommend caution when introducing such reporting mechanisms. Staff also need to understand who and how any whistleblowing reports are processed to build trust and confidence in the process.

Table 6

Which, if any, of the following would be your preferred way of blowing the whistle to an employer ?

Respondents ticked all that applied	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Direct email address (e.g. from you to another employee)	34%	22%	18%	19%	14%
External reporting website (not part of your organisation e.g. Navex, Safecall etc)	28%	24%	25%	20%	17%
Internal anonymous phone message	33%	15%	11%	10%	10%
Employer run whistleblowing reporting line	18%	21%	28%	26%	32%
Scanning a QR code	14%	6%	6%	5%	1%
Encrypted messaging (e.g. Whatsapp, Signal, Telegram etc).	17%	14%	11%	6%	4%
None of these	10%	9%	6%	10%	13%
Don't know	10%	18%	20%	25%	21%

Conclusions

Giving staff access to a range of options and methods to raise concerns is vital. Staff who use the whistleblowing arrangements may find themselves in situations where raising concerns with line managers or supervisors is not appropriate - where they are involved in the wrongdoing for instance, or where the concerns have been raised but ignored. Our survey shows all age groups view confidential or anonymous ways of raising concerns as the default option.

Organisations should not be afraid to try new methods of raising whistleblowing concerns, but staff need to be brought along with the decision if they are to trust it. This means being transparent with staff and communicating the decision clearly.

Where possible, recording the age of staff who use the whistleblowing arrangements and mapping out who is using different methods is a useful way to assess what works well and what does not. When overlaid with overall staff numbers, employers can evaluate which methods are most effective, which will support reviewing their whistleblowing arrangements in the future.

"So at my place we've done that scanning QR code thing. They told us it was anonymous and all that, but as soon as you scan the QR code it actually came up with your name, where you work, what area you worked at. I like the idea, but not if they're going to track my information."

– Lee, age 22

"I'm a Muslim and I received a couple of comments that I deemed as Islamophobic. For a while I pondered on whether it was something I should speak up on. It was only when I spoke to my family about it, and I realised the extent of the comments I actually thought, okay, I should. So, I spoke to the relevant people for it."

– Misha, age 24

"They've obviously realised that there is a huge problem after a staff survey brought up a lot of issues from the people who did speak up. So they tried to put things in place for whistleblowing but it still goes back to people are too afraid to speak out, because they don't trust the confidentiality of it."

– Jane, age 54



Reporting via social media and the press

Although internal whistleblowing is a relatively loose term, it is normally understood to mean the reporting of misconduct to someone within your own organisation, through the line manager, a dedicated team, HR staff or by using an internal "hotline" or similar channel (sometimes outsourced to a commercial external reporting line). Whistleblowers can also report their concerns directly to their regulators or MP. Some whistleblowers choose to report their concerns 'externally' by posting about them on social media or turning to traditional media channels such as newspapers or radio and TV. It is often assumed that external whistleblowing takes place when an individual has exhausted the internal process, although it can also happen when people do not know their organisation's process or have no trust in it.

Unsurprisingly external whistleblowing can, as a result, impact an organisation's reputation, as the whistleblowing concerns become public knowledge and cannot be managed inside the organisation anymore. Both internal and external whistleblowing are protected under the Employment Rights Act, but there are stricter tests for disclosing concerns using social media or the press compared to internal whistleblowing.

"Under no circumstances does anybody speak to the press, you're not going to do it. You're not going to jeopardise your job."

– Elspeth, age 59

"What I know is that if you do share sensitive information on social media, or you speak to the media without proper guidance around company issues, internally or externally, there are really strict guidelines. There's a training module that's done every few months because of the industry I'm in as well. So to cross that line there would be serious consequences. Basically, you put yourself at risk."

– Yousuf, age 26



Whistleblowing on social media

Our survey asked people whether they would ever post on social media about workplace issues that they believed would be of public interest. Although this is something only a tiny minority of Gen X and Baby Boomers would consider, it is a real option for Gen Z and younger Millennials. 15% of 18-24 year olds said they would post on social media about some serious work issues, compared to only 2% of 45-54 year olds, and 3% of the 55+ age group.

Table 7

Would you ever post on social media about workplace issues that you believe are of public interest?

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
I would post on social media about more trivial work issues	7%	6%	3%	2%	1%
I would post on social media about SOME serious work issues, but not all	15%	9%	5%	2%	3%
I would post on social media about all work issues, no matter how serious they were	4%	3%	2%	1%	1%
I would never post on social media about any work issue	61%	72%	81%	84%	90%
Don't know	12%	10%	10%	11%	6%

Note: Figures for table 7 may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Whistleblowing to the press

When asked about speaking to the press about workplace issues, again we saw younger people more willing to take this step. 14% of 18-24 year olds said they would talk to journalists, compared to only 6% of the 55+ age group.

Our focus groups backed up this finding with the older workers stressing they would be in breach of contract and likely to be dismissed for speaking to the press. The assumption here is that younger people have less to lose and are perhaps more naïve than their older colleagues when it comes to sharing work issues with the media.

Table 8

Would you ever go to the media/talk to a journalist about workplace issues that you believe are of public interest?

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Yes, I would	14%	10%	6%	9%	6%
I might do depending on the issue	36%	37%	40%	37%	40%
No, I would never do this	33%	42%	43%	44%	44%
Don't know	16%	11%	11%	10%	10%

Note: Figures for table 8 may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Conclusions

Organisations would rather deal with concerns within their own systems than have their staff raise issues externally. The good news is that most staff across all the age groups said they would look to raise their concerns internally first (see Table 4 for details). However, for those who do not trust their organisation's whistleblowing framework or do not know how to use it, posting their concerns on social media or approaching journalists becomes tempting, hence the need to clarify how and what to report, especially to the younger generations. This should include guidance in both the whistleblowing policy and the social media policy.

"We had a phone call about a member of staff complaining about one of the systems. They rang us to say, we've seen this on a chat group on Facebook. It was taken really seriously. Why would you write that down? You know, if you've got concerns you have to let us know and then we'll deal with it."

– Cath, age 46



Trust and workplace culture

Workplace culture and trust in the system plays an enormous role in the success of any effective whistleblowing arrangements. If staff understand how their concerns are processed and have faith they will be handled well, they are more likely to speak up.

Confidence in the whistleblowing system

Our survey asked how confident people felt about how their employer would deal with whistleblowing concerns. The results show a declining confidence as staff get older. More than 70% of the 18-24 year olds said their employer would manage things very well or fairly well. This decreased to just under 50% of the 55+ age group.

Table 9

If someone were to raise a concern over wrongdoing, malpractice or risk via whistleblowing at your workplace...How well, if at all, do you think your employer would deal with this?

	Total	18-24	24-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Very well	15%	21%	15%	12%	14%	16%
Fairly well	40%	51%	42%	41%	38%	33%
Not very well	13%	6%	12%	13%	14%	15%
Not well at all	10%	7%	10%	12%	9%	10%
Don't know	21%	13%	16%	21%	23%	26%
Prefer not to say	2%	2%	5%	0%	2%	1%

"I'm a firm believer HR is there to protect the company, not the employee. So I always say to people, just be mindful what you're saying to each other, because if HR deem you as the issue, then it's easier to get rid of you."

– James, age 33

"The older I get, I'm not going to step back because I think "Well, you can't hurt me", but I kind of know they can. But again, it's about how high up you want to challenge."

– Jane, age 54

Changing attitudes in the workplace

Our survey also asked whether people's attitudes towards whistleblowing had changed during their working lives. There were no significant differences between the generations with half of respondents remaining ambivalent. Across all the age groups, a third (33%) said the change has been somewhat or very positive, whereas only 4% reported a somewhat or very negative change.

However, when this was discussed in the focus group with older workers, the participants were divided in their perspectives. On the one hand some said they felt empowered by their age and experience to call things out when they saw them, while on the other hand some said they had learned to curb their ambitions for change and would only speak up in the rarest of situations.

In the focus group with younger people, perspectives varied based on experiences and approaches taken by different employers. One participant said a new CEO had led to a change in culture and given her confidence that action would be taken if you spoke up.

However, this was not the experience for all and two of the focus group participants – who worked in factory settings – were very distrustful of their employer's approach and more aligned to getting support from their union.

Table 10

How positive or negative, if at all, has your attitude towards whistleblowing changed during your working life?

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Very positive change	10%	17%	14%	4%	11%	9%
Somewhat positive change	23%	20%	21%	23%	20%	28%
Neither positive nor negative change	51%	37%	46%	55%	59%	51%
Somewhat negative change	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Very negative change	1%	-	2%	1%	0%	2%
Don't know	12%	22%	14%	15%	7%	7%

Conclusions

The worrying trend we have found is that the older the cohort – and by extension the longer someone has been in employment – the less confident they are that the concerns they raise will be dealt with appropriately by their employer. Bluntly, staff come with baggage and experience of previous employers. Organisations need to recognise this and work to reassure and reaffirm processes, and illustrate with examples, to build confidence in their staff. The tone from the top is really important, and leaders need to lead by example.

Be aware that some sections of your workforce will be suspicious of the employer. “HR is there to protect the company” was a response we saw throughout the focus groups. This again underlines the importance of ensuring communication is clear on the routes to raise concerns, and training is provided to named contacts to reassure staff that their whistleblowing concerns will be appropriately dealt with.

Although there is overall a clear willingness to raise whistleblowing concerns using the employer’s Speaking Up systems, there are important differences between generations. Organisations should take note that younger members of staff are less willing to speak up compared to older workers, while older workers can be less confident that their concerns will be addressed.

“When I was younger I wanted to change the world. Over years of working in public service I’ve worked out where my lane is and what I can do and what is going to change. I’ve met many people over my public service career who have been smacking their heads against a brick wall for many, many years, and it’s done them no favours. So yeah, I stick to my lane now.”

– Cath, age 46

“In our company there’s been a real shift change recently. Before, bullying has unfortunately been tolerated. But we’ve had a lot of people lose their jobs recently because they have just taken an absolutely no-nonsense approach to a lot of things, like health and safety laws and bullying. So there’s a level of trust for me now that if I raised it, it would be absolutely taken seriously.”

– Rebecca, age 33



Key recommendations

Age is clearly a factor in whether staff raise concerns, what they speak up about, who they approach and their confidence in the system overall. This is not a blanket approach, there will be other factors that impact on whistleblowing including type of role, workplace culture, workplace language, experience, gender, ethnicity etc.

Given the research outcomes and the fact that many employers have staff across the generations, we have outlined recommendations below that employers should carefully consider when setting up or enhancing their whistleblowing frameworks.

Recording age as a data point

When reviewing whistleblowing arrangements, recording the age of staff using the whistleblowing systems will give an organisation great insight into the different attitudes and experiences of the workforce. It will also future proof the organisation's systems as Generation Alpha (2013-2024) starts to enter the workforce.

A range of ways to raise concerns

Our survey results show that while a line manager or supervisor is the most popular way to raise concerns, there needs to be a range of options outside of line management to take into account different staff preferences. Remember the default way staff want to raise concerns will be confidentially or anonymously.

Senior leadership is crucial

Tone from the top is vital. Make the whistleblowing message personal, welcoming, reassuring and conveyed through diverse methods. It is important to be conscious of who is delivering the message – consistent communication messaging from the top and throughout the organisation is best practice with senior personnel driving the culture. Some staff will have had bad prior experiences when it comes to whistleblowing and may not trust HR to look after their interests. Use staff surveys to assess this issue and try to address these points in the way whistleblowing is communicated to staff if this is identified as an issue.

Engage with staff

This includes being aware of the types of concerns that worry staff - issues they are more likely to feel they should raise - and communicating to staff the types of risks the organisation feels should be raised through the whistleblowing arrangements. Communicate clearly on whistleblowing when on-boarding new staff and regularly review your whistleblowing arrangements to build trust and confidence.

Policy

Ensure all policies are implemented correctly, promoted regularly and reviewed periodically. Also ensure whistleblowing is referenced in social media policies so staff are aware there are safer and better alternatives to reporting problems than sharing on social media.

Training

The lack of trust identified - especially in the older age groups - underlines again why training of managers and designated contacts is so important. Those first points of contact with the whistleblower need to establish confidence in the system to ensure information is communicated to enable an investigation.

Don't be afraid to try something new

Technology presents new ways of raising concerns that younger age groups may utilise more readily but remember more traditional forms are needed for some of the older workforce. To gain the trust of staff, new methods of raising concerns need to be implemented in a transparent way.



Connect with Us

Website

www.protect-advice.org.uk

Email

info@protect-advice.org.uk

LinkedIn

[company/protect-advice](https://www.linkedin.com/company/protect-advice)

Copyright Protect, 2025. All rights reserved.
No reproduction without permission.

Registered Charity No.1025557.
Company Limited No. 2849833.

The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9DA.