



TEDx speaker

Megan Reitz  
and John Higgins

# Speak Up

*'The how-to guide  
to navigating the  
power and politics  
of conversations  
at work'*

Des Dearlove and  
Stuart Crainer, Thinkers50

Say what needs  
to be said and hear  
what needs to  
be heard

**FT** PUBLISHING  
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# SPEAK UP



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Megan Reitz  
John Higgins

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SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE  
SAID AND HEAR WHAT  
NEEDS TO BE HEARD



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Megan Reitz** is Professor of Leadership and Dialogue at Ashridge Executive Education, Hult International Business School, where she speaks, researches, consults and supervises on the intersection of leadership, change, dialogue and mindfulness. She is on the Thinkers50 radar of global business thinkers and is ranked in *HR Magazine's* Most Influential Thinker listing. She has presented her research to audiences throughout the world and is the author of *Dialogue in Organisations* and *Mind Time*. Her passion and curiosity centres around the quality of how we meet, see, hear, speak, learn with and care for one another in organisational systems. She is mother to two wonderful daughters who test her regularly and rigorously on her powers of mindfulness and dialogue.

**John Higgins** approaches life as a continuous research project, integrating the personal and professional, and finding ways to bring the hidden habits of work into the light of day. He is Research Director at The Right Conversation, where he's working to develop a 'Speak-up index' (a measure of organisational transparency), and Research Fellow at Gameshift. He has written widely on organisational change as part of his role on the Ashridge Doctorate and Masters in Organisational Change and his work draws heavily on insights from his long-standing engagement with the psychoanalytic process.

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# INTRODUCTION

Today, like every other day, you will choose when to speak up and when to stay silent. You will select whose opinion to listen to and whose to disregard.

Your choices have and will turn into habits which determine whether you get promoted or side-lined. Whether you steer clear of trouble or land right in it. Whether you feel proud of yourself or ashamed for what you have or have not said. Whether you flourish and feel motivated or end up dissatisfied and resentful.

Seemingly mundane acts of speaking and listening become habitual and profoundly influence how you see yourself and how others see you. They have defining consequences for you and those around you.

In this book you will learn how your perceptions of relative power, status and authority drive what you and your colleagues say and who you listen to. Although these perceptions are often unconscious, you need to be skilful at acknowledging, observing and influencing them in order to make better choices.

Reading this book will help you to do the following:

- Realise what stops you speaking up and being heard at work.
- Learn how to speak up with confidence and be heard effectively.
- Understand how to increase your personal impact by making the agenda and not just following it.
- Spot how you silence others and learn how to make it easy for people to speak openly to you.
- Create a working environment that is more innovative, honest, productive and fulfilling.

Wherever you sit in the organisational hierarchy, you will find out what you can do to make speaking up feel safe and useful.

Through our research, based on hundreds of interviews and survey responses, ethnographic studies and action research inquiries, we have developed a practical TRUTH framework. You'll discover in this book how it can change conversations, relationships and performance.

It sets out five questions which are vital to answer if you want to speak up and listen up more effectively:

1. How much do you **TRUST** the value of your opinion and the opinions of others?
2. What are the **RISKS** involved when you or others speak up?
3. Do you **UNDERSTAND** the politics of who says what to who and why?
4. Are you aware of the **TITLES** and labels we attach to one another – and how they shape what gets said and heard?
5. Do you know **HOW** to choose the right words at the right time in the right place and how, skilfully, to help others to speak up through what you say and do?

## TIME TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Our research uncovered a critical blind spot in our capacity to improve conversations at work. Answering these questions might reveal it to you:

- Do you ever find yourself thinking: ‘*They* should speak up more’?
- Do you ever find yourself thinking: ‘*They* are scary – *they* should be more approachable’?

If you do, then you are far from alone. Our blind spot is that we tend to think that it is *other people* that need to change. While this may be the case, as we wait impatiently for them to do something differently, we can forget to look in the mirror and take responsibility for changing *our own* conversations.

All too often senior executives told us that the problem lies with the rest of the organisation failing to have the courage to speak up.

‘*They* just wait to be told what to do! *They* need to step up!’

‘*They* need to start challenging things and coming up with ideas!’

So we have gone to talk with ‘*them*’ – usually the middle management – who have earnestly told us that there is no way they can speak up as it would be career suicide or simply a waste of time.

‘Did you hear what happened to the last person who challenged *them*? They disappeared!’

‘*They* don’t really care – *they’ve* already made up their minds.’

The point is this – speaking up is *relational*. It happens in-between someone being willing to say something and someone being willing and able to listen.

We know from all of the different strands of our research that we tend to think it's the other person's fault. The reason we don't speak up is because *that* person doesn't listen. The reason we don't listen up is because *that* person takes too long to get to the point or we assume *that* person just doesn't understand.

We know that we tend to value our own opinion around a third more than the opinion of others (in some groups we looked at, this went as high as three times).

We know that we tend to believe we are approachable and therefore assume others wouldn't hide things from us.

We know that if each one of us alters how we speak and listen, even marginally, whole cultures can change.

As individuals, teams, organisations and societies, we need to stop the blame game, look in the mirror and face up to not only how we silence ourselves, but also how we silence others.

## THE SOUND (AND COST) OF SILENCE

Silence is the missing voice in a conversation. It is the sound of the something that should have been said but hasn't been. It happens all the time.

Have you ever encountered a situation you know to be wrong but not said anything? Have you ever had an idea about how something could be improved but kept it to yourself? Ever come to the realisation that someone at work or at home hasn't told you something because they were too scared to, didn't want to embarrass you, thought there was no point, or believed it wasn't their place to tell you?

The silence of missing voices costs careers, relationships and lives. It means new ideas never see the light of day and obvious problems don't get sorted out. It can and regularly does bring global organisations to their knees.

Silence leads to the drama of a CEO being fired, the scandalous fraud splashed across the front pages and the public outcry when what seems to be too good to be true turns out to be just that. But these dramatic moments don't come out of nowhere; they build up, often imperceptibly, over time as we silence ourselves and others, one conversation at a time.

We absorb the rules for our social group: what we should say and what we shouldn't; whose opinion counts and whose doesn't. Undiscussables, the 'elephants in the room', develop and are kept alive through our ordinary habits of going along with how things are done round here. Work is not just

about getting the job done, it's also about fitting in – being recognised as someone who belongs to the gang. This means that challenging the status quo, however wrong it is, is risky.

We interviewed Sophie, a new graduate. She had arrived enthusiastically in the quality control team and couldn't understand why a dangerous practice was being tolerated. She mentioned it to her boss but was given the brush-off. She said nothing more. She saw herself as the junior newbie and didn't want to make a fuss – it took her a while to land the job and she wanted to keep it. Six months in, she accepted it as how things are done. But then an accident happened that changed a colleague's life forever and Sophie now feels crushed and responsible. A preventable accident emerging from silence.

Put yourself in the shoes of Toni, a successful sales director we interviewed. Frighteningly propositioned by one of her company's most influential customers, she eventually plucked up the courage to talk to her stressed head of sales. His impatient first question was: 'Maybe you were sending out the wrong signals?' Confused, she felt at fault, didn't argue when she was taken off the account and stayed silent about her experience. She has since heard that a female colleague was harassed by the same client. Patterns of silence and silencing meant this was allowed to go on.

In contrast, Stuart, a talented marketing manager had arrived bearing the scars of his previous workplace. He had been silenced by the risk-averse, controlling owners. It took about a year for him to find his voice. A patient boss, who trusted in his capabilities proved to Stuart, day after day, that he would be listened to and that mistakes are acceptable and even encouraged if they are learnt from, in the pursuit of new ideas. This bore fruit as he developed an astoundingly innovative campaign which shot the organisation's product to a market leadership position.

How do *you* get your voice heard? How do you know if something is going on in *your* workplace right now that will be the next front-page scandal? And how do you embolden others to offer their ideas so you can respond to a world of ever-shifting expectations.

The answer is you can't and won't, unless you know how to speak up and help others to in our messy, political world filled with ordinary people, brimming with hope, vulnerability, insight and ambition.

The solution comes from the same place as the problem – we must *unsilence* ourselves and help others to do the same, one conversation at a time. We must begin to make choices today that mean it is less risky for *everyone* to speak up.

**ANTHONY**

*Consider the situation of Anthony, a well-meaning COO of an international design company, and his team.*

*'Let me tell you about speaking truth to power,' said Anthony when we met him. 'When I joined this place people would turn their heads away from me when we passed in the corridors. Now, I'm pleased to say, they always make eye contact and speak to me. Before they disrespected me. Now they respect me.'*

*A week later, we facilitated a workshop with Anthony's team. They shared insights and stories, spoke candidly about their realities as aspiring leaders in their company. Then Anthony walked into the room and immediately the conversation shifted. We sensed the tension, saw that opinions were suddenly more guarded and carefully phrased. The enthusiasm and ideas vanished and were replaced by measured, politically acceptable words. He was invited to speak and he earnestly told them what he deemed they wanted to hear. What leadership really was. How hard he'd had to work. What they needed to do to rise to the challenge.*

*After he had left we asked the group what they didn't say to him.*

*'People make eye contact and speak up because they're scared of him and what he can do to them – he is after all in charge of the restructure.' It had nothing to do with respect, fear was the key.*

*Ah! What a double bind. No one could tell Anthony they were scared of him – because they were scared of him. Looking back, it feels like a missed opportunity. A moment when both sides might have learnt together, collaborated, innovated and felt inspired. Prospects of seeing and hearing each other moved yet further away, lost in a familiar pattern of senior people asserting a truth and junior people staying silent about their reality.*

On the one hand this interaction doesn't matter too much. Just another moment in a 'here today, gone tomorrow' workshop. One you might well recognise. On the other hand, it matters enormously, especially when this conversation is part of the cultural norm. Over time, it chips away at our ideas, motivation and development. It sustains a world of day-to-day fake-believe, of conversations conducted from behind facades where we disguise what we really think.

A tipping point might come when we decide we've had enough of sitting on our hands – we speak up and deal with the consequences. Or we might just continue and end up being cynical, suspicious or oblivious. However much lip service is paid to diversity, we might resign ourselves to fitting in. To succeed as a woman for instance, we might decide, in the words of a senior female executive we interviewed, that we 'have to speak up more like a man in the eyes of men'.

The missed opportunities are profound as we stifle our own and others' capacity to be at our best as human beings.

## WHY ARE YOU READING THIS BOOK?

We assume that at some level you are interested in developing the way that you speak and listen to others. You may want to change your team or organisational culture for the better. You probably have in mind reasons why this would be a good thing, but we'd ask you to really pay attention right now to your *intention*.

If your intention is to change your habits – and we all have habits around what we speak up about, as well as who we listen to – it is vital to be clear on the case for change. Changing habits is often tough and if you don't have a compelling case, it is likely you will take the path of least resistance and stay with what you know. Most people's habits are, after all, tried and tested – and for the most part have served them well enough.

There is both a business and moral case for speaking up and listening up. Let's look at these in more detail.

## THE BUSINESS CASE #1: SPEAKING UP TO THRIVE

It is likely that you are well aware of the 'industrial revolution 4.0', or the fourth industrial revolution. You will have heard such authoritative projections as 38% of jobs in the US could be replaced by AI in the next 15 years<sup>i</sup>. You will have listened to some who argue that this new wave of automation will be the making of us all, freeing us up to do the work we want to do and do best<sup>ii</sup> . . . and you will have heard those who paint terrifying

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<sup>i</sup>[www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics-policy/insights/the-impact-of-automation-on-jobs.html](http://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics-policy/insights/the-impact-of-automation-on-jobs.html)

<sup>ii</sup>[www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/03/01/14-ways-ai-will-benefit-or-harm-society/#67dae5f74ef0](http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/03/01/14-ways-ai-will-benefit-or-harm-society/#67dae5f74ef0)

scenarios about a world of fake news, social dislocation and weaponised mis-information<sup>iii</sup>.

Of course, we simply can't be certain what the future holds for work. We live in yet another age of upheaval and uncertainty and we are trying to figure out what model of good leadership will enable us to *thrive*. While 'heroic leadership'<sup>iv</sup> seems to be alive and well in politics, for better or for worse, in the workplace it is falling out of favour. Due to our uncertain and possibly tumultuous future, approaches that distribute accountability across organisations are gaining in popularity. There's a drive to harness the agency and ideas of *all* employees and encourage new thinking, collaboration and adaptability. It's over 20 years since the CEO of one-time technology colossus Hewlett Packard observed: 'If only HP knew what HP knows we would be three times more productive.' We recognise the benefits of transparency and collaboration but we still haven't cracked how to make it work in practice.

Organisations currently lauded as the most innovative in the world, such as Google, Unilever and Netflix, advocate the value of speaking up and listening up. What other way is there to generate the ideas that keep them disruptive, creative and ahead of the curve? But advocating such a culture is the easy thing, living it quite another. Shifting from the centralised paradigm to a distributed paradigm is tricky. It requires us to change the way we have conversations – from the managed world of top-down direction towards a more inclusive, multi-voiced model. This is often deeply counter-cultural.

Our research data points to a challenge for many senior leaders. Getting people to speak up is often less about the less powerful having a voice and more about the more powerful *really* wanting to listen to others throughout the organisation.

But leaders may well have to listen if their organisations, and by default, themselves, are to *thrive*.

## THE BUSINESS CASE #2: SPEAKING UP TO SURVIVE

In September 2015, an upstanding corporate giant was shown to be hiding a critical flaw. Volkswagen, considered by many as invincible, stood

<sup>iii</sup>[www.managementtoday.co.uk/5-real-dangers-ai-according-experts/future-business/article/1457779](http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/5-real-dangers-ai-according-experts/future-business/article/1457779)

<sup>iv</sup>Higgins, J., Reitz, M. and Williams, C. (2017), *The Hero is Dead – Long Live the New Hero!* Chapter 3 in *Inspiring Leadership*, Fleming, K. and Delves, R. (eds.). Bloomsbury, London

accused of intentionally tampering with diesel engine emissions controls so that they activated during laboratory testing but not out on the roads. During real driving situations, cars were emitting up to 40 times more nitrogen oxide than was apparently the case in the laboratory, breaking any number of national and international laws and regulatory standards.

Over the days following the breaking story, the VW stock price fell by one third and Group CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned, although not before the many senior executives received their annual bonus payment in full. In May 2018, Winterkorn was criminally indicted in the US on charges of fraud and conspiracy<sup>v</sup>.

Inevitably, there were employees at VW who knew what was going on and decided not to speak up about malpractice or, if they did, their concerns were not listened to at the highest levels. A single employee eventually broke the scandal by talking to the regulators. Some reports suggested that organisational culture and leadership style led to the cover-up. 'We need, in future, a climate in which problems aren't hidden but can be openly communicated to superiors . . . [where] it's possible and permissible to argue with your superior about the best way to go.' said Osterloh, the chief of the VW works council<sup>vi</sup>.

Today, newspaper headlines are littered with organisational and institutional scandals: financial misreporting in Japan; sexual predation throughout Hollywood and far beyond; military personnel going into battle with inadequate equipment; modern slavery being tacitly accepted practice in global supply chains; food products being contaminated with rogue substances as a matter of course; doping in sport that calls into question whether any sporting hero or team is going to be worthy of long-term admiration.

Throughout the years of our research, scandals were a weekly occurrence from around the world and in every sector. It became a cliché to read that people in such and such an organisation had 'failed to speak truth to power', with severely detrimental consequences for customers, investors and the wider world.

It is extremely difficult to ensure water-tight governance and accountability that might prevent wrongdoing. The failed British outsourcing giant Carillion had been given a clean bill of health from its auditors and had satisfactorily self-evaluated its board effectiveness (as the UK Corporate Governance Code requires), just before it fell into a heap of financial mismanagement and undeliverable contracts that had been many years

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<sup>v</sup>[www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44005844](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44005844)

<sup>vi</sup>[www.reuters.com/article/us-volkswagen-emissions-culture-idUSKC-N0S40MT20151010](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-volkswagen-emissions-culture-idUSKC-N0S40MT20151010)

in the making. Directors and non-executive directors sign personal liability statements – but for things they cannot possibly control. In the finance sector, credit control committees, dealing with sums almost beyond imagining, have to try to stay on top of an impossible brief. We were surprised, when interviewing them, that any of them had any hair left.

Realising governance is only part of the answer, many organisations are urgently seeking to create more transparency where challenging and speaking up about misconduct are an integral aspect of culture. It has become a matter of organisational *survival* and of personal career sustainability.

Would you know if there was something going on around you at work that could change everything, for you and your organisation, if it were to be found out?

## THE BUSINESS CASE #3: SPEAKING UP TO STRIVE

The degree to which our opinion counts is, according to Gallup's famous research on employee engagement<sup>vii</sup>, a critical factor in how motivated and engaged we are at work.

The problem is only three out of ten of us strongly agree that our opinion counts. According to Gallup, if that figure was more like six out of ten, organisations could realise a 27% reduction in staff turnover, a 40% reduction in safety incidents and a 12% increase in productivity<sup>viii</sup>.

If we feel able to speak up with our opinions and believe that, when we do, those opinions are listened to and considered valuable, then we are more motivated. We are likely to *strive* and perform better, as is our organisation.

But time and again we come across situations where the focus on control and the rituals of so-called engagement undermine people's desire and ability to contribute.

The following is an example of this from Jeff, Head of Merger Integration in the advertising and social media world, who spoke to us about the merger of his specialist firm, let's call it 'SmallCo', into a larger parent 'BigCo'.

<sup>vii</sup> [http://news.gallup.com/reports/191489/q12-meta-analysis-report-2016.aspx?g\\_source=link\\_news9&g\\_campaign=item\\_223235&g\\_medium=copy](http://news.gallup.com/reports/191489/q12-meta-analysis-report-2016.aspx?g_source=link_news9&g_campaign=item_223235&g_medium=copy)

<sup>viii</sup> [http://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/223235/create-culture-psychological-safety.aspx?g\\_source=link\\_NEWSV9&g\\_medium=&g\\_campaign=item\\_&g\\_content=How%2520to%2520Create%2520a%2520Culture%2520of%2520Psychological%2520Safety](http://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/223235/create-culture-psychological-safety.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=&g_campaign=item_&g_content=How%2520to%2520Create%2520a%2520Culture%2520of%2520Psychological%2520Safety)

**SMALLCO**

*In terms of employee engagement, the SmallCo people have moved from a world where engagement meant active participation in decision-making to one based upon merit badges, staff awards and nominees for employee of the month. For the SmallCo staff this is experienced as deeply infantilising, the equivalent of star charts stuck to the family fridge and used to reward children for doing their chores. Engagement workshops and staff briefings are viewed as 'a load of bullshit'.*

*In BigCo there was a deep-seated belief that motivation and engagement are in the gift of management. Years of scripted communication and 'town hall' (organisational or departmental wide, leadership-led) meetings, attempted to keep everybody aligned and singing from the same hymn sheet. Consultation and involvement were a pretence as was people's engagement.*

It is only in knowing that we can speak up with our opinions, and that they are *genuinely* listened to and valued, that organisations can really build the engagement that is necessary to tackle the challenges ahead.

Only then will employees will truly *strive* to perform better.

## THE MORAL CASE

Most things seem to need a business case to get anywhere in our organisations. We need to prove our actions will lead to higher profits or operational efficiency. Changing habits of speaking and listening can indeed lead to these results, but they are also a matter of human potential, flourishing and dignity. This alone should compel us to focus our attention and ambition upon them.

Martin Buber, a twentieth-century philosopher, commented on the nature of our relationships with others and the world around us, describing two modes of encounter: I-It and I-Thou<sup>ix</sup>. In the first, we interact in a transactional manner in order to get things done. Understandably and appropriately, we do a lot of that in organisations. But, says Buber, the problem comes when that is the *only* way in which we see and relate with one another. I-Thou signals a way of seeing and being with one another

<sup>ix</sup> Reitz, M. (2015), *Dialogue in Organisations: Developing Relational Leadership*, Palgrave

which is mutual, respectful, humane and recognises our shared experience and interconnection. It relies on our capacity to speak openly and listen to one another deeply. It is fundamental to our human being-ness.

In business and organisational terms this means seeing each other as fellow human beings first, and second as workers – there to perform a role. If we strictly confine our speaking and listening to the transactional, we silence ourselves and others. We restrict our conversations to the detached, phlegmatic, formalised and self-interested. We distance ourselves from the extraordinary experience of being compassionately connected with one another. In doing so we drain the colour from our lives.

A good example of this is our tendency to expel personal emotions from the workplace. Most of the time when a work colleague asks how you are, the reflex is to reply ‘Oh, fine’, even when inside you are feeling far from fine. In this way, the personal is taken out of the professional, which limits the capacity for rich connection and conversation.

## MEGAN

*Megan was asked how she was feeling a while back. At the time a close member of the family had been taken ill. There was no prognosis and no understanding of exactly how serious it was. Being someone used to ‘fixing’ things, Megan experienced this situation as extraordinarily anxiety-provoking.*

*At first she told no one at work. It did not seem appropriate, she wanted to protect the privacy of her family member and critically, she didn’t want anyone to think she couldn’t cope.*

*Then one day a colleague asked her how she was. Megan paused and began by saying: ‘Actually, I’m struggling right now.’ Then she explained the situation. Her colleague stopped in her tracks, listened and later in the conversation, confided how she’d just had a breakdown that she concealed from her work colleagues.*

*Through speaking and listening to one another, the two of them uncovered their shared humanity. It feels almost sacrilege to turn it into a list of benefits, but it resulted in closeness, feeling understood, relief and warmth. Over the next few weeks, Megan spoke with a few more colleagues and in every case, they had a story they shared relating to their own anxiety or powerlessness. On most occasions, it was the first time they had spoken up in the workplace.*

*The conversations Megan had with her colleagues enriched her relationships with them, deepened her understanding of her experience and transformed the way she sees and relates with others more generally.*

*Yes, it happened that these conversations and patterns of support enabled Megan to stay functioning at work – there's a business case. However, that feels far less important than the deeper compassion and understanding she now feels for herself and for others experiencing anxiety and helplessness.*

If we aren't careful we find ourselves constructing a façade at work that is impenetrable. We create an environment – like the one in the science fiction film 'The Matrix' – where only certain things are shared and spoken about. Our conversations then primarily serve clinical execution of processes and procedures.

While of course it is appropriate to speak about some things in some environments and not in others, we need to keep an eye on our choices. These choices define the way we see ourselves and others. Restricting our conversations holds long-lasting consequences for our sense of fulfilment, purpose, self-respect, wellbeing and humanity.

## OUR RESEARCH

This book is the culmination of decades of research examining how we talk, listen and learn with one another inside workplace systems.

Between us we have published half a dozen books examining organisational culture, change, dialogue, mindfulness and how it influences our relationships. Our research has been published in *Harvard Business Review* and numerous other global journals, magazines and online blogs. Together we have many years of working in organisational development, executive coaching and leadership facilitation. We have heard the intimate details of the dilemmas, fears, strengths and shortcomings of leaders inside organisations across the public, private and third sector, in small start-ups and global giants.

In 2014 we began an extensive research project with Ashridge Executive Education, part of Hult International Business School, called 'Speaking Truth to Power'. We set out with these specific research questions:

- What happens when we make the choice to speak up or stay silent?
- How does an appreciation of the complexities of this choice inform effective leadership?

- How might individuals make more informed choices regarding speaking up?

A more thorough description of this research project is available in the appendix. In brief, we used the following methods:

- **Interviews:** We interviewed over 150 leaders in almost every industry you can think of: politics, law, finance, manufacturing, education, professional services, farming, civil service, charity, technology, health, education and defence.
- **Surveys:** We surveyed over 1,500 individuals, across the globe and at all hierarchical levels, about their perspectives on speaking and listening up in the workplace.
- **Ethnographic inquiry:** The practice of participating in workplace activities, observing and interviewing people, gathering multiple (often conflicting) perspectives on speaking and listening up in specific organisations.
- **Collaborative inquiry:** Small group inquiry conversations held over a sustained period of years with groups of leaders, all interested in altering the habits of conversations in their organisations, sharing what works and what doesn't.
- **Facilitating workshops:** Live testing of our emerging insights with hundreds of people, exploring what resonated and what didn't and how they could apply our research findings.
- **Personal inquiry:** As authors we have explored, with supervision, our own habits of speaking and listening to one another. We have examined the ironies of our method which relies on people speaking to us openly about their experiences of staying silent.

We understand the moments of speaking and listening up to be contextual. Therefore we do not attempt to unearth a formula that will predict whether truth is spoken or not. Rather our project is to understand the complexities inherent in these moments of choice. This enables us to make suggestions about how you can equip yourself to speak and listen in a way that is appropriate to the situation.

Our research is driven by a quest to help our organisations to be more humane, relational, ethical and productive and to help individuals within them to flourish. It is our hope that this book contributes to that.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book is made up of the eight chapters that introduce and then follow our TRUTH framework:

- **Chapter 1: Speaking the TRUTH in a world of power** explains the TRUTH framework in more detail and reveals how perceptions of power affect how we speak up, stay silent and choose who to hear.
- **Chapter 2: Trust: in your voice and the voices of others** asks why and when we do and don't have confidence in our own opinion and the opinions of others.
- **Chapter 3: Risk: how we experience it and how we create it** explores why speaking and listening up can feel risky for you and for those around you.
- **Chapter 4: Understanding: navigating the unwritten rules of politics and power** describes how our relative political power and our own agenda and that of other people influences who says what and who gets heard.
- **Chapter 5: Titles: how they give and take authority** uncovers how bias, entrenched in the way we label and categorise others, affects whose voices are heard.
- **Chapter 6: How to: speak and listen up with skill** advises how we can enable safer, more mindful, conversations.
- **Chapter 7: TRUTH in the future: the profound consequences of a digital world** is an exploration of how changes in technology may alter our conversations.
- **Chapter 8: Six compass points on the way to TRUTH** provides a summary of why speaking truth to power matters and what you can do to speak and hear truth better.
- **Appendix: Our research** includes more detail on our questions, methods and analysis. It lists available resources which offer additional support for you and your organisation in developing a better speak up, listen up culture.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Speaking up and listening up matters in our organisations. Without it, you might only hear about misconduct and wrongdoing when it appears on the front page of the newspaper. It is vital for innovation

and adapting to this latest age of upheaval. It is essential to motivation and engagement.

- Fundamentally, it matters to us as human beings. Through our conversations, we share, connect, empathise, seek support and offer it. We affect what others think of us and what we think of them. We learn what it is to be human. Without freely speaking and listening up, we live an emaciated life.
- Perceptions of power, status and trust rule how we speak and listen.
- Particularly in the workplace, we don't speak up or listen up very well. We tend to criticise others for their silence or for not listening, without examining our own abilities and responsibilities. We leave our own habits unchanged.
- TRUTH (Trust, Risk, Understanding, Titles, How-to), based on our extensive research, is a framework that enables us to improve our awareness of how and why we speak and listen up.
- This book aims to help you and your workplace flourish by enabling conversations to be more open, productive, compassionate and creative.

**If you do only one thing now, take a stand on something you know people don't want to talk about, but you know is important. Think about how to raise it well and who to. Then do it.**

**What you say or don't say in a conversation can have life-defining consequences on ourselves and those around us. *Speak Up* helps you to navigate power differences so you can speak up with confidence and enable others to find their voice in a way that will be heard.**

Our day-to-day conversations define how we see ourselves and how we're seen. The choices we make about what to say and who to say it to are decisive factors in whether we get promoted or side-lined; whether we steer clear of trouble, or find ourselves in it up to our necks. With daily scandals hitting the headlines and the continuous need to innovate to survive, creating a more honest, open, fulfilling and productive workplace has never been more pressing.

Our conversational choices harness the ideas and intelligence of the people we work with, or result in that revolutionary concept never seeing the light of day. They make us feel proud or ashamed of ourselves for what we have or have not said. They cause us to flourish and feel motivated, or result in us feeling dissatisfied and resentful.

*Speak Up* helps you to navigate power differences and speak up with confidence in a way that you will be heard. But it's no good speaking up if there isn't anyone listening, so we also help you to understand how your power enables others to speak up and how it might silence them.

*'A powerful book on an important topic. *Speak Up* helps us understand the subtle elements that contribute to our holding back valuable ideas and observations. Their TRUST framework – which is as practical as it is rigorous – identifies essential elements to help individuals find their voice.'*

**Amy Edmondson, Professor, Harvard Business School; author, *The Fearless Organization* (Wiley, 2019)**

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