

CASE STUDY ABAX takes control of its security culture with KnowBe4

Brief Summary

European telematics company, ABAX has been using CLTRe (pronounced “culture”) by KnowBe4 to establish a baseline for its security culture—periodically measuring employees’ cybersecurity behaviours and identifying areas for improvement that can be easily relayed back to the company’s Board.

About ABAX

ABAX, a Norwegian company started in 2009, is currently the fastest growing telematics company in Europe with a presence in the Nordics, Netherlands and UK. ABAX manages 270,000 account subscriptions for 30,000 customers under its fleet management, driver behaviour monitoring and vehicle/container tracking services.

Business and Technical Challenges

With ABAX swiftly growing from a start-up of five people to over 400 staff after just ten years, Espen Otterstad head of IT and acting CISO at ABAX realised that **“people were probably one of the largest vulnerabilities”** when it came to the security of the business. Furthermore, as the company was expanding with new owners taking over, ABAX was receiving a lot of media attention, appearing in a number of new articles. With the extra attention, Otterstad noticed that phishing attempts were on the rise and **“employees were opening emails they perhaps shouldn’t be opening.”**

With information security being a huge priority for ABAX due to changing European regulations like GDPR, ABAX had already invested in “above average” technical security controls. However, Otterstad wanted to extend the security scope beyond pure technology controls and establish a security culture baseline for the organisation. This meant focusing on the human as the last line of defence from cybersecurity threats. Crucially, because ABAX is a relatively sales-focused business with a naturally high turnover of staff, regularly gauging the security culture of the business was vital to keeping the company more secure.

In addition, while information security was paramount, Otterstad also recognised that wading through long reports was not going to have the desired impact when it came to translating the security culture to the Board and management team. Therefore, he also needed clear and precise metrics to share with the Board and be able to demonstrate improvements or conversely, areas for improvements.

“The Board is not interested in twenty-page detailed reports, it simply wants to know that we’re at the level we need to be,” explained Otterstad.

The Solution

In order to fulfil the requirements of measuring the security culture baseline for ABAX—while being able to deliver a concise KPI measurement for the Board and management team—Otterstad initiated conversation with Kai Roer, CEO of CLTRe, now a KnowBe4 company. CLTRe helps companies manage and gauge security culture with a comprehensive toolkit and Security Culture Framework that uses a scientific approach to scope security across seven dimensions, resulting in a detailed insight into how different teams and business units compare.

“We needed to look into how the security culture was in the company to establish a baseline,” said Otterstad.

“Using the security CLTRe tool was a good starting point for us. By distributing a short and simple survey to employees, we could track and measure trends over time to see which specific areas of the business we needed to focus security awareness training on.”

He continued: **“When we forget to focus on security or provide regular training, we can actually measure a decline and pinpoint which departments receive extra attention.”**

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Importantly, ABAX can use these baseline metrics provided by CLTRe to plan and build its security culture, measure effectiveness, mitigate risk and channel efforts into weak points to successfully manage its security culture.

Implementation and Recommendations

Otterstad described the implementation of CLTRe as “pretty straight forward.” It involved gathering a list of employees, breaking them down into different business units, departments and countries and finally, emailing them a short five-minute survey designed to test their aptitude on seven different facets of cybersecurity. The survey was supported by an advanced internal marketing campaign, with Otterstad making it clear that employees would not be singled out and results would be kept anonymous.

“We’re coming up to our third survey, with the first two having gained an almost 90 percent completion rate, which we were really happy with,” explained Otterstad. “Because the survey is quick and has minimal impact on employees, it has contributed significantly to the completion rate.”

The seven different areas CLTRe has identified as key to security culture are attitude, behaviour, cognition, communication, compliance, norms and responsibilities. Using the results and in tandem with the Security Culture Framework, ABAX can gather evidence about its current security culture and how it changes over time, allowing Otterstad to easily report the findings to the Board.

The one implementation recommendation Otterstad had for others considering the CLTRe toolkit and Security Culture Framework was to think carefully about the grouping of employees up front and how the company would ideally report them to the Board. He noted: **“We changed our groupings on year two of the survey, which we should have done from year one to give us more accurate, comparable results year on year.”**

Results and Benefits

With many cybersecurity implementations, the theoretical cost savings were huge for ABAX, particularly before and after the advent of GDPR, Otterstad explained. “Using CLTRe was not only absolutely necessary, but also a good investment,” he said.

“The results that CLTRe gives us allows us to fine tune the message and focus on specific areas of the business that may be more at risk.”

For instance, classifying information was flagged as an area that needed improvement as it became clear that employees were not understanding the difference between marking certain documents as ‘restricted’, ‘limited’ or ‘open’. This realisation meant Otterstad could make changes to the way people were trained on the topic, potentially limiting data leakage.

The number one benefit to ABAX Otterstad says is **“the insight we get into security culture across the entire business that we can compare from year to year. Before CLTRe, we were merely guessing and feeling our way through perceived issues, but we didn’t have actual numbers to back it up. Now, we can note differences between departments and focus education on known weak points, rather than relying on guesswork.”**

Future Plans

ABAX plans to roll out its third test in September 2019 to continue to measure its security culture. Otterstad noted, **“No company will ever reach a ‘secure state’; the main risks of today will be different in six months. Our work with CLTRe has been important to helping us gauge the maturity of our security culture over time.”**

He concluded:

“Now that CLTRe is part of KnowBe4, we have a very real way to advance the maturity of our program and test the knowledge of our users’ understanding via KnowBe4’s fresh content, engaging trainings and simulated phishing tests. The combination of CLTRe and KnowBe4 means that we can improve security within our organisation through training and phishing tests, and manage our security culture program, while proving ROI.”