Security Approaches Around the Globe

KnowBe4 PR | By Roger A. Grimes

Most people probably assume other people around the globe approach computer security the same way they do. And for the most part, it is true. But there are distinct cultural differences where one country, in general, cares more or less about different topics than their international counterparts.

A survey of over 6,000 people spread across the globe (the U.S., United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and South Africa) regarding social engineering and password policies revealed some key differences that deserve a bit more investigation.

For example, regarding the survey question, "How confident are you at spotting [various types of] online scams?", nearly 83% of all respondents felt Very Confident or Quite Confident overall in spotting email phishing. Only 16% of total respondents felt Not Very Confident or Not At All Confident, when looking at email phishing. But Norway's Not Confident percentage came in at nearly 43%. All the other surveyed countries came in at only 10%-11% lacking confidence in spotting online scams. Interestingly, only 41% of the same Norwegian respondents said they had never fallen for any type of online scam. That is only 7% below the average of the other surveyed countries. Contrast this with the UK, where only 10% of respondents felt they were lacking confidence in detecting online scams and 62% said they had never fallen for any type of online scam. Either Norwegians are seriously self-critical or they need more security awareness training than the average comparison country.

Another question asked, "How comfortable would you be to report a security issue, violation or mistake to your security team?". In average across all surveyed countries, nearly 53% of all respondents said they would be Very Comfortable. That number dropped to a low of nearly 35% in Germany and nearly 39% in the Netherlands, but was nearly 80% in South Africa. Whatever South Africans are doing to make their employees more comfortable in reporting security incidents, we need to replicate worldwide.

The top three reasons for not feeling comfortable reporting a computer security incident were:

- The process to report an incident is too difficult
- I am scared to report security issues to the IT security team
- I do not know how to report issues to the security team

Two of these reasons involve issues of process improvement. However, employees being emotionally scared to report an incident to the IT security team is something that is harder to address and points to a cultural and societal issue that needs to be resolved. When employees do not feel safe reporting security violations, it increases the risk that a security incident will go unreported and unnoticed longer.

On a good note, only 22% of respondents said that their organization did not do any security awareness training. Most security awareness training (SAT), was focused on mitigation email phishing attacks (55%), which makes sense since most social engineering attacks happen via email. Surprisingly, over a third of SAT programs cover voice call phishing, text-based phishing and social media phishing. Nearly 23% of SAT programs cover the threat of deep fake videos, which is a surprisingly large coverage for an attack that has so far been almost a non-threat.

The survey questions around password security revealed some interesting patterns, and perhaps not all answers were precisely reflecting real-world conditions or respondents are far better at securing their passwords than the rest of the world. For example, nearly 44% of respondents said they use different passwords for different sites. Most other surveys and analysis over two decades have shown that less than a few percent of people actually have different passwords for every website and service. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they used passphrases or long passwords and 43% said they use lots of special characters in their passwords. Some of this can be explained by the larger than average percentage of respondents who said they use password managers (25%), which make using long passwords with lots of special characters easier to do. It is estimated that less than 2% of the world's population uses a password manager, so clearly this survey's respondents were far more computer security aware than the general population. That is good.

Just over 23% of respondents reported they used multi-factor authentication (MFA), but Germany (14%) and South Africa (nearly 13%) were the lowest reporting countries. All countries need to increase the adoption of MFA to better fight cybersecurity crime, but some have a farther way to go than others.

It is clear that this survey's respondents were more computer security savvy than the general population. Still, globally, large percentages of respondents are not getting any or enough security awareness training and it should concern us all that only 53% of those above average computer security savvy users felt very confident in reporting a security incident to their IT teams. It is clear we all have more work to do to better secure our enterprises.

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Q1. How confident are you at spotting the following online scams?

Answer	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count
Email phishing	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	42.52%	2553	46.10%	461	46.40%	464	42.91%	430	24.20%	242	51.70%	518	43.80%	438
Quite confident	40.94%	2458	40.50%	405	43.30%	433	45.01%	451	33.90%	339	36.73%	368	46.20%	462
Not very confident	12.59%	756	10.30%	103	8.50%	85	9.58%	96	29.00%	290	10.48%	105	7.70%	77
Not at all confident	3.95%	237	3.10%	31	1.80%	18	2.50%	25	12.90%	129	1.10%	11	2.30%	23
Smishing, or text phishing	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	38.74%	2326	42.60%	426	41.70%	417	44.61%	447	22.50%	225	41.42%	415	39.60%	396
Quite confident	41.91%	2516	41.50%	415	45.30%	453	42.12%	422	33.50%	335	41.12%	412	47.90%	479
Not very confident	14.62%	878	11.80%	118	10.60%	106	9.98%	100	30.20%	302	15.17%	152	10.00%	100
Not at all confident	4.73%	284	4.10%	41	2.40%	24	3.29%	33	13.80%	138	2.30%	23	2.50%	25
Vishing, or call phishing	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	37.03%	2223	37.60%	376	43.40%	434	43.51%	436	19.30%	193	40.42%	405	37.90%	379
Quite confident	42.42%	2547	42.10%	421	42.50%	425	43.81%	439	36.80%	368	42.12%	422	47.20%	472
Not very confident	15.94%	957	15.10%	151	11.80%	118	10.48%	105	30.20%	302	15.87%	159	12.20%	122
Not at all confident	4.61%	277	5.20%	52	2.30%	23	2.20%	22	13.70%	137	1.60%	16	2.70%	27
Social media phishing messages	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	36.24%	2176	35.40%	354	42.40%	424	35.33%	354	21.40%	214	45.21%	453	37.70%	377
Quite confident	42.75%	2567	44.30%	443	42.80%	428	47.70%	478	34.80%	348	39.62%	397	47.30%	473
Not very confident	16.27%	977	15.80%	158	12.70%	127	14.47%	145	28.70%	287	13.77%	138	12.20%	122
Not at all confident	4.73%	284	4.50%	45	2.10%	21	2.50%	25	15.10%	151	1.40%	14	2.80%	28
Deep fake videos	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	24.78%	1488	19.10%	191	29.70%	297	24.45%	245	18.60%	186	32.14%	322	24.70%	247
Quite confident	39.97%	2400	39.20%	392	36.60%	366	49.00%	491	34.70%	347	38.92%	390	41.40%	414
Not very confident	28.11%	1688	34.40%	344	27.50%	275	22.26%	223	31.70%	317	24.55%	246	28.30%	283
Not at all confident	7.13%	428	7.30%	73	6.20%	62	4.29%	43	15.00%	150	4.39%	44	5.60%	56
Social engineering	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	24.40%	1465	22.70%	227	30.20%	302	22.85%	229	20.60%	206	25.25%	253	24.80%	248
Quite confident	41.44%	2488	47.40%	474	39.90%	399	46.61%	467	34.70%	347	35.83%	359	44.20%	442
Not very confident	27.47%	1649	24.70%	247	25.30%	253	26.45%	265	30.20%	302	32.53%	326	25.60%	256
Not at all confident	6.70%	402	5.20%	52	4.60%	46	4.09%	41	14.50%	145	6.39%	64	5.40%	54
Other types of online scam	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very confident	28.18%	1692	24.20%	242	33.20%	332	26.55%	266	20.20%	202	35.53%	356	29.40%	294
Quite confident	48.87%	2934	52.20%	522	48.80%	488	53.49%	536	34.90%	349	48.00%	481	55.80%	558
Not very confident	18.04%	1083	20.00%	200	14.90%	149	16.77%	168	30.10%	301	14.27%	143	12.20%	122
Not at all confident	4.91%	295	3.60%	36	3.10%	31	3.19%	32	14.80%	148	2.20%	22	2.60%	26

Q2. Which online scams, if any, have you ever fallen for? (either at work or personally): (Tick all that apply)

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
I've never fallen for any type of online scam	48.43%	2908	53.50%	535	51.10%	511	44.91%	450	41.20%	412	37.82%	379	62.10%	621
Email phishing	21.49%	1290	19.00%	190	23.50%	235	22.55%	226	18.20%	182	28.74%	288	16.90%	169
Social media phishing messages	14.59%	876	11.00%	110	14.70%	147	13.67%	137	15.30%	153	24.45%	245	8.40%	84
Deep fake videos	12.77%	767	8.90%	89	10.10%	101	14.47%	145	18.40%	184	15.57%	156	9.20%	92
Smishing, or text phishing	11.81%	709	10.30%	103	9.00%	90	14.57%	146	14.90%	149	11.58%	116	10.50%	105
Vishing, or call phishing	11.56%	694	6.70%	67	10.80%	108	16.47%	165	15.50%	155	11.28%	113	8.60%	86
Other types of scam	11.33%	680	10.90%	109	7.90%	79	12.28%	123	14.40%	144	14.17%	142	8.30%	83
Social engineering	11.03%	662	10.80%	108	11.00%	110	10.08%	101	15.80%	158	9.88%	99	8.60%	86
Prefer not to say	3.03%	182	4.50%	45	3.10%	31	3.49%	35	2.70%	27	1.70%	17	2.70%	27

Q3. How comfortable would you be to report a security issue, violation or mistake to your security team?

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very comfortable	52.83%	3172	34.90%	349	68.60%	686	38.62%	387	42.30%	423	79.94%	801	52.60%	526
Somewhat comfortable	34.31%	2060	37.60%	376	24.20%	242	46.91%	470	40.40%	404	17.07%	171	39.70%	397
Not very comfortable	10.44%	627	20.80%	208	6.10%	61	12.57%	126	14.00%	140	2.50%	25	6.70%	67
Not at all comfortable	2.42%	145	6.70%	67	1.10%	11	1.90%	19	3.30%	33	0.50%	5	1.00%	10

Q3a. Why would you not be comfortable reporting a security issue, violation or mistake to your security team? (Check all that apply)

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count
N	772		275		72		145		173		30		77	
The process to report an incident is too difficult	36.66%	283	26.18%	72	34.72%	25	44.83%	65	53.76%	93	23.33%	7	27.27%	21
I'm scared to report security issues to the IT security team	33.29%	257	31.27%	86	34.72%	25	21.38%	31	42.77%	74	26.67%	8	42.86%	33
I don't know how to report issues to the security team	23.58%	182	23.64%	65	20.83%	15	28.97%	42	14.45%	25	40.00%	12	29.87%	23
I don't want to bother them	15.54%	120	16.00%	44	18.06%	13	12.41%	18	17.92%	31	13.33%	4	12.99%	10
Other	11.66%	90	19.27%	53	9.72%	7	13.79%	20	1.16%	2	13.33%	4	5.19%	4

*Respondents who would not be comfortable to report a security issue, violation or mistake to their security team

Q4. How helpful, or unhelpful, is your IT security team in your organization in helping you handle security issues?

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very helpful	43.79%	2629	33.60%	336	51.80%	518	44.61%	447	31.10%	311	59.68%	598	41.90%	419
Somewhat helpful	25.02%	1502	31.80%	318	22.40%	224	22.85%	229	27.40%	274	20.06%	201	25.60%	256
Neither helpful or unhelpful	7.89%	474	10.80%	108	4.70%	47	6.89%	69	14.80%	148	3.79%	38	6.40%	64
Somewhat unhelpful	7.74%	465	9.10%	91	5.10%	51	8.28%	83	12.50%	125	3.29%	33	8.20%	82
Very unhelpful	6.91%	415	5.30%	53	6.40%	64	8.68%	87	9.60%	96	6.19%	62	5.30%	53
N/A I've never had to report a security issue to our IT security team	8.64%	519	9.40%	94	9.60%	96	8.68%	87	4.60%	46	6.99%	70	12.60%	126

Q5. Thinking of the last time you or a colleague clicked on a phishing link, what, if anything, was the security teams response?

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
N/A My colleagues and I have never clicked on a phishing link	26.63%	1599	30.00%	300	26.40%	264	27.15%	272	14.80%	148	24.55%	246	36.90%	369
Sent on security awareness training	25.22%	1514	20.70%	207	25.80%	258	30.24%	303	19.60%	196	32.73%	328	22.20%	222
They responded, but no further action was taken	18.39%	1104	18.60%	186	18.90%	189	13.97%	140	20.20%	202	20.16%	202	18.50%	185
Slap on the wrist / verbally told not to do it again	13.64%	819	14.60%	146	12.90%	129	12.87%	129	22.60%	226	10.28%	103	8.60%	86
Disciplinary action / HR involvement	10.89%	654	9.60%	96	10.20%	102	9.28%	93	18.50%	185	8.68%	87	9.10%	91
There was no response	3.93%	236	5.80%	58	3.80%	38	4.59%	46	3.00%	30	2.59%	26	3.80%	38
Other, please specify	1.30%	78	0.70%	7	2.00%	20	1.90%	19	1.30%	13	1.00%	10	0.90%	9

Q6. On average, how often is there a security incident that you report to your IT security team?

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**	**All**	**Count**
N	5485		906		904		915		954		932		874	
Daily or more	7.06%	387	4.42%	40	9.96%	90	6.12%	56	9.43%	90	5.90%	55	6.41%	56
Less than daily, up to once a week	13.49%	740	11.04%	100	11.73%	106	13.77%	126	22.12%	211	9.66%	90	12.24%	107
Less than weekly, up to once a month	20.24%	1110	17.33%	157	14.60%	132	20.33%	186	30.71%	293	17.60%	164	20.37%	178
Less than monthly, up to once every six months	20.05%	1100	18.10%	164	17.70%	160	22.62%	207	19.92%	190	21.78%	203	20.14%	176
Less than once every six months, up to once a year	15.61%	856	19.21%	174	15.49%	140	16.83%	154	8.60%	82	18.88%	176	14.87%	130
Less than once a year	23.56%	1292	29.91%	271	30.53%	276	20.33%	186	9.22%	88	26.18%	244	25.97%	227
Mean: months			6.39		6.11		5.11		2.92		6.00		5.58	

*Respondents who have ever had to report a security issue to their IT security team

Q7. On average, how long does it take your IT security team to deal with a security issue you've raised?

Answers	Total All	Total Count	DE All	DE Count	US All	US Count	NL All	NL Count	NO All	NO Count	ZA All	ZA Count	UK All	UK Count
N	5485		906		904		915		954		932		874	
Less than an hour	25.47%	1397	25.28%	229	29.42%	266	25.79%	236	15.62%	149	33.37%	311	23.57%	206
Between 1-5 hours	39.45%	2164	40.29%	365	39.16%	354	37.70%	345	38.05%	363	39.70%	370	41.99%	367
More than 5 hours, up to 12 hours	19.43%	1066	18.76%	170	16.70%	151	20.55%	188	28.09%	268	12.55%	117	19.68%	172
More than 12 hours, up to 24 hours	8.79%	482	9.16%	83	6.97%	63	9.73%	89	11.64%	111	7.83%	73	7.21%	63
More than 24 hours, up to a week	4.85%	266	4.30%	39	4.98%	45	4.26%	39	5.97%	57	4.08%	38	5.49%	48
More than one week	2.01%	110	2.21%	20	2.77%	25	1.97%	18	0.63%	6	2.47%	23	2.06%	18
Mean: hours			12.44		13.45		12.17		12.50		11.92		13.10	

*Respondents who have ever had to report a security issue to their IT security team

Q8. How easy or difficult is it for you to reach your IT security team (i.e for questions, information etc.)?

Answers	Total All	Total Count	DE All	DE Count	US All	US Count	NL All	NL Count	NO All	NO Count	ZA All	ZA Count	UK All	UK Count
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Very easy	40.94%	2458	33.80%	338	50.90%	509	35.13%	352	27.80%	278	60.48%	606	37.50%	375
Somewhat easy	35.23%	2115	36.00%	360	30.30%	303	39.72%	398	40.40%	404	25.95%	260	39.00%	390
Neither easy nor difficult	16.74%	1005	18.50%	185	13.30%	133	19.76%	198	23.80%	238	8.68%	87	16.40%	164
Somewhat difficult	5.86%	352	10.20%	102	4.60%	46	4.29%	43	7.00%	70	3.49%	35	5.60%	56
Very difficult	1.23%	74	1.50%	15	0.90%	9	1.10%	11	1.00%	10	1.40%	14	1.50%	15

Q9. What, if anything, do you do to keep your passwords secure on work-related devices and accounts? (Check all that apply)

Answers	Total All	Total Count	DE All	DE Count	US All	US Count	NL All	NL Count	NO All	NO Count	ZA All	ZA Count	UK All	UK Count
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Use different passwords for different sites	43.84%	2632	49.20%	492	46.60%	466	43.01%	431	37.80%	378	43.31%	434	43.10%	431
I use lots of special characters	43.02%	2583	50.90%	509	43.80%	438	38.62%	387	32.90%	329	50.80%	509	41.10%	411
I use passphrases (or long passwords)	30.98%	1860	31.40%	314	28.60%	286	30.94%	310	34.50%	345	32.63%	327	27.80%	278
I use a password manager	25.43%	1527	25.80%	258	26.40%	264	27.54%	276	27.60%	276	22.95%	230	22.30%	223
I enable MFA where available	23.15%	1390	14.20%	142	15.30%	153	38.02%	381	40.40%	404	12.77%	128	18.20%	182
I don't do anything to keep my passwords secure on work-related devices and accounts	5.06%	304	5.00%	50	7.10%	71	2.20%	22	2.20%	22	4.89%	49	9.00%	90
Other, please specify	1.23%	74	0.80%	8	1.90%	19	1.40%	14	0.40%	4	2.30%	23	0.60%	6

Q10. Which security threats, if any, are covered in your organization`s security awareness training? (check all that apply)

Answers	Total		DE		US		NL		NO		ZA		UK	
	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count	All	Count
N	6004		1000		1000		1002		1000		1002		1000	
Email phishing	54.66%	3282	53.60%	536	62.70%	627	49.60%	497	38.30%	383	69.46%	696	54.30%	543
Vishing, or call phishing	35.36%	2123	26.70%	267	44.00%	440	34.23%	343	28.20%	282	44.31%	444	34.70%	347
Smishing, or text phishing	35.21%	2114	25.30%	253	40.90%	409	34.23%	343	31.70%	317	44.41%	445	34.70%	347
Social media phishing messages	33.84%	2032	29.20%	292	35.90%	359	33.53%	336	30.10%	301	45.11%	452	29.20%	292
Social engineering	29.18%	1752	24.00%	240	34.70%	347	26.25%	263	28.60%	286	35.83%	359	25.70%	257
Deep fake videos	22.82%	1370	16.00%	160	22.10%	221	22.36%	224	27.30%	273	31.14%	312	18.00%	180
We don't do security awareness training, but I know what some or all of these are	15.24%	915	16.60%	166	13.80%	138	17.17%	172	11.20%	112	15.47%	155	17.20%	172
We don't do security awareness training and I don't know what any of these are	6.70%	402	10.70%	107	6.10%	61	7.09%	71	4.40%	44	3.99%	40	7.90%	79
Other, please specify	0.47%	28	0.40%	4	0.50%	5	1.20%	12	0.20%	2	0.40%	4	0.10%	1

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