

Kashi Research Memo

Bystander / Ally Perspective - Research synthesis and project recommendation

Prepared for product / governance design. Tailored to Kashi as currently framed in the concept note and the 2026-04-21 progress overview.

Core conclusion

A controlled ally path strengthens Kashi materially. Research supports four claims: witnesses are common; witnessing itself is harmful; silence is structurally predictable; and organizations need a safe path for non-targets to surface repeated patterns. But the product move must be bounded. Kashi should not add a generic reporting button. It should add an observational concern path that routes to neutral review, preserves target autonomy, and never turns peers into dossier-holders or amateur prosecutors.

Question	Answer	Recommended level
Should Kashi support a bystander / ally pathway?	Yes, but only as a tightly controlled concern-routing layer.	Not MVP-core, but strong V2 / governance-ready layer.
Primary users Peers, recurring attendees, PMs, facilitators, skip-level observers.	Wrong implementation Anonymous accusation tool or manager backdoor.	Right implementation Observer concern -> neutral triage -> facilitated review -> formal route only if threshold is crossed.

1. Why this matters for Kashi specifically

Kashi is already framed as governance infrastructure rather than a harassment classifier or productivity widget. Its core logic is repeated-pattern visibility, review-worthy events rather than machine judgment, role-based presentation, strong visibility boundaries, no content-level live detection, and no HR decisions from the tool [K1][K2]. That architecture already solves part of the ally question: the system is built to surface longitudinal asymmetry, not to let one person make a decisive accusation.

The gap is that Kashi currently centers four main actors: the target, the manager, HR / Compliance, and the CEO. That leaves out a large and practically important class of observers: peers, facilitators, PMs, skip-levels, and recurring meeting participants who may see a pattern before the target is ready to act or before the institution has enough confidence to intervene [K1][K2].

That omission matters because Kashis own product thesis says the burden of recognition and proof should not sit entirely on the person under pressure [K2]. If only the target can activate the concern path, Kashi still leaves too much recognition burden on the target. An ally path partially distributes recognition without distributing surveillance power.

2. What the external research supports

2.1 Witnesses are common, not peripheral

The bystander problem is not a side case. In one NHS questionnaire study involving 2,950 staff, 43 percent reported witnessing bullying in the previous 6 months; witnessing bullying was associated with lower psychological health, lower job satisfaction, and higher intention to leave work [R1]. This matters for Kashi

because the product lives in recurring meetings, where repeated participants often see the pattern before any formal complaint exists.

2.2 Witnessing itself has consequences

A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis on witnessing workplace bullying identified 24 studies from 13 countries. Cross-sectional findings showed significant associations between witnessing bullying and mental-health outcomes, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intent, while also warning that the phenomenon is complex and moderated by factors such as proximity to the target, overlap with direct exposure, and helping behavior [R2]. The important takeaway is not that every witness will become ill; it is that witnessing is itself a meaningful organizational harm signal and cannot be treated as morally neutral background noise.

2.3 Silence is structurally predictable

The NHS study found recurring barriers to reporting: people believed nothing would change, did not want to be seen as trouble-makers, feared the seniority of the bully, and lacked confidence in how policies would actually be applied [R1]. Qualitative research on bullying bystanders in healthcare identified four recurring factors shaping support behavior: the negative impact on bystanders themselves, perceptions of target responsibility, fear of repercussions, and bystander awareness [R3]. A later vignette study found that bystander responses vary across contexts and do not reduce to a simple intervene / do not intervene model; context and personal factors matter heavily [R4].

This is exactly the product point. The failure is not merely that coworkers are morally weak. The failure is that organizations often give them no proportionate, safe, non-self-destructive way to act.

2.4 Institutions need trusted, accessible, non-accusatory pathways

EEOC guidance on harassment prevention emphasizes five core principles that have generally proven effective: committed leadership, accountability, strong policy, trusted and accessible complaint procedures, and regular interactive training [R5]. The EEOCs task-force report goes further and says employers should consider workplace civility training and bystander-intervention training as part of a holistic prevention program, while also noting that the efficacy of such training should be evaluated rather than assumed [R6].

This is useful for Kashi because it supports the organizational shape of an ally path: not a dramatic whistleblowing button, but a trusted route inside a broader prevention system.

2.5 The ombuds model is the closest institutional analogue

The organizational-ombuds model is highly relevant here. IOA materials describe an ombuds as a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource that can work with individuals and groups, explore options, surface issues to appropriate decision-makers, and bring systemic concerns forward without becoming a formal investigator or adjudicator [R7][R8]. The 2026 IOA revision materials are especially useful: they state that an ombuds program may engage regarding individual, group, or systemic concerns, may bring concerns to appropriate individuals, is voluntary and informal, does not conduct formal investigations, and should disclose only to the most limited extent possible [R8].

For Kashi, that is the cleanest design analogy. An ally path should look much more like an ombuds-style concern-routing channel than a classic misconduct-reporting form.

3. What the research does not support

The literature does not justify a naive conclusion like: "Bystanders are the answer, so give everyone a report button." That would over-read the evidence. The research says witnesses matter and safe intervention

pathways are valuable. It does not say anonymous accusation systems or unrestricted peer reporting are effective or fair [R2][R3][R6].

It also does not support turning witnesses into secondary investigators. Once a witness can see another persons detailed metrics or receives confirmation that a named person is "the problem," the product stops being governance infrastructure and starts drifting toward crowd-sourced surveillance. That would conflict directly with Kashis current principles: mirrors rather than microscopes, self-view and aggregate view over universal visibility, no content surveillance, no HR decisions from the tool, and no open browsing of employee records [K1][K2].

4. Product conclusion for Kashi

Kashi should support an ally path, but only in a constrained form. The right abstraction is not "bystander reporting." The right abstraction is an Ally / Observer Concern Path with three modes of use:

Mode	What the observer is saying	Why it fits the research	Kashi treatment
Pattern affecting someone else	"I am repeatedly seeing asymmetry affecting another participant."	Matches witness literature: observers often see repetition before the target acts; keeps language observational rather than accusatory [R1][R2].	Allowed with structured inputs and no observer access to target metrics.
Team-health concern	"The meeting dynamic is suppressing someone or a subgroup, but I am not ready to name a target."	Matches systemic / ombuds logic; useful when the observer sees climate-level distortion rather than a single dyad [R7][R8].	Routes to aggregate or facilitated review without naming by default.
Request facilitated review	"A neutral party should review this pattern or meeting climate."	Best institutional fit: trusted procedure, not direct punishment demand [R5][R6][R8].	Routes to People / Compliance / ombuds-style reviewer, not directly to line management.

The common thread is simple: the observer contributes a bounded concern. They do not gain access, they do not receive a verdict, and they do not directly trigger disciplinary workflow.

5. Design rules that keep the ally path useful instead of dangerous

5.1 The ally path must be a routing mechanism, not a visibility mechanism

Observers should be able to surface a concern, but they should not gain access to another persons dashboard, review-worthy events, or encrypted evidence. The product should preserve Kashis current visibility

ladder: self-view, manager self-mirror, aggregate HR / executive view, and restricted review under procedural justification [K1][K2].

5.2 The input must stay observational

Do not ask users to label harassment, intent, or illegality. Ask them to identify observable structural patterns: repeated interruption, ignored turns, selective pressure, chilled participation, subgroup suppression, facilitator misuse, takeover, or repeated concentration around one person. This keeps the ally path consistent with Kashis review-worthy event framing and with the evidence base, which is stronger on witnessed pattern and organizational consequence than on witness legal judgment [K1][R2].

5.3 The first recipient should be neutral

The first institutional recipient should be a neutral or semi-neutral function - for example a People / Compliance reviewer trained for procedural fairness, or an ombuds-like resource where available. The line manager should not be the default receiver. This matters because witnesses often hesitate precisely due to power and retaliation concerns [R1][R3][R8].

5.4 The targets autonomy should be preserved wherever possible

If the concern is low-grade or climate-level, Kashi should first support non-personal interventions: facilitator coaching, meeting-norm resets, manager self-mirror updates, or team-level review of speaking-structure patterns. Only stronger patterns should move closer to named review. This avoids taking agency away from the target while still letting the institution respond earlier.

5.5 The system should distinguish concern from case

A usable internal model is: Concern logged -> Pattern watch -> Facilitated review eligible -> Formal route if threshold and human judgment support it. This is cleaner than collapsing every ally concern directly into an HR case.

6. Recommended operating model for Kashi

Step	Product behavior	Human behavior	Reason this is coherent
1. Observer submits concern	Structured form: who am I in the meeting, what pattern am I seeing, over what date range, name now / later / not at all, what kind of help is requested.	No freeform accusation required.	Keeps reports comparable and prevents narrative sprawl.
2. System checks existing structural pattern	Kashi evaluates whether there is already low / medium / high structural support in the observed window.	No one outside neutral review sees the result.	Uses what Kashi is already good at: repeated pattern detection [K1].
3. Neutral triage	Concern is routed to a neutral reviewer or ombuds-style function.	Reviewer decides: watch, coach, facilitate, or refer onward.	Matches trusted-procedure and ombuds logic [R5][R8].

Step	Product behavior	Human behavior	Reason this is coherent
4. Low-grade response	If the concern is weak or climate-level, default response is non-punitive: meeting-process coaching, manager self-mirror, or team facilitation.	No named case unless threshold is crossed.	Reduces overreaction and keeps the tool non-carceral.
5. Stronger response	If repeated asymmetry is structurally strong and human review agrees, create a bounded review workflow.	Target can be invited into the process, not bypassed by default.	Protects fairness and target autonomy.
6. Audit and closure	All drill-downs and transitions logged; observer sees only process state, not the targets data.	Organization can later review whether ally-path use improved early detection or produced misuse.	Makes the feature governable rather than mystical.

7. MVP / V2 recommendation

Best recommendation: do not make the ally path a day-one flagship surface. Kashis current priority is still proving that the structural detector stack, governance posture, and role-based presentation feel defensible and non-creepy in live organizational settings [K1][K2].

So the practical rollout should be:

- MVP: no explicit ally UI yet; let neutral reviewers note externally raised concerns while Kashi does pattern monitoring and self / aggregate surfaces.
- V2 governance-ready: add the Ally / Observer Concern Path in a tightly constrained form, with observational input categories and neutral routing.
- Post-V2 hardening: add analytics on how often ally concerns were corroborated, how often they only justified watch-mode, and whether they improved early intervention quality without increasing misuse.

This sequencing matters because a badly timed ally feature can accidentally define the entire product as reporting software rather than governance infrastructure.

8. Critical risks and how to avoid them

Risk	What goes wrong	Prevention
Anonymous accusation tool	People use the feature to create gossip trails or political cover.	No anonymous freeform accusations; structured observational inputs only; neutral triage only.

Risk	What goes wrong	Prevention
Manager fishing backdoor	Managers use ally logic to create trails around disfavored staff.	Line managers cannot be default recipients; no manager access to named employee telemetry; audit all drill-downs [K1][K2].
Target disempowerment	Someone else starts a process around the target without protecting their agency.	Prefer climate-level or facilitated response first; involve the target before escalating to named formal routes where feasible.
Overconfidence from weak evidence	Single awkward meetings become pseudo-cases.	Use repeated-pattern thresholds, confidence levels, and human approval before stronger action [K1].
Product drift into reporting software	The market reads Kashi as hotline tech or surveillance tech.	Keep the ally path subordinate to structural review and governance framing, not as the product headline.

9. Decisions the team can take now

Recommended decisions for the current project cycle:

- Adopt the concept term Ally / Observer Concern Path, not Bystander Reporting.
- State explicitly that this path is observational, not accusatory, and does not give observers access to other peoples records.
- Add a product principle: non-target observers may surface repeated structural concerns, but only through neutral, procedurally bounded review.
- Keep line managers out of the default intake path.
- Design the state model as concern -> watch -> facilitated review -> formal route, rather than concern -> case.
- Keep this as V2 / governance-ready scope unless a pilot customer explicitly needs it and has neutral review capacity.

10. Final recommendation

The research supports a clear project move: Kashi should broaden its institutional logic beyond target / manager / HR / CEO and make room for non-target observers. That strengthens the product thesis because workplace harm is often visible to the room before it becomes visible to the institution. But the same research also warns against naive optimism. Witnesses often stay silent because they fear retaliation, doubt anything will change, or do not know what kind of help is safe [R1][R3].

So the winning design is not a louder reporting mechanism. It is a safer one. Kashi should build a bounded ally path that lets people say, in effect: "I am seeing a repeated structural pattern and I want a neutral, limited review." That is the version that fits the evidence, fits the ombuds analogy, and fits Kashis own governance architecture [K1][K2][R7][R8].

Source notes

Kashi sources

- [K1] Kashi - Progress & Project Overview (2026-04-21). Key points used here: governance-infrastructure framing; mirrors-not-microscopes; role-based presentation; deterministic structural detectors; review-worthy events; no HR decisions; visibility and retention boundaries.
- [K2] Transparency That Drives Institutional Accountability (concept note). Key points used here: burden of recognition / proof on the target; escalation remains user-driven rather than automatic; role-based access and audit trail; review-worthy event construct; governance-ready product framing.

External research

- [R1] Carter M, Thompson N, Crampton P, et al. Workplace bullying in the UK NHS: a questionnaire and interview study on prevalence, impact and barriers to reporting. *BMJ Open*. 2013;3(6):e002628. Key results used: 43% witnessed bullying in prior 6 months; managers most common source; major reporting barriers were nothing would change, fear of being seen as a trouble-maker, bully seniority, and uncertainty about policy application.
- [R2] Nielsen MB, et al. Witnessing workplace bullying - A systematic review and meta-analysis of individual health and well-being outcomes. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. 2024. Key results used: review identified 24 studies from 13 countries; cross-sectional associations with mental health, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intent; authors caution that witnessing effects are moderated by overlap with direct exposure, proximity to target, and helping behavior.
- [R3] Thompson NJ, Carter M, et al. Workplace Bullying in Healthcare: A Qualitative Analysis of Bystander Experiences. *The Qualitative Report*. 2020. Key results used: barriers to support clustered around negative impact on bystanders, target-responsibility perceptions, fear of repercussions, and bystander awareness.
- [R4] Jonsson S, Muhonen T. Bystander behavior in workplace bullying: a vignette study exploring how organizational space and situational strength influence intentions to intervene. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*. 2025. Key result used: bystander behavior is varied and context-sensitive; personal factors and specific context matter heavily.
- [R5] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment. Key principles used: committed leadership, accountability, strong policy, trusted and accessible complaint procedures, and regular interactive training.
- [R6] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace - recommendations on civility and bystander intervention training. Key point used: employers should consider bystander-intervention training as part of a holistic prevention program, while effectiveness should be evaluated rather than assumed.
- [R7] International Ombuds Association. What Is an Organizational Ombuds? Key points used: ombuds as confidential, impartial, informal, independent resource; can work with individuals and groups; can surface issues and systemic concerns to appropriate decision-makers.
- [R8] International Ombuds Association. 2026 Standards of Practice revision guidance. Key points used: ombuds may engage regarding individual, group, or systemic concerns; may bring concerns to appropriate

individuals; is voluntary and informal; does not investigate formally; discloses only to the most limited extent possible.

Prepared for internal product / governance work. Not legal advice.