

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

Phil Linnard at Slaughter and May
Clare Fletcher at Slaughter and May

12. Can the identity of the complainant, witnesses or sources of information for the investigation be kept confidential?

Germany

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at Hengeler Mueller

There is no general obligation on the part of the employer to disclose to the employee concerned the identity of the complainant, witnesses or other sources of information during the workplace investigation.

However, as described in question 11, the employee must be sufficiently informed of the allegations before a termination based on suspicion of wrongdoing is issued. This may also require disclosing the complainant's or witnesses' identity or other sources of information. In addition, the employer would have the burden of proof in the context of a legal dispute (eg, termination protection proceedings or proceedings about the legality of certain investigation measures) and may have to name witnesses and disclose sources of information.

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Italy

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Yes, in principle the identity of the complainant, witnesses or sources of information for the investigation can be kept confidential.

On the other hand, if the employer – after having concluded the investigation – brings disciplinary action against the employee, the employer must send a letter to the employee in which the facts are described in detail, objectively and in a precise way, identifying when and where they have taken place, to allow a proper defence for the employee.

Even at this stage, however, the employer has no obligation to provide the employee with the evidence underlying the facts ascribed to him (ie, the employer has no obligation to specify the identity of the individuals through which they gained knowledge of the facts reported in the disciplinary letter).

However, if the employee subsequently challenges the disciplinary sanction before a judge, the employer bears the burden of proof, which may mean having to call the individuals interviewed within the internal investigation to stand as witnesses in court.

Moreover, in case of whistleblowing reports falling within the scope of the WB Decree, the employer is requested to generally keep the whistleblower's identity confidential (according to art. 12 of the WB Decree). More specifically: (i) if the disciplinary charges are grounded on investigations which are different and additional to the whistleblowing report (although arising as a consequence of the report), the whistleblower's identity may not be disclosed; (ii) if the disciplinary charges are grounded, in whole or in part, on the whistleblowing report, and knowing the identity of the whistleblower is indispensable for the defendant, such report may be used for the purpose of the disciplinary proceeding only if the whistleblower gives consent to his/her identity being revealed.

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Switzerland

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As mentioned under Question 10, the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations) also entails the employer's duty to respect and protect the personality (including confidentiality and privacy) and integrity of employees (article 328 paragraph 1, Swiss Code of Obligations) and to take appropriate measures to protect them.

However, in combination with the right to be heard and the right to be informed regarding an investigation, the accused also has the right that incriminating evidence is presented to them throughout the investigation and that they can comment on it. For instance, this right includes disclosure of the persons accusing them and their concrete statements. Anonymisation or redaction of such statements is permissible if the interests of the persons incriminating the accused or the interests of the employer override the accused' interests to be presented with the relevant documents or statements (see question 11; see also article 9 paragraphs 1 and 4, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection). However, a careful assessment of interests is required, and these must be limited to what is necessary. In principle, a person accusing another person must take responsibility for their information and accept criticism from the person implicated by the information provided.^[1]

[1] Roger Rudolph, *Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht*, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

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