

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

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10. What confidentiality obligations apply during an investigation?

Austria

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If the report and the whistleblower fall within the scope of the Whistleblowing Directive, his or her identity must be protected. From a data protection perspective, the principles of the DSG must be observed to protect the legitimate confidentiality of the individuals concerned.

Furthermore, the employer should ensure that information is only disclosed to trustworthy persons to avoid pre-judgements.

Last updated on 29/09/2023

Spain

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Companies and employees are not bound by any statutory confidentiality obligation in the context of workplace investigations. However, if a company's enquiry has the potential to examine employees' private affairs, then the company must ensure the confidentiality of the investigation.

This confidentiality obligation would not arise from the investigation itself, but from the company's obligation to safeguard its employees' rights.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Switzerland

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Besides the employee's duty of performance (article 319, Swiss Code of Obligations), the employment relationship is defined by the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations) and the employee's duty of loyalty (article 321a, Swiss Code of Obligations). Ancillary duties can be derived from the two duties, which are of importance for the confidentiality of an internal investigation.[\[1\]](#)

In principle, the employer must respect and protect the personality (including confidentiality and privacy) and integrity of the employee (article 328 paragraph 1, Swiss Code of Obligations) and take appropriate measures to protect the employee. Because of the danger of pre-judgment or damage to reputation as well as other adverse consequences, the employer must conduct an internal investigation discreetly and objectively. The limits of the duty of care are found in the legitimate self-interest of the employer.[\[2\]](#)

In return for the employer's duty of care, employees must comply with their duty of loyalty and safeguard the employer's legitimate interests. In connection with an internal investigation, employees must therefore keep the conduct of an investigation confidential. Additionally, employees must keep confidential and not disclose to any third party any facts that they have acquired in the course of the employment relationship, and which are neither obvious nor publicly accessible.[\[3\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Wolfgang Portmann/Roger Rudolph, BSK OR, Art. 328 N 1 et seq.

[\[2\]](#) Claudia Fritsche, Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz, Ein Handbuch für Unternehmen mit besonderem Fokus auf Finanzinstitute, p. 202.

[\[3\]](#) David Rosenthal et al., Praxishandbuch für interne Untersuchungen und eDiscovery, Release 1.01, Zürich/Bern 2021, p. 133.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

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