International Employment Lawyer

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

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01. What legislation, guidance and/or policies govern a workplace investigation?

Finland

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Mainly, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002). In addition, the following also have relevance in connection to a workplace investigation: the Employment Contracts Act (55/2001), the Criminal Code (39/1889), the Act on Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement and Cooperation on Occupational Safety and Health at Workplaces (44/2006), the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) and the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014). In addition, the employer's own policies must be taken into consideration while conducting a workplace investigation.

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Nigeria

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- The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
- The Criminal Code Act
- Penal Code Law
- Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act 2011 (as amended)
- Freedom of Information Act 2011
- Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2013
- Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Act 2000
- Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act
- Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020
- Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance 2018
- Economic Financial Crime Commission (Establishment) Act 2004
- Investment Securities Act 2007
- Central Bank of Nigeria Act 2007
- Banks and Other Financial Institutions Act 2020
- Whistleblowing Programme under the Ministry of Finance

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United States

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In the United States, any combination of legislation at the federal, state and local level, as well as judicial opinions and regulatory guidance interpreting those statutes, may impose obligations on relevant employers to undertake a timely internal investigation in response to complaints of workplace misconduct and to promptly implement remedial measures, where appropriate.

An employer's written policies often also set forth the company's expectations for how its employees, partners, vendors, consultants or other third parties will conduct themselves in carrying out the business of the company, and these policies may include protocols setting forth the parameters for an investigation in the event of potential non-compliance. Such investigatory roadmaps are often described in, for example, employee handbooks or a company's policy against discrimination and harassment.

Due to the patchwork nature of employment and related laws, it is not possible to cover every investigation scenario or related legislation in this guide. Employers should instead consult with experienced employment attorneys in their state to ensure compliance with the applicable legal and regulatory regimes.

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02. How is a workplace investigation usually commenced?

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When the employer becomes aware of possible misconduct, the employer must commence an investigation immediately, in practice within about two weeks. The information may come to the employer's knowledge via, for example, the employer's own observations, from the complainant or their colleagues or an employee representative.

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Nigeria

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A workplace investigation is conducted to verify alleged misconduct within a workplace.[1] Once a complaint is made regarding wrongdoing, misconduct or unethical behaviour by an employee or group of employees within a workplace, an investigation is required to confirm the complaint and if it is confirmed, the body in charge of supervising the employees (usually the HR specialist, disciplinary committee or line managers) determine and implement necessary corrective or disciplinary actions.

[1] Conducting Internal Investigations In Organisation - Health & Safety - Nigeria (mondaq.com)

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United States

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A workplace investigation is often, although not always, prompted by a complaint of workplace misconduct, usually made directly by the employee who was harmed by the conduct, a third party who witnessed the conduct, or a manager or supervisor who was made aware of the issue and has reporting obligations as a result of his or her role in the organisation.

It is best practice – and often a legal requirement depending on the applicable state law – for companies to clearly outline a complaint process in their policies and to provide employees who experience, have knowledge of, or witness incidents they believe to violate the company's policies with one or more options for making a report. Although the specific complaint procedure may vary depending on the size of the organisation, the nature of the business and the type of complaint at issue, many companies provide for (or require) making a report through one of the following channels:

- a company-managed hotline or online equivalent;
- human resources;
- an affected employee's supervisor or manager; or
- a member of the legal or compliance department.

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03. Can an employee be suspended during a workplace investigation? Are there any conditions on suspension (eg, pay, duration)?

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There is no legislation on temporary suspension in the event of a workplace investigation or similar. In some situations, the employer may relieve the employee from their working obligation with pay for a short period.

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Nigeria

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Yes, an employee can be suspended during an investigation to allow the employer to investigate the allegations against the employee unhindered and without undue interference by that employee. A suspension under the law merely prevents the employee from discharging the ordinary functions of his or her role without any deprivation of his rights during the period of the suspension. Thus, unless there is an express provision in the contract of employment or employee's handbook stating that the employee can be suspended with or without half pay, the employee would be entitled to a full salary.

Further, the duration for which the employee may be suspended should be as contained in the employee's contract, employee's handbook, or letter of suspension.

In the recent case of *GLOBE MOTORS HOLDINGS NIGERIA LIMITED v. AKINYEMI ADEGOKE OYEWOLE (2022)*, the court held, *"Since suspension is not a termination of the employment contract nor a dismissal of the employee, the implication is that the employee is still in continuous employment of the employer until he is recalled or formally terminated or dismissed. Pending his recall or dismissal, a suspended employee is entitled to his wages or salary during the period of suspension, unless the terms of the contract of employment or the letter of suspension itself is specific that the suspended employer will not be paid salaries during the period of suspension"*.

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Yes. An employer may suspend the subject of an internal investigation with full pay pending the outcome of an investigation. However, this measure should be used sparingly, for example in cases where an employee has been accused of gross misconduct or where it is the only means of separating the alleged victim of harassment from the accused to prevent continued harassment. As an alternative means of separating the victim from the accused, an employer can consider interim measures such as a schedule change, transfer or leave of absence for the alleged victim with his or her consent (employers should take care not to take any action that could be perceived as retaliatory against the complainant – even if well-intentioned – including involuntarily transferring him or her or forcing a leave of absence).

Where an employer does determine that suspending the subject of an investigation is warranted while the company carries out its investigation, it should provide him or her with a written statement briefly outlining the reason for the suspension and the estimated date the employee will be advised of the investigation outcome and his or her final employment status.

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04. Who should conduct a workplace investigation, are there minimum qualifications or criteria that need to be met?

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The employer must conduct the investigation, but the actual work can be done either by the employer's personnel or by an external investigator, for example, a law firm. Either way, there are no formal criteria for

the persons executing the investigation; however, impartiality is required from the person conducting the investigation

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Typically, the legal department, the chief compliance officer, the HR manager, the audit committee or any other committee as may be set up by the company may conduct a workplace investigation. However, in other instances, the company may engage the services of independent external personnel to assist with conducting an internal investigation.

The minimum qualification or criteria of the person conducting the investigation should be as contained in the relevant company policies. Criteria may include independence, objectivity and impartiality.

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While every internal investigation should be carried out promptly, thoroughly and in a well-documented manner, employers should appoint one individual or team of individuals to oversee all complaints regardless of how they are received. Doing so helps to ensure that all allegations are documented, reviewed and assigned for investigation as consistently as practicable.

Once a complaint is received and recorded, the company should undertake an initial triage process to determine:

- the risk of the alleged misconduct from a reputational, operational and legal perspective;
- who is best suited to conduct an investigation based on the nature of the alleged misconduct and the perceived risk level (potential candidates may include members of human resources, legal or compliance departments, or outside counsel); and
- a plan for investigating the factual allegations raised in the complaint.

The appropriate investigator should be able to investigate objectively without bias (ie, the investigator cannot have a stake in the outcome, a personal relationship with the involved parties and the outcome of the investigation should not directly affect the investigator's position within the organisation); has skills that include prior investigative knowledge and a working knowledge of employment laws; has strong interpersonal skills to build a rapport with the parties involved and to be perceived as neutral and fair; is detail-oriented; has the right temperament to conduct interviews; can be trusted to maintain confidentiality; is respected within the organisation; and can act as a credible witness.

At this triage stage, an employer may also wish to use the information collected from the complaint to proactively identify potential patterns or systemic issues at an individual, divisional or corporate level and react accordingly. For example, if a company receives a complaint against a supervisor for harassing conduct and that same individual has already been the subject of previous complaints, the company should consider whether it may be appropriate to engage outside counsel to carry out a new investigation to bring objectivity and lend credibility to the review – even if the prior complaints were not ultimately substantiated following thorough internal investigations. Similarly, the engagement of outside counsel is often appropriate where a complaint involves alleged misconduct on the part of a company's senior management or board members.

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05. Can the employee under investigation bring legal action to stop the investigation?

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The employee does not have a legal right to stop the investigation. The employer must fulfil its obligation to investigate the alleged misconduct.

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Generally, issues surrounding workplace investigations are usually embedded in either the employee's contract or handbook, which is binding on the employee. Thus, an employee cannot validly bring an action to stop the investigation unless his rights as guaranteed by the Constitution, the Employee's handbook, and other laws such as a right to a fair hearing are violated during the investigation.

Consequently, the employee may apply to the National Industrial Court for an order of interim relief against his or her employer restraining further prejudicial investigation.

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In general, private sector employees have considerably fewer rights vis-à-vis a company-led internal investigation than their public sector counterparts. This is because many US states are "at will" employment states, which means that, absent an employment contract that provides otherwise, an employee can be terminated for any reason not prohibited by statute or public policy. Depending on the specific circumstances, however, an employee who is the subject of an internal investigation could bring or threaten legal action according to contract or tort principles to stop an investigation. An employee may also challenge an investigation because it was conducted in violation of certain federal, state or foreign laws, for example, the use of polygraph tests in violation of the Employee Polygraph Protection Act or foreign data privacy laws.

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06. Can co-workers be compelled to act as witnesses?

What legal protections do employees have when acting as witnesses in an investigation?

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There is no legislation on a witness's role in investigations. However, the legislation on occupational safety requires that employees must report any irregularities they observe. Depending on the situation, participating in the investigation may also be part of the person's work duties, role or position, in which case the employer may require the employee to contribute to clarifying the situation. However, there is no formal obligation to act as a witness, and there is no legislation regarding the protection of witnesses. If a witness wishes, they may have, for example, an employee representative as a support person during the hearing.

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Nigeria

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The employee's contract, employee handbook or company policies typically mandate an employee to cooperate and participate in good faith in any lawful internal investigation undertaken by the company, and also protects an employee acting as a witness in an internal investigation. Some of the legal protections available to an employee acting as a witness during workplace investigations are freedom from intimidation, threats or the loss of employment.

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United States

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Yes. The investigator is empowered to decide which witnesses should be interviewed as a part of the fact-gathering process. In addition to interviewing the complainant, the investigation should include individual interviews with other involved parties, including the subject of the complaint, as well as individuals who may have observed the alleged conduct or may have other relevant knowledge, including supervisors or other employees. Many companies' code of conduct, employee handbook or similar policy set forth the requirement for current employees to cooperate fully in any investigation by the company or its external advisors and also provide that failure to do so could result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

In the absence of contractual protections, employees may have no legal right to refuse to submit to an interview, even if their answers tend to incriminate them. That being said, when acting as a witness in an internal investigation, a current employee is usually afforded similar legal protections as the subject of an investigation, including the right to oppose unreasonable intrusions into his or her privacy and unreasonable workplace searches. For example, certain state laws prohibit an employer from questioning an employee regarding issues that serve no business purpose.

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07. What data protection or other regulations apply when gathering physical evidence?

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Generally, the basic principles set out by the GDPR and the Finnish Data Protection Act apply to data processing in connection with investigations, including evidence gathering: there must be a legal basis for processing, personal data may only be processed and stored when and for as long as necessary considering the purposes of processing, etc.

Additionally, if physical evidence concerns the electronic communications (such as emails and online chats) of an employee, gathering evidence is subject to certain restrictions based on Finnish ePrivacy and employee privacy laws. As a general rule, an employee's electronic communications accounts, including those provided by the employer for work purposes, may not be accessed and electronic communications may not be searched or reviewed by the employer. In practice, the employer may access such electronic correspondence only in limited situations stipulated in the Act on Protection of Privacy in Working Life (759/2004), or by obtaining case-specific consent from the employee, which is typically not possible in internal investigations, particularly concerning the employee suspected of wrongdoing.

However, monitoring data flow strictly between the employee and the employer's information systems (eg, the employee saving data to USB sticks, using printers) is allowed under Finnish legislation, provided that employee emails, chats, etc, are not accessed and monitored. If documentation is unrelated to electronic communications, it also may be reviewed by the employer. Laptops, paper archives and other similar company documentation considered "physical evidence" may be investigated while gathering evidence on the condition that any private documentation, communications, pictures or other content of an employee are not accessed.

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When gathering evidence, the person being investigated is protected by the Constitution, the Freedom of Information Act and the Nigerian Data Protection Regulation (NDPR), among others.

The Constitution, particularly section 37, guarantees the right of a person to privacy.

The NDPR is the main data protection regulation in Nigeria. It regulates the processing and transfer of personal data.

Further, the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 prohibits the disclosure of information gathered during an investigation to the public.

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Documents and instruments that set out a company's policies (eg, employee handbooks, code of conduct or other written guidelines) often contain provisions regarding employee data and document collection, workplace searches, communication monitoring, privacy, and confidentiality. As discussed below, state and federal constitutional, statutory and common law – and in some cases foreign data privacy regimes – may provide additional protections to protect employees from an unwarranted or unreasonable invasion of privacy during an internal investigation.

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08. Can the employer search employees' possessions or files as part of an investigation?

Finland

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Only the police can search employees' possessions (assuming that the prerequisites outlined in the legislation are met).

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Nigeria

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Yes, an employer can search the possessions or files of an employee as part of an investigation where the employee's contract or handbook authorises such a search and there is a reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing.

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As there is no unified data protection regime, privacy protections stem from a patchwork of federal and state privacy laws which impose limits on the extent to which an employer can collect information from its employees in connection with an internal investigation. Whether specific conduct violates an employee's rights is a very fact-specific inquiry requiring the application of relevant state laws and a regulatory regime.

In most circumstances, an employer is free to conduct searches of its workplace and computer systems in the course of investigating potential wrongdoing. Such searches are generally not protected by personal privacy laws because workspaces, computer systems and company-issued electronic devices are often

considered company property. Many companies explicitly address this in written corporate policies and employment agreements. Employees who use their own electronic devices for work should be aware that work-related data stored on those devices is generally considered to belong to the employer (as a matter of best practice, employers should generally prohibit or at least advise employees against using personal devices for work and to maintain separate work devices, where possible).

These broad investigatory powers notwithstanding, the ability of an employer to conduct searches in furtherance of an internal investigation is not unlimited. For example, if an employer seeks to obtain or review work-related data from an employee's personal device, the employer must be careful to exclude any personal data. Certain states also prohibit an employer from requiring an employee to disclose passwords or other credentials to his or her personal email and social networking accounts, but permit an employer to require employees to share the content of personal online accounts as necessary during an interview while investigating employee misconduct.

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09. What additional considerations apply when the investigation involves whistleblowing?

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In respect of data protection, the processing of personal data in whistleblowing systems is considered by the Finnish Data Protection Ombudsman (DPO) as requiring a data protection impact assessment (DPIA).

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Nigeria

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Consideration must be given to the confidentiality or anonymity of the whistleblower, when an investigation involves whistleblowing.

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Several federal, state, and local employment laws prohibit retaliation against employees who come forward with complaints or participate in corporate investigations. Employees who possess information regarding corporate misconduct may also be considered whistleblowers protected from retaliation under federal and state whistleblower laws, including but not limited to the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, and the Consumer Financial Protection Act of 2010.

An employee generally does not need to show that he or she was terminated or demoted to bring a

retaliation claim; other actions on the part of the employer may qualify if they could be seen to discourage employees from raising complaints. To protect against a potential retaliation claim, employers should make clear at the outset of an investigation that retaliation will not be tolerated and require the complaining employee (and potentially his or her manager) to bring any instances of retaliation to the investigator's attention immediately.

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10. What confidentiality obligations apply during an investigation?

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Concerning a workplace investigation, there is no specific legislation in force at the moment regarding confidentiality obligations. All normal legal confidentiality obligations (eg, obligations outlined in the Trade Secrets Act (595/2018)), and if using an external investigator, the confidentiality obligations outlined in the agreement between the employer and the external investigator, apply. Attorneys-at-law always have strict confidentiality obligations as per the Advocates Act (496/1958).

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Nigeria

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Workplace investigations should be kept strictly confidential to protect the parties involved in the investigation from victimisation. Some of the confidential obligations that apply during investigations are the identities of the parties involved in the process (whether as a complainant, respondent or witnesses), the confidentiality of reports, recordings and other documents generated or discovered during the investigation, as well as attorney-client privilege between the employee and his or her attorney, provided that such privilege is within the bounds of the law.

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Information arising from the initial complaint, interviews and records should be kept as confidential as practically possible while still permitting a thorough investigation. Although an employer must maintain confidentiality to the best of its ability, it is often not possible to keep confidential the identity of the complainant or all information gathered through the investigation process. An employer should therefore not promise absolute confidentiality to any party involved in an internal investigation, including the complainant. The investigator should instead explain at the outset to the complaining party and all individuals involved that information gathered will be maintained in confidence to the extent possible, but

that some information may be revealed to the accused or potential witnesses on a need-to-know basis to conduct a thorough and effective investigation.

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11. What information must the employee under investigation be given about the allegations against them?

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The process must be transparent and impartial, and therefore all the information that may influence the conclusions made during the investigation should be shared with the employee.

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Nigeria

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An employee must be given the full details of the allegations against him or her to enable the employee to make adequate representations against the complaints made against him or her.

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The investigator must disclose to the employee under investigation the purpose of the investigation and, where the investigator is in-house or outside counsel, he or she should disclose that the company is the client.

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

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See question 11, there is no protection of anonymity as the process must be transparent to the parties involved.

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Nigeria

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Typically, the identities of the complainant, witnesses and sources of information for the investigation are kept confidential.

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In general, except as provided above, depending on the seriousness of the complaint and investigation, the only persons who should be aware of it are the relevant individual in human resources or legal, and where different, the persons assigned to investigate. Although it may not be feasible to maintain absolute confidentiality in conducting an investigation depending on the nature of the allegations, investigators should exercise discretion at all times and, where possible, avoid identifying complainants, the subject of the investigation or witnesses by name where it is not necessary, and where doing so could be detrimental to the fact-finding process.

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13. Can non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) be used to keep the fact and substance of an investigation confidential?

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Yes, however, the need for an NDA is assessed always on a case-by-case basis.

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NDAs are usually part of an employee's contract and, as such, create a contractual obligation between the parties privy to it. However, where the subject matter of an investigation borders on matters of a criminal nature, it might be impossible for parties to the NDA to continually uphold the obligation under the NDA because the parties have an obligation to the state to disclose facts of a criminal nature.

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This is a fact-specific inquiry that depends on the specific circumstances and laws of the relevant state. In general, NDAs are frowned upon but can be used to an extent to keep certain facts and the substance of an investigation confidential. NDAs can never prevent employees from assisting in official agency investigations, however. NDAs also cannot lawfully prohibit employees from officially reporting illegal conduct by their employer.

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14. When does privilege attach to investigation materials?

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The privilege of investigation materials concerns a rather limited amount of cases. In practice, materials may be considered privileged in connection with the litigation process under the Procedural Code (4/1734). For example, communications between a client and an attorney may attract protection against forcible public disclosure.

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Privilege attaches to investigation materials when a legal practitioner facilitates the internal investigation. Documents prepared during a workplace investigation will not automatically attract legal professional privilege, unless the investigation is facilitated by a legal practitioner.

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For legal privilege to apply, a primary purpose of the investigation should be to provide legal advice to the company, including concerning non-lawyers working at the counsel's direction, and legal privilege likely will not apply to internal investigations performed as part of the ordinary course of business or where the investigation is required by a state or federal regulatory regime (eg, post-incident investigations of operations governed by OSHA's Process Safety Management Standards). It is, therefore, important to contemporaneously document the scope and purpose of the investigation and not risk waiving privilege by sharing privileged materials with unnecessary third parties.

Whereas attorney-client privilege includes only communications between an attorney and the client, work-product privilege is broader and includes materials prepared or collected by persons other than the attorney with an eye towards impending litigation. Examples of potential work products produced by attorneys in the context of an investigation include investigative work plans, interview outlines, memoranda summarising witness interviews and investigative reports.

As a practical matter, employees should be aware that communications with other employees or colleagues regarding the investigation are not privileged regardless of whether the colleague is also involved in the investigation or represented by the same counsel. Even if an employee believes he or she is sharing attorney communications with other employees who need to know the attorney's advice and who also have attorney-client privilege with the same counsel because he or she is involved or implicated in the investigation and also represented by company counsel, it is always prudent to refrain from sharing privileged information. If an attorney's communication is shared beyond those who need to know, attorney-client privilege may be destroyed.

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15. Does the employee under investigation have a right to be accompanied or have legal representation during the investigation?

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The employee under investigation has a right to have a support person present (eg, a lawyer or an employee representative) during the hearings and a right to assistance in preparing written statements.

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The Constitution guarantees the right of every person to legal representation during investigations and interrogations by law enforcement agencies. However, our labour legislation is silent on whether an employee has a right to be accompanied or have legal representation during an investigation. Whether an

employee has a right to legal representation will depend on the policy of the employer as well as the nature of the interrogation.

In practice, an employee is usually not accompanied or represented legally during an investigation. However, unless it is stipulated in the employee's policy, nothing prohibits the employee from being accompanied or represented legally during an investigation.

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Employees generally have no automatic right to counsel in connection with an internal investigation, unless contractually provided for under the terms of an employment agreement. Nonetheless, employees may choose to retain counsel, particularly if they face liability.

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16. If there is a works council or trade union, does it have any right to be informed or involved in the investigation?

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A works council or a trade union does not have a role in the investigation.

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Nigeria

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The law is silent on whether a member of a trade union has the right to be informed or involved in the investigation. Typically, this is dependent on the employee's contract, handbook or other policies of the employer.

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Employers generally have no obligation to inform employees of their right to union representation or to ask if they would like a union representative present during the interview. Union employees may insist, however, that a union representative attend any investigatory interview that could lead to the employee's punishment, although the union representative may not interfere with the interview.

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17. What other support can employees involved in the investigation be given?

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They can request assistance, for example, from an occupational health and safety representative, a shop steward or the occupational healthcare provider.

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An employee being investigated has a right to be heard before a decision being made by the employer. Further, the body responsible for investigating the employee must be independent, so as not to be considered biased.

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The employer's counsel should provide an *Upjohn* warning at the start of any interview, and delivery of the warning should be documented by a note-taker. An *Upjohn* warning is the notice an attorney (in-house or outside counsel) provides a company employee to inform the employee that the attorney represents only the company and not the employee individually.

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18. What if unrelated matters are revealed as a result of the investigation?

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If they are related to the work or workplace, the employer will handle the emerging matters separately. In internal investigations, the employer is allowed to use any material legally available.

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Where unrelated matters are revealed as a result of the investigation, the body investigating the employee is expected to inform the employee of the new matters and give him adequate time to respond.

However, there are exceptional cases where a crime is revealed during an investigation. In such instances, the employer is required to report its findings to the police for investigation and possible prosecution.

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United States

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Where new issues or claims arise during an ongoing workplace investigation, the investigator should discuss with in-house counsel whether the new issues or claims should be separately investigated and if so, by whom, or if instead those new issues or claims are sufficiently related to the current review that they can be investigated in parallel and incorporated into the ongoing fact-gathering process.

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19. What if the employee under investigation raises a grievance during the investigation?

Finland

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If the nature of the grievance relates to the employer's obligations to handle such matters in general, the grievance will be investigated either separately or as a part of the ongoing investigation.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Nigeria

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It is not unusual for an employee under investigation to raise a grievance during the investigation. This grievance may be on the same subject matter as the complaint being investigated or may disclose new facts outside the scope of the matter being investigated.

Where the issue discloses new facts, the employer is required to investigate those facts without suspending the investigation. However, where the grievance relates to the same subject matter as the complaint being investigated, the employer may either suspend the investigation to allow the investigation to recognise the grievance and the complaint against the employer or proceed with the investigation while noting that the matter disclosed is being or will be investigated.

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United States

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Where an employee who is the subject of a workplace investigation raises his or her grievance during the investigation, the investigator should follow the same steps outlined above to triage new issues or claims. The investigator should also discuss with in-house counsel whether any particular steps should be taken to avoid the perception that any disciplinary measures taken against the employee (in the event the original claims are substantiated) were retaliatory.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

20. What if the employee under investigation goes off sick during the investigation?

Finland

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As a general rule, sick leave does not prevent an investigation from progressing. Depending on the nature of the sickness, the employee can attend hearings and take part in the procedure. If the sickness prevents the employee from participating, the employer can put the process on hold temporarily.

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Nigeria

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The investigation would be suspended until the employee returns from sick leave. The investigation will immediately restart upon the return of the employee.

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United States

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If an employee who is the subject of a workplace investigation becomes sick during the investigation, the investigator should complete as much of the process as possible in the employee's absence, for example by conducting interviews with the complainant and other witnesses and collecting and reviewing relevant documentation. Where the employee's absence is expected to be short-term, the employer can postpone completing the investigation until the employee returns to work and can be interviewed. Where a lengthy absence is expected, the investigator should take steps to ensure that the employee nevertheless has a fair chance to participate in the process, for example by providing the employee with flexibility in scheduling his or her interview or by offering other accommodations such as conducting the interview by video conference instead of requiring an in-person interview, or alternatively meeting in a neutral place instead of the office. It is important to maintain records of the steps taken to accommodate the employee to show that the process was reasonable and fair.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

21. How do you handle a parallel criminal and/or regulatory investigation?

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Regardless of a possible criminal investigation, the employer must run its internal workplace investigation without unnecessary delay. A workplace investigation and a criminal investigation are two separate processes and can be ongoing simultaneously, so the criminal process does not require the workplace investigation to be stayed. Thus, parallel investigations are to be considered as two separate matters. The police may only obtain evidence or material from the company or employer if strict requirements for equipment searches are met after a request for investigation has been submitted to the police.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Nigeria

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Where an employee has committed misconduct at work that is also the subject of a police investigation, the employer can conduct its own investigation and does not have to await the outcome of the criminal proceedings. The Supreme Court, in the case of Dongtoe v CSC Plateau State (2001), held that it is preposterous to suggest that the administrative body should stay its disciplinary jurisdiction over a person who had admitted criminal offences.

Further, the police or regulator may compel the employer to share evidence with it in the interests of justice.

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United States

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Employers have obligations to conduct a thorough and unbiased internal investigation and take prompt remedial action to prevent further workplace violations. As such, absent a criminal or regulatory investigation where the investigators ask the employer to pause an internal investigation, employers should be prepared to continue their internal investigation in parallel with the criminal or regulatory investigation while cooperating with police or regulatory investigators.

The police and the regulator can often compel the employer to share certain information gathered from its internal investigation. In some cases, the employer should analyse whether the non-disclosure of information evidencing criminal conduct within the company itself constitutes an independent crime or whether an applicable statute or regulation imposes an independent duty to disclose. Alternatively, the employer should consider whether, even absent an affirmative duty to disclose, disclosure of information gathered during an internal investigation may still benefit the employer.

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22. What must the employee under investigation be told about the outcome of an investigation?

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The employer's conclusions from the investigation.

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Nigeria

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The employee under investigation must be informed of the outcome of the investigation as soon as a decision is reached.

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In general, it is often helpful to provide the complainant and subject of the complaint with a short written communication or verbal communication at the end of an investigation to advise that the investigation has concluded. Where the allegations are unsubstantiated, the communication should convey that no evidence

of misconduct or unlawful conduct was found. Where the allegations are substantiated, the results and proposed communication should be reviewed with the legal function, together with potential disciplinary and remedial action, before it is communicated to the complainant and the subject of the complaint.

Where the misconduct alleged poses a high risk to the company from a reputational, operational or legal perspective, and especially where an investigation is conducted by outside counsel, outside counsel should determine, in consultation with the relevant individuals at the company, for example the general counsel, how and with whom to share investigation results and if and how to communicate the outcome to the complainant and the subject of the complaint. This is the case regardless of whether the allegations are found to be substantiated or unsubstantiated.

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23. Should the investigation report be shared in full, or just the findings?

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The employee under investigation may only be informed of the conclusions.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Nigeria

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The employer needs to balance the interests of the employee investigated, and the interests of other persons involved in the investigation such as the complainant and witnesses. Thus, the employer may either share the findings of the investigation or the full investigation report, provided that the identities of all other persons involved in the investigation are kept confidential.

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United States

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Only the findings should be shared with the complainant and the subject of the complaint.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

24. What next steps are available to the employer?

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The employer decides whether misconduct has taken place or not. Depending on the case, the employer may recommend a workplace conciliation in which the parties try to find a solution that can be accepted by both sides. The employer may choose to give an oral reprimand or a written warning. If the legal conditions are met, the employer may also terminate the employment agreement.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Nigeria

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Upon the completion and receipt of the findings of the investigation, the employer may affirm the employee's innocence or take disciplinary action against them.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

United States

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Where the misconduct alleged is substantiated in whole or in part by an internal investigation, the human resources function, potentially in consultation with in-house or outside counsel, should agree on disciplinary or remedial action to be implemented.

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25. Who can (or must) the investigation findings be disclosed to? Does that include regulators/police? Can the interview records be kept private, or are they at risk of disclosure?

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In general, investigation materials, including findings, that includes personal data should only be processed by the personnel of the organisation who are responsible for internal investigations. However, it may in some situations be required by applicable legislation that findings are disclosed to competent authorities for the performance of their duties, such as conducting investigations in connection with malpractice and violations of the law.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

Nigeria

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Investigation findings may be disclosed to the employee and every other person having an interest in the investigation. Where it is discovered that a crime has been committed, the investigation findings may be disclosed to the regulators or police.

Typically, interview records are kept private and will not be disclosed unless it is interest of justice.

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Once fact-finding is complete, the investigator should discuss his or her notes with in-house or outside counsel and prepare a summary of the process, high-level findings, and a proposed resolution at the counsel’s direction. This report should not include subjective commentary and should also avoid including excessive detail, and generally be treated confidentially during and after the investigation. If the report is requested by regulators or the police, the company should discuss with in-house counsel, and preferably also with outside counsel, how to respond to the request and whether any steps need to be taken to protect any applicable legal privilege.

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26. How long should the outcome of the investigation remain on the employee’s record?

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Please see question 7. The outcome of the investigation involving personal data may be retained only for as long as is necessary considering the purposes of the processing. In general, the retention of investigation-related data may be necessary while the investigation is still ongoing and even then the requirements of data minimization and accuracy should be considered. The data concerning the outcome of an investigation should be registered to the employee's record merely to the extent necessary in light of the employment relationship or potential disciplinary measures. In this respect, the applicable retention time depends on labour law-related rights and limitations, considering eg, the applicable periods for filing a suit.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

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The law does not provide for the time the outcome of the investigation may remain on the employee's record. However, this will depend on the employer's record-retention policies, which must comply with applicable data protection laws.

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There is no requirement for the results of a workplace investigation to remain on an employee's record for any specific period. It is often helpful, however, for information relating to the outcome of such an investigation (regardless of whether the allegations are substantiated) to be accessible to the human resources or legal functions such that during the initial complaint intake process described above, any prior complaints and investigations relating to the same individual or group of individuals can be taken into account to identify any recurring issues or systemic violations.

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27. What legal exposure could the employer face for errors during the investigation?

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There are no regulations regarding the actual investigation process. Therefore, the employer cannot be accused of procedural errors as such. However, once the matter has been adequately investigated, the employer must decide whether or not misconduct has taken place. If the employer considers that misconduct has taken place, the employer must take adequate measures for remedying the situation. Failure to adequately conduct the investigation could result in criminal sanctions being imposed on the employer as an organisation or the employer's representative, or damages.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

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- Violation of Fundamental Rights of the Employee
- Breach of Contract of Employment or wrongful termination

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The subject of the investigation, the complainant, or a government agency investigating the same alleged misconduct could subject the employer to legal exposure. It is, therefore, helpful for a company to prepare a contemporaneous report of the investigation that summarises: the incident or issues investigated, including dates; the parties involved; key factual and credibility findings; employer policies or guidelines and their applicability to the investigation; specific conclusions; the party (or parties) responsible for making the final determination; issues that could not be resolved through the internal investigation; and employer actions taken.

The employer should also maintain a clear record of the steps taken to investigate the alleged misconduct and any findings, as well as all evidence gathered during the investigation, including documents collected and reviewed, any work done to identify systemic issues or patterns of behaviour, and notes from all interviews, which should be limited to the facts gathered, dated and should indicate the duration and location of the interview.

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