

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

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

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

Switzerland

Author: *Laura Widmer, Sandra Schaffner*
at Bär & Karrer

In the context of private internal investigations, grievances initially raised by the employee do not usually have an impact on the investigation.

However, if the employer terminates the employment contract due to a justified legal complaint raised by an employee, a court might consider the termination to be abusive and award the employee compensation in an amount to be determined by the court but not exceeding six months' pay for the employee (article 336 paragraph 1 (lit. b) and article 337c paragraph 3, Swiss Code of Obligations). Furthermore, a termination by the employer may be challenged if it takes place without good cause following a complaint of discrimination by the employee to a superior or the initiation of proceedings before a conciliation board or a court by the employee (article 10, Federal Act on Gender Equality).

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United States

Author: *Rachel G. Skaistis, Eric W. Hilfers, Jenny X. Zhang*
at Cravath, Swaine & Moore

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.

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27. What legal exposure could the employer face for

errors during the investigation?

Switzerland

Author: *Laura Widmer, Sandra Schaffner*
at Bär & Karrer

As there are no specific regulations for internal investigations, the usual legal framework within which the employer must act towards the employee derives from general rules such as the employer's duty of care, the employee's duty of loyalty and the employee's data protection rights.

But, for example, unwarranted surveillance could conceivably result in criminal liability (article 179 et seq, Swiss Criminal Code) for violations of the employee's privacy. Furthermore, errors made by the employer could have an impact on any later criminal proceedings (eg, in the form of prohibitions on the use of evidence).[1]

Evidence obtained unlawfully may only be used in civil proceedings if there is an overriding interest in establishing the truth (article 152 paragraph 2, Swiss Civil Procedure Code). Consequently, in each case, a balance must be struck between the individual's interest in not using the evidence and in establishing the truth.[2] The question of the admissibility of evidence based on an unlawful invasion of privacy is a sensitive one – admissibility in this case is likely to be accepted only with restraint.[3] Since the parties in civil proceedings do not have any means of coercion at their disposal, it is not necessary, in contrast to criminal proceedings, to examine whether the evidence could also have been obtained by legal means.[4]

Unlawful action by the employer may also have consequences on future criminal proceedings: The prohibitions on exploitation (article 140 et seq, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code) apply a priori only to evidence obtained directly from public authorities. Evidence obtained unlawfully by private persons (ie, the employer) may also be used if it could have been lawfully obtained by the authority and if the interest in establishing the truth outweighs the interest of the individual in not using the evidence.[5] Art. 140 paragraph 1 Swiss Criminal Procure Code remains reserved: Evidence obtained in violation of Art. 140 paragraph 1 Swiss Criminal Procure Code is subject to an absolute ban on the use of evidence (e.g. evidence obtained under the use of torture[6]).[7]

[1] Cf. ATF 139 II 7.

[2] ATF 140 III 6 E. 3

[3] Pascal Grolimund in: Adrian Staehelin/Daniel Staehelin/Pascal Grolimund (editors), *Zivilprozessrecht*, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2019, 3rd Edition, §18 N 24a.

[4] Pascal Grolimund in: Adrian Staehelin/Daniel Staehelin/Pascal Grolimund (editors), *Zivilprozessrecht*, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2019, 3rd Edition, §18 N 24a.

[5] Decision of the Swiss Federal Court 6B_1241/2016 dated 17. July 2017 consid. 1.2.2; Decision of the Swiss Federal Court 1B_22/2012 dated 11 May 2012 consid. 2.4.4.

[6] Jérôme Benedict/Jean Treccani, CR-CPP Art. 140 N. 5 and Art. 141 N. 3.

[7] Yvan Jeanneret/André Kuhn, *Précis de procédure pénale*, 2nd Edition, Berne 2018, N 9011.

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Author: *Rachel G. Skaistis, Eric W. Hilfers, Jenny X. Zhang*
at Cravath, Swaine & Moore

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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Contributors



Switzerland

Laura Widmer
Sandra Schaffner
Bär & Karrer



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Jenny X. Zhang
Cravath, Swaine & Moore