

10 Essentials for Effective Workplace Investigations Checklist

A practical checklist for conducting consistent, objective and defensible workplace investigations

Following your organization's investigation standards, policies and procedures, use this checklist before, during and after an investigation to keep the process focused, document key decisions and turn findings into meaningful action. For additional related information, visit the links throughout to learn from expert insights and foundational knowledge to build and grow your whistleblowing and case management capabilities.

1. Set up the investigation

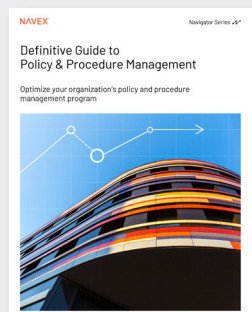
- ☐ [Confirm the matter requires a formal investigation](#) rather than another type of inquiry or response.
- ☐ Confirm who will lead the investigation and who needs to be involved. Ensure all investigators have received appropriate training and understand the processes to be followed.
- ☐ Check whether anyone who may be assigned to the case has an actual or potential conflict of interest that should limit or exclude their involvement.
- ☐ Confirm that anyone implicated in the allegation does not have access to the case.
- ☐ Don't share allegations with anyone who doesn't have a demonstrated need to know about it. Remember they are allegations not substantiated matters.
- ☐ Define the investigation scope and the preliminary questions it needs to answer.
- ☐ Identify relevant confidentiality, privilege, privacy or data-handling considerations with appropriate internal or legal stakeholders.
- ☐ Determine which stakeholders should be notified before starting a review and follow any defined escalation policies (including board of directors' escalations).
- ☐ Identify any immediate risks that require action before the investigation is complete.

Investigator check: Do I understand what needs to be established – and what an objective, complete and defensible investigation looks like?

Just getting started? These resources deliver foundational guidance for setting up your investigations processes.



[Definitive Guide to Incident Management](#)



[Definitive Guide to Policy and Procedure Management](#)

2. Create a timeline

- ☐ Start a working timeline to record relevant events, communications and actions in sequence. Note the evidence supporting each event.
- ☐ Distinguish documented facts from witness accounts and any unverified information.
- ☐ Identify gaps or inconsistencies in the timeline. Use gaps to inform additional evidence collection and interview questions.
- ☐ Update the timeline as documents, interviews and other evidence become available.

Investigator check: What is missing from the timeline that could materially change my understanding of what happened?

3. Objectively test the evidence and don't presume a conclusion

- ☐ Review available documentation ahead of interviews and approach interviews as fact-finding exercises.
- ☐ Protect the accuser and the accused equally during the course of the investigation.
- ☐ Identify evidence supporting each explanation. Identify evidence contradicting each explanation. Note any evidence that remains ambiguous.
- ☐ Separate individual behavior from possible systemic contributors.
- ☐ Periodically check for confirmation bias as the investigation progresses.
- ☐ Follow the facts; the scope may expand as additional information is discovered.

Investigator check: If my initial assumptions were wrong, what evidence would I expect to find?

4. Keep communicating without compromising the investigation

- ☐ Acknowledge the concern according to your organization's established process and [reporter communication best practices](#).
- ☐ Set appropriate expectations about what the reporter can and cannot expect during the investigation.
- ☐ Maintain confidentiality appropriate to the investigation.
- ☐ Provide regular status updates to the reporter even if the investigation isn't complete.
- ☐ Keep communication channels available for additional information from the reporter.
- ☐ Seek feedback about the reporter's experience with the speak-up and investigation process.

Investigator check: Have we communicated enough to maintain trust without compromising confidentiality or investigative integrity?

5. Look beyond the case to identify systemic risk

- ☐ Conduct root cause analysis where appropriate.
- ☐ Identify any control weakness that allowed the issue to occur.
- ☐ Ask whether the same weaknesses exist in another business unit, function or geography.
- ☐ Look for previous allegations involving similar behavior, people, locations or circumstances.
- ☐ Consider whether recurring issues point to a broader organizational pattern.
- ☐ Determine whether policies, procedures, controls or training contributed to or failed to prevent the issue.

Investigator check: If this happened here, where else could it happen?

6. Examine incentives that may have led to inappropriate behavior

- ☐ Consider whether performance targets or compensation structures contributed to the conduct.
- ☐ Identify pressure from managers, customers or business objectives that may have influenced behavior.
- ☐ Ask whether employees could reasonably meet expectations while following organizational policies.
- ☐ Assess if there were conflicting messages between stated values and rewarded behavior at your organization.
- ☐ Consider whether investigation KPIs themselves create incentives to sacrifice quality for speed.

Investigator check: Did our organization make doing the wrong thing easier – or more rewarding – than doing the right thing?

7. Test the quality of the investigation before closing

- ☐ Confirm the investigation addressed its original scope and addressed any new issues identified through the course of the review.
- ☐ Confirm conclusions are supported by documented evidence.
- ☐ Ensure contradictory or ambiguous evidence has been considered.
- ☐ Complete the required investigation report and documentation and check the investigation against your organization's minimum documentation standards.
- ☐ Consider peer review or another quality review for significant or complex investigations.
- ☐ Confirm corrective or disciplinary action is consistent with comparable cases.

Investigator check: Could someone unfamiliar with this case review the record and understand how we reached the conclusion and determined corrective actions?

8. Monitor for retaliation

- ☐ Determine whether the reporter or other participants (witnesses) are at risk of experiencing retaliation and should have post-investigation monitoring. Establish an appropriate monitoring period based on organizational policy and the circumstances of the case.
- ☐ Coordinate with HR where appropriate to monitor relevant employment actions without compromising the individual.
- ☐ Watch for delayed forms of retaliation, such as changes in role, compensation, advancement opportunities or employment.
- ☐ Document and investigate potential retaliation independently when concerns arise and take action with retaliators.

Investigator check: Could an employment action that appears routine actually be connected to someone's decision to speak up?

9. Turn findings into action to make your organization stronger

- ☐ Complete a root cause analysis. Share systemic findings with appropriate leadership and risk owners.
- ☐ Identify policy or procedure changes arising from the investigation.
- ☐ Determine whether controls need to be strengthened. Identify opportunities for employee or manager training.
- ☐ Consider whether an appropriately anonymized investigation scenario could improve future training.
- ☐ Assign responsibility and timelines for remediation. Ensure determined corrective actions are implemented.

Post-investigation questions to ask yourself

- What surprised us?
- Did any assumptions turn out to be wrong?
- What signals existed before the issue surfaced?
- What did this case teach us about how our controls operate under pressure?
- With the benefit of hindsight, what would we do differently?

10. Improve the next investigation

- ☐ Compare and benchmark the case with similar investigations and outcomes.
- ☐ Track investigation quality alongside case closure time.
- ☐ Watch for gaps in substantiation rates across investigation teams.
- ☐ Use peer review to identify opportunities for investigators to learn from one another.
- ☐ Periodically review investigation policies and processes.
- ☐ Incorporate lessons learned into future investigation processes.

Final check: Did we just close the case – or did we learn something that will help us investigate better and reduce future risk?

Additional reading:
[From Findings to Fixes:](#)
[Closing the Loop on](#)
[Investigations](#)

Board-level and ready-to-use hotline [benchmark metrics deck](#)

Compare your reporting data to global whistleblowing and incident management benchmarks using editable, presentation-ready charts – plus regional insights for deeper analysis.