

## **Looking Beyond the Written Grievance: The Value of Listening**

### **The Challenge**

I was appointed as an independent HR consultant to take over a complex workplace grievance after the original investigation had stalled. The organisation required an impartial investigator to review a wide range of concerns, rebuild confidence in the process and provide clear, evidence-based findings that everyone involved could trust. The investigation involved reviewing extensive documentation, gathering evidence from multiple sources and carefully considering a range of perspectives before reaching independent conclusions.

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### **My Approach**

Throughout the investigation, I remained focused on ensuring every stage of the process was fair, impartial and evidence based.

The grievance hearing provided an opportunity to explore the concerns in greater depth. While the written grievance was detailed and professionally presented, the discussion revealed important context that could not be fully understood from the written submission alone.

As is often the case, understanding an individual's experience required more than reviewing documentation. It required careful listening, thoughtful questioning and an open mind.

One question proved particularly valuable throughout the investigation:

"What outcome are you hoping to achieve?"

That simple question shifted the conversation away from focusing solely on allegations and towards understanding what the individual genuinely hoped would change.

Throughout the investigation I:

- Conducted interviews with relevant individuals.
- Reviewed documentary, digital and supporting evidence.
- Assessed facts objectively against the available evidence.
- Distinguished between evidence, perception and assumption.
- Identified opportunities for wider organisational learning and improvement.

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### **The Outcome**

The investigation resulted in a comprehensive report with clear, evidence-based findings and practical recommendations to strengthen organisational processes, improve communication and reduce the risk of similar issues arising in the future.

Most importantly, the organisation had confidence that the investigation had been conducted fairly, independently and objectively, enabling informed decisions to be made and providing a constructive way forward.

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## Key Insight

One of the biggest lessons from this investigation reflects a challenge that organisations are increasingly facing.

Employees now have access to AI tools that can help prepare workplace correspondence, including grievances. These documents are often well written, highly structured and professionally presented.

However, written submissions don't always tell the whole story.

This investigation reinforced that documents alone rarely provide the complete picture. Only through careful listening, thoughtful questioning and genuine conversation can an investigator fully understand the concerns, the context and—perhaps most importantly—the outcome the individual is hoping to achieve.

Sometimes the most important question isn't: **"What happened?"** It's: **"What outcome are you hoping to achieve?"**

Because understanding that often provides the clearest path towards resolving workplace conflict.

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Every investigation is more than a process.

It's an opportunity to establish the facts fairly, rebuild trust where possible, identify wider organisational learning and help organisations move forward with confidence.