

Worked Example 01

Vendor Deletion Certification — a synthetic illustration

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This is a synthetic example. No part of this document describes a real engagement, a real client, a real vendor, or a real investigation. The organization, the vendor, the evidence, and the findings are constructed to illustrate how the Zemi Method operates end to end. Any resemblance to an actual matter is coincidental and unintended.

Why this example

The most common question asked of any methodology is whether it changes the outcome. A discipline that produces the same conclusion a competent practitioner would have reached anyway is documentation, not method.

This example is chosen because the two paths diverge. A certificate-only review of the same evidence produces a clean, confident answer. The Zemi Method produces a narrower answer, a stated uncertainty, and a different decision by the client. The divergence is the point.

The example also illustrates a claim-testing engagement rather than an attribution engagement. The question is not who acted. It is whether an assertion can be relied upon.

How to read this example

This document is not a model legal opinion, a model regulatory response, or a claim that this synthetic fact pattern proves the method’s validity. It is a worked illustration of how the method changes the handling of a claim.

The important movement is from a broad vendor assertion to bounded findings:

Starting assertion	Method result
“All customer records were permanently deleted.”	A substantial deletion event occurred. Complete deletion is undetermined on the available evidence. The vendor’s deleted-record count is assumed only for limited descriptive purposes.

The example should be read for the reasoning discipline: how authority and scope are checked, how the question is reframed, how independence is tested, how conflict is handled, how assumptions are kept visible, and how the final answer becomes narrower than the answer the client hoped to give.

Method map

Zemi phase	What this example shows
Authority and Scope	The examiner confirms contractual audit authority, identifies disclosure authority, identifies the decision-maker, names excluded systems, and records access limits before framing the question.

Zemi phase	What this example shows
Frame	The client's request is reframed from confirmation of a certificate to testing whether the evidence supports the claim. Competing explanations are carried forward together.
Preserve	Each artifact is recorded, hashed, and tied to its source. Vendor-supplied evidence and independently sourced evidence are kept distinct.
Corroborate	The certificate and deletion log are rejected as independent corroboration because they share a vendor source and failure mode. Cloud provider metrics become the independent test, and material exports are checked for completeness before being relied on.
Analyze	The evidence is interpreted together: a deletion event is supported, complete deletion is not, and the deleted-record count cannot be reconciled.
Adjudicate	Findings are classified as known, undetermined, and assumed before they are relied on; known findings state support basis and undetermined findings state resolution status.
Report	The findings state evidence, reasoning, contrary evidence, limits, support basis, undetermined status, automation use, AI role classification, tool-derived metric limits, and material limitations.
Defensibility check	The final answer is narrower, but a reviewer can trace why it holds and where it stops.

The situation

Meridian Health Collective (synthetic) terminated its contract with Northgate Data Services (synthetic), a processor that had held customer records for four years. Under the termination terms, Northgate was required to permanently delete all records and certify the deletion.

Northgate issued a signed deletion certificate stating that all customer records were permanently deleted on 14 March 2026.

A regulator has since asked Meridian to confirm that the data no longer exists. Meridian's compliance lead intends to forward Northgate's certificate as the response, and engages an examiner to confirm it is sound before doing so.

The certificate-only path. The certificate is signed by an authorized officer. The vendor supplies a deletion job log on request showing 2,431,908 records deleted, timestamped 14 March 2026, status complete. Certificate and log agree. If the review stops there, the resulting answer is clean: deletion appears confirmed, forward the certificate.

The path below is what the method produces when the claim is tested rather than accepted.

1. Administrative record

Matter: Meridian Health Collective, vendor deletion verification Report date: 12 June 2026 (synthetic) Method: The Zemi Method, Version 1.1 Mode of work: Investigative mode Mode justification: The engagement asks what the available evidence can establish about a vendor deletion claim. It does not ask for a formal likelihood-ratio evaluation or a fully evaluative opinion between legal propositions. Standards applied: none; this is a synthetic illustration. In a real engagement, applicable acquisition, preservation, validation, and handling standards would be identified by name and version. Classification: privileged and confidential

2. Authority and scope

Client and decision-maker: Meridian Health Collective, acting through its compliance lead. The immediate decision is whether Meridian can defensibly forward Northgate's deletion certificate to a regulator as confirmation that the data no longer exists.

Authority identified: Meridian has contractual authority under the synthetic data processing addendum to request deletion evidence from Northgate and to obtain tenancy-level storage consumption metrics from the cloud provider under an audit-right mechanism. That authority permits review of vendor-supplied deletion records, Meridian's own egress records, the contract and retention schedule, and provider-issued storage metrics for the Northgate tenancy.

Disclosure authority identified: Meridian's compliance lead is authorized to receive the examiner's findings and to decide what, if anything, may be disclosed to the regulator. The examiner is not authorized to send evidence, work papers, provider metrics, or the report directly to the regulator. Any external release requires Meridian's authorization and legal/privacy review.

Authority not identified: The examiner has no authority in this synthetic scenario to access Northgate backup systems, replica systems, internal administrative consoles, unrelated customer data, or provider-side object-level records outside the audit-right mechanism.

Scope included: testing whether available evidence supports the claim that all customer records transferred to Northgate were permanently deleted on 14 March 2026.

Scope excluded: legal advice to Meridian, regulatory response drafting, direct examination of Northgate backup or replica systems, object-level content identification, and independent validation of Northgate's internal deletion tooling.

Proportionality justification: The decision is significant because it concerns a regulator-facing statement about deletion of customer records. The engagement therefore requires evidence beyond a vendor certificate and vendor log. The proportional scope is limited to records Meridian can lawfully obtain before responding: vendor artifacts, Meridian transfer records, contract terms, and independently sourced cloud-provider metrics. The limitation is not treated as harmless; it directly constrains Finding 2.

Effect on findings: The work may proceed because authority exists for the evidence obtained. The lack of authority to examine backups, replicas, and object-level records prevents a complete-deletion finding and is carried into the limitations and classification of the central claim as undetermined.

3. The question

As posed by the client: confirm that Northgate deleted all customer records on 14 March 2026.

As reframed for examination: determine whether the available evidence supports the claim that all customer records transferred to Northgate were permanently deleted, and identify the limits of what the evidence can establish.

The client’s framing presupposes the conclusion. It asks for confirmation of a claim rather than a test of it. The reframed question is the one the engagement can actually answer, and the gap between the two framings is recorded here because it shaped everything downstream.

Assumptions surfaced at intake:

- That the record set Northgate deleted is the same record set Meridian transferred. Not yet evidenced.
- That “deleted” as used in the certificate means the same thing Meridian and the regulator understand it to mean. Not yet evidenced.
- That Northgate’s deletion covers all locations where the data came to rest, not only the primary datastore. Not yet evidenced.

4. Explanations considered

Explanation	What would have to be true	What evidence would break it
E1. All transferred records were permanently deleted across all locations.	Deletion executed against the full transferred set, in primary storage and every derivative copy.	Storage evidence inconsistent with full deletion; record counts that do not reconcile; evidence of retained replicas or backups.

Explanation	What would have to be true	What evidence would break it
E2. Primary records were deleted; copies persist in backup or replica systems.	Deletion scoped to production storage only, with backup retention operating on its own schedule.	Storage consumption falling to a level consistent with no retained data; documented backup purge covering the same period.
E3. Deletion executed against a subset of the transferred records.	A scope mismatch between what was transferred and what the deletion job targeted.	Reconciliation of Meridian's transfer records against Northgate's deletion count showing agreement.

Three explanations are carried forward together. E1 is the client's working theory and is not privileged over the others.

5. Evidence record

Item	Source and acquisition	Integrity	Notes
A1	Northgate deletion certificate, provided by Northgate	Hashed on receipt	Signed attestation, one page
A2	Northgate deletion job log, provided by Northgate on request	Hashed on receipt	Reports 2,431,908 records, status complete
A3	Meridian egress records for the transfer period, acquired from Meridian systems	Hashed at acquisition	Meridian's own record of what was sent
A4	Contract, data processing addendum, and retention schedule	Hashed on receipt	Defines "deletion" and backup obligations
A5	Cloud storage consumption metrics for the Northgate tenancy, obtained under Meridian's contractual audit right, direct from the cloud provider	Hashed at acquisition	Provider-issued, not vendor-supplied

A5 is the item the certificate-only review does not obtain, because that review does not test whether the vendor's documents are independently corroborated. Under this method it is required, because A1 and A2 both originate with Northgate and cannot corroborate each other.

6. Corroboration record

Claim 1: Records were deleted on 14 March 2026.

Source asserting it: A1, the certificate. Independent source tested against: A2 is **not independent**. The certificate and the deletion log are both produced by Northgate from the same operational systems and the same reporting chain. They share a failure mode: if Northgate's deletion tooling reports success incorrectly, or if its scope was misconfigured, both artifacts are wrong in the same direction and their agreement means nothing. Two documents from one source are one source. Independent source actually tested against: A5, cloud storage consumption metrics issued by the infrastructure provider rather than by Northgate. Completeness check on A5: Before A5 is relied on, the examiner verifies that the provider export covers the relevant tenancy, the period before and after 14 March 2026, all available storage classes reported under the audit-right mechanism, and the provider's stated timezone. The export manifest shows no failed pages or omitted metric groups. This does not prove what data remained, but it supports treating A5 as a complete metric extraction for the limited question of storage-consumption change. **Result: corroborated in part.** A5 shows a substantial drop in stored volume on 14 March 2026, consistent with a large deletion event on that date. A deletion occurred.

Claim 2: All customer records were permanently deleted.

Independent source: A5. **Result: sources conflict.** Following the 14 March drop, storage consumption in the Northgate tenancy plateaus at a level materially above what would be expected if no customer data remained. The plateau persists through the most recent metric available. A1 asserts complete deletion. A5 is inconsistent with complete deletion.

Per the method, the conflict is treated as evidence in its own right and investigated rather than averaged or resolved toward the working theory. Investigation of A4 establishes that the data processing addendum obliges deletion of production records within thirty days but is silent on backup and replica retention. This does not resolve the conflict. It supplies a plausible mechanism for E2 and leaves E2 live.

Claim 3: The deleted set is the transferred set.

Source asserting it: A2, reporting 2,431,908 records. Independent source tested against: A3, Meridian's own egress records. Completeness check on A3: The examiner verifies that A3 covers the relevant transfer period and Meridian-controlled export channel, but the source schema records batch identifiers and total transfer volume rather than per-record counts. The extraction is complete for what Meridian's source holds, but the source itself does not hold the field needed for record-count reconciliation. **Result: uncorroborated, limitation stated.** Meridian's egress records capture transfer events by batch and volume but not by record count, so no reconciliation against 2,431,908 is possible from available

evidence. The figure in A2 is unverified. This is a limitation of the available record, not an indication of error.

7. Analysis

The evidence establishes one point clearly and leaves the central claim unresolved.

A1 and A2 support the existence of a deletion event, but they do not independently support each other. Both are produced by Northgate, both depend on Northgate's systems and reporting chain, and both would fail in the same direction if the deletion job was scoped incorrectly or if the reporting layer overstated what happened. Their agreement is useful as a lead but insufficient as corroboration.

A5 changes the analysis. It comes from the infrastructure provider rather than Northgate and shows a material storage reduction on 14 March 2026. That independently supports the narrower proposition that a substantial deletion event occurred on the date stated.

A5 does not support the broader proposition that all customer records were permanently deleted. The post-deletion plateau is inconsistent with the strongest form of Northgate's claim, but it does not prove retained Meridian data. It could reflect retained backups or replicas, unrelated retained data, storage overhead, delayed purge behavior, or another mechanism not visible from the available record. A4 makes backup or replica retention plausible because the data processing addendum does not require backup purging within the same deletion window, but A4 does not prove what remains.

E1 is therefore not supported. E2 remains plausible and unresolved. E3 cannot be resolved because A3 does not permit record-count reconciliation. The analysis supports a narrower finding: a deletion event occurred. It does not support the decision Meridian wanted to make: that all customer records were permanently deleted.

8. Findings

Finding 1 Classification: KNOWN A deletion event affecting a substantial volume of stored data occurred in the Northgate tenancy on 14 March 2026. **Support basis:** Single independent corroboration, supported by vendor assertion and independently sourced provider metrics; bounded to storage-consumption change rather than content-level deletion. **Evidence:** A1, A2, A5. **Reasoning:** Northgate asserts deletion on that date. Storage consumption metrics issued independently by the infrastructure provider show a corresponding volume reduction on the same date. The vendor's assertion and an independently sourced measurement agree, and they do not share a failure mode. **Tool-derived basis:** A5 is a provider-issued storage-consumption metric rather than an examiner-generated measurement. The examiner uses it only to identify a material change in stored volume on the relevant date. Automated correlation was confirmed against the raw provider metrics before reliance. **Contrary evidence:** None encountered. **Limits:** Establishes that a deletion occurred and its approximate scale. Does not establish what was deleted or that deletion was complete.

Finding 2 Classification: UNDETERMINED Resolution status: EXHAUSTED Whether all customer records transferred to Northgate have been permanently deleted cannot be resolved on the available evidence. **Evidence:** A1, A4, A5. **Reasoning:** The vendor’s certificate asserts complete deletion. Independently sourced storage metrics show consumption plateauing above the level expected if no customer data remained. These sources conflict. The contract’s silence on backup and replica retention supplies a plausible explanation for retained copies but does not evidence their contents. Resolving this requires evidence not presently available: backup system inventories, replica configuration, or provider-side object-level records. **Contrary evidence:** Northgate’s certificate directly asserts the opposite of what the storage metrics suggest, and it is a signed attestation by an authorized officer. It is reported here rather than set aside. **Limits:** The plateau is consistent with retained customer records. It is also consistent with other retained data unrelated to Meridian. The evidence does not distinguish between these. The examiner’s authority does not extend to the backup, replica, or object-level records needed to resolve the question.

Finding 3 Classification: ASSUMED For the limited purpose of describing the vendor’s asserted deletion scope, the record count reported in the deletion log is treated as corresponding to the record set Meridian transferred. **Evidence:** A2, A3. **Reasoning:** The assumption is necessary only to describe what Northgate claims its deletion job covered. It is classified as assumed, rather than undetermined, because the report does not attempt to resolve whether the count is correct and does not rely on it as proof of deletion. Meridian’s egress records do not capture per-record counts, so the vendor’s figure cannot be reconciled against an independent measure. The assumption is identified rather than absorbed into Finding 1. **Contrary evidence:** None encountered. **Limits:** If the transferred set exceeded the deleted set, a scope mismatch would not be detectable from the evidence obtained. This assumption cannot be used as evidence that the deleted set and transferred set actually match.

9. Automation record

Tool and version	Used for	Inputs preserved	Outputs preserved
Local language model, version recorded in engagement file	Timeline alignment across A2, A3, and A5; drafting of the evidence table	Preserved in engagement record	Preserved in engagement record

Statement of separability: the findings in section 8 were adjudicated by the undersigned examiner. Automated assistance was limited to correlation and drafting. The storage plateau in A5 was identified by automated correlation and then confirmed against the raw provider metrics before being relied upon. No automated system determined any classification or the content of any finding.

AI role classification: AI-assisted. The local language model supported timeline alignment and drafting. It did not select evidence sources, decide source independence, classify findings, adjudicate

conclusions, determine report content, or sign off. No AI system is the subject under examination in this example.

This matters here. The automated correlation proposed a pattern. Had that proposal been accepted without confirmation against the underlying data, the finding would rest on a summary rather than on evidence, which is the failure the method’s premise names.

10. Limitations

- Backup and replica systems within the Northgate tenancy were not within the scope of the contractual audit right and could not be examined.
- Object-level records that would identify the contents of retained storage were not obtainable.
- Meridian’s egress records do not support per-record reconciliation.
- The examination relies on storage consumption as an indirect provider-issued metric. It is used to identify a volume change and a remaining plateau, not to identify retained content or prove what was deleted.
- All evidence originating from Northgate is vendor-supplied and could not be independently verified except where an independent source existed.
- The reported deletion count is treated only as Northgate’s asserted scope and is not independently established.
- The mode of work is investigative. The example does not express a formal likelihood ratio, probability, or fully evaluative opinion.
- The depth of verification is proportionate to a pre-response deletion verification, but not to an unrestricted forensic examination of Northgate’s full infrastructure. That proportionality choice is why the central question remains undetermined rather than known.

11. Defensibility check

Check	Result
Lawful, contractual, ethical, and professional authority identified	Yes
Disclosure authority identified before release	Yes, Meridian may receive the findings; external disclosure to the regulator requires Meridian authorization and legal/privacy review
Packaging or encryption, transfer path, authorized recipient, integrity verification, and receipt confirmation recorded where evidence or forensic copies are transferred	Not applicable; this synthetic example releases findings only and does not transfer forensic copies

Check	Result
Custody boundary, observer or controller, retained material, temporary media handling, and non-transfer verification recorded where material must remain inside a defined boundary	Not applicable; this synthetic example does not require onsite-only work or retained-custody conditions
Scope of the question, evidence access, and excluded material stated	Yes
Mode of work identified	Yes, investigative mode
Selected mode justified by engagement purpose	Yes
Proportionality, access, and scope limits justified rather than merely noted	Yes
Material extractions assessed for completeness	Yes, A5 is checked for tenant, period, storage classes, timezone, and export completeness; A3 is complete for the source but lacks record-count fields
Prior reports, prior examiner findings, or investigative summaries treated as source material rather than inherited as findings	Not applicable; no prior report or investigative summary is relied on in this synthetic example
Every conclusion traces to an inspectable source	Yes
Claims bounded to what the evidence supports	Yes
Known, assumed, and undetermined separated	Yes
Known findings state support basis	Yes, Finding 1 states single independent corroboration and its limits
Suspect, actor, account, device, system, or source narrowing distinguished from attribution where unique responsibility is not established	Not applicable; this synthetic example tests a vendor deletion claim, not attribution or suspect narrowing
Layered infrastructure, intermediaries, platforms, CDN services, cloud services, domains, accounts, hosting, payment records, or financial records separated into technical delivery, account ownership, operational control, legal responsibility, and financial benefit where material	Not applicable; this synthetic example does not make a layered-infrastructure responsibility finding
Undetermined findings state pending or exhausted status	Yes, Finding 2 is exhausted within the available authority and proportionate scope
Classification of each finding consistent with the evidence record	Yes
Standards, frameworks, policies, or benchmarks mapped to specific requirements, applicability basis, evidence, and interpretive limits where material	Not applicable; no standards-based finding is made in this synthetic example

Check	Result
Tool-derived measurements, calculations, or transformations state processing basis and limits	Yes, A5 is a provider-issued storage-consumption metric; automated correlation was confirmed against raw provider metrics; no content-level measurement is inferred
Derivative presentations tied back to underlying source, selection or editing criteria, source locations or timestamps, material excluded context, and non-substitution limits where material	Not applicable; this synthetic example does not rely on an excerpt, compilation, edited video, demonstrative exhibit, visualization, transcript, timeline, or other derivative presentation
Would hold if an independent examiner re-ran the work from preserved evidence	Yes
Automation contribution documented and separable	Yes
AI role classified and bounded	Yes, local language model classified as AI-assisted; no AI system is the subject under examination
Material limitations stated clearly enough to be accounted for	Yes

Examiner signature and date.

What the method changed

The certificate-only path ends with a confirmed deletion and a certificate forwarded to the regulator. Certificate and vendor log agree; nothing on their face suggests a problem.

The method produces three differences.

It refused to treat two vendor documents as corroboration. The certificate and the deletion log agree because they come from the same source and the same systems. Their agreement carries no more weight than the certificate alone. This is what forced the acquisition of an independently sourced measurement, which is the only reason anything further was learned.

It surfaced a conflict that the certificate-only review never encounters, because that review never obtains the source that conflicts. The storage plateau does not prove that customer records remain. It establishes that the vendor's claim of complete deletion is not supported by the only independent evidence available, which is a different and more useful thing to know.

It changed the client's decision. Meridian cannot tell the regulator that all data has been deleted. What Meridian can say, accurately, is that a deletion event of substantial scale occurred on the stated date, that complete deletion is unresolved on available evidence, that the contract did not oblige backup

purging, and that further verification requires authority and access Meridian does not currently hold. That is a weaker answer and a defensible one. Forwarding the certificate would have been a stronger answer that Meridian could not have defended if the retained copies were later discovered.

A narrow finding that holds is worth more than a broad one that breaks. This is what that principle looks like when it costs something.

Why this example matters

The example does not show the method discovering a dramatic hidden fact. It shows the method preventing a premature conclusion. That is the more common and more important use case.

The certificate-only answer is attractive because it is complete, quick, and administratively convenient. The Zemi answer is less convenient because it separates the supported claim from the unsupported one. The method changes the decision not by making the evidence stronger, but by preventing the unsupported part of the claim from passing as proven.

That is the value of the method in practice: it does not promise certainty where the evidence does not provide it. It gives the decision-maker a finding that can be defended, and it states the remaining uncertainty clearly enough that the decision-maker can account for it.

Worked examples are illustrative and synthetic. They demonstrate the method's operation and are not evidence of its application in practice. This example tracks the Version 1.1 lifecycle.