

Principles of Effective Complaint Handling

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My Brief

- How agencies may effectively use complaints not only to provide a positive response to the individual complainant (and so encourage customer satisfaction) but also improve overall customer service through the effective use of complaint data to identify systemic issues for rectification.
- Using AS ISO 10002 (Customer satisfaction—Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations) as a benchmark.

Dealing with complaints effectively: can anyone see us?

- Prominent phone number/ email address/address:
 - At service delivery
 - In brochures
 - Home pages on websites
 - White pages
- Are your front line staff aware of contact numbers and CH procedures?
- *Don't be afraid to use the word "complaints": it has an unambiguous meaning to the public (have an outside-in approach not an inside-out approach)*
- Example: www.nab.com.au

Dealing with complaints effectively: are we easy to access?

- Do we provide easily accessible information about our complaint handling process? Is this information in clear language? Is assistance in making a complaint available, in whatever languages or formats that the products were offered or provided in, including alternative formats, such as large print, Braille or audiotape, so that no complainants are disadvantaged?
- Do we provide flexibility in the methods of making complaints (e.g. orally (by phone & over the counter), emails)
- Do we provide toll-free or local free facilities for making complaints (including outside business hours)

Dealing with complaints effectively: how responsive are we?

- Receipt of each complaint should be acknowledged to the complainant immediately.
- Complaints should be addressed promptly in accordance with their urgency (requires an initial assessment/escalation procedure).
- Challenging but realistic timelines to be set.
- The complainants should be treated courteously and be kept informed of the progress of their complaint through the complaints-handling process.

How objective are we?

- Due weight is to be given to the views of the agency and complainant.

Serious complaints

- Investigation/assessment done by someone at “arms length” from the business activity being complained about
- Review should be conducted by person(s) who have the personal attributes of detachment and capacity to assess relevant evidence, and a good understanding of the rules of evidence and relevant standards of proof.
- Rules of natural justice followed
- Complaints to be considered on its merits.
- Emphasis should be placed on solving the problem and not on assigning blame.
- Guidance on objectivity in Annex C of AS ISO 10002.

Charges/Confidentiality

- *Charges*: Access to the complaints-handling process should be free of charge to the complainant.
- *Confidentiality*: Personally identifiable information concerning the complainant should be available where needed, but only for the purposes of addressing the complaint within the organization and should be actively protected from disclosure.

Do we have a customer-focused approach?

- Organisations should have a primary focus of the world from the user’s perspective not from the organisations.
- *a customer-focused approach* can be evidenced by:
 - Clear set of published values of the organization and its role.
 - Management actively seen to be implementing the values I.e. “walking the talk” (Railcorp example).
- RailCorp’s vision is to deliver safe, clean and reliable passenger services that are efficient, sustainable and to the satisfaction of its customers.

How accountable are we?

- Important to have reporting systems on complaints and improvement initiatives up to and including the governing body.
- Units responsible for identified systemic problems need to report back on implementation of corrective/remedial action.

Are we continually improving the CH process and our services?

- Feedback (including complaints) assists in identifying service, process and information inadequacies to be addressed through corrective action.
- Organisations could:
 - explore, identify and apply best practices in complaints handling (SOCAP, Forum, Google)
 - foster a customer-focused approach within the organization,
 - encourage innovation in complaints-handling development, and
 - recognize exemplary complaints-handling behaviour.

Maintaining the system and improving products and services: using data

Information Collection

- Need for a reliable record keeping/information gathering system
- Complaints data can assist in identifying where customer service standards not been met & opportunities for improvement in these standards

Analysis & evaluation of complaints

- Need to classify & analyse complaints to identify systemic, recurring & single incident problems so as to eliminate the root causes of complaints

Root cause analysis

- Few organisations are really utilising the captured data to its full potential as envisaged by AS ISO 10002;
- How well are we doing this analysis and subsequent remedial action? An obvious and quick rule of thumb test is whether complaints have been significantly reduced within your agency. If not, then it may be that complaint investigations are not getting to the root causes of complaints.
- Typically many current corrective action plans are along the lines of, “We’ll pay more attention in the future, we’ll be more careful, and we’ll try harder.”
- The problems with some current analysis of complaints data is that:
 - it treats trends as root cause analysis,
 - looks for only one cause to a problem when often there are many, and
 - are intent on finding blame rather than understanding the nature of the cause. Cause analysis.

- Effective Root Cause Analysis should be done by a team of people within the organisation under the guidance of a facilitator to bring a range of appropriate skills and knowledge to the table for a more forensic analysis.
- This “collegiate” approach not only gets the right mix of skills to understand the causes and suggest the appropriate remedial action but also brings an enterprise response to problems rather than a “silo” mentality that exists in many organizations
- Root Cause Analysis of complaints data should use a structured logic tree process to identify and verify hypotheses with data and uses a diagram approach as much as possible. A logic tree is the graphical expression of cause and effect relationships that lead to an undesirable outcome. Unlike a fault tree, which is traditionally used for mapping out what *could* go wrong, a logic tree helps determine what *did* go wrong
- Root Cause Analysis goes beyond the human cause and identifies the process, behavioral, system, latent or organizational causes. Only by eliminating these root causes can the probability of recurrence be significantly reduced or eliminated.
- This type of analysis doesn’t stop at the first root cause found, but keeps digging deeper to identify and eliminate the multiple causes. Problems are typically the result of multiple causes than a single one