

ABOUT ISO 10002
- the international complaint-handling standard

ISO 10002 emerged in mid-2004 and has been promulgated as the international standard on complaints handling. It is intended to guide the design and implementation of an effective complaints-handling process. It is drafted to be compatible with, and is a guiding and supporting document to, the quality management system, ISO 9000. It takes its place alongside two other important add-on standards; ISO 10001- Best Practice Codes Of Conduct and ISO 10003- External Customer Disputes Resolution System. ISO 10002 and these other guideline standards can be used in conjunction with ISO 9000 or independently of it.

The ISO 10002 document describes in some depth how handling complaints well provides benefits both in customer terms and in quality and learning terms for organisations. ISO10002 is international in its scope and takes into account both traditional and e-commerce contexts. With widespread adoption, this Standard provides a consistency of customer processes which transcends geography.

CONTENT OF ISO10002

The standard presents process requirements under 5 groupings: guiding principles, process framework, planning and design, operations, and process maintenance and improvement.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The nine elements of this dimension describe core themes, each pointing to an important matter of principle which sets the scene for operational aspects of the end processes.

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| visibility | Information about how and where to complain should be well-publicised. |
| accessibility | Complainants should find it easy to engage and use the complaints procedure, irrespective of language or disability. |
| responsiveness | Prompt acknowledgement should be followed by prompt action, with complainant kept informed of progress. |
| objectivity | Any investigation should be open-minded and impartial, complete and equitable. |
| charges | There should be no costs to the complainant as their complaint is lodged and handled. |
| confidentiality | Personal information about the complainant should be disclosed internally on a need-to-know basis only and never disclosed externally without permission. |
| customer-focus | The organisation should welcome customer feedback of all types, with a culture that sees the customer as central. |
| accountability | There should be clarity on roles and authority in handling complaints, and staff should be accountable for their actions and decisions. |
| continual improvement | There should be a permanent objective to learn from complaints to improve processes, products and service. |

PROCESS FRAMEWORK

This dimension looks at non-operational matters. It is concerned principally with senior-level commitment to the concepts and ideals of quality complaints handling, the existence of thoughtful policies and clarity about who is responsible for what.

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| commitment | Beginning with top management, the organisation should demonstrate a belief in high-quality complaints handling, and resource it accordingly. |
| policy | Explicit complaint handling policies should exist, disseminated to staff and available to customers, and be embodied in, and served by, formal procedures. |
| responsibility and authority | The processes themselves need a management “owner” accountable for their implementation, quality and periodic review. |

PLANNING AND DESIGN

This dimension of the Standard requires that complaint processes should not be ad hoc but, instead, the result of careful thought and structured design which lead to interlocking activity in which information, materials, financial, human and infrastructure resources function harmoniously in pursuit of complaints handling excellence.

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| objectives | Explicit complaint handling objectives should be set and monitored at different levels and functions throughout the organisation. |
| activities | Complaints processes should be the result of a coherently designed plan which is developed mindful of best practices in other organisations, is focused on customer satisfaction and aligned with the Quality system. |
| resources | Adequate finance, staff, training and materials should be made available to enable and ensure effectiveness of the complaints processes. |

OPERATIONS

This dimension of the standard focuses on process details.

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| communication | Ensure complainants understand the process, such as what information they must supply, time limits for resolution. (Also see visibility and accessibility) |
| complaint receipt | Adequate data should be recorded immediately to enable effective investigation and handling, including the remedy sought by the complainant. |
| complaint tracking | The status of all current complaints should be recorded and tracked, and made available to complainants upon request. |

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| complaint acknowledgement | Complainants should receive immediate acknowledgement that their complaint has been received. |
| initial assessment | Upon receipt complaints should be assessed for severity, urgency, safety and other matters to determine if fast-track action is required. |
| investigation | Sincere information-gathering efforts commensurate with the seriousness of the issue should be made to enable an informed investigation and decision. |
| response | Following investigation, the complainant should be offered an appropriate response as soon as possible. |
| communication decisions | All involved individuals, complainants and staff, should be informed of the results of the investigation and action taken. |
| closing | Complainants should be involved declaring issues closed and closures recorded. If not satisfied, alternatives and escalation options should be explained. |

PROCESS MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

The core theme of this element is that simply having a complaints process is not enough. The process must remain under scrutiny for performance and adequacy, with management being vigilant to the evolving concepts of best practice, and adjusting their processes accordingly.

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| information collection | Clear procedures should exist for classifying, storing and disposing of complaint records, ensuring confidentiality is maintained. |
| analysis | Reviews should be conducted of classes of complaints to identify trends and recurring problems, to help identify root causes. |
| satisfaction with process | Complainants' satisfaction with the complaints handling process should be periodically reviewed. |
| monitoring of process | Observation and review of the whole process, from staff training through to root cause analysis and customer satisfaction should be routine to ensure a continued high level of performance. |
| auditing the process | Periodic formal audits should quantify and evaluate aspects of the complaints process and reveal conformity to policy and meeting of objectives. |
| management review | Senior management, informed by monitoring and audit activity, should understand the complaints process performance, to identify and remedy deficiencies. |
| link to continual improvement | The complaints process itself should be continually improved, and those process should lead to continual product and service improvements. |

The **ISO10002 annexes** are as follows:

- Annex A** provides guidance to smaller businesses about process basics and how to adapt the standard to smaller-scale needs.
- Annex B** provides an example of a complaint form.
- Annex C** sets out the importance of objectivity and confidentiality.
- Annex D** provides an example of a follow-up form for an organisation's internal use as a complaint is investigated.
- Annex E** lists the various sorts of responses an organisation may make to a complaint.
- Annex F** provides a flow chart to describe the principle of issue escalation.
- Annex G** provides guidance to management about the importance of ongoing monitoring of their organisation's complaints processes and provides a list of valuable measurements which can be made and tracked.
- Annex H** outlines the importance of formal audits in the on-going monitoring and continual improvement of the processes.