
Quality management — Customer satisfaction — Guidelines for dispute resolution external to organizations

*Management de la qualité — Satisfaction du client — Lignes directrices
relatives à la résolution externe de conflits aux organismes*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 10003 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 176, *Quality management and quality assurance*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Supporting technologies*.

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Introduction

0.1 General

This International Standard provides guidance for organizations to plan, design, develop, operate, maintain and improve effective and efficient external dispute resolution for product-related complaints. Dispute resolution gives an avenue of redress when organizations do not remedy a complaint internally. Most complaints can be resolved successfully within the organization, without the need for further time-consuming and more adversarial procedures.

NOTE 1 Organizations are encouraged to develop an effective and efficient internal complaints-handling process consistent with ISO 10002.

There are different methods for resolving disputes and different terms used to describe them. These methods are facilitative, advisory or determinative (see Annex A). Each method can be used by itself or the methods can be used in sequence.

This International Standard can be used to

- a) design a dispute-resolution process and decide when to offer dispute resolution to complainants, and
- b) select a dispute-resolution provider (hereinafter referred to as “provider”; see 3.9) that is able to meet an organization’s specific needs and expectations.

NOTE 2 Providers from the public and private sectors can take various forms around the world, including industry-sector specific associations, ombudsmen and multi-sector associations.

While this International Standard is directed towards organizations, providers can also benefit from knowing what guidance is being given to organizations. Providers can also use the guidance in their dispute-resolution process.

Organizations are encouraged to plan, design, develop, operate, maintain and improve a dispute-resolution process in conjunction with a customer satisfaction code of conduct and internal complaints-handling process, and to integrate them with the organization’s quality or other management systems.

This International Standard can assist individuals and organizations in evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of an organization’s dispute-resolution process. Implementation of this International Standard can:

- provide flexible dispute resolution that, in comparison with court-based processes, can be less expensive, easier and quicker, especially in disputes across borders;
- help to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty;
- provide a benchmark against which individuals and organizations can evaluate claims by organizations and providers that they operate in an effective, efficient and fair manner;
- help to inform potential users of dispute resolution about the conditions of access, cost and the legal consequences;
- enhance the ability of an organization to identify and eliminate causes of disputes;
- improve the way complaints and disputes are handled in the organization;
- provide additional information that can contribute to improvement of the organization’s processes and products;
- improve the organization’s reputation or avoid damage to it;

- improve domestic and international competitiveness;
- provide confidence of fair and consistent treatment of disputes throughout the global marketplace.

Note that external dispute resolution can be the subject of statutory and regulatory requirements.

NOTE 3 Terminology used in connection with dispute resolution is not always the same throughout the world. Annex A provides a glossary of some of the equivalent terms.

0.2 Relationship with ISO 9001 and ISO 9004

This International Standard is compatible with ISO 9001 and ISO 9004 and supports the objectives of these two standards through the effective and efficient application of a dispute-resolution process. This International Standard can also be used independently of ISO 9001 and ISO 9004.

ISO 9001 specifies requirements for a quality management system that can be used for internal application by organizations, or for certification, or for contractual purposes. The dispute-resolution process described in this International Standard (ISO 10003) can be used as an element of a quality management system. This International Standard is not intended for certification or for contractual purposes.

ISO 9004 provides guidance on continual improvement of performance regarding quality management systems. The use of this International Standard (ISO 10003) can further enhance performance in resolving disputes with complainants and increase the satisfaction of customers, complainants and other interested parties. It can also facilitate the continual improvement of the quality of processes and products based on feedback from customers, complainants and other interested parties.

NOTE Apart from customers and complainants, other interested parties can include suppliers, industry associations and their members, consumer organizations, relevant government agencies, personnel, owners and others who are affected by the dispute-resolution process.

0.3 Relationship with ISO 10001 and ISO 10002

This International Standard is compatible with ISO 10001 and ISO 10002. These three standards can be used either independently or in conjunction with each other. When used together, ISO 10001, ISO 10002 and this International Standard can be part of a broader and integrated framework for enhanced customer satisfaction through codes of conduct, complaints handling and dispute resolution (see Annex B).

ISO 10001 contains guidance on customer satisfaction codes of conduct for organizations. Such codes, in setting out what customers can expect from the organization and its products, can decrease the likelihood of problems arising and can eliminate causes of complaints and disputes. When complaints and disputes do arise, the existence of codes of conduct can assist the parties in understanding customer expectations and the organization's attempts to meet those expectations.

ISO 10002 contains guidance on the internal handling of product-related complaints. This International Standard (ISO 10003) can be used when complaints are not resolved internally.

0.4 Statements regarding conformity

This International Standard is designed to be used solely as a guidance document. Where all applicable guidance provided in this International Standard has been implemented, statements that a dispute-resolution process is based on that guidance can be made.

However, any statements claiming or implying conformity to this International Standard are inconsistent with this International Standard, and it is therefore inappropriate to make such statements.

NOTE Statements claiming or implying conformity to this International Standard are thus inappropriate in any promotional and communication material, such as press releases, advertisements, marketing brochures, videos, staff announcements, logos, slogans and catch lines for diverse media, ranging from print and broadcasting to Internet and multi-media applications, to product labels, signs and banners.

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Quality management — Customer satisfaction — Guidelines for dispute resolution external to organizations

1 Scope

This International Standard provides guidance for an organization to plan, design, develop, operate, maintain and improve an effective and efficient dispute-resolution process for complaints that have not been resolved by the organization. This International Standard is applicable to:

- complaints relating to the organization's products intended for, or required by, customers, the complaints-handling process or dispute-resolution process;

NOTE 1 Throughout this International Standard, the term "product" encompasses services, software, hardware and processed materials.

- resolution of disputes arising from domestic or cross-border business activities, including those arising from electronic commerce.

This International Standard is intended for use by organizations regardless of type, size and product provided, and deals with

- guidance on determining when and how organizations can participate in dispute resolution,
- guidance on the selection of providers and use of their services,
- top management involvement in, and commitment to, dispute resolution and deployment of adequate resources within the organization,
- the essentials for fair, suitable, transparent and accessible dispute resolution,
- guidance on management of an organization's participation in dispute resolution, and
- monitoring, evaluating and improving the dispute-resolution process.

NOTE 2 This International Standard is particularly aimed at dispute resolution between an organization and

- individuals purchasing or using products for personal or household purposes, or
- small businesses.

This International Standard is not intended for certification or for contractual purposes. It does not apply to the resolution of other types of disputes, such as employment disputes. It is not intended to change any rights or obligations provided by applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

This International Standard does not apply to complaints handling within an organization.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 9000:2005, *Quality management systems — Fundamentals and vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 9000:2005 and the following apply.

3.1

association

organization (3.8) consisting of member organizations or persons

3.2

complainant

person, **organization** (3.8), or their representative, making a **complaint** (3.3)

NOTE 1 In this International Standard, customers who refer their complaints to a provider in the first instance are also considered to be “complainants”.

NOTE 2 This definition clarifies the definition given in ISO 10002, in that a representative can represent a person or an organization.

3.3

complaint

expression of dissatisfaction made to an **organization** (3.8), related to its products, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected

[ISO 10002:2004, 3.2]

NOTE Complaints can be made in relation to the **dispute** (3.6) resolution process.

3.4

customer

organization (3.8) or person that receives a product

EXAMPLE Consumer, client, end-user, retailer, beneficiary or purchaser.

NOTE 1 A customer can be internal or external to the organization.

NOTE 2 For the purposes of this International Standard, the term “customer” includes potential customers.

NOTE 3 Adapted from ISO 9000:2005, 3.3.5.

3.5

customer satisfaction

customer's (3.4) perception of the degree to which the customer's requirements have been fulfilled

NOTE 1 Customer **complaints** (3.3) are a common indicator of low customer satisfaction but their absence does not necessarily imply high customer satisfaction.

NOTE 2 Even when customer requirements have been agreed with the customer and fulfilled, this does not necessarily ensure high customer satisfaction.

[ISO 9000:2005, 3.1.4]

3.6**dispute**

(dispute resolution) disagreement, arising from a **complaint** (3.3), submitted to a **provider** (3.9)

NOTE Some **organizations** (3.8) allow their **customers** (3.4) to express their dissatisfaction to a provider in the first instance. In this situation, the expression of dissatisfaction becomes a complaint when sent to the organization for a response, and becomes a dispute if not resolved by the organization without provider intervention. Many organizations prefer their customers to first express any dissatisfaction to the organization before utilizing dispute resolution external to the organization.

3.7**dispute resolver**

individual assigned by a **provider** (3.9) to assist the parties in resolving a **dispute** (3.6)

NOTE Dispute resolvers can be staff, volunteer or contract individuals.

3.8**organization**

group of people and facilities with an arrangement of responsibilities, authorities and relationships

EXAMPLE Company, corporation, firm, enterprise, institution, charity, sole trader, **association** (3.1), or parts or combination thereof.

NOTE 1 This International Standard pertains to different types of organizations, each with very different roles in the **dispute** (3.6) resolution process. They include organizations that have unresolved **complaints** (3.3), **providers** (3.9) of dispute resolution, and **associations** (3.1) that provide or sponsor dispute-resolution processes. For convenience, in this International Standard, the term "organization" used alone means the entity against which an unresolved complaint has been made and that is now or can be in the future a party to a dispute. The terms "provider" and "association" are used to describe the other types of organizations.

NOTE 2 Adapted from ISO 9000:2005, 3.3.1.

3.9**provider**

(dispute resolution) person or **organization** (3.8) that supplies and operates a **dispute** (3.6) resolution process, external to the organization

NOTE 1 In general, a provider is a legal entity, separate from the organization and the **complainant** (3.2). In this way, the attributes of independence and fairness are emphasized (see 4.5). In some situations, a separate unit is established within the organization to handle unresolved **complaints** (3.3). This International Standard is not intended for that situation, but it can be useful.

NOTE 2 The provider contracts with the parties to provide dispute resolution, and is accountable for performance. The provider supplies dispute resolvers. The provider also utilizes support, executive and other staff to supply financial resources, clerical support, scheduling assistance, training, meeting rooms, supervision and similar functions.

NOTE 3 Providers can take many forms, including not-for-profit, for-profit and public entities. An **association** (3.1) can also be a provider.

4 Guiding principles**4.1 General**

The foundation of effective and efficient dispute resolution is based on adherence to the guiding principles set out in 4.2 to 4.12.

4.2 Consent to participate

Participation of the complainants in dispute resolution offered by an organization should be voluntary. Consent to participate should be based on full knowledge and understanding of the process and possible outcomes. When the customer is an individual purchasing or using products for personal or household purposes, consent to participate should not be a required condition for receiving them (see Annex C)

NOTE 1 Consent to participate in dispute resolution can be a required condition in business-to-business contracts.

NOTE 2 Consent to participate can be subject to different statutory and regulatory requirements in different parts of the world.

4.3 Accessibility

A dispute-resolution process should be easy to find and use (see Annex D).

4.4 Suitability

The type of dispute-resolution method offered to parties to a dispute (see Annex A) and the potential remedies available to a complainant should be suitable to the nature of the dispute (see Annex E).

4.5 Fairness

The organization should engage in dispute resolution with the intent of fairly and honestly resolving the dispute with the complainant. The organization should select a provider whose dispute-resolution personnel and dispute resolvers engaged in dispute resolution are impartial and objective, so that processes, recommendations and determinative decisions are fair to both parties and are recognized as being made independently (see Annex F).

4.6 Competence

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Organization personnel, providers and dispute resolvers should have the personal attributes, skills, training and experience necessary to discharge their responsibilities in a satisfactory manner (see Annex G).

4.7 Timeliness

Dispute resolution should be delivered as expeditiously as feasible, given the nature of the dispute and of the process used (see Annex H).

4.8 Confidentiality

Personally identifiable information should be kept confidential and protected, unless disclosure is required by law, or consent for disclosure is obtained from the person concerned. Similarly, trade secrets should be kept confidential and protected, unless disclosure is required by law, or consent for disclosure is obtained from the party that has the trade secret.

NOTE 1 Personally identifiable information is information that when associated with an individual can be used to identify him, or her, and is retrievable by the individual's name, address, email address, telephone number or similarly specific identifier. The precise meaning of the term differs around the world.

NOTE 2 This principle can be applied through a policy governing the use and disclosure of information obtained during a dispute, and providing notice of that policy to the parties to the dispute.

NOTE 3 To encourage the voluntary participation of organizations in dispute resolution, it is sometimes necessary to protect the identity of the organization, unless disclosure is required by law.

4.9 Transparency

Sufficient information about the dispute-resolution process, the provider and its performance should be disclosed to complainants, organizations and the public (see Annex I).

NOTE Transparency refers to information about the dispute-resolution process, the provider and its performance, as opposed to personal information about the complainant and trade secrets of the organization.

4.10 Legality

A dispute-resolution process should be operated in accordance with applicable law and the agreement of the parties.

4.11 Capacity

Sufficient resources should be made available and committed to dispute resolution, and managed effectively and efficiently.

4.12 Continual improvement

Increased effectiveness and efficiency of the dispute-resolution process should be a permanent objective.

5 Dispute-resolution framework

5.1 Commitment

The organization should be committed to an effective and efficient dispute-resolution process that conforms to the organization's dispute-resolution policy (see 5.2). It is particularly important that top management demonstrate and promote this commitment. An unambiguous commitment to dispute resolution can be a useful supplement to the organization's internal complaint handling process, and can allow both personnel and complainants to contribute to the improvement of the organization's processes and products. This commitment should be reflected in the establishment and dissemination of policy and procedures for the resolution of disputes, and by the provision of adequate resources, including training.

An organization should also be committed to selecting effective and efficient providers that can deliver dispute resolution consistent with the organization's objectives and process design (see Annex J).

NOTE When the provider is an association, it is advisable that it evaluates its own experience and capacity in the same way an organization would evaluate potential providers.

5.2 Dispute-resolution policy

5.2.1 Policy establishment

Top management should establish a dispute-resolution policy that is clear and unambiguous. That policy should describe under which circumstances the organization will inform customers about the dispute-resolution process and offer dispute resolution to complainants (see Annex K). The organization should also determine whether it will require complainants to use the internal complaints-handling process before initiating a dispute-resolution process. The policy should be made available to all relevant personnel, complainants, customers and other interested parties. The policy should be supported by procedures and objectives for each function and personnel role included in the process.

NOTE The organization can agree to offer dispute resolution in advance of a dispute arising, or on a case-by-case basis after a dispute has arisen, under criteria set by the organization. An organization can make such a commitment for all cases or only for certain categories of cases. Advance commitments can be made in different ways, such as the commitment in warranties or a customer contract (see Annex C), in advertised "pledges", or agreements with a provider.