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**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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CP 401 • Ch. de Blandonnet 8  
CH-1214 Vernier, Geneva  
Phone: +41 22 749 01 11  
Fax: +41 22 749 09 47  
Email: [copyright@iso.org](mailto:copyright@iso.org)  
Website: [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)

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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.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

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. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

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

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 10003:2007), which has been technically revised.

The main changes compared with the previous edition are as follows:

- alignment with ISO 9000:2015;
- alignment with ISO 9001:2015;
- improved alignment with ISO 10001, ISO 10002 and ISO 10004.

## Introduction

### 0.1 General

This document provides guidance for organizations to plan, design, develop, operate, maintain and improve effective and efficient external dispute resolution for product- and service-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 document can be used to:

- a) design a dispute-resolution process and decide when to offer dispute resolution to complainants;
- 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 document 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 document can assist individuals and organizations in evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of an organization’s dispute-resolution process. Implementation of this document 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 the 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 products, services and processes;
- 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 3 External dispute resolution can be the subject of statutory and regulatory requirements.

NOTE 4 The satisfaction of persons or organizations that could or do receive a product or a service from a public or a private organization is the focus of this document.

## 0.2 Relationship with ISO 9001 and ISO 9004

This document 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 document can also be used independently of ISO 9001 and ISO 9004.

ISO 9001 specifies requirements for a quality management system. The dispute-resolution process described in this document (ISO 10003) can be used as an element of a quality management system.

ISO 9004 provides guidance to achieve sustained success of an organization. The use of this document (ISO 10003) can further enhance performance in resolving disputes with complainants and increase the satisfaction of customers, complainants and other relevant interested parties to facilitate the achievement of sustained success. It can also facilitate the continual improvement of the quality of products, services and processes based on feedback from customers, complainants and other relevant interested parties.

NOTE Apart from customers and complainants, other relevant 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, ISO 10002 and ISO 10004

This document is compatible with ISO 10001, ISO 10002 and ISO 10004. These four documents can be used either independently or in conjunction with each other. When used together, this document, ISO 10001, ISO 10002 and ISO 10004 can be part of a broader and integrated framework for enhanced customer satisfaction through codes of conduct, complaints handling, dispute resolution and monitoring and measurement of customer satisfaction (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 and services, 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- and service-related complaints. This document (ISO 10003) can be used when complaints are not resolved internally.

ISO 10004 contains guidance on establishing effective processes for monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction. Its focus is on customers external to the organization. Guidelines given in ISO 10004 can support the establishment and implementation of a dispute resolution process. For example, the processes described in ISO 10004 can assist the organization in monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction with the dispute resolution process (see [8.3](#)). Likewise, information from a dispute resolution process can be used in monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction. For example, the frequency and nature of disputes can be an indirect indicator of customer satisfaction (see ISO 10004:2018, 7.3.2).

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

## 1 Scope

This document gives guidelines 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 document is applicable to:

- complaints relating to the organization's products and services, the complaints-handling process or dispute-resolution process;
- resolution of disputes arising from domestic or cross-border business activities, including those arising from electronic commerce.

This document is intended for use by any organization regardless of its type or size, or the products and services it provides, 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;
- monitoring, evaluating and improving the dispute-resolution process.

This document is particularly aimed at dispute resolution between an organization and

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

This document does not apply to the resolution of other types of disputes, such as employment disputes. It does not apply to complaints handling within an organization.

## 2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements 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 9000:2015, *Quality management systems — Fundamentals and vocabulary*

## 3 Terms and definitions

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

## ISO 10003:2018(E)

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

### 3.1

#### **association**

<customer satisfaction> *organization* (3.12) consisting of member organizations or persons

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.8]

### 3.2

#### **complainant**

person, *organization* (3.12) or their representative, making a *complaint* (3.3)

Note 1 to entry: In this document, *customers* (3.4) who refer their complaints to a provider in the first instance are also considered to be “complainants”.

[SOURCE: ISO 10001:2018, 3.2, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

### 3.3

#### **complaint**

<customer satisfaction> expression of dissatisfaction made to an *organization* (3.12), related to its product or service, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected

Note 1 to entry: Complaints can be made in relation to other processes where the organization interacts with the *customer* (3.4).

Note 2 to entry: Complaints can be made directly or indirectly to the organization.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.9.3, modified — Notes 1 and 2 to entry have been added.]

### 3.4

#### **customer**

person or *organization* (3.12) that could or does receive a product or a service that is intended for or required by this person or organization

EXAMPLE Consumer, client, end-user, retailer, receiver of product or service from an internal process, beneficiary and purchaser.

Note 1 to entry: A customer can be internal or external to the organization.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.4]

### 3.5

#### **customer satisfaction**

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

Note 1 to entry: It can be that the customer's expectation is not known to the *organization* (3.12), or even to the customer in question, until the product or service is delivered. It can be necessary for achieving high customer satisfaction to fulfil an expectation of a customer even if it is neither stated nor generally implied or obligatory.

Note 2 to entry: *Complaints* (3.3) are a common indicator of low customer satisfaction but their absence does not necessarily imply high customer satisfaction.

Note 3 to entry: Even when customer requirements have been agreed with the customer and fulfilled, this does not necessarily ensure high customer satisfaction.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.9.2]

**3.6****customer service**

interaction of the *organization* (3.12) with the *customer* (3.4) throughout the life cycle of a product or a service

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.9.4]

**3.7****dispute**

<customer satisfaction> disagreement, arising from a *complaint* (3.3), submitted to a *DRP-provider* (3.9)

Note 1 to entry: Some *organizations* (3.12) allow their *customers* (3.4) to express their dissatisfaction to a DRP-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 DRP-provider intervention. Many organizations prefer their customers to first express any dissatisfaction to the organization before utilizing dispute resolution external to the organization.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.9.6]

**3.8****dispute resolver**

<customer satisfaction> individual person assigned by a *DRP-provider* (3.9) to assist the parties in resolving a *dispute* (3.7)

EXAMPLE Staff, volunteer, contract personnel.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.1.6]

**3.9****DRP-provider****dispute resolution process provider**

person or *organization* (3.12) that supplies and operates an external *dispute* (3.7) resolution process

Note 1 to entry: Generally, a DRP-provider is a legal entity, separate from the organization or person as an individual and the *complainant* (3.2). In this way, the attributes of independence and fairness are emphasized. In some situations, a separate unit is established within the organization to handle unresolved *complaints* (3.3).

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

Note 3 to entry: DRP-providers can take many forms including not-for-profit, for-profit and public entities. An *association* (3.1) can also be a DRP-provider.

Note 4 to entry: In this document, instead of the term DRP-provider, the term “provider” is used.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.7, modified — Note 4 to entry has been modified.]

**3.10****feedback**

<customer satisfaction> opinions, comments and expressions of interest in a product, a service or a complaints-handling process

Note 1 to entry: Feedback can be given in relation to other processes where the *organization* (3.12) interacts with the *customer* (3.4).

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.9.1, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

### 3.11

#### **interested party**

stakeholder

person or *organization* (3.12) that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity

EXAMPLE *Customers* (3.4), owners, people in an organization, providers, bankers, regulators, unions, partners or society that can include competitors or opposing pressure groups.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.3, modified — Note 1 to entry has been deleted.]

### 3.12

#### **organization**

person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

Note 1 to entry: The concept of organization includes, but is not limited to, sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, *association* (3.1), charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private.

Note 2 to entry: This document pertains to different types of organizations, each with very different roles in the *dispute* (3.7) resolution process. They include organizations that have unresolved *complaints* (3.3), providers of dispute resolution, and associations that provide or sponsor dispute-resolution processes. For convenience, in this document, 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.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.1, modified — Note 2 to entry has been replaced.]

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## 4 Guiding principles

ISO 10003:2018

### 4.1 General

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Effective and efficient dispute resolution is based on adherence to the guiding principles set out in 4.2 to 4.17.

### 4.2 Commitment

The organization should be actively committed to defining and implementing a dispute-resolution process.

### 4.3 Responsiveness

The organization should address the needs and expectations of customers with respect to dispute resolution.

### 4.4 Information integrity

The organization should ensure that the information about its dispute resolution is accurate and not misleading, and that data collected are relevant, correct, complete, meaningful and useful.

### 4.5 Accountability

The organization should establish and maintain accountability for, and reporting on, the decisions and actions taken with respect to dispute resolution.

#### 4.6 Consent to participate

Participation of the complainants in dispute resolution offered by the 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 and services 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.

#### 4.7 Accessibility

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

#### 4.8 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](#)).

#### 4.9 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](#)).

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#### 4.10 Competence

Organization personnel, providers and dispute resolvers should have the personal attributes, skills, training, education and experience necessary to fulfil their responsibilities related to dispute resolution (see [Annex G](#)).

#### 4.11 Timeliness

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

#### 4.12 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.