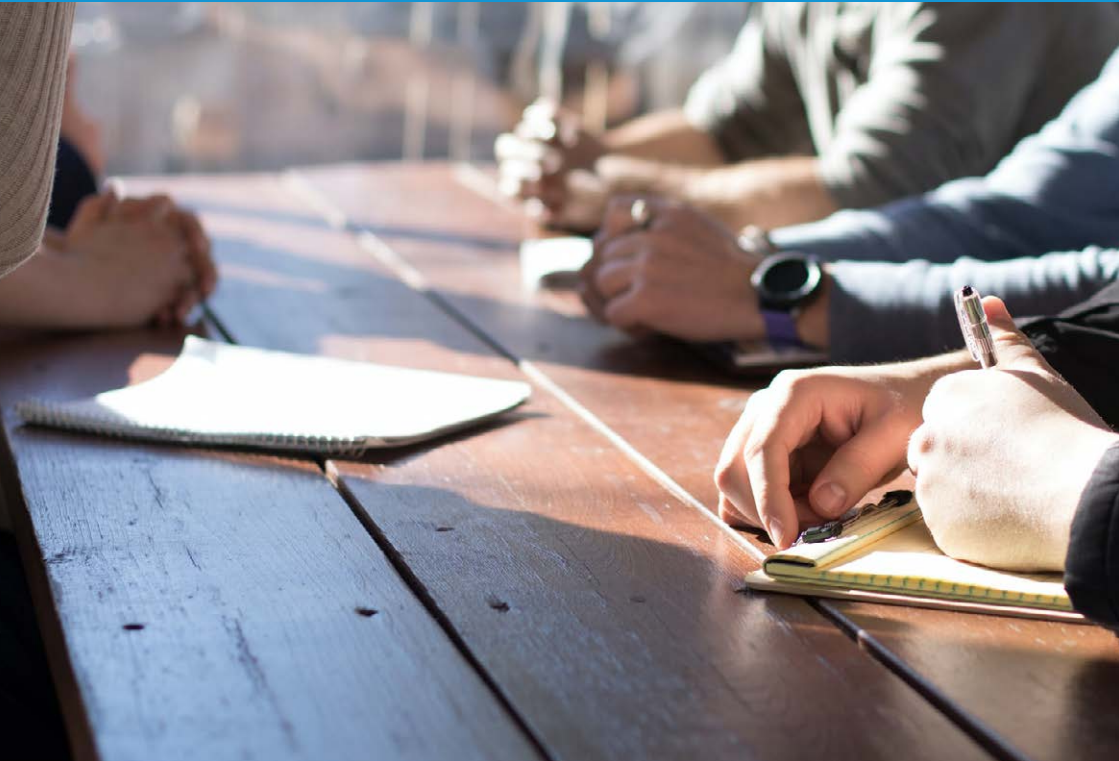


# Complaint Process Guidelines

Developed by WaterWorX Community of Practice Customer Relations



# Complaint Process Guidelines

## Short Term Experts

Marcel Lips | **Vitens**

Linda Moraca | **Dunea**

Marjolein Spit-Griend | **Vitens**

Nicole Kesselaer | **WML**

This document can serve as a guideline for setting up and improving the customer complaint process.

# Table of Contents

<b>1   What is a complaint?</b>	4
<b>2   The complaint process</b>	5
<b>3   Channels</b>	7
<b>4   Registration of a complaint</b>	7
<b>5   Investigation of a complaint</b>	8
<b>6   Respond to customer</b>	8
<b>7   Analyzing &amp; Reporting</b>	9
<b>8   Training and development</b>	13

# 1 | What is a complaint?

Definition of a complaint - a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction (or an unmet customer expectation) addressed to an organization, with regard to its products or services, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

An effective complaint handling system has many benefits to an organization; for example:

- It resolves issues raised by a person who is dissatisfied in a timely and cost-effective way;
- It provides information that can lead to improvements in service delivery;
- If complaints are handled properly, it can improve the reputation of the organization.

It is important to listen to the voice of the customer. You are not only providing a product, but also investing in a relationship with the customer. The voice of the customer can help to make improvements:

- What is the current situation?
- What is the desired situation?
- Identify gap between current and desired
- Determine what is classified as a complaint



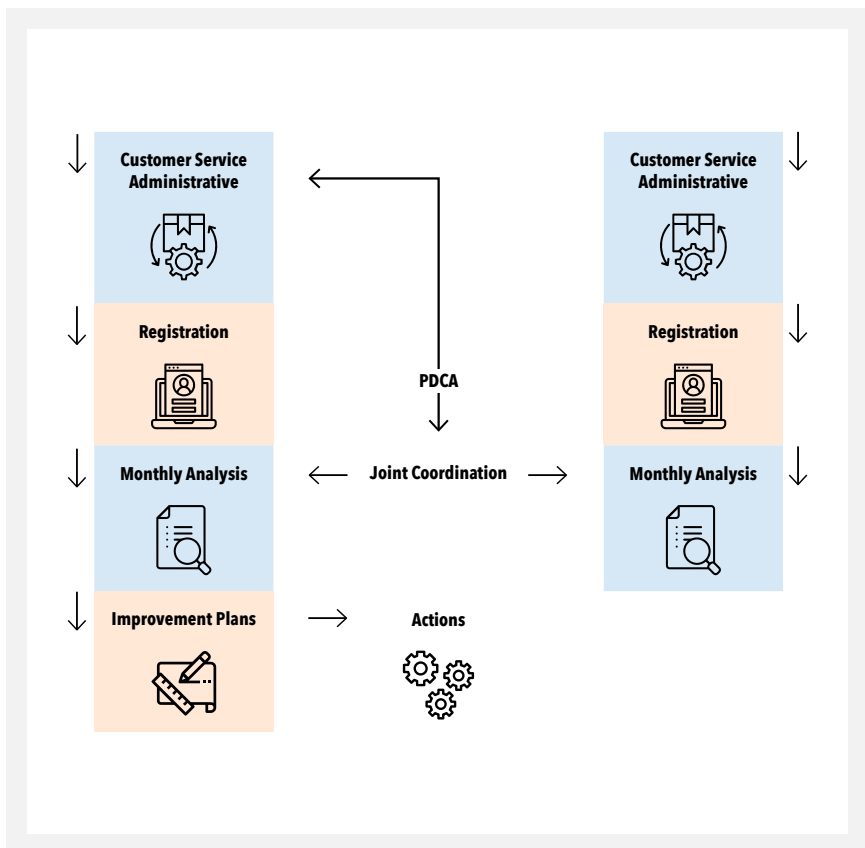
## 2 | The complaint process

A well-defined complaint process with clear defined responsibilities and tasks will increase customer satisfaction and needs to be embedded in the entire organization; it is not only the customer service department that is responsible for a complaint.

Assigning responsibilities is one of the key factors that contribute to the success. For example:

- Who will collect and record the complaint?
- Which complaint will be resolved by which department?
- Who communicates to the customer?

The picture below shows an example of a chain of actions related to administrative and technical complaints.

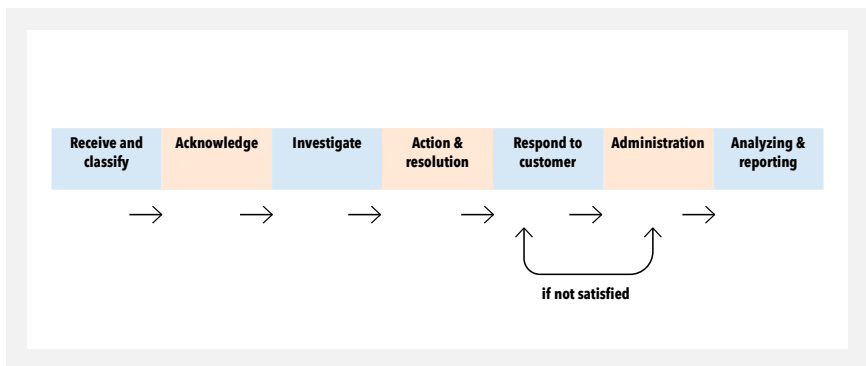


## Complaint process flowchart

A complaint process goes through a number of steps:

1. Receive and classify
2. Acknowledge
3. Investigate
4. Action & resolution
5. Respond to customer
6. Administration
7. Analyzing & reporting

A complaint process flowchart:



## Remarks

- Define a complaint policy and procedure
- Flowcharts can help to identify steps, roles and responsibilities
- Be aware of the position of complaint management in the organization and also in the physical offices; complaints can be filed at various regional offices.
- Look at how the complaints are registered: manually in a book or in the computer. Recommendation is to register all complaints in one system and make one report
- If not possible, try to enter all available data in one system.
- A SLA (Service Level Agreement) or SLG (Service Level Guarantee) can help to agree on times to resolve complaints.
- Make sure the staff is trained to follow up on handling complaints.

## 3 | Channels

There are various channels to receive a complaint:

- by e-mail;
- by phone;
- in writing;
- personal contact.

Keep in mind that contacts are often informal in these regions so complaints can also be communicated to the caretaker, plumber or manager.

It is important to look at these channels and make sure you register a complaint using the same process.

## 4 | Registration of a complaint

Complaint registration can be done on paper or in a system (computer - preferred option). Make sure all information is registered at a central location; including follow-up and feedback to the customer. It is important to register a complaint properly and to ask the correct questions:

- Date complaint received
- Name of customer
- Address
- Phonenumber
- E-mail
- What is the complaint about? Always classify the complaint:
  - Billing
  - Meter reading
  - Technical
    - Leakage
    - Pipe burst
    - Low pressure
    - No water
  - Customer service
- Customer group
- Detailed description of the complaint
  - How long, as of when, effects of the complaint
  - Classify complaint: is it urgent or can it wait?
- Date the complaint is resolved
  - Solved within the agreed timeframe (SLA/SLG)?

Ensure that all complaints are collected in one system or folder so that complaints can be easily found and analyzed.  
Divide into:

- Received
- Pending
- Resolved, including:
  - Date of customer response
  - Customer response
  - Internal feedback
  - What actions have been taken internally

Every complaint has a different context so it is important to collect the critical information to solve the complaint. For instance seasonal circumstances, meter reading cycles, reconstruction activities or intermittent water supply.

## 5 | Investigation of a complaint

Once a complaint has been received and registered somebody has to take action.

- Who will get a notification to take action?
- Which type of complaints will be resolved by which department?
- Who will review the resolution of the complaint and approve it?
- Who communicates back to customer service so that they can communicate to customer?

All this needs to be clearly defined.

## 6 | Investigation of a complaint

Responding in a timely manner to the customer is necessary for a customer oriented utility:

**To Who should feedback be given? Depending on the type of complaint:**

- Personalized feedback directly to the customer by e-mail, phone or other channel.
- General feedback to a group of customers; for instance directed to a neighborhood or a street.

**When should feedback be given?**

- During resolution – keep the customer informed if it takes more time to resolve; manage expectations. Inform customer what the problem is, how long it will take and what the next steps are.
- After resolving the problem. Communicate that problem is solved and inform the customer of the resolution.



### How should feedback be given?

- General feedback to group of customers.
  - Channels can be local radio, tv, social media, announcement in newspaper, information card, e-mail or whatsapp
- Personalized message
  - E-mail to the customer
  - Telephone call to the customer
  - Whatsapp message to the customer
  - SMS

## 7 | Analyzing & Reporting

Frequent analysis and reporting is crucial for an effective complaint process. Analysis of complaints are necessary in order to use it as a tool to make improvements and improve customer satisfaction:

- Promote rapid handling of complaints
- Prevention of complaints
- Alert function for complaint types, regions and departments

By regularly reviewing complaints it can serve as an alert function to prevent complaints.

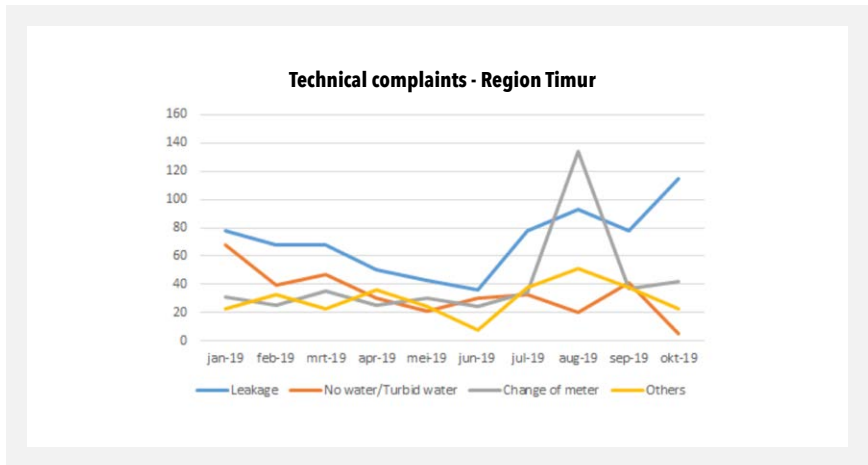
Monitoring complaints is very important in view of the cooperation with other departments. The consequence could be that procedures or communication need to be adjusted or even technical modifications in water supply are required.

Reporting should be used to manage and steer the process. It is important to define clear responsibilities. Who pulls the data from the system (books), who makes the report, who analyzes the reports and defines actions and next steps. In order to be effective, reporting should be used to steer the team on an ongoing basis and should be part of ongoing business reporting. Use PDCA cycle: Plan, Do, Check and Act.

The PDCA cycle (Plan Do Check Act) is a four-step problem-solving iterative technique that works well to improve processes. The basic principle of the PDCA cycle is that repeating a working method ensures improvement and thus the achievement of your objectives.

When doing analysis please keep in mind that specific circumstances may influence the number of complaints. For example specific event like a major leakage in a pipeline, seasonal influence or schedules in meter reading/billing.

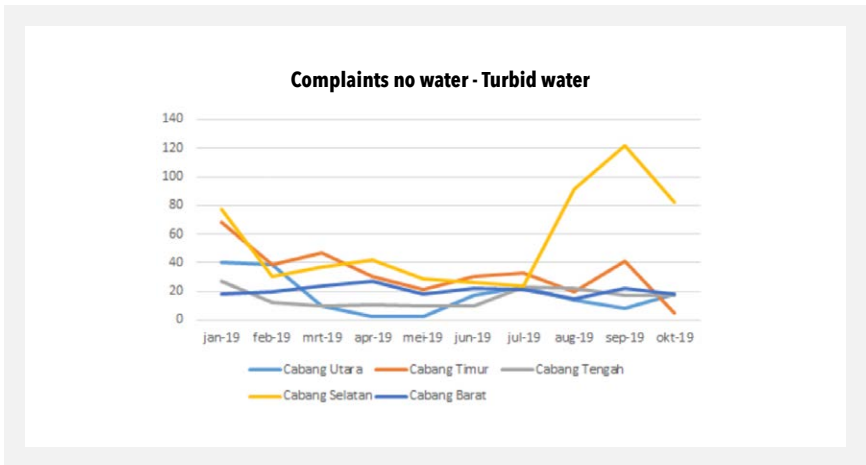
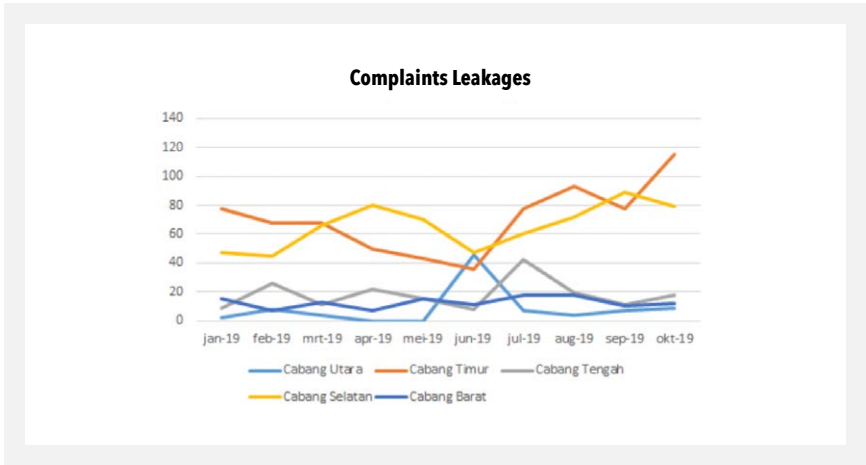
This graph shows an increase in the number of complaints in relation to the change of meter. Further analysis should make clear if the number meter changes higher in the month of August.



There are many data that can be used for complaint reporting. Below are different parameters that can be used for reporting:

- Number of complaints per region
- Number of complaints per customer group
- Number of complaints per complaint type
  - Billing
  - Meter reading
  - Technical
    - Leakage
    - Pipe burst
    - Low pressure
    - No water
  - Customer service
- Solved within desired time
- Complaints per # of connections
- Top 10 complaints
- Days outstanding
- Average time to solve; split per category
- Complaints solved within agreed timeframe
- Development of the total number of complaints over time
  - Week
  - Month
  - Quarter
  - Year
  - Same month previous year(s)

Here are some graphs shown in which you can see the development of every type of complaint in each region.

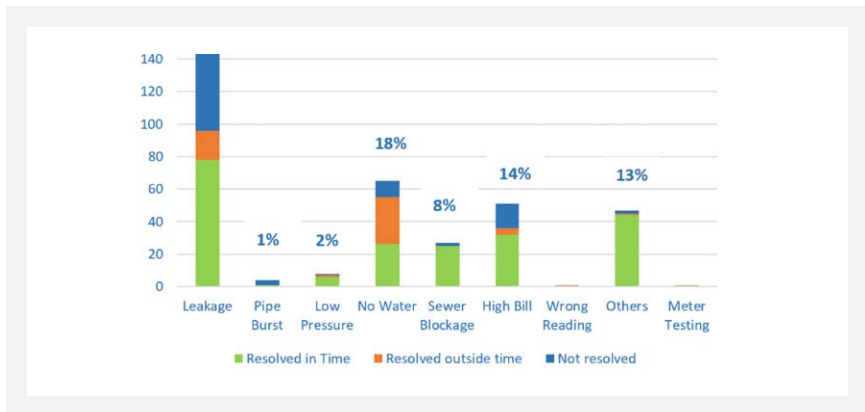


**A KPI - key performance indicator** - is a measurable value that helps you to look at the effectiveness of the complaint process. It is suggested to use KPI's for reporting.

A few examples of key-performance indicators are:

- Maximum # of complaints per category
- Time to solve the complaint (split into categories)
- # of complaints per connection

Example graph:



## How to report

- Define sequence for reporting
  - Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly
    - Daily/weekly reporting for day to day steering
  - YTD - annual
- Use standard format for reporting
- Visualize data with graphs
- Set up a manual/work instructions: how to gather data for analyses and reporting.

## How to follow up

- Define clear actions; make SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time based)
- Cooperation with other departments (especially Commercial/Customer Care and Technical/Distribution) is very important; customer satisfaction is everybody's responsibility.
- Reporting should be part of working routine.
- Automize reporting as much as possible.

## **8 | Training and development**

Another aspect of a successful complaints management system is to support the process with training and development.

It is important to have the complaint process well embedded in the organization. People need to be trained to be effective following the above process.

# About WaterWorX

WaterWorX is a flagship program that brings together 10 Dutch water utilities and 40 water operators in developing countries to provide 10 million people with sustainable access to clean drinking water through WOPs. Supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), this programme enables Dutch and local water experts to collaborate in WOP projects, across Asia, Africa and Latin America, till 2030.

WaterWorX aims to increase sustainable access to drinking water to 10 million people, by:

1. Strengthening the financial, technical and social sustainability of the local partner water companies in order to make sustainable drinking water available to millions of people in developing and transition countries.
2. Strengthening the enabling environment of laws & regulations, financing and policies in which water companies are encouraged to function properly and enhance their performance.
3. Increasing access to water infrastructure investment finance, by developing investment proposals and engaging with domestic and international financing organisations and banks.

Utility access to investment finance is problematic and often very little. The WaterWorX programme had to develop and innovate activities to improve utility access. In the first phase (2017-2021), the WaterWorX programme set up specific activities within the WOP to increase the access of utilities to investment finance. These activities differ per country, utility and WOP since investment finance is very context specific. Successes and failures of these WOP activities are documented, and lessons learned will be used to improve WOP activities in the second phase of WaterWorX (2022-2026).

