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Making complaints systems work

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Recommendations for dealing with complaints

- ◆ Keep it simple - avoid long forms.
- ◆ Use the phone more than a letter.
- ◆ Find out straight away what the person complaining wants you to do about the problem.
- ◆ For less serious complaints, better a quick apology.
- ◆ Give personal and specific replies, not standard answers.

Recommendations for dealing with complaints (cont.)

- ◆ Treat people as you'd like your mother to be treated.
- ◆ Don't pass the problem. If you need to refer to someone else give the customer full details.
- ◆ Be clear about your remedies.
- ◆ Feedback citizens about improvements resulting from their complaints.
- ◆ More complaints show that your customers trust you to take them seriously.

Stages of developing a complaints system

- ◆ Service standards
- ◆ How to complain
- ◆ The stages of the complaints procedures
- ◆ Deadlines for receiving a reply
- ◆ The possible result

Access to the complaints procedure

- ◆ Encouraging complaints and compliments by advertising your procedures and making them easy to use.
- ◆ Making it clear that you welcome complaints and comments and will use the information to improve your services.
- ◆ Allowing complaints for users with special difficulties, reading disability or whose first language is not Czech.
- ◆ Carrying out surveys and 'mystery shoppers' to check that your system is easy to use

Handling complaints

- ◆ Having clear written procedures
- ◆ Consulting staff and users when drawing up and revising complaints procedures.
- ◆ Fair treatment of staff and users, and confidentiality of information.
- ◆ All staff, especially those who have most contact with users, should know your policy and receive training.
- ◆ A menu of remedies that staff and users should understand.
- ◆ Get senior managers' commitment to handling complaints properly.

Dos about handling a complaint

- ♦ give your name
- ♦ take the person who complains seriously
- ♦ tell the person what will happen next and the stages of the procedure
- ♦ act quickly once the complainant has left
- ♦ get their details, e.g. names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates
- ♦ listen, get the facts and make notes
- ♦ stay calm even if the person gets angry
- ♦ be sympathetic and honest

***Don'ts* about handling a complaint**

- ♦ argue with the complainant
- ♦ get into a blame conversation
- ♦ accept abuse from a complainant, e.g. swearing
- ♦ deter people from making a complaint (asking them not to do it, to do it in writing, in person or coming back later)
- ♦ consider the complaint as a personal criticism
- ♦ use jargon when writing back to the complainant

Organising the handling of your complaints system

- ◆ Encouraging front-line staff to 'own' complaints combined with a centrally monitoring system
- ◆ Responsibility for investigating and replying to complaints should generally lie with the section responsible for the failure in service.
- ◆ The sections handling complaints should maintain close links with all parts of the organisation.

The procedure about the written reply should (i)

- ◆ be written in clear language;
- ◆ be simple to operate;
- ◆ cover complaints about both operational and policy matters;
- ◆ be reviewed regularly; and

The procedure about the written reply should (ii)

- ♦ aim to answer all the points of concern;
- ♦ be factually correct;
- ♦ avoid jargon;
- ♦ be signed by the officer responsible;
- ♦ contain a contact phone number and e-mail; and
- ♦ tell the person what to do next if they are still not satisfied.

Results

- ◆ Analysing complaints to understand users' views and the improvements they want.
- ◆ Publishing information at least once a year on:
 - *the number and type of complaints;*
 - *how quickly they were dealt with;*
 - *users' satisfaction; and*
 - *actions taken as a result.*
- ◆ Sending information from complaints to policy makers.
- ◆ Using Internet
- ◆ Having complaints reviewed by someone not responsible for the person or service complained about

Summing up the features of a good complaints system

- ♦ easy to access and well publicised;
- ♦ speedy - with fixed time limits for action and keeping people informed of progress;
- ♦ confidential - to protect staff and those who complain;
- ♦ informative - providing information to management so that services can be improved;
- ♦ simple to understand and use;
- ♦ fair - with a full procedure for investigations;
- ♦ effective - dealing with all points raised and providing suitable remedies; and
- ♦ regularly monitored and audited - to make sure that it is effective and improved.