Customer complaint handling

Process Definition Document (PDD): template and worked example

Example company (fictional): Calderfield Telecom Ltd, a broadband and mobile provider in the United Kingdom with a customer care centre in Leeds (about 420 employees and 310,000 customers).

Document control

Field	Value
Process name	Customer complaint handling
Process owner	[Name, role]
Prepared by	[Name]
Reviewed by	[Names of the people who do the work]
Approved by	[Name, date]
Version	1.0 (as-is)
Status	Draft

How to use this template

This is a complete process definition document (PDD) for customer complaint handling, also called the complaints procedure, complaints management or dispute resolution process. It describes how a complaint is received on any channel, logged and acknowledged, classified by severity, investigated with the department that caused it, resolved with a remedy, answered, escalated where needed and closed, and how the causes are fed back to the business. The company is fictional, but the roles, systems and exceptions are typical of a consumer service provider with a dedicated complaints team.

Use it as a starting point. Replace the company details, keep the sections, and sit with a complaints handler for a day, because the real process is usually messier than the policy. Most companies change the acknowledgement time, the severity scale, the compensation limits and the point at which a case goes to a senior reviewer. Rules on complaint handling, response deadlines and the external route for unresolved complaints differ by country and by industry, so check them locally. Legal claims, fraud investigations and complaints about employees are left out on purpose.

- Replace the company, the case system and the ombudsman scheme with yours. Name the deadlines your sector sets, and check them with your legal or compliance team, because they differ by country and by industry.
- Set your own severity scale and approval limits. The 50 GBP and 250 GBP limits here are examples that depend on your average order and your margin.
- Write the compensation guide as a table with a typical fault on each line and the remedy next to it. Most inconsistency between handlers disappears once there is one table.
- Decide what counts as a complaint and write it in a sentence. Companies that count only complaints that use the word often report a number that is half the real one.
- Add your own special groups: customers in vulnerable circumstances, business customers, customers who are represented by an adviser or a charity.

1. Purpose and scope

This procedure describes how Calderfield Telecom Ltd handles customer complaints, from the moment a customer expresses dissatisfaction on any channel to the moment the case is closed and its cause has been recorded. It gives customer care, the operational departments, finance and quality one shared description of who does what, so that

every complaint is logged, acknowledged on time, investigated by someone who can fix the cause, answered in plain words and counted, and so that repeat causes are found and removed instead of being compensated again and again.

In scope

- Complaints received by phone, email, web form, letter, social media and in writing through the app
- Logging, acknowledgement and classification of every complaint
- Investigation with the responsible department and the decision on the remedy
- Written final response to the customer, including the right to take an unresolved complaint to the approved external body
- Referral of unresolved cases to the ombudsman scheme and the response to its requests
- Monthly analysis of complaint causes and the actions that follow

Out of scope

- Routine enquiries and requests that the customer does not describe as a complaint
- Legal claims, court proceedings and letters from solicitors
- Suspected fraud and identity theft investigations
- Complaints about the conduct of a named employee, which go to HR
- Regulatory incident reporting for network outages

2. Process at a glance

Item	Description
Trigger	A customer tells the company they are dissatisfied with a product, a service, a charge or the way they were treated, and asks for something to be put right.
Starts when	The complaint is received on any channel and a case is created in the complaints system.
Ends when	The customer has received the final response, any remedy has been applied, the case is closed with a root cause code and the customer has been told what to do if they remain unhappy.
Inputs	The complaint, in the customer's own words, from any channel, Account, billing and contract history, Call recordings and the contact history for the account, Evidence from the operational department, such as engineer visit records or network logs, Complaints policy, severity scale and the compensation guide
Outputs	Complaint case with reference number, Written acknowledgement, Severity and category classification, Investigation findings and a decision, Remedy: apology, correction, credit, goodwill payment or service fix, Final response letter or email, Ombudsman case file where the complaint is referred, Root cause code and monthly trend report
Volume	About 9,600 complaints a year, roughly 38 per working day, of which about 3% are classed as severe and about 4% are referred to the ombudsman scheme
Working hours	Complaints team Monday to Friday, 08:00 to 18:00, and Saturday 09:00 to 13:00. Complaints are logged around the clock through the web form and the app. Targets: acknowledgement within 1 working day, final response within 15 working days.

3. Roles and responsibilities

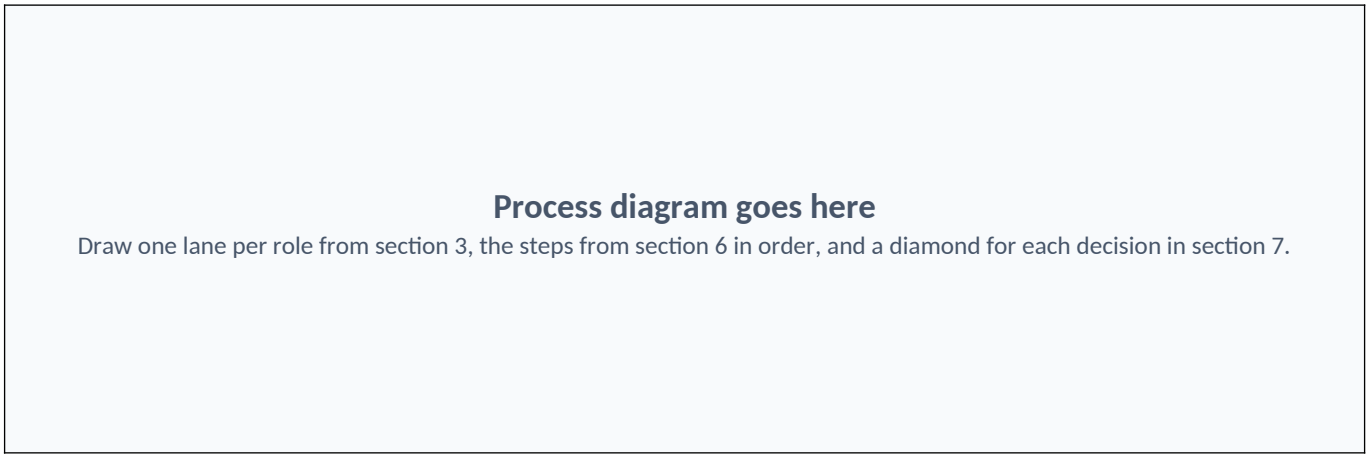
Role	Responsibilities
Customer (external)	Raises the complaint, provides detail and evidence when asked, accepts or rejects the proposed remedy and decides whether to take the matter further.
Ombudsman Scheme (external)	The independent body that reviews complaints the company has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, requests the case file and issues a decision.
Complaints Handler	Logs the complaint, sends the acknowledgement, classifies it, collects the facts, proposes the resolution and writes to the customer.
Complaints Team Leader	Reviews severity ratings, handles complaints that are escalated by the customer,

Role	Responsibilities
	approves remedies above the handler's limit and manages the queue against the deadlines.
Department Investigator	A named person in billing, field operations, sales or network support who investigates the cause in their area, replies within the agreed time and carries out the fix.
Complaints Manager	Reviews severe complaints, signs off ombudsman case files, owns the complaints policy and reports trends to the leadership team.
Finance Analyst	Approves and pays credits and goodwill payments above the team leader's limit and reconciles them to the complaints system.
Quality Analyst	Checks closed cases for compliance with the policy, assigns or confirms the root cause code and prepares the monthly trend report.
Complaints system (system)	Creates the case, starts the response clocks, sends reminders before deadlines and records every action and message in an audit trail.

4. Systems

- Salesforce Service Cloud: complaint cases, clocks, audit trail and reporting
- Genesys telephony and call recording
- Billing system: invoices, credits and payment plans
- Field service system: engineer visits and job notes
- Shared mailbox and social media inbox
- Ombudsman scheme online portal
- Power BI: complaint dashboards

5. Process map



6. Procedure, step by step

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
1	Raise a complaint	Customer	Tells the company about the problem. About 45% complain by phone, 30% by email or web form, 15% on social media and 10% in writing or in the app. Many do not use the word complaint, so any expression of dissatisfaction counts.	Phone, email, web form, social media, app	Complaint received
2	Log the complaint	Complaints Handler	Creates a case, links it to the customer account, records the complaint in the	Salesforce Service Cloud	Case with reference number

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
			customer's own words, the channel and the date and time of receipt. Complaints taken by a frontline agent are passed to the team the same day. This takes 5 to 8 minutes.		and clock started
3	Acknowledge the complaint	Complaints Handler	Sends a written acknowledgement with the reference number, the name of the handler, the expected date of the final response and how to reach the team. The target is within 1 working day of receipt. Complaints settled on the first call skip to step 8, with the acknowledgement sent as a short confirmation.	Salesforce Service Cloud, email	Acknowledgement sent
4	Classify category and severity	Complaints Handler	Picks the category (billing, installation, service quality, sales conduct, vulnerable customer, other) and a severity from 1 to 4. Severity 4 covers loss of service for a vulnerable customer, safety, a threat to leave with a media or legal mention, and repeat complaints on the same issue. About 3% of complaints are severity 4.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Category and severity set
5	Review a severe complaint	Complaints Team Leader	Reviews every severity 4 case the same working day, assigns it to an experienced handler, sets a shorter internal deadline of 5 working days and informs the Complaints Manager. Handlers can ask for a second opinion on a lower severity at any time.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Severe case assigned and flagged
6	Collect the facts	Complaints Handler	Reads the account history, listens to the relevant call recordings and checks bills, contract terms and earlier cases. Phones the customer when the complaint is unclear, to agree what outcome they want. This takes 20 to 40 minutes.	Billing system, Genesys, Salesforce	Fact file on the case
7	Investigate the cause in the department	Department Investigator	Receives the case through a task with the question and the deadline, finds out what went wrong, whether the company was at fault and what it would take to fix it. Departments must reply within 3 working days for severity 1 to 3 and within 1 working day for severity 4. About 35% of complaints need this step.	Billing system, field service system	Investigation findings and proposed fix
8	Decide the resolution and remedy	Complaints Handler	Decides whether the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld, and picks the remedy from the compensation guide: apology, correction of the account, a credit, a goodwill payment or a service fix. Handlers can approve credits up to 50 GBP on their own. About 62% of complaints are upheld or partly upheld.	Salesforce Service Cloud, compensation guide	Decision and remedy proposal
9	Approve a larger remedy	Complaints Team Leader	Approves credits and goodwill payments from 50 to 250 GBP, and any decision to refuse a complaint from a customer who has complained about the same issue before. This takes about 10 minutes and applies to 14% of cases.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Remedy approved or changed
10	Approve and pay a high-value remedy	Finance Analyst	Reviews and releases payments above 250 GBP, checks that the amount matches the compensation guide or the exception reason, and posts the credit or the	Billing system	Payment or credit released

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
			payment. About 3% of cases need this step. It takes one working day.		
11	Carry out the fix	Department Investigator	Corrects the invoice, rebooks the engineer, repairs the fault or changes the contract record, then confirms the fix in the case. A fix without a confirmation is not counted as done.	Billing system, field service system	Fix confirmed in the case
12	Respond to the customer	Complaints Handler	Calls the customer where that helps, then sends the final response in writing. It states what was found, what has been done, what the customer will receive, and, if the customer is still unhappy, how to ask for a review and that they can take the matter to the ombudsman scheme after 8 weeks or after a final response. The target is within 15 working days of receipt. Average today is 9 working days.	Salesforce Service Cloud, email, letter	Final response sent
13	Accept the outcome or ask for a review	Customer	Accepts the response, which closes the matter in about 88% of cases, or replies asking for a review. Replies after the final response are treated as a new stage of the same case, not as a new complaint.	Phone, email	Accepted or review requested
14	Review the case on request	Complaints Team Leader	A person who did not handle the case rereads the file, checks the decision against the policy, and either confirms or changes it. The target is a reply within 10 working days. About 8% of cases reach this stage and about 30% of them are changed in the customer's favour.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Review decision
15	Decide on a deadlock	Complaints Manager	When the customer still disagrees after the review, issues a deadlock letter that states the final position and the details of the ombudsman scheme. For severe complaints, signs the final position personally.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Deadlock letter sent
16	Review the complaint externally	Ombudsman Scheme	Opens a case when the customer refers the complaint, asks the company for its file and issues a decision. About 4% of complaints are referred. The scheme may find for the company, for the customer or propose a settlement.	Ombudsman scheme online portal	Request for file and, later, a decision
17	Submit the case file and apply the decision	Complaints Manager	Sends the account history, recordings, findings and correspondence within the scheme's deadline, then applies the decision, including any award, within the time it sets. Each referred case is also logged as a learning point.	Ombudsman scheme online portal, Salesforce	File submitted and decision applied
18	Close the case	Complaints Handler	Checks that the remedy has been applied, that the customer has the final response and that nothing is open, then closes the case with an outcome code and a first draft of the root cause code.	Salesforce Service Cloud	Closed case
19	Sample closed cases	Quality Analyst	Reviews 5% of closed cases each month, plus every severity 4 case, against a checklist: timeliness, tone, accuracy, remedy against the guide and the wording of the external route. Confirms or changes the root cause code. This takes about 2	Salesforce Service Cloud	Quality score and confirmed root cause

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
			days a month.		
20	Report root cause trends	Quality Analyst	Publishes the monthly report on volumes, causes, repeat complainants, cost of remedies and ombudsman outcomes, and agrees named actions with the department owners. Actions are tracked until they are closed.	Power BI	Trend report and action list

7. Decision points and business rules

- Is the contact a complaint? Any expression of dissatisfaction with a request for a remedy is logged as one, even when the customer does not use the word (step 2).
- Which severity does the complaint get? Severity 4 goes to the Team Leader the same day (steps 4 and 5). About 3% of complaints.
- Does the cause lie in another department? Yes: the Department Investigator must reply within the agreed time (step 7). About 35% of complaints.
- Is the complaint upheld, partly upheld or not upheld? The decision follows the policy and the evidence, not the tone of the customer (step 8). About 62% are upheld or partly upheld.
- Is the remedy above the handler's limit of 50 GBP or the team leader's limit of 250 GBP? Yes: the next level approves it (steps 9 and 10).
- Does the customer accept the final response? No: the case is reviewed by a second person (step 14). About 12% of cases.
- Is the customer still unhappy after the review? Yes: a deadlock letter explains the external route (step 15).
- Has the same cause appeared in more than 20 cases in a month? Yes: it becomes a named action on the trend report (step 20).

8. Exceptions

- Complaint on social media in public (about 15%): the handler replies publicly with a short acknowledgement and moves the conversation to a private channel for details, and the case is logged the same way as any other.
- Customer who is vulnerable, for example bereaved, ill or without a working phone line (about 2%): classed at least severity 3, a named handler is assigned, and the customer is asked how they want to be contacted.
- Complaint made on behalf of someone else (under 2%): written consent or proof of authority is requested before account details are shared, and the case is kept open in the meantime with the clock running.
- Customer sends several complaints on the same issue (about 5%): they are merged into one case, the earliest receipt date is kept and the customer is told that they have been combined.
- Complaint arrives through a solicitor or a legal letter: passed to the legal team within one working day and handled outside this procedure.

9. Controls

- Every complaint gets a case and a reference number. The system does not let a complaint be closed without an outcome code and a root cause code.
- Response clocks start on the date of receipt, not the date of logging, and the system warns the handler at 50% and 80% of the time allowed.
- Segregation of duties: the handler who decided a case does not carry out the review, and the person who approves a payment does not log the complaint.

- Remedies follow the compensation guide, and any amount outside it needs a written reason and the approval of the next level.
- Every final response includes the external route and the ombudsman scheme's contact details, checked in the monthly sample.
- Closed cases are sampled monthly by someone outside the complaints team, and the results are shared with every handler.
- Access to call recordings and account data is limited to the team and logged.

10. Known issues today

- Complaints taken by frontline agents are sometimes logged only as a note on the account, and the clock is lost for a day or two.
- Departments take longer than the 3 days allowed to answer, and the handler is left chasing by email.
- Customers who complain twice about the same issue are treated as new customers by the next handler, because earlier cases are hard to find.
- Remedies are not always consistent: the same fault gets a 10 GBP credit from one handler and a 40 GBP credit from another.
- The root cause code is picked by the handler under time pressure, so about a third of cases end up in the code 'other'.
- Ombudsman case files are put together by hand from five systems, which takes up to two days each.

11. RACI matrix

R = responsible (does the work), A = accountable (owns the outcome), C = consulted, I = informed.

Activity	Complaints Handler	Team Leader	Department	Complaints Manager	Finance	Quality
Log and acknowledge the complaint	A/R	I				
Classify category and severity	R	A		I		
Investigate the cause in the department	C	I	A/R			
Decide the resolution and remedy	A/R	C	C			
Approve credits and goodwill payments	R	A		I	C	
Send the final response	A/R	C		I		
Review a case on request	C	A/R	C	I		
Handle the ombudsman case	C	C	C	A/R	I	
Sample closed cases and report root causes	I	I	C	A		R

12. KPIs

KPI	Definition	Target
Acknowledgement on time	Share of complaints acknowledged in writing within 1 working day of receipt. Target: 98%.	[set]
Final response time	Average and 90th percentile of working days from receipt to the final response. Target: under 15 working days for 95% of cases.	[set]
Complaints per 1,000 customers	Number of complaints received in the month divided by the customer base, split by category.	[set]
Upheld rate	Share of closed complaints that were upheld or partly upheld. Today 62%,	[set]

KPI	Definition	Target
	watched together with the ombudsman outcomes.	
Repeat complaint rate	Share of complaints from a customer who has complained about the same issue in the previous 90 days.	[set]
Ombudsman referral and overturn rate	Number of cases referred to the scheme and the share where the scheme found for the customer.	[set]
Cost of remedies	Total credits and goodwill payments in the month, by category and by root cause.	[set]

13. Revision history

Version	Date	Author	Change
1.0	[date]	[name]	First as-is version

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