

# Turning things around

## Understanding and improving the experience of customers who make a complaint

An Optimisa Research Point of View

*Jonathan Pickup explores how complaints handling can ensure a positive outcome for customers*

The way in which an organisation handles complaints can, over time, make a considerable difference to brand perceptions. In the most positive cases, exceptional complaint handling can drive retention and even advocacy. On the other hand, poor service at this point can lead to long term disaffection with the brand. At Optimisa Research, we therefore believe it is vital for any business to fully understand how their customers view the complaints process. Below are our top five tips to ensure you get the most out of this evaluation.

### 1. EXPLORE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS FIRST

Rushing straight into the design and implementation of a structured survey is a common pitfall. The survey will be much more effective if you first seek to understand how your current complaints process matches up to customer expectations. The customer view can differ quite widely from the assumptions you hold internally and where this is the case, it is easy for service to miss the mark. An initial piece of qualitative work can explore these differences, as well as informing the design of any subsequent tracking research.

### 2. RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRE-REGISTRATION EXPERIENCE

Another common mistake in complaint journey research is to focus solely on the period from the official registration of the complaint to the point at which confirmation of resolution is sent. Typically, customers see the process starting much earlier. Understanding the experience or circumstances which led to the complaint can provide important context when evaluating how it was handled.

### 3. INCORPORATE SOFTER MEASURES

The process of making a complaint can be as much of an emotional experience as a rational one. In research amongst complainants, we frequently find a clear desire for empathy, sympathy and understanding, both from the people they speak to on the phone and in the tone of written communications. Whilst hard metrics like outcome and time taken are undoubtedly important, a personal touch can often make a difference, and this should be incorporated into your study.

### 4. IDENTIFY THE CAUSE OF BROKEN PROMISES

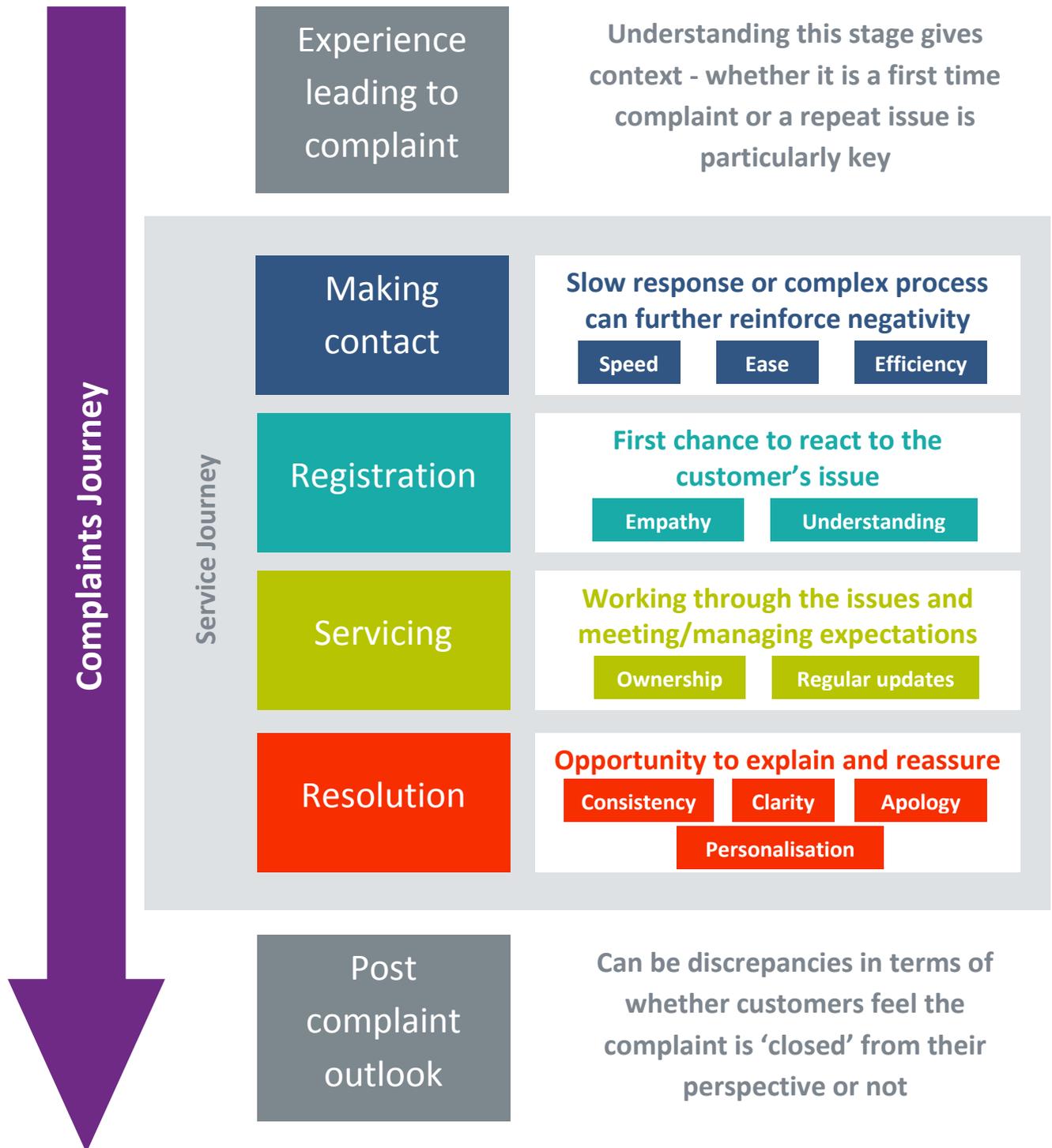
Across all the complaints evaluations we have conducted, broken promises have consistently led to increased dissatisfaction. A well-designed survey will help pinpoint where promises are not being kept, or where expectations could be managed more effectively. Tackling any issues highlighted by the survey will help to drive positive customer outcomes.

### 5. INCORPORATE INTERNAL DATA WHERE POSSIBLE

Combining survey data with internal metrics can maximise the value of a complaints experience tracking programme. Even at a general level, an overview of internal data can help explain customer attitudes or link fluctuating survey scores with internal process changes. Further value can be gained if it is possible to link individual customer case histories with their survey results. This can help identify key trigger points for the types of complaint that are hardest to turn round during the servicing process. Isolating and proactively dealing with these cases before a complaint is made can maximise goodwill towards the brand.



Our approach to complaints journey research is underpinned by the following framework which incorporates key stages and service attributes of the complaints journey...



To discuss this topic further or for any other research needs, please contact Jonathan Pickup at Optimisa Research. [www.optimisaresearch.com](http://www.optimisaresearch.com)

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