

PREPRINT

OPTIONS AND CHOICE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE WORKPLACE:¹

COMPLAINANTS SHOULD HAVE MORE CHOICE ABOUT HOW TO COMPLAIN

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(for Changing Tactics, Lavinia Hall, Editor; Program on Negotiation)

Henry came into my office extremely upset by his supervisor's taking credit for work that Henry had done. Henry said he did not want "just to forget it". He also did not want to leave the department -- and he did not see how he could stay. He also did not want to make a formal complaint. In short, he felt he had no options. At first Henry was also afraid of the half dozen other alternatives I suggested to him, including the possibility of a polite, well-crafted letter to the supervisor. However, he finally decided to work with me on a letter, and he did then send the letter (privately) to his supervisor. He was astonished that his letter brought an apology and full credit in public.

Colleen poked her head into my office. "Just wanted you to know that my boss tried to take off my blouse last night in the lab. I stopped in to tell you because I know you want to know about these things and besides I just wanted to tell somebody. Charges? A complaint? No, I don't want to make a complaint. He'll never do it again. I really walloped him. I told him if I, or any one else I know, ever has this problem with him again, he'll be missing a piece of himself. I don't want you to do anything about this; what's more,... you don't need to!"

Sandy came in sadly to talk about a problem with an old friend in the department. Sandy felt the friend might be drinking at lunch, was using poor judgment, might possibly get himself or Sandy into an unsafe situation with high voltage equipment. "I know I should simply turn him in, but I hate just to call down an investigation on him, and get him fired."

Both complainants and complaint handlers need options

I believe that people with concerns -- and those who complain and dispute -- often want more options than they have. I also argue here that employers and others who are responsible for dealing with complaints have much to gain from offering options. For example, I believe that people with problems who believe they have options are much more likely to come forward in timely fashion. I note that those who choose their own options are more likely to be satisfied. In addition, employers may in some cases be protected, if a complainant's choice of option does not work out well, because the complainant could have chosen a different mode of complaint-handling.

However, many managers and even some negotiation theorists do not believe in providing options. Moreover, I believe that many complainers and complaint-handlers actually practice very restricted options with respect to complaining².

¹This article was adapted from a lecture about complaints and disputes that arise within institutions. I have been a full-time ombudsman at MIT for seventeen years, and consultant to a fairly wide variety of other ombudsmen and other private and public employers. The ideas in this article, the examples and the quotes, (which are taken from real cases), are drawn from this experience.

² See also the work of Deborah Kolb, (Simmons College), and of Sally Merry and Susan Silbey, (Wellesley College), on the narrow range of conflict resolution modes practiced by mediators whom they have studied.

Disempowering the complainant

Decision-makers do not instinctively provide options to others, about how they may complain or raise a concern. Most people who think about complaint procedures and grievance procedures, at home or at work, imagine only one or two ways to handle a concern or complaint. In fact many people learn in childhood only two ways to handle conflict, (versions of fight or flight). Others seem to think that "experts" can and should learn what is the "best" way for complaint-handlers to deal with any given dispute. Restricted thinking characterizes many alternative dispute resolution (ADR) theorists, as well as more traditional people. Some examples of restrictive thinking, and of the all-too-common willingness of decision-makers to make decisions about how complainants "ought" to have their complaints handled, are:

1) many traditional people automatically assume that most disputes should be handled, -- one hopes fairly -- by those with more *power*³: for example, parents, the relevant supervisor, the CEO. ("*Because I'm the parent; that's why!*" "*Do it my way or you're fired!*") Many managers in fact believe that managers should decide the outcome of most workplace disputes and concerns, as a matter of management rights, of "being a leader", and of "maintaining workplace control."

2) many principled people and many political activists think that nearly all disputes should be handled as a matter of justice, or decided on the basis of the letter of a contract, say a union contract. In this view, complaints should be decided on the basis of who is *right*, of course with due process. ("*Get the facts and decide the matter fairly.*") This point of view may indeed be appropriate for certain problems like proven larceny. However this type of thinking is also common when the problem is controversial and in part a matter of perception, as in the vignettes that begin this article: academic credit, sexual harassment, use of alcohol and safety. In fact many managers and academics think of workplace complaint systems only in terms of formal, due process, complaint-and-appeal systems. In the extreme form of this position, if a problem cannot be adjudicated fairly, for example for lack of sufficient evidence, a person oriented solely toward justice may then take the position that nothing can be done and therefore that no complaint exists.

3) many ADR practitioners will seek the *interests* of those in the dispute and then recommend and/or practice the form of interest-based problem-solving with which they are familiar. Mediators tend to think solely or mainly about mediation, (and within that context may be "bargainers" or "therapeutic")⁴; counsellors tend to think mainly of therapy or therapeutic intervention; communications specialists think about better communications; organizational theorists think about changing the system to prevent or deal with problems.

In prescriptive research, as negotiation theorists have applied their tools to more and more types of negotiations and conflicts, they have, reasonably enough, tended to seek what a researcher would see as "optimal" solutions to the problems they address. For many types of objectively quantifiable problems, this has made excellent sense. My concern is that this type of

Compare also the typologies of Myers-Briggs, and of Gerald Williams (Brigham Young University), on negotiating styles; many people appear to have quite well-defined, but very limited, ways of negotiating.

³ This typology is drawn from the terminology of colleagues at the (Harvard/MIT/Tufts) Program on Negotiation and of William L. Ury, Jeanne M. Brett, and Stephen B. Goldberg, in Getting Disputes Resolved, Jossey-Bass, 1988. It will be noted by negotiations theorists that an orientation on rights is likely to lead to distributive solutions; an orientation on power is also most likely to be distributive although there are a few power-orientated managers who seek integrative solutions. A manager who is oriented toward interests is more likely to seek integrative solutions.

⁴ See again the work of Kolb, Merry and Silbey.

research, -- and all three viewpoints above -- while extraordinarily useful as advisory tools, tend to focus peoples' thinking on **singular solutions, rather than ranges of choice**. It also focuses on solutions that can be prescribed by those outside the dispute and even outside the system. I believe this often is not as appropriate for complaint-handling as for other forms of negotiations.

Descriptive research may also lead to the idea of stereotyped solutions to problems. For example, some researchers who have observed complaint handling and complaint-handlers, correctly note that the ways in which people deal with their disputes are culture-specific, and that many complaint-handlers deal with disputes in narrowly defined ways. Thus descriptive researchers also may focus quite narrowly on only one type or style of complaint handling, in a way that inadvertently reduces the likelihood that interested managers will learn to think about many different modes of complaint handling.

I believe that complaints and intra-institutional disputes are not necessarily like commercial or game-theory negotiations, which may have an inherently "best" solution. And the specific practices of individual complaint-handlers may or may not be as broad as complainants would wish, (at least if the complainants knew the choices they were missing). In short, **for a wide range of cases, there may not be any one, "optimal" way to handle a complaint, other than whatever responsible method is freely chosen, by disputants and complaint-handler, under conditions of choice**. This article then is about developing options, and deliberately providing choices within a complaint system.

The Value of Options and Choice

-Different people want to settle things in different ways. Different options may be necessary to satisfy the variety of people in a given workplace who believe "complaints should be resolved on the basis of principle", but who do not share the same principles. For example some believe, on principle, that disputes should generally be resolved in an integrative fashion; these people will not be very happy if they are provided only adjudicative, complaint and appeal channels. ("*Please don't set up another formal EO thing for racial harassment; we get singled out enough already.....*") People who share this opinion may not complain at all, and will simply suffer, rather than be forced into a polarized situation. The reverse is also true. An exclusively integrative, problem-solving complaint system also will not satisfy the feelings of everyone who uses it, for some people will feel some grievances should have been adjudicated as a matter of justice. ("*It's time those creeps were stopped. I am going to take them every step of the way if I have to. I'll go to the Supreme Court.*")

-Providing alternative modes may also be necessary in order to be able to deal with a particular problem. For example many complaints cannot be adequately adjudicated in the workplace, for lack of sufficient evidence to "convict" a wrongdoer⁵. A formal process may therefore be useless in certain workplace disputes such as harassment, if sufficient evidence of wrongdoing does not exist. ("*He only does it behind closed doors; it'd be his word against mine. I don't want to bring a formal complaint; they would say it could not be proved and nothing would happen.*") An adjudicatory process may also be impractical for handling a very complicated web of problems; mediated outcomes may in such cases be substantively better, for example by including a wider range of topics and feelings. ("*Separating the work of the guys on that work team would take an arbitrator six weeks. We need to find a way to help them to work out the details themselves, without killing each other or the project....*")

⁵ I have written further on this point in a long article on "Characteristics of People Who Complain of Harassment."

-Choice itself is often important to disputants and complainants. (*"I stopped feeling that my hands were tied."*) Having choice offers a measure of power and self-esteem and will often be perceived to be more fair. Some complainants specifically ask for a "vote" about how something will be handled, instead of, or in addition, to substantive redress. Choice can be, itself, an "interest", that can and should be included in interest-based problem-solving. Even in situations where there appears to be only one responsible option about what will happen, a complaint-handler may be able to provide small choices. For example, suppose a theft must be reported; there seems to be only one responsible option. But still there may be some small choices available: would the complainant prefer to go directly to the security office alone, or would she rather have the complaint-handler accompany her, or would she rather that the complaint handler go to report the theft alone? It is especially important to offer some choice if the subject matter is stressful; people cope better with tough problems if they perceive that they have some control over the complaint process; they are more likely to feel that the process is fair.

-Knowing that they have a choice about how to pursue a complaint is also essential to getting some people actually to come forward with serious concerns. My research⁶ indicates that many people who have a concern do not wish to lose control over their complaints, especially at the beginning while they are thinking things through. For example, a majority of people who have come to my office feeling harassed express fear of retaliation, and loss of privacy. (*"I know it's important to stop my supervisor using coke, if only because he's mean as hell. But I can't be the one to complain; I've got a family."*) In addition they may care about the object of the complaint, and they may fear being seen as childish or disloyal. Many would ultimately do nothing about their problems if we could not together devise a tailor-made option that satisfied their individual concerns. (*"Thank-you for letting me wait until after graduation; I just could not have come forward before."*)

The complainant's choice may be a better choice. The complainant who chooses his or her own mode for how the complaint will be handled, may well do so in a way that is for some reasons "better", where the factors taken into account would be very hard to identify and quantify. (*"I don't know why. I just couldn't look her in the face if I didn't try one more time to take it up with her directly, before I go to the boss....."*)

The complainant who chooses may learn something. Having a choice of complaint-handling mode may encourage complainants to take more responsibility for their lives and to become more effective. Developing and then choosing an option with a skilled complaint-handler provides a complainant not just an individual solution, but a method for responsible disputing in the future. (*"Hey. I came back to see you. You know that year I spent carping at everyone about safety on the plant floor? Well, you know you finally taught me how to negotiate these things. I haven't had a fight about safety (or much of anything else) for four years....I just wanted to tell you....."*)

-Providing options may be less costly. It is important to provide (responsible) options that cost the complainant and the system as little as possible for any given dispute. Otherwise, people who perceive that they have only one way to complain may use that restricted option, rather than do nothing, even if it costs a lot in time and soul and money. Take, for example, the situation where someone mainly "just wants to be heard." We know from numerous studies of union grievances, -- and from our lives as parents and family members -- that complainants sometimes pursue formal grievances when they think this is the only available way to express their feelings about dictatorial work relationships. People sometimes go to court or to Government agencies for the same reason, even though they may wish they had a better

⁶Ibid.

option. ("I know I may lose this case against that bastard; I know I don't necessarily have a leg to stand on. But he is going to have to listen to me.") In my experience as an ombudsman and as a consultant, the strongest impetus behind labor law suits against employers, is that the plaintiff felt humiliated and could find no other way satisfactorily to express the humiliation. By the same token, sabotage and violence are also likely to be precipitated by humiliation. As PON graduate Diane Di Carlo put it, "when social rules provide alternatives, people are less likely to take revenge".

Providing choice in how to deal with a complaint may help protect the employer. The complainant that has chosen his or her dispute-processing mode may well be better satisfied with the solution. And if he or she is not satisfied, the employer can reasonably plead that the complainant chose the mode himself and therefore should take some responsibility for what ensued. (*"This company always offers the possibility of a formal investigation and adjudication to anyone who feels harassed. When Chris Lee complained, we wrote her a letter offering to investigate. Obviously this is the option we would have preferred. She refused. She did not permit us to do a fair, prompt and thorough investigation. She absolutely refused to make an open complaint; the only choice Lee would agree to was that we should bring in a training program to that department, which we did immediately."*)

I believe options and choice for complainants will be especially important for the US workplace of the 1990's. We are moving into an era of extraordinary diversity. The Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that only about one in ten, of net new entrants in the US labor force of the 1990s, will be a native-born "Anglo" white male. The rest will be minorities, women, and immigrants, who will represent an extremely diverse group of managers and workers, by contrast with the past. We can assume that with such a diverse workforce it will be especially important to have choices in how to express concerns or pursue grievances in the workplace, because individual values will differ.

What are some of the choices?

An effective complaint system should be able to offer the following options to those who have a complaint:

1) Complaint-handlers who will listen, and offer respect, for the feelings of a person who has a concern, and who will help people who are hurt, in grief, confused, angry, aggrieved or frightened, to deal with their feelings. It is essential that this function should be offered on a confidential basis. (probably without the keeping of individual case records by the complaint-handler). Moreover, a complainant should, under many circumstances, be able just to talk, and then choose no further action, if that is what he or she wishes⁷. Or there may be a referral to talk with a counsellor, or a religious advisor, for those who wish it. The option "just to be heard" by the complaint-handler may be the appropriate complaint-handling mode for the case of Colleen in our opening vignette. Colleen is simply asking for affirmation, and for her

⁷This possibility is controversial for some types of complaints, for example, harassment. It is in this arena that we see most clearly the extent to which many people would like to be able to make decisions for complainants about how they will be "allowed" to complain. For example, many people think that all harassment complaints should be investigated and adjudicated, whether or not the offended person wishes this to happen. This is a complicated matter, but in most cases I feel that if a complainant knows there are options and refuses investigation and adjudication, and the complaint-handler follows up and knows the harassment has ended, then the matter should not be pursued. Investigating harassment that is said to have ended should, ordinarily, require permission from the harassed person. There should of course not be adverse administrative action or a record made against the alleged offender, in the absence of a fair investigation. (A review of choices actually made by this type of complainant in my office is included in my article "Characteristics of People Who Complain of Harassment".)

situation to be recorded in the aggregated statistics on sexual harassment. The complaint-handler should, if possible, follow up with Colleen to be sure that the harassment has in fact ended. The complaint-handler might also agree with Colleen about the importance of bringing in a training program for the whole work unit. However, in most cases, the complaint-handler ought not do anything, in this kind of situation, without permission.

2) Any person in the workplace should be able to get certain kinds of information off the record, for example, about "how the system works", what fairness is, what salary equity is, how to raise a concern. Everyone should also have safe (that is, anonymous or completely confidential) channels to provide information back to management about unsafe conditions, unethical and illegal practices, and the like. Colleen wants her case recorded for statistical use. Sandy and Harry, in our opening vignettes, need to know how the system works. Sandy for example, needs to know about Employee Assistance, what are the policies on use of alcohol, and how supervision and the Safety Office may be expected to function if and when they hear about Sandy's co-worker. Harry also needs to know his employer's policies on assignment of credit and perhaps on fraud.

3) All employees and managers (and disputing groups) should be able to find effective, confidential counselling, to learn how to sort out their complaints and conflicts, how to generate different responsible options for action, and how to negotiate their problems directly if desired⁸. This was an option for Sandy and Harry to consider. For example, Sandy might have learned how to persuade the old friend to seek help, perhaps even accompanying the old friend to Employee Assistance, while nevertheless insisting on compliance with the safety code. Harry finally chose this option and successfully wrote and sent a personal letter. Colleen seems already to have chosen this option, but even she may learn from talking through what she did, (there are several different ways she could have rejected the harassment), and the employer may learn more from her story, for example, the effectiveness of direct negotiations by the complainant.

4) There should be effective shuttle diplomats and process consultants, as go-betweens and educators, for individuals and for groups⁹ It is important to note that this is by far the commonest form of "mediation" in the workplace, because it helps people of unequal rank to save face, in dealing with each other with the help of a third party. Harry and Colleen could have asked the complaint-handler to talk with their bosses. Sandy could have asked the complaint-handler to talk with his co-worker.

5) Formal mediation should be available, (with written agreements if desired), for individuals and for groups, with the possibility of formal written settlements, if desired¹⁰. This would have been a reasonable option for both Harry and Colleen.

6) There should be fair, prompt and thorough investigation of complaints where appropriate. A good complaint system can provide formal and informal investigation, with or without written recommendations to a decision-maker¹¹. Harry might have asked for an investigation by his supra-supervisor. Colleen might have asked for an EO person or her boss' boss to look into her complaint. Sandy could trigger a safety inspection

⁸See for example, Rowe, Mary, "Helping People Help Themselves", in Negotiation Journal, forthcoming.

⁹See for example, Robert R. Blake and Jane Srygley Mouton, Solving Costly Organizational Conflicts, Jossey Bass, 1985.

¹⁰See for example, William L. Ury, Jeanne M. Brett, and Stephen B. Goldberg, Getting Disputes Resolved, Jossey- Bass, 1988.

¹¹See for example, David Ewing, Justice on the Job, Harvard Business School Press, 1989, and Alan F. Westin and Alfred G. Feliu, Resolving Employment Disputes Without Litigation, BNA, 1988.

and possibly also a substance abuse investigation, by a specialized staff person or the supervisor.

7) **There should be appropriate, "fair process", complaint and appeal channels, with impartial arbitration, or peer review, or other impartial adjudication¹².** These options could have been offered to Harry and Colleen, and indeed would likely have been triggered by investigation. Harry, Colleen, their supervisors, and Sandy's co-worker could also have appealed a decision they did not like within a formal grievance structure.

8) **There should be effective provision for upward feedback and systems change,** both as a problem resolution device for a specific complaint, and to prevent further problems¹³. Colleen's employer should offer a program on harassment, Harry's employer should train supervisors about work credit; Sandy's employer should train about safety and substance abuse. A good complaint system will provide management the information needed to design effective problem prevention programs.

How to provide options for complainants

Obviously an employer wants to take the lead in the design of the system to provide choices for complaint handling and dispute resolution in the workplace, to assure responsible and consistent practice. The employer should in fact think of this process as the design of a complaint-handling system, and should involve potential disputants and potential complaint handlers in the design process. This may happen naturally in the context of union negotiations or consultative committees, or may happen ad hoc, (for example, by focus groups or circulating draft proposals to many networks in the workplace).

It is important to note that the impetus for designing a grievance channel or a complaint system can be, for perfectly understandable reasons, much too narrowly focussed. For example, because of an organizing campaign, there may be a singular focus on one configuration of complaint, like worker vs. management grievances. Or a group of concerned employees may generate a great deal of attention to just one type of concern, like transfer policy, or safety.

This article, by contrast, is meant to foster choice of complaint-handling options for the whole panorama of real-life, workplace disputes. A great many workplace problems are between worker and co-worker, manager and fellow manager, or between or among groups rather than individuals. And, of course, complaints may arise in any area where people feel unjustly treated. In order to make clear that there truly are various options for complaint-handling which in fact are available to everyone within a workplace, complaint systems should provide all the options above. And of course, everyone in the organization (managers, employees, union workers, professionals, etc.), should have recourse, with respect to every kind of important concern.

In addition, the systems approach requires having different kinds of people available as complaint handlers. This is true with respect to demographic characteristics: the set of complaint handlers should, in a reasonable way, reflect the given workforce, for example including African-Americans, females, technical people, etc. This makes it more likely that the

¹²Ibid.

¹³There are many good examples of systems change mechanisms in the books cited above, although each example tends to focus on only one way to produce systems change. Ombuds practitioners typically spend a quarter to a third or more of their time in systems change.

workforce will believe there are accessible and "credible" managers, who might offer acceptable ways to raise a concern.

The point is also true with respect to complaint handling skills. Since few complaint handlers are equally good at listening, referring, counselling, mediating, investigating, adjudicating, and systems change, a good system will have a variety of complaint handlers providing a variety of functions. (In particular it often helps to have different people for problem-solving and adjudication, since some people are better at integrative solutions and others consistently think distributively and may make better judges.)

Finally, a good system will train its employees and its complaint handlers, including all managers, to respect and offer and pursue the widest possible variety of different options for dealing with disputes and concerns -- with as much choice as possible for those who raise concerns. It may not be easy to change the working styles of employees, managers and complaint-handlers, but everyone can learn what their own strengths are, and can learn at least to respect and offer other options¹⁴.

"I used to think that my only choices were put up with the unpaid overtime -- shut up -- or just quit. Then I thought, well, I could take that slavedriver to court, or maybe file a formal grievance with Corporate (headquarters). Then I thought, I can't stand it any longer, and I began to miss work. Then you pointed out to me that there were several possibilities other than fantasies of revenge or a law suit or dropping out. I actually had not considered sending a private letter to my boss, for example, and I certainly had not imagined that you (the company ombudsman) would be willing to go see the boss for me. But the best idea was that you would go to Human Resources to ask them to send out a general notice on the overtime rules. Your having gone to Human Resources alone, without mentioning me, really made me feel safer. My boss stopped requiring unpaid overtime, and no one knew I was involved. I'm very glad it worked. Who knows? Maybe somebody else's situation got cleared up at the same time."

¹⁴Please see the Appendix for an exercise that can be used as a diagnostic tool. The exercise provides a framework for analyzing one's own skills as a complainer and a complaint-handler, and for analyzing the skills and methods of others.

APPENDIX

Exercise on "Skills Needed by the Complaint-Handler"

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This exercise is very simple. The sheet on "Skills Needed" is assigned for a one week or one month period. The task is to notice and keep a journal on the ways in which the writer finds himself or herself dealing with concerns. In addition the writer should analyze the complaint-handling options chosen by others.

For example, if the writer is a parent or lives in student housing, or works in any employment context, he or she should notice his or her customary ways of expressing concerns. Do I seek advice about how to handle my problems? Do I just need to blow off steam, and with whom do I do this? Do I look for mediation? Do I ask others to be a shuttle diplomat for me? Do I ask for investigation of my problems? Do I want someone more powerful than I to take care of my complaints? Do I seek for a systematic change in the conditions that cause the problem?

By the same token, the writer should notice how others handle complaints and concerns. Do they offer choices to the complainants? Or do they just seem to "know what is best?" Do they appear to listen to the complainer, help to invent options, advise on tailoring an option to the concern at hand? Or do they irritably decide the question before exploring it?

The writer should try to develop insight into his or her normal complaint-handling modes with children, colleagues, supervisors, strangers, and so on. By the same token it is useful to analyze the patterns of others, as they deal with the complaints and concerns of many different people.

Obviously some people will be very much oriented toward justice, in almost all circumstances and with nearly everyone. Others will "problem-solve" in the face of the most tenacious wrong-doing and in the most serious, win-lose situations. Most people have a variety of skills and can develop and work on new skills. It is useful to reflect on the variety of skills needed in different situations and to provoke discussion as to whether and when certain complaint-handling modes appear to be best or necessary.

Skills Needed by a Complaint Handler and Functions and Characteristics Required in a Good Complaint System

A good complaint system will provide multiple options for complainants, and as much choice as possible among those options. The first three functions of the system will be available on a confidential basis if desired. The system will have men and women, minorities and non-minorities, available as complaint-handlers. The system will be available to everyone within the workplace, including managers, trainees, employees, etc., and will accept any kind of concern. Necessary functions include:

- Expressing respect for feelings, especially rage, fear of retaliation and grief. Helping people deal with their feelings so they will be able to make good decisions and be able to deal effectively with their problems or complaints;

- Giving and receiving information on a one-to-one basis;

- Helping people help themselves: confidential counselling with clients, inventing options, listing possible options for the choice of the client, coaching on how the client or group may deal with the problem directly (problem-solving, role-playing, anticipating possible outcomes, etc.);

- Shuttle diplomacy by a third party, back and forth among those with a problem, to resolve the matter at hand, (sometimes called "conciliation" or "caucusing" or as one form of "mediation");

- Mediation: having a third party bring together the people with a problem, so they reach their own settlement or are helped by a third party to reach their own settlement; the settlements of mediation may be formal or informal;

- Fact-finding or investigation: this may be done either formally or informally; results may be used or reports made either with or without recommendations from the fact-finder to a decision-maker;

- Decision-making, arbitration or adjudication: where a person or body with power and/or formal authority decides a dispute; this may be structured as (part of) a formal complaint-and-appeals channel or formal grievance procedure;

- Systems change: designing a generic address to a problem or complaint; "upward feedback"; actual change in policies, procedures or structures as a result of inquiry, suggestion, complaint or grievance.

Within organizations, where all these functions are being performed, one may speak of a complaint-handling system. Without fair, accessible complaint-and-appeals channels, other functions are not likely to work well. Where all functions are working well, the formal grievance channel is not likely to be used heavily. By analogy, a manager who is not able to decide disputes fairly will not be much trusted in carrying out other functions of a complaint handler. And the manager who has all these skills will usually be able to solve most problems without much "arbitrating of disputes."

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