

# Complaints management in cleaning services.

Molnar, Ella

2015 Leppävaara

**Laurea University of Applied Sciences**  
Leppävaara

## Complaints management in cleaning services

Ella Molnar  
Facility Management  
Bachelor's Thesis  
November, 2015

**Laurea University of Applied Sciences**  
 Leppävaara  
 Degree Programme in Facility Management

**Abstract**

Ella Molnar

**Complaint management in cleaning services.**

Year	2015	Pages	29
------	------	-------	----

---

Customers today have become increasingly empowered and have high expectations of good service. Thus the need for constant change and improvement is necessary in the service business. In order to keep up with the expectations customer feedback is vital. Complaints are one method of acquiring feedback, which offers a chance to improve existing services.

Complaints have the possibility to give the service provider valuable insight into the current problems and areas that need to be improved. Effective handling of complaints provides an opportunity to correct and improve the services and in this way to increase customer satisfaction, loyalty and profit.

The objective of this thesis is to develop a better complaint handling solution for a service provider company. The case company for which the research is conducted is Lassila and Tikanoja, a service provider offering cleaning services. In the theoretical section of the thesis report the focus is on explaining how complaints can be a gift for the company and how complaint management can affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. The empirical section focuses on identifying the problems in Lassila and Tikanoja's complaint handling methods and also in developing a new system that would be more efficient for the company.

Complaint handling is concerned with taking into consideration the customer's needs and expectations. The empirical section of the thesis project was conducted with the help of one of Lassila and Tikanoja's biggest clients. Firstly, complaints were analyzed to get an idea about the most common problems and then interviews were conducted with representatives of the client company and also with representatives and employees from Lassila and Tikanoja. Finally, a new system was developed with guidance from the company's IT department. The development ideas include the introduction of an improved mobile phone based system, which would include incorporate changes to the existing system to offer a chance for improved complaints handling.

Keywords, complaints, customer feedback, complaint management, complaint handling

Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	5
2	Importance of customer feedback .....	6
	2.1 Customer complaints .....	8
3	Complaint management.....	10
4	Research background .....	13
	4.1 Research questions.....	14
	4.2 Case company.....	15
	4.3 Methodology.....	16
5	Research development .....	17
	5.1 Complaints .....	17
	5.2 Client`s perspective .....	19
	5.3 Complaint handling at Lassila and Tikanoja .....	21
	5.4 Results overview .....	23
6	Development ideas .....	24
7	Conclusion .....	26
	References .....	27

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays customer's needs and expectations are continuously rising. Service provider companies are struggling to keep up with expectations. Thanks to the internet and the unlimited access to information customers are more informed and more demanding than before. In order to keep customers satisfied, service provider companies need to continually improve and develop their services. Customer feedback plays a great role in service development; it is important to always take into consideration what the customer wants and needs. Complaints are one form of feedback, when companies manage to deal with upcoming complains effectively, they encourage customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. Complaints are helping in developing a good communication with the customers and handling complaints effectively can ensure a good and honest relationship between service provider and customer.

The complaint handling, therefore, is very important in maintaining and developing a good relationship with the customer. While it is important for service providing companies to attract new customers, it is vital for them to retain the existing ones as well. Dissatisfied customers have to be encouraged to complain, in order to be able to resolve the existing problem and also to develop a better communication and a better relationship. As mentioned, customer feedback and complaints are very important for improving different aspects of business. An effective complaint management process can ensure the company more satisfied and loyal customers in this way improving profitability. Handling complaints effectively and ensuring customer satisfaction constantly have to be a priority for any service provider company. Customers are the ones who bring profit to the company so their opinion have to be take into consideration when developing services for them.

The theory part of this thesis explains the importance of customer feedback and customer complains. It is important to understand that even if complains are mostly perceived as negative and unnecessary, complains can be a great help for service provider companies. Complaints handled effectively can help in developing and improving the services, can also ensure a better communication and a better relationship with the client and can improve customer loyalty. By having a well developed complaint handling system, companies can keep customers happy and satisfied.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a more efficient complaint handling system for a service provider company. The case company chosen for this project is Lassila and Tikanoja, working in the field of cleaning services. Because customers play a huge role when think-

ing about complains and how to resolve incoming complains one of Lassila and Tikanojas biggest clients helps in conducting this research. In order to get to the final development idea, the research is based on three research questions. First of all is important to find out the main reasons for the complaints. After knowing the reasons it is important to make an idea on how complains are managed now at Lassila and Tikanoja. Finally it is very important to know the customers opinion about the complaint handling system. It is vital to know about the customers' expectations in order to be able to develop the existing services.

The research begins by analyzing the complaints Lassila and Tikanoja got from one of his clients in a time period of six months. This complains give a clear picture about the type of problems that usually occur. After having an idea about the problems group interviews are conducted with employees of the client company and also the manager is interviewed. Gathering information about how complaints are handled from customer's perspective and also finding out the customer's needs and expectations for the future is vital for this research. In the end some group interviews are held with employees of Lassila and Tikanoja and also with the manager and one of the service supervisors. It is important to get the service provider companies perspective as well in order to be able to improve their complaint handling system.

## 2 Importance of customer feedback

Nowadays customers are more informed and they are expecting more when thinking about services and how services are provided to them. Managing the delivery of a quality service is very different from managing the production of a product (Zemke & Schaaf 1989, 13). A service doesn't exist until the time of delivery. The customer's role is very important and vital in designing the service. Besides knowing what the service provider offers, it is very important to have a clear picture about what the customer expect in order to deliver a good quality service. It is important to educate the customer about the possibilities in order to get useful feedback during service delivery (Zemke & Schaaf 1989, 14). Services are successful if customers expectations are satisfied and the level that customer expects is reached.

In the service business it is important to know that the customer is the one who defines the service, but to many service provider companies this is hard to understand. That is why customer feedback is so important; in case that is missing there are several ways to ask for it (Ford & McNair & Perry 2009, 149-151). Getting the right feedback is important in order to determine customer expectations about an existing or new service. It also helps companies determine customer needs and it can help in developing a better rela-

tionship with the client (Shuttle 2015). Customer expectations should be always the starting point when offering a service, the clients preferences should always be taken into consideration in order to make the customer feel important and in order to develop a good relationship in the long run. Customers can also give an idea about the company, valuable outside perspective that can help in further develop the business. By trying to take into consideration customer needs and expectations, unwillingly services are improved and developed all the time (Aspili, 2014). Customer feedback can give a clear picture for the service provider company about how its services are perceived and what changes could be made for improving.

As Sarah Cook mentions in one of her books, “listening to customer is vital” in order to be able to attract more new customers and also it is vital in retaining and satisfying existing ones. The result of good customer care and good customer relationship is valuable feedback, good and bad, which automatically helps in service design and development (Cook, 2002. 80-83). It is important to listen to the customer good, constructive feedback and also complaints need to be taken into consideration. The customer has the right to communicate its likes and dislikes and these opinions need to be taken into consideration. Especially in the cleaning busies, the service provider must provide at some level personalized services in order to make it work. Every customer is different it is expected that the same service needs changes to satisfy different customer needs. Even if in this research the focus is on the complaints it is important for the reader to understand that all kind of customer feedback is important for a service delivery company. Complaint are also feedback from the customer, a sign that something went wrong and services need to be improved or corrected.

Nowadays the customer is more and more empowered, does not accept a poor service any more. The expectations are becoming higher and so is the competition. Customers are always informed about the new trends and improvements, thanks to the internet and unlimited access to information. Service companies need to stay informed about the latest trends and need to improve and redesign the services all the time in order to keep up with the competition and the customer needs (Cook 2012, 3-6) Cleaning services are becoming more and more competitive as new companies offering them appear almost daily. The client’s expectations are growing and in order to be able to retain customers it is important to make them happy and listen to their needs when designing the services for them. In today’s internet driven world information is travelling really faster, a happy customer, a good feedback can ensure lot of new customers and in the same way complaints can have a negative affect if not corrected in a timely matter ( McDonald 2013).

## 2.1 Customer complaints

Complaints are just another way of getting feedback. People tend to think of complaint as a bad thing, but as mentioned before feedback is necessary and complaints can help in improving the services. Complaints can help understanding the customer needs better and can give a clearer picture about customers expectations. Even if complaints suggest negativity, because they usually describe some kind of service failure, by handling them effectively these complains can lead to a positive customer interaction (Evans 2013.). Listening to customers is vital in any service business, complaints have to be taken seriously and solution to the problem has to be found always in order to keep customers loyal and happy. In order to be able to correct mistakes is really important for the service provider company to know about the existence of the service failure. Customers have different expectations and sometimes they perceive services differently, some service delivery failures may not be clear for the provider company, that is why complaints are vital in understanding the customer.

Usually only a small percentage of a company's customers do actually complain and even less take the time to write compliments. It is important to consider every complaint and deal with it as soon as possible, because clients that do take the time to complain, probably take the time to describe their bad service experience to different other possible customers. A complaint gives the service provider opportunity a second chance to make things right and it is important to implement the improvements also to other existing customers that maybe don't take the time to complain. (Cook, 2002. 81-82) Only a small percentage of customers usually complain, but this percentage needs to be taken into consideration in order to improve the services throughout the company. The few persons that take the time to complain or to report a service failure are trying to communicate and are trying to develop a relationship with the service provider company, how these complains are handled can make a difference in how this relationship will progress in the future.

Nowadays the most important fact that everybody has to realize, especially in the service industry is that customer is always right. Sometimes people that don't understand the importance of customer can end up working in the service business and this can be one of the reasons complaints arise, it is important to make everybody working in the service business understand that customers expectations always have to be taken into consideration. Customer always wins and if the customer doesn't get the expected services it will change to other service provider company. Sometimes the customers give another chance, by making a complaint or by simply presenting what the expectations for improvement are. It is important to hear these complaints and offer a solution as fast



as possible for any kind of problem (Swyers, 2012). By not listening to the customer or by giving a wrong answer and not taking care of the problem it is possible to lose more than one customer, so it can cost a great deal of money for the company.

Complaints are an expression of dissatisfaction and customers are complaining in order to release their anger and because they expect a solution that is why complains should always be taken seriously. ISO 10002:2004 defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organization related to its products, or the complaint-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.” (Cook, 2012. 9). The problem can be that dissatisfied customers don’t always complain, findings show that only a very small percentage take the time to voice their expectations and ask for solutions. It is important for service providing companies to welcome complains and to give the chance to their customer to complain. By encouraging people to complain the company gets a second chance to make things right. By efficiently handling the complaint communication with customer can be developed. By listening to costumers needs and making an effort in improving the services in the favor of the client can assure the company a good relationship and a loyal client. (Cook, 2012. 9-21)

All in all even if getting feedback is a good thing and complaints can help develop services, still most service provider companies strive to reduce the number of the incoming complaints. In many organizations complaints are seen as a really bad thing that needs to be minimized and managed in order to be able to control them. Complaints cause negative reactions; sometimes it can be difficult solving them that is why most of the time complaints are perceived as something negative that causes problems (Lim, 2011). Organization do have to realize that complains can help in developing their services in order to better need the always changing needs of their customers. Of course this does not mean that managing complains is not important, actually it is crucial and it can make a huge difference. How complaints are taken care of can give an idea to the client how involved the company is. Unresolved complaints can negatively affect an organization. Research show that customers are most satisfied when complaints are dealt immediately and especially when they don’t have to repeat the same complaint again and again (Brandweiner, 2013).

The best thing for a company is to comprehend complaints as gifts received from the customer that can help them develop (Lim, 2011). It is important to make use of these gifts and develop a well designed complaint management system that helps in resolving the complaints as soon as possible and also it makes sure that the company learns from the mistakes. As not everybody takes the time to complain, the service provider needs to learn from the few complains that are getting to them and improve their services for

everybody. By always improving and redesigning the services, by listening to complains, the company can have a great competitive advantage and keep its clients happy. Complain are the best way to increase customer trust and build a good relationship with the customer.

### 3 Complaint management

Feedbacks and complaints coming from the customers are necessary; the way complaints are handled can make a huge difference and also can ensure a better customer experience. Instead of dismissing complaints or by trying to resolve them without giving to much importance it is necessary to understand that the way complaints are handled can make a huge difference in customer satisfaction. Developing a complaint handling system needs to be seen as a necessary investment that can result very profitably in the long run. Companies also need to develop a system which makes it easier for customers to complain and to describe their expectations, in order to have an idea about the customer's perspective. Different customers can perceive the same services differently and it is important to develop the services according to their needs and expectations. (Cook, 2012. 14-19)

Service provider companies usually see complaints as a bad thing and they strive to eliminate complaints, without realizing how important customer feedback is. In trying so hard to eliminate complaints sometimes management forgets to check the core of the problem. Service failure cannot be totally eliminated, it is impossible. Especially in the cleaning business, but all other service providing companies, the services are delivered by people and making mistakes is a human thing. It is important to understand that complaints don't have to be eliminated, they have to be resolved. It is important for the companies to develop a good and efficient service handling system, because complaint handling is critical (Baron & Harris & Elliott. 2005. 261-263). An effective service recovery system can effect customer satisfaction and can spread positive publicity about the company. Customers that have a positive experience about complaint handling and are happy with the end result will probably share their experience with others.

Customers complain for a reason, they do expect to be treated fairly and they also expect their complaint to be handled in a short period of time. Ignoring or not giving the necessary importance to complaints can give a very bad feeling to the customer and emotions can have an important role in the customer's future decisions. First of all the service provider company needs to take responsibility and act accordingly. As mentioned before the customer is always right, so the complaint handling steps have to be flexible and customer inputs and expectation have to be followed. Also it is important to work

together with the client in resolving the problem, giving explanations and making an effort to solve the problem by involving the client results in a good communication and more satisfied customers. In the end depending on the dimensions of the service failure, customers need to be compensated somehow for the time, for their effort and energy spent and also for the inconvenience the service failure may have caused. Managers need to develop an effective service recovery system in order to be able to keep track all the incoming complains, in order to be able to resolve the problems effectively and in order to make sure that the same complaint never happens again. How a company takes action when things go wrong can make a huge difference for the customer, it is well known fact that when complaints are resolved as expected customer loyalty increases. (Love-lock & Wirtz & Chew, 2009. 339-343)

Complaints are one way to measure customer service, how complaints are handled can indicate how much the company cares about its customers. Managing complaints requires flexibility and customers expectation needs to be taken into consideration. Having a standardized answer or a standard way to resolve a problem can create even more complaints as customers expect different things. When designing a complaint managing and handling system it is important to include a part that makes it possible to interact with the costumer. It is important to create a process or system that is accessible for the customer or any other complainer and also it is easy to use, in this way customers can be persuaded to give more feedback. The main idea is that complaint handling needs to be prompt and personalized. The customers have to feel that their needs are important and are taken into consideration. (Faulkner 2003, 91-95)

When customers complain it is important for them to get a fast response and solution for the problem. Giving promises that take a long time to be actually turned into action it's not what the customer expects. Nowadays we are living in a fast-moving society and clients need fast resolutions, in case that something goes wrong is important to be corrected immediately. The longer it takes to resolve a complaint, customers can get annoyed and it can lead to a bad relationship. In case that resolving the complaint takes longer than expected it is important to keep in touch with the customer and explain the problem. It is important for the customer to know that the problem is dealt with and a solution is on its way. Taking complaints seriously means taking costumers seriously and valuing customers can lead to a good relationship with the client. If customers invest time and effort in complaining and giving feedback it is important not only to make sure that their complains are resolved to the customers expectation, but also its important to reimburse the customer in order to show her that its valued. (Cook 2012, 37-47)

In any service provider company there is a need for effective complaint management. As presented before complaint handling can really affect customer satisfaction so a well designed complaint handling system is important. Even if it involves investing in developing a good system it is worth it in the long run. Complaint handling policy has to be developed and has to be presented to everybody. For example there are seven steps that describe very clearly the most important stages that have to be taken into consideration when handling complaints.

<i>Listen</i>	<i>Thank them</i>	<i>Apologies</i>	<i>Find solution</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Take action</i>	<i>Follow up</i>
---------------	-------------------	------------------	----------------------	--------------	--------------------	------------------

Customer complaints need to be taken into consideration because it can help not only in developing services but also in developing the relationship with the customer. It is important to see complaints as an advantage. First of all it is important to listen to the customer, complaints doesn't matter how small have to be taken into consideration. The customer has to feel that he is being heard and it is important to always thank the customer for the feedback, even if it is a bad one. If the customer takes its time to update the company about the problem it is important to show the customer that the feedback is valued. Apology is always necessary, when customer reports a problem. It is no time for the explanations, first it is important to apologies for the inconvenience that occurred. After hearing the problem it is time to think about a solution. It is important to take into consideration the customers ideas as well; sometimes the client can have a clear picture about how the problem must be corrected. If the customer doesn't help, it is still important to find a way to resolve the problem as fast as possible. If it takes more steps than a clear plan has to be developed. After the solution is found it is important to discuss about it with the customer once again before taking action. It is vital that the problem gets fixed in the time schedule promised to the customer. Follow up sometimes remains forgotten especially in case of small complaints, but it is necessary. By following up on a problem after an amount of time, it can be ensured that the solution was a good one and the customers can feel well. (Altorena 2015)

Complaint handling is necessary and every company should have a well developed system or at list the main steps of how complaints should be handled have to be clear for everybody. Customer's expectations are really high nowadays and in order to reach dose expectations working together with customer is important. Service recovery needs to be a priority for all the service provider companies. Especially in the cleaning business, where the services are delivered by people and making mistakes is human and it happens sometimes. Complaints need to be accepted as necessary evil and by developing a good system to handle these complains can bring many benefits for the company.

#### 4 Research background

The main objective of this research is to find out how complaint management can be improved at a service company. Working in the field of cleaning services for more than eight years has thought me that complaints are inevitable, but the way a service provider company handles complaints can be vital in order to improve customer satisfaction and their relationship with the customer. Focusing on the current problems that appear daily in the cleaning services and the reasons for the complaints the aim of the research is to help developing a better complaint handling system for the service company in order to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Working in the service field has thought me that customers are the most important. Everything that the customer needs or wants to improve, to develop or to change at a service has to be made possible by the service designing company.

How a service provider company handles complaints and feedbacks can affect the relationship with the customer, finding new customers can be easy but retaining customers can be hard work. In the service business complaints and feedbacks are an important tool in improving or in creating new services. This research aims to improve the service company's complaint handling methods and also to create additional services that can improve the company's complaint management in the long term. Focusing on complaints that arise every day, for a longer period of time, and by taking into consideration the customer's opinion along the way can give the information needed for improving the way how complaints are managed. Not every customer complains, but those who take the time to report about a service failure, they really want to get a response and a solution to their problem as fast as possible.

This research is conducted for Lassila and Tikanoja, one of the most important Facility Management companies in Finland. Working there as a service supervisor and working closely together with my service manager it was discovered the need for a better complaint handling system. In order to retain its customers, nowadays when everybody is looking for a cheaper option, it is vital for the managers to keep customers satisfied. When complaints and feedbacks are not considered and taken care of in the way and in the time manner that the client expects, problems can appear and customers can be lost. It is important to find a way to retain customers and in order to do that complaint management have to be improved. Customers are really important for Lassila and Tikanoja and nowadays the big company is losing them because of the competition. Complaints are coming every day and the managers do think that this is one of the reasons why customers change to other companies.

Lassila and Tikanoja realized that there is a need in developing the way how complaints are handled. Even if getting complaints is not necessarily a bad thing, getting too many complaints or having unresolved complaints can seriously affect the business in a bad way. It is important to develop a system that takes into consideration the fact that complaints not only have to be answered and resolved it is important to use them also for improving the services and to make sure that the same complaint doesn't keep re-appearing. Lassila and Tikanoja invested in many different ways to develop their services, to offer a better place to work for its employees even developed the technology used at the company. They didn't really invest in developing a new complaint management system. Complaint handling is part of the manager's job description. There is not a well-founded system, which helps in resolving upcoming service failures.

#### 4.1 Research questions

In order to get results it is important to follow the main idea, to always keep in mind the objective of this research. In order to be able to have a good outcome and valuable development ideas it is important to have a plan and basic ideas to guide the outcome of this research. Implementing good research questions are a valuable tool in helping the work to move forward and also to ensure that the focus of the research is not lost from the main idea. By analyzing and implementing the research questions this survey has to be able to give the general picture about how complaint management can be improved and can help in developing future aspects in complaint handling.

This research is concerned with the topic of complaint management at a service company and the objective is to find out how this company's complaint management system can be improved in order to be more efficient. To be able to give development ideas on this topic, first the research questions have to be developed. In the beginning it is important to know what are the most common complaints and what is the reason for these complaints. Through these questions the research will get a much clearer picture about the company and its services. After studying the complaints it is important also to find out the customer's point of view. It is vital to know what the customer's expectations are when making the complaint and how satisfied the customer is with the final outcome. Finally it is very important to find out from the service provider company how complaints are handled and what the reason for the specific approach in resolving the problem. The whole idea of a better complaint handling system is to keep the customer happy.

First research question is: what are the reasons for the complaints at Lassila and Tikanoja. By responding to this question it becomes clearer what are the main prob-

blems that the company faces with one of its biggest clients. By going through the complaints, the main problems should be found and these problems can be a starting point for the research. Based on the findings possible questions for future interviews have to be developed in order to move forward with the research.

The second research question is: What is the customer's perspective about the complaints. It is very important to find out how the customers feel about the complaints. Giving feedback is a good thing, but always complaining can be annoying for the customer. It is important to know at which point these complaints become a problem for the customer. Also it is important to know what the customer thinks about how Lassila and Tikanoja handle these complaints. Is the customer satisfied with the outcome, are the customers' expectations reached.

The third research question, guiding this thesis is: what is Lassila and Tikanoja's point of view. By interviewing the manager and some of the employees working at the company relevant information should be revealed. It is important to know how the manager handles the complaints in order to find out what went wrong.

In order to be able to give a clear development idea and in order to develop a better complaint handling system, all these questions have to be answered. It is important to keep in mind the guidelines and always follow the research questions in order to get good results.

#### 4.2 Case company

This research is conducted for Lassila and Tikanoja, being an employee there for over seven years I have the necessary knowledge and access to the necessary information in order to be able to work on a project that will benefit the company. Lassila and Tikanoja is a service company with operations in Finland, Russia and Sweden with over 8000 employees. (Unknown1 2013) Founded in 1905 through the years has developed into an international company focusing on environmental management and support services for properties and plants. It is a service company with the main idea to help the customers focusing on their core business by taking care of their other service needs.

Lassila and Tikanoja is a facility management company offering the full range of services to its customers, such as waste management and recycling, cleaning and support services, property maintenance, sewer maintenance, damage repairs, process cleaning, environmental construction and event services. In my research the focus will be on cleaning services. (Unknown2 2013) Lassila and Tikanoja offers expert cleaning services

to any different property types always taking into consideration the needs of its customers, by offering environmentally friendly and professional cleaning staff maintains its competitive advantage in the cleaning service sector. (Unknown3 2013) Working myself at Lassila and Tikanoja as an expert and supervisor in cleaning services it was important to develop a project that focuses on a problem that needs resolving in the field I am interested in.

Lassila and Tikanoja is one of the biggest and well known service company in Finland, offering its services everywhere in the country. This research is conducted in the companies cleaning services division situated in Espoo. Only in this division, in the city of Espoo, Lassila and Tikanoja is offering its cleaning services to over 230 clients. The research will be conducted taking into consideration one client of the company. Developing a more effective complaint management system focusing on one of their bigger clients can later help in using the same system with all the other clients. This client will be referred to as a grocery store, it is not necessary to use names, the research being conducted for Lassila and Tikanoja and not for their client.

#### 4.3 Methodology

Aim of this thesis is to give some practical development ideas about how complaint management can be developed at Lassila and Tikanoja. This research sets out finding out the entire background information needed with the help of the company's biggest clients. For this research are chosen mainly qualitative methods, it is important to gain a good understanding about the problems in order to be able to develop new ideas. Interviews are mainly used in order to get a clear image about how the company and the client company's employees perceive the cleaning services. With the help of these interviews reliable customer feedback will help to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of Lassila Tikanojas complaint management system. The research is made in three phases in order to get all the necessary information.

In the first phase complaints coming from the client company are studied in order to help developing the most important interview questions necessary in the second and third phase of the research. Complaint and feedback emails which came to Lassila and Tikanoja from the grocery store begging from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015 until 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 are analyzed in order to get a big picture about the main occurrence of these complaints. The focus is to find out the nature of these complaints without focusing on the cleaning issues.



Qualitative research is used; most of the needed information's are gathered through individual and group interviews. The questions for the interviews are mainly developed based on the complaint emails. In the second part of this research the information is gathered from the grocery stores manager and employees. It is important to get their point of view in order to get to the bottom of the problem. It is needed to have a clear picture of why complaints are made and what is the client's expectation for further development in the complaint management system. The third part of this research focuses on finding out Lassila and Tikanojas point of views concerning complains. Interviews are conducted with the service manager, service supervisor and two cleaners working in the grocery store. It is important to know how complaints are managed now at the company in order to give further development ideas.

## 5 Research development

This research is based mainly on qualitative methods and it set out in resolving one of Lassila and Tikanoja, cleaning companies, main problem. Complaint handling at the company has to be improved in order for the company to be able to keep their customers satisfied. In the service business complaints and feedbacks are a vital part in service development. Cleaning services also have to be constantly developed by the expectations of the clients and for this to be possible client feedback has to be taken into consideration all the time. This research was conducted from the beginning of August 2015 until the end of October 2015 and the results are described in this part of the report. As the study was conducted in three parts the results and conclusions will be described in separate divisions and overview will be given in the end.

### 5.1 Complaints

This research sets out into finding out how Lassila and Tikanoja complaint management system can be improved. In order to be able to give some development ideas it is vital to find out more about their current complaint handling methods. In the first part of this study are analyzed the complaints that Lassila and Tikanoja got from one of his biggest client, the grocery store. The main form of complaints and feedback registered to the company are coming through emails. As the service manager Ulle Samilova mentioned, more than 90 percent of all complaints are coming through emails, only very urgent problems are announced through phone, but even those are usually later resolved and documented through emails. Even when the monthly check ups are done together with the client, the final report is handled through emails.

There were analyzed all the complaints' and feedbacks that were registered in a period of six months, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015 until 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2015. In total in this period there were registered 106 feedback emails coming from the grocery store. First of all it was noticed the small number of good feedback on a period of six months. This proves that client usually takes the time to report the problems that encounters. It is a very good sign that there are at least a few feedbacks that give a better felling for the service provider.

	Nr of emails	% of emails
<b>complaints</b>	97	<b>91,5%</b>
<b>good feedback</b>	9	<b>8.50%</b>
	106	100%

Good, constructive feedback is also important and it is almost missing altogether, only 8.5 % of all the emails registered are as good feedback. It is important to find out the reason of this in the future parts of this study, but the main focus still remains to find out more about complaints.

Further in this study are analyzed the main reasons these complains occur. After going true all the complaints, there are recognized five categorize, which describes clearly the reasons for these negative feedbacks. There were in total 97 complaints registered in the period of six months, as mentioned before in this thesis, the main focus is not to find out about the service failure or the cause of it. The idea is not to improve Lassila and Tikanojas cleaning services, the idea is to find out what types of complains are coming up. By categorizing these complains helps in a better understanding of the reason why these are occurring.

	Nr of complaints	% of complaints
complaints about the cleaning services	27	28%
complaints about the cleaners attitude	12	13%
complaints about cleaning room and equipment	9	9%
complaints about how complaints are handled	7	7%
<b>reoccurring complaints about the same problem</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>43%</b>
Total	97	100%

After analyzing and understanding the nature of the complaints, it was possible to create five different categories. First category, complaints about the cleaning services, refers to the emails which report a problem about the cleaning itself, the service failure

itself. When the perceived cleaning services are not according to the level agreed between the service provider and the client these complaints appear. As the main focus is not to develop or to improve the cleaning service, there is no use to get into describing the service failures that this grocery store faces. The second category, complaints about the cleaner's attitude, refers to complains about the cleaning stuff. For example the cleaner has an inappropriate attitude towards others or doesn't respect it's working schedule. This could mean, that the employees are not getting the necessary induction at the workplace about the Finnish working culture. The third category, complaints about cleaning room and equipment, contains feedback about how the cleaning rooms and the cleaning equipments are not taken care of. As there is more than one cleaner working in the same premises, using the same tools, it seems that they easily forgot to take care of their own equipment and the cleaning room premises. The fourth category concerns a small percentage of the emails, when the client is not satisfied with the results on how some of the complaints were managed. The last category, and as shown in the table above the most important one, are the reoccurring complaints. By analyzing the complaint it became obvious that some of the problems are keep reappearing over and over again. For example one of the complaints about a simple cleaning service, that the mirrors are not cleaned appropriately, reappeared 8 times. When these complaints are keep coming up about the same perceived service in an interval of a few weeks, it means that something must have went wrong in the handling of the first complain, or otherwise it shouldn't appear again. Reappearing complaints can be a sign that some of these complaints were not handled effectively in the first time. After taking care of a problem, handling a complaint, it is important to also make sure that the same problem will not reaper, that is why follow up is important.

Taking into consideration that 97 complaints in six months is quite a big number and it is necessary to take into consideration different methods in reducing the number. In avoiding dealing with the problem can result in losing the client's confidence on the way. After analyzing all the emails it is becoming quite clear that complaints are not handled very effectively as it is proved by the very high number of reappearing of the same complaint.

## 5.2 Client`s perspective

In the second part of the research interviews were conducted with the grocery stores manager and a group interview with some of the stores employees. The questions used in the interviews are mainly based on the emails analyzed before. It is important to find out the client's perspective on these complaints, for example, why the amount of complaints is so big and how the client perceives these complaints. Are these com-

plaints made more as a form of constructive feedback or they are used as a necessary tool in order to get the cleaning services to the expected level. Taking into consideration that some complaints reappear so many times it can be annoying for the client the fact that these complains are not managed efficiently.

First it was set up a group interview with six of the grocery stores employees, from different divisions. It was a short interview, not more than 10 minutes, at the end of the employees work shift. First of all one of the questions was how they perceive the overall cleaning services provided by Lassila and Tikanoja. Everybody agreed that the overall cleaning level is high and the store is clean, but there are small problems that are keep reappearing and are getting annoying. "Making a complaint about the same problem over and over again can be really annoying" was the answer of one of the employees. One employee also mentioned that checking the cleaning level, and checking if work was done by the cleaner is not in his work description. It was a common idea that the cleaning level is usually high, but in case if something goes wrong it really takes a long time until it gets fixed. About the question that in what way these cleaning problems affect their work, the answer was that usually the problems are not that big and their work is only affected by the fact that they need to report when something is not done properly and usually they are busy with their own job. The only think that four of the participating employees mentioned, was about the cleaner working in the day time. Most of the cleaning is conducted at night, when the store is closed, but there is one cleaner in the daytime. The problem with him is that he "bothers the stores employee quite often" as an employee mentioned. Very many times he comes to ask employees to translate his texts for example or to ask where different places are. One of the employees even mentioned that he came to her and invited her to coffee. They don't like that the cleaner doesn't have the necessary training and it's not their job to give him instruction, "we are very busy with our own job, especially in the morning" was one of the employees reply. In their opinion the supervisors from Lassila and Tikanoja are not doing their job properly, cleaners need more teaching and more guidance; also the complaints need to be resolved right away. They think that more supervision would be necessary, as most of the cleaners are from different countries; they are not totally familiarized with Finnish working culture. Cleaners should know better how to do their job and in case of complaints it is important for them to know that is not enough to correct it, they also have to make sure that it doesn't appear the same problem again.

The meeting with the grocery store manager was also quite short, not more than 15 minutes, but relevant information was reveled. First of all the manager also agreed with the workers that the cleaning level is high. Most of the complaints were coming to

Lassila and Tikanoja from the manager, so he was familiar with the emails. Writing feedback doesn't mind him, even if it is negative one. As he revealed in the interview, he had many years of experience working in the service business and he knows very well how things work. "By writing these complaints I know that in some way I can help in further developing the cleaning services" was the opinion of the manager. He likes to be involved and to communicate all the time with the service provider, as he described it, this is his job. The manager also revealed that he wants to keep improving the services and it is important to him to be up to date in all issues. Even if he doesn't mind reporting about the observed service mistakes, he was bothered by the fact that some of his complaints are never completely resolved. "It is hard to go forward if the same complaints are keep reappearing again and again" was the manager's approach of the problem. He said that he is not familiar with the workers; he usually keeps contact with the service manager or sometimes with the service supervisors from Lassila and Tikanoja. Many times it had happened that it was promised to him by an email that the work will be corrected, but it didn't actually happen. It was really annoying for him to write about the same thing many times. The manager's opinion was that there is some miss communication most of the time between the manager, the supervisor and the workers and somehow the information gets lost on the way. He is not familiarized exactly with their system to resolve complaints, but he is sure that something's doesn't work as it should. In the end the grocery stores manager reveals the fact that he already talked to Lassila and Tikanoja about the possibility to develop some kind of system which would make keeping track of the complaints easier. He would really appreciate if he could get some kind of feedback as well in real time, when complaints are resolved. He really thought that a company this big should have a better system in resolving the complaints.

### 5.3 Complaint handling at Lassila and Tikanoja

After getting the grocery stores perspective about the complaint handling system at Lassila and Tikanoja, it is also relevant to find out what the employees working for Lassila and Tikanoja think about this subject. There where interviews conducted with two of the cleaners who work at the grocery store, one of the service supervisors and the service manager. Relevant information was gathered along these discussions.

The interviews with the cleaners working at the store where relevant in understanding how the information's about the complaints are getting to them and how they handle it. One of the cleaners sad that they have two service supervisors, one of them usually appears at the store when they need to resolve some problem. Most of the time the information about the complaints doesn't even get to the cleaners, it is handled by the

service supervisors. The employees also explained that sometimes the service manager called them directly to ask those to correct some work, because there was no one to guide them sometimes the work wasn't done properly. One of the worker also reported, that as they work really late at the store, many times has happened that in case of a problem nobody responded to the phone and they have no way to reach someone in order to resolve the problem. Also the cleaners think that they didn't have the necessary induction for the work and because of the lack of supervision mistakes do happen quite often. The employees also told that they have too much work and the time is really limited, so sometimes when they get a call or message about some kind of complaint that needs to be corrected, they don't have other choice but to ignore it or do it very superficially. They also think that the supervisors should take into consideration their time and help them out or schedule the work in a way that is manageable. When presented to them the big amount of complaints that came in the last months, they replied that they had no idea, the complaints are not coming directly to them and they are not the ones that usually correct the mistakes. That means that after the complaints are handled, the problems are not discussed with the cleaners and there is no way for improvement.

The interviews with the service supervisor and the service manager took place as a group interview. After describing the results gathered from the grocery store and also from their own employees, the service manager admitted that she knows about most of these problems. She recognized that there is a problem with communication when it comes to complains and also the biggest problem is supervision. She doesn't have time to always check if all the complaints are resolved, that is the service supervisor's job. The manager sad that it is really needed a system that somehow can follow all the complaints and also to have a real time feedback about the complaint handling. The complaints are coming by email, the manager sad that sometimes she calls to her employee to tell about the complaint and ask to correct the mistake, but sometimes she doesn't have time and she just forwards the message to her supervisor. The service supervisor taking part at the interview recognized that normally is her job to take care that the complaints are handled and that the cleaners get the necessary induction in order for this to never happen again. Because the cleaners are working so late and sometimes they have so much work, the service supervisor itself corrects the mistakes and it is no time to involve the cleaner as well. Because of the big amount of clients, that one supervisor has to take care of sometimes it is no time to check on everything personally and sometimes there is not enough time to follow up how complaints were handled. Both of the manager and the service supervisor agreed that it would be a good help to find a solution to the problem, which would make their job easier.

#### 5.4 Results overview

The main purpose of this research is to find a solution to Lassila and Tikanojas problem concerning their complaint handling system. By analyzing the complaints of one of their biggest client and by having interviews with both representatives of the clients and of the company, the results are quite clear. The lack of a well defined system makes complaint handling hard and confusion appears quite often.

After gathering the results from the conducted interviews it is possible to describe a clear picture about how complaints are usually handled. Every complaint and feedback from the clients come through emails to the service manager in charge of the place in question. The service manager relocates the complaint handling to the service supervisor, it is in the supervisor job description to ensure that the complaints are resolved and normally she should then report back to the manager. Unfortunately this reporting back doesn't happen all the time and the supervisor doesn't always have time to check how the complaints were handled, as a result sometimes the job remains poorly done or undone and that and the client complains again. This is when the client gets annoyed about the services offered by Lassila and Tikanoja. Even when the complaints are handled properly, follow up on them is forgotten and the cleaners are not inducted about these complaints so that is why complaints are keep reappearing. It would be very important to get the information also to the cleaners; only they can make sure that the same mistake doesn't keep reappearing. As a conclusion, it became clear that information flow is incorrect. Nobody gets the necessary information inside Lassila and Tikanoja, everybody hopes that someone else can take care of the problem and sometimes there is nobody to actually check if the job was well done.

In the service business giving feedback is very important in order to be able to develop and personalize the services in order to satisfy the different client needs, and the clients usually understand this. Also as found out in this research, the client, for which Lassila and Tikanoja offers its cleaning services, understands the need for writing the feedbacks and the need to work together in order to develop personalized cleaning services. The way the service provider manages to handle the complaints indicates the quality of the customer experience. So as the manager of the grocery store indicated, he has no problem with giving feedback, but it does get annoying when the complaint is not corrected as expected and the services are not improved accordingly. The manager from Lassila and Tikanoja thinks that there is not a well designed system to help her keep track about how the complaint handling evaluates and that is the reason mistakes are happening. The most important would be to find a way to track how the complaints are handled and in this way make sure that same problems doesn't occur again and again.

## 6 Development idea

The aim of this research was to develop a better complaint handling system. After gathering the necessary background information, based on our theory part and also based on the research, the main finding is that Lassila and Tikanoja needs a better complaint handling system. The service manager needs to be in control of the situation, needs to keep track on how the complaints are handle and most importantly needs to make sure that the same complain doesn't reoccur again and again. Customer satisfaction it is important, annoyed customers that make too many complaints are hard to retain. In order to ensure customer satisfaction concerning complains and also to help out the service manager to be able to better overlook the complaint handling a new system was created as a result of this research. The system was presented to Lassila and Tikanoja, the decision of implementing it or not will be the company's decision as it involves an amount of money that needs to be invested.

As a result of this research it became clear that a new complaint handling tracking system is really necessary. Just last year Lassila and Tikanoja implemented a new system concerning work and working hours tracking. As a result of this new system every employee from the company has his own mobile phone and his own company email. True this the manager can track in real time when the employee starts the work and when it finishes. Trough the company emails communication with the employees is a lot easier nowadays. As it was mentioned by the IT manager, Lassila and Tikanoja spent millions of Euros in implementing this new system, it would be a good idea to further develop it and use it for example also for complaint handling.

The main idea to develop the system how complaints are handled at Lassila and Tikanoja, includes a further development of the already existing phone system that would incorporate the real time tracking of upcoming complaints. Basically the idea is that the service manager should be able to forward the complaints directly to the employees and give a time frame in which the complaint needs to be handled. The employees already have emails on their phone, but emails are not all the time checked, so it would be important that the complaints come to the phone trough a different way, making it impossible for the employees to ignore it. Also the manager has to have a feedback about the fact that the employee saw the message, if the feedback doesn't come a phone call can be made or the service supervisor can check the situation. Most importantly after the employee resolved the problem, would have to make a picture and send it to the manager so she can check the end result and also can decide if the prob-



lem is resolved or needs further correction. Also by having the picture, the manager can send a response to the client that the complaint was being taking care of. The employees can be educated to always check trough the complaints they have on their phone and make sure that same mistakes doesn't happen again.

After the clear idea was developed, it was discussed with the IT manager to find out if the implementation of this system is possible. The manager confirmed that it would include some further costs, in order to develop the tracking system, but it is not impossible. It would be an idea that would really help with complaint handling management. If Lassila and Tikanoja would accept the cost this system involves it would be possible to make the changes needed in a few months.

This development idea needs a lot of work if Lassila and Tikanoja take it into consideration implementing it. This research gives a good idea for a future project that could really benefit the company in the future.

## 7 Conclusion

Complaint management is vital for any service provider company. Taking into consideration customer needs have to be a priority in order to succeed. Nowadays it is impossible to create a service that can offer the same satisfaction for all the customers. Everybody is different, that is why customer's needs and expectations are varying. The important thing is to find a way to keep all customers happy, and that can only happen if customer's individual needs are taken into consideration. Sometimes companies invest huge amount of money in surveys in order to get a glimpse of what is important for the customers. Complaints are a free way to find out about the problems or the areas where improvement is needed. Companies should invest in developing system that can help in effectively handling complaints.

This thesis presents complaints as a necessary tool for a service provider company. Complaints are very helpful; the important thing is to know how to handle them in order to keep customers satisfied. As presented in the theory part, customers have to be encouraged to complain in order for the company to get the valuable information needed for improvement and development. Also it is important to keep in mind that complaints are made for a reason and all service failures have to be corrected and customers' expectations have to be reached. Going true this research can help getting a better understanding about how customers comprehend complaints and also about how important it is for the service provider company to take these complaints seriously.

The main purpose of this thesis was to find a solution in improving Lassila and Tikanojas current complaint handling system. By conducting the research a development idea surfaced and with the help of an already existing system and with the help of the IT department the way of putting the idea to action was also concluded. The idea is not fully developed but it gives a starting point for a future project at Lasilla and Tikanoaj. Now it is important for the company to realize the importance of improving their complaint handling methods and to invest the necessary amount of money and resources in developing the new system. In the long run this system should help in more effective complaint handling and should increase customer loyalty and customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is vital for any service provider company. In order to keep customers happy it is important to make sure that complaints are handled effectively and customers are welcomed to complain. By developing a well designed complaint handling system, that helps communication with the customer, can ensure the company great profits in the long run.

## References

### Printed sources:

Zemke, R. & Schaaf, D. 1989. The service edge. 101 Companies that profit from customer care. New York: Nal Books.

Cook, S. 2002. Customer care excellence: how to create an effective customer focus. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. London: Kogan Page.

Ford, L. & McNair, D. & Perry, W. 2009. Exceptional customer service. Exceed customer expectations to build loyalty & boost profits. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Avon: Adams Business.

Cook, S. 2012. Complaint management excellence. Creating customer loyalty through service recovery. London: Kogan Page.

Faulkner, M. 2003. Customer management excellence. Successful strategies from service leaders. England: John Wiley & Sons.

Lovelock, C. & Wirtz, J. & Chew, P. 2009. Essential of services marketing. Singapore: Prentice Hall.

Portigal, S. 2013. Interviewing users. How to uncover compelling insights. New York: Rosenfeld Media.

Baron, S. & Harris, K. & Elliott, D. 2015. Service recovery and service continuity. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

### Electronic sources:

Suttle, R. 2015. The importance of customer feedback. 14 October 2015.

<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/importance-customer-feedback-2089.html>

Aspili, A. 2014. 5 reasons why customer feedback matters more than ever. 14 October 2015. <http://customerthink.com/5-reasons-why-customer-feedback-matters-more-than-ever/>

McDonald, S. 2013. Why customer complaints are good for your business. 14 October 2015. <http://www.superoffice.com/blog/customer-complaints-good-for-business/>

Evans, P. 2013. How complaints handling can positively affect your customer relationship management. 26 October 2015. <http://www.coretec.com.au/blog/-how-complaints-handling-can-positively-affect-your-customer-relationship-management>

Swyers, M. 2012. 5 steps to handling a customer complaint. 14 October 2015 <http://www.inc.com/matthew-swyers/5-steps-to-handling-a-customer-complaint.html>

Lim, M. 2011. Customer complaints are great for your organization. 26 October 2015. <http://www.clarityasiatraining.com/blog/customer-service-communications/customer-complaints-are-great-for-your-organization>

Brandweiner, N. 2013. Unsatisfactory service: Two thirds of customer complaints go unresolved. 26 October 2015. <http://www.mycustomer.com/news/unsatisfactory-service-two-thirds-customer-complaints-go-unresolved>

Altorena, A. 2015. 7 steps for handling customer complaints. 26 October 2015. <http://hubpages.com/business/handling-customer-complaints>

Unknown1 2013. Company. <http://www.lassila-tikanoja.fi/en/company/> 11 October 2015

Unknown2 2013. Company history. 11 October 2015. <http://www.lassila-tikanoja.fi/en/company/history>

Unknown3 2013. Cleaning and support services. 11 October 2015. <http://www.lassila-tikanoja.fi/en/services/cleaning%20and%20support%20services/>

Interviews:

Interview with six of the grocery stores employees, who want to remain anonym, conducted on 10 of September 2015. Duration 15 minutes.

Interview with the grocery stores manager, wishes to remain anonym, conducted on 11 of September 2015. Duration 20 minutes.

Interview with two of Lassila and Tikanoyas employees, who want to remain anonym, conducted on 22 of September 2015. Duration 10 minutes.

Interviews with Lassila and Tikanoja service manager, Ulle Samilova and the service supervisor Tiina Pedak, conducted on 24 of September 2015. Duration 25 minutes.

Interviews, discussions with Lassila and Tikanojas IT consultant on 15 of October 2015.