



## Improvement complaining: When complainers have the solution to the problem

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## **Improvement complaining: When complainers have the solution to the problem**

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This working paper studies a new conceptual approach of customers' complaints that we called "improvement complaining". The underlying idea is that customers' dissatisfaction can be turned into a creative learning process. Indeed, dissatisfaction is often considered as one of the strongest antecedents leading to creativity (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013; Carbonell et al. 2009; Duverger, 2012; Füller, 2010; Zhou & George, 2001). Many successful products have been suggested by dissatisfied customers or employees (e.g. McDonald's Filet-O-Fish or Starbucks' Frappuccino). Accordingly, we define improvement complaining as the expression of customer's voice following a service failure in which he or she expresses innovative suggestions to improve the firm's practices and/or services. The main question is: "What influence customers' willingness to share ideas while complaining?" To the best of our knowledge, no study has examined the creative potential of customers' complaints and this one can fill that literature gap, about how a service failure may be the starting point for the innovation process

In sum, this work is motivated by three questions related to improvement complaining. Our first research question is about improvement complaining's occurrence. For that, we run a content analysis on 375 complaint letters collected from a French bank's database and find that around 3.5% of customers' complaints can be considered as an improvement complaint. Secondly, we question the customers' motives associated with improvement complaining. Our results show that this complaint is more related with others-oriented motives (company and other customers) compared to other complaining forms. Finally, our third question examines the effect of the organizational climate on complaint intentions. We find that when organizational climate is favorable, customers are more open to complain in an innovative and less in a vindictive way.

To conceptualize improvement complaining and identify its antecedents and effects, we propose a theoretical framework that draws from different literatures, both from marketing and organizational behaviour researches.

First, considering the service failure literature, we consider the main antecedents like dissatisfaction (Bougie et al. 2003), blame (Folkes, 1984), severity (Maxham III & Netemeyer, 2002), inferred firm motives (Joireman et al. 2013) and perceived justice (Tax et al. 1998). We also focus on the customers' desire while complaining. Particularly, customers may frame service failure based on different schemas (Beverland et al. 2010; Ringberg et al. 2007; Tuncay-Zayer et al. 2015), like desire for reparation or desire for revenge (Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Gelbrich, 2010). Here, we argue that improvement complaining is motivated by a special desire for reparation—that to obtain reparation for himself and others by trying to improve the service delivery (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). It is equally important to note that this desire is closely related to the notion of value co-creation in the service recovery context (Dong et al. 2008; Heindenreich et al. 2015). This idea is consistent with literature dealing with promotive voice (Liang et al. 2012; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), which considers that employees sometimes complain to their supervisor not only to point failures but also to give ideas that could change the status quo. By the way, Van Dyne and her colleagues (2003) show that promotive voice is a prosocial behavior oriented not only on the self, but also toward others (the company and/or other customers). As said previously, our results confirm that improvement complaining is more other-oriented (toward the company and toward other customers) compared to other complaining forms (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Finally, we mobilize antecedents that contribute to build a favorable organizational climate for creative

ideas' sharing: procedural justice climate (Moorman et al. 1998; Naumann & Bennett, 2000) and perceived organizational support (Einseberger et al. 1984; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). We demonstrate that a favorable organizational context enhances customers' propensity to make improvement and problem-solving complaining and reduces vindictive complaining.

Finally, we assess that future researches should use antecedents from open-innovation literature (Huizingh, 2011). Specifically, we judge lead-users characteristics (Von Hippel, 1984) and domain-specific knowledge (Luo et al. 2015) to be relevant antecedents to understand customers' willingness to make improvement complaining.