How to implement an open-door policy

Author: Lindah Mavengere . August 2020

As organizations aim to be more progressive in the 21st century, easing of protocols and procedures is helping to achieve this, and having an open-door policy in the organization is one of the many ways to do this. An open-door policy is one of the means organizations use to improve communication with employees, enhance trust and motivation, and reduce the need for unionization (Shenhar, 1993). You can consider implementing an open-door policy in your workplace to encourage team members to approach you with any issues, concerns, or comments. This article will explore what an open door policy is, the significance of having one in the workplace, and detail the steps to create one.

What is an open-door policy?

McCabe (1990) defines an open-door policy as an organizational policy where employees are encouraged to address any complaints or grievances they may have with any member of the management hierarchy, including executive management. In most cases, the issue is something the employee does not feel comfortable discussing with his immediate supervisor or the immediate supervisor may be part of the issue. Businesses use open-door policies to encourage freedom of expression, respect, and cooperation between management and employees (McCabe, 1990). It can help solve problems between superiors and subordinates and curb bad behaviour. An open-door policy can also be an effective tool for gathering feedback and gauging the staff's perspective regarding job satisfaction and workplace perception (Shenhar, 1993).

Advantages of an open-door policy

According to Brown, et.al. (2015), employees who trust their management exhibit higher levels of workplace performance. An open-door policy is intended to foster an environment of collaboration, high performance, and mutual respect between upper management and employees, as it encourages employees to address any issues that may be hampering their progress. Brown et.al. (2005) identified some advantages of open door policies which are listed below:

Encourages interaction across all levels

With an effective open-door policy, you can break down barriers between managers and subordinates. This leads to more effective communication, actionable feedback, and improved results. Being able to walk up to senior management whenever you face challenges at work makes you more valuable and indispensable to the company's success. This also helps in positively improving the organization as any problems may be solved at the senior management level.

Stimulates beneficial discussions

Companies with an open door policy enjoy a cordial environment that fosters healthy discussions between management and employees. Instead of a rigid and formal atmosphere, managers who use open-door policies create an informal environment in which individuals can relate freely without the fear of official reproach. These discussions can provide valuable insights about what the employees think of the business and how to improve work conditions and the company's bottom line.

Increases morale

An open-door policy motivates your team members to commit themselves fully to the common goal. Compensation and perks are not the only things that boost employee morale. An environment that allows workers to voice their opinions without fear can be enabling, liberating, and motivating. Employees will feel appreciated within the organization and apply themselves to the improvement of the organization.

Improves working relationships

An open-door policy encourages cohesion between employees and managers. When employees can always speak with managers about important matters, the employees feel managers want to help them do their jobs better and show a genuine concern for their plights. When subordinates see managers are engaged in their work, they become motivated to dedicate themselves to achieving targets.

How to design an open-door policy?

Brown et.al (2005) states that a good open-door policy is critical for the well-being of any organization. For this policy to work, there is a need for pre-established conditions. Below are some of the steps that can be taken in designing an open-door policy:

Set expectations

Talk to employees who might utilize the open door, and gain their trust and support for the process. Consider asking what they want out of an open-door policy, such as whether they would prefer a set time or the ability to make an appointment. These conversations can help you understand what your team needs and wants from the policy. One way to boost employee confidence in the policy is to create a chain of command that identifies who they can speak to whenever they have a certain problem or need to share insights. That somebody is always available to speak with them increases the credibility of the policy among employees and increases the chances of success.

Create boundaries

An open-door policy should help managers stay updated with their teams' work. However, you should set clear boundaries before implementing it to ensure employees know the right way to use it. Be clear about the discussions employees can have with contact persons. Consider whether certain conversations should be prohibited, such as gossip or casual chat to ensure time is well used. You may need to set times and venues for the meetings. One-on-one, in-person meetings are an effective way to derive

maximum value from this process.

Design a conflict-management plan

Prepare for potential conflicts that you may handle during the open door hours, such as those between employees. Consider training managers to listen attentively to both sides of an argument and mediate between them to find a compromise or solution. You might also develop a protocol for possible escalation scenarios that involve bringing in higher-level managers or human resources officers to ensure conflicts are resolved quickly and effectively. Consider setting boundaries for conflicts during open-door hours. This can help employees understand the proper approach to bringing conflicts up during those times and the most effective ways they can discuss their issues and resolve them within the limitations.

References

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Lindah Mavengere is a Business Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a business management and human resources consulting firm.

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/lindah-mavengere-552b32b2/

Phone: +263 242 481946-48/481950

Mobile: +263 717 988 319

Email: lindah@ipcconsultants.com

Main Website: www.ipcconsultants.com

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