

Kluwer Patent Blog

EPO: consultation on Strategic Plan 2023, social tensions remain

Kluwer Patent blogger · Sunday, January 27th, 2019

The EPO has opened a public consultation to get input for its Strategic Plan 2023, which will outline the vision for the Office. 'Its implementation will ensure that we continue to provide high-quality patent services that encourage innovation and contribute to growth.'

Input can be sent in on 15 March 2019 at the latest by filling out the [contribution template](#). The consultation is focused on three topics: 1) Evolution of the patent system and future challenges; 2) Delivering high quality products and services; 3) Social responsibility and transparency. The final proposal for the Strategic Plan 2023 will be submitted to the Administrative Council for adoption in June 2019 and the approved version will be published on the EPO website.



It is interesting to read the description of the third topic, 'social responsibility and transparency', in the contribution template. Input is welcome about the EPO's responsibility towards the outside world: 'As a public institution, the EPO has a duty to ensure that not only its stakeholders but the public in general are well informed about the activities of the Office and the way they are conducted. (...) Moreover, the EPO sees itself as being part of a wider eco-system, in which its activities have an impact on the economy and the environment. (...)'

The consultation is apparently not about internal social issues, although there are many signs (reported about by this blog [here](#) and [here](#)) that despite changes for the better, the climate of distrust and fear has not disappeared since António Campinos succeeded Benoît Battistelli as EPO president last year.

As JUVE Patent [reported](#) in an article about the EPO last week: 'The fact no insiders and even some external patent attorneys (...) did not want to be named indicates the depth of mistrust towards EPO management in some parts of the workforce.' According to JUVE Patent, criticism 'is focused particularly on Principal Director for Human Resources, Elodie Bergot. She is regarded as a key figure in the long-running dispute between the old EPO leadership and parts of the workforce (...). "As long as she is in office, everyone is afraid to express themselves publicly and nothing changes in the atmosphere of the house", JUVE Patent quoted an insider. It also wrote that the

three new vice presidents Nellie Simon, Christoph Ernst and Stephen Rowan, who were elected last October and [started in office on 1 January 2019](#), might be able to change things for the better.

A letter from the Central Staff Committee, in the meantime, shows that EPO president Campinos' [listening to the staff](#) has certainly not always led to improvements for EPO employees. The CSC sent a letter to Campinos last Friday about the 'very inconsiderate treatment' of several colleagues and about 'chaotic' HR management. Staff are seen as, and treated like a faceless commodity - just like pawns on a check-board.

Departmental reorganisations allegedly necessitating multiple sequential transfers in a very short period are proposals which concern 'the conditions of employment of the whole or part of staff' (Article 38(2) first bullet ServRegs) and should have been subject to GCC consultation. We consider the non consultation of the GCC when staff is so affected to be, at the very least, a breach of the Service Regulations, but more importantly, a failing of the duty of care that the Office has to its staff. Neither the CSC, nor the affected staff, has been consulted in any way. The treatment which the affected staff members are receiving at present - if maintained - would constitute a new low in staff/management relations. And this is happening at a time when we had finally hoped to see an improvement.



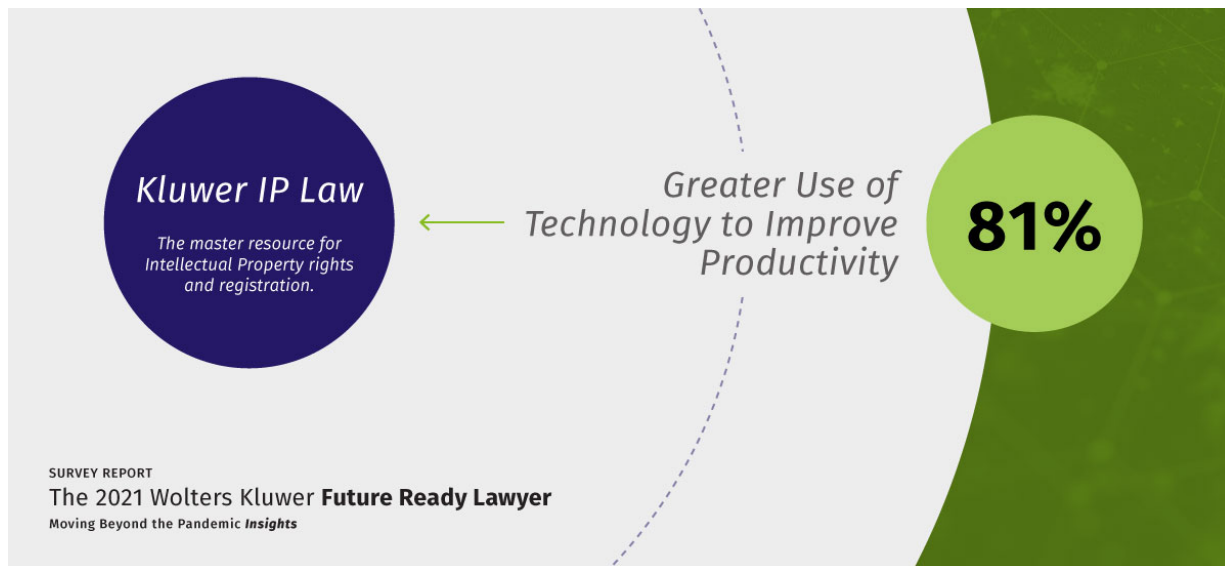
We are taken aback by the total absence of "*Fingerspitzengefühl*" in the approach to the colleagues. The heavy-handed style of communication merely breeds distress and demotivation, and we have been confronted with several of our colleagues in tears.

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