

Kluwer Patent Blog

Survey: EPO staff don't trust top management, concerns about quality

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Staff members of the EPO have little confidence in the top management. They don't think there is a clear and coherent strategy, there are big concerns about quality and also about the increasing work load. This is shown by the fifth Technologia Survey, the results of which have been shared with staff last week.

The survey, which was commissioned by trade union SUEPO, reveals deep divisions between management and staff. It was published just ahead of the meeting of the Administrative Council, 29 and 30 June 2022, in which a decision about the re-appointment of António Campines as EPO president for a second term until 2028 is on the agenda.



One sign of the lack of trust between staff and management is the fact that the Technologia survey could be held among SUEPO members only and those among EPO staff who actively opted in, since president Campinos refused SUEPO to use EPO emails*.

Some results in more detail:

- I think top management has set out a clear and coherent strategy for the EPO: 31% of respondents said they totally disagree, 33% tend to disagree, 21% are neutral, 14% tend to agree and 2% totally agree.
- I support the strategy of the EPO set out by top management: 39% totally disagree, 32% tend to disagree, 21% neutral, 7% tend to agree, 1% totally agree.
- In my view, the actions of top management and the strategy adopted have departed considerably from the role that the EPO should be playing in the European patent system: 6% totally disagree, 12% tend to disagree, 20% neutral, 31% tend to agree, 32% totally agree.
- I identify with top management's view: 46% totally disagree, 35% tend to disagree, 15% neutral, 4% tend to agree, 1% totally agree.
- I identify with the views of Staff Representation: 1% totally disagree, 5% tend to disagree, 17% neutral, 51% tend to agree, 27% totally agree.

Questions about the level of trust in superiors show a staggering 3% confidence in president Campinos and 1% in the Management Advisory Committee, whereas the confidence in immediate superiors is relatively good.

- Trust in my immediate superior : 7% very little, 12% little, 24% neutral, 35% much, 22% very much
- My director : 20% very little, 19% little, 37% neutral, 18% much, 6% very much
- My Principal Director/COO : 50% very little, 26% little, 20% neutral, 4% much, 1% very much
- My Vice President : 47% very little, 24% little, 23% neutral, 6% much, 1% very much
- The Management Advisory Committee: 60% very little, 24% little, 16% neutral, 1% much, 0% very much
- The President : 61% very little, 23% little, 13% neutral, 3% much, 0% very much

Quality

The survey also clarifies there are concerns about the quality of the work the EPO produces and about recent reorganizations.

In reaction to the statement: ‘Do you consider that the introduction of a performance-related bonus at the level of the individual employee is a good thing for the QUALITY OF THE WORK produced by the European Patent Office?: 61% answered they totally disagree, 28% tend to disagree, 10% tend to agree, 1% totally agree.

With the following statement: ‘the current president and top management have taken useful measures to maintain and improve the quality of the EPO’s products and services’, 38% totally disagrees, 32% tends to disagree, 19% is neutral, 11% tends to agree, 1% totally agrees.

Staff members were asked as well how many times ‘the operational organigram around your post within the EPO’ had been restructured in the last three years. 19% answered ‘never’, but more than 80% of respondents had experienced such restructuring (once 30%, twice 34%, three times or more 18%).

These reorganizations concerning their post were ‘pointless’, according to 86% of respondents. 72% said that the ‘constant reorganizations and restructuring over recent years are pointless and have a negative effect on my situation’.

In the meantime, the economic situation of the EPO is favorable, according to most respondents: 2% say: ‘disagree and it bothers me’, 6% disagree, 66% agree, 26% say ‘agree and I appreciate’

Equality

The Technologia survey was also about the personal situation of staff members. A remarkable result is the reaction to the statement: ‘Employees are treated equally at the EPO’: 32% totally disagrees, 30% tends to disagree, up sharp since the 2020 survey, in which these numbers were 8% and 22% respectively.

Some other findings:

- I can expand my professional competences: 14% answer: disagree and it bothers me, 38% disagree, 40% agree, 9% says: agree and I appreciate

- The amount of work I am tasked with is acceptable: 29% disagree and it bothers me, 36% disagree, 30% agree, 5% agree and I appreciate
- My work pace is acceptable: 24% disagree and it bothers me, 34% disagree, 37% agree, 5% agree and I appreciate
- My professional activity allows me to balance work life and private life: 20% disagree and it bothers me, 30% disagree, 41% agree, 10% agree and I appreciate
- My work is interesting: 7% disagree and it bothers me, 17% disagree, 55% agree, 21% agree and I appreciate

Remarkable also is the reaction to the statement: Do you work outside the hours provided for by the regulations governing your working hours? 58% work in the evening or at night, 26% during weekends or public holidays, 16% during holidays. 36% don't work outside working hours.

This a huge change compared to earlier Technologia surveys, in which many more respondents said they did not work outside working hours: 76% in 2010, 69% in 2013, 61% in 2016, 58% in 2020.

Proud

Asked to describe the work atmosphere at the level of the EPO, respondents mentioned the words: tense (56%), confrontational (35%), cold (31%), warm (2%), cheerful (1%).

69% of staff feel very tired (sometimes, often or always), 42% feel depressed and 37% feel desperate. 67% think their current work life affects their health.

93% of respondents said they were fairly (44%) of very (49%) proud to work for the European Patent Office before. But asked whether they are proud to work for the European Patent Office now, only 34% said they are fairly proud, and a mere 8% is very proud.

**Over 6545 staff, the questionnaire was sent to 2915 and 1766 participated.*

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