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SUBJECT: 2010 EPO Pulse Survey on Staff Satisfaction

SUBMITTED BY: President of the European Patent Office

ADDRESSEES: Administrative Council (for information)

SUMMARY

In June 2010, the Office conducted a pulse survey with the aim of monitoring the development of staff satisfaction in the EPO and updating the corresponding key indicator in the Balanced Scorecard (BSC).

The results have been analysed and the main findings and aspects relevant to the various DGs have been summarised in a report attached to this document.

In short, the survey results show that the majority of EPO staff are generally satisfied with their individual work, whilst they are less content with the EPO as an employer. This appears to be a continuing trend, as similar results have already been obtained in previous surveys.

The Administrative Council is invited to take note of the survey results presented in the attached report.

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I. STRATEGIC/OPERATIONAL

1. Operational.

II. RECOMMENDATION

2. The Administrative Council is invited to take note of the survey results presented in the attached report.

III. MAJORITY NEEDED

3. Not applicable.

IV. CONTEXT

A. SURVEY BACKGROUND

4. Since 2006, the EPO has been conducting biennial Office-wide staff surveys to collect reliable management information on the functioning and health of the Organisation as a whole. A full survey of this nature was planned for 2010 but then postponed to 2011 due to budgetary constraints. In order to bridge the time gap between the Office-wide staff surveys, the Office ran a sample survey on staff satisfaction. Its main purpose was to measure the overall "temperature" in the Office, update the corresponding Staff Satisfaction Indicator in the EPO Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and monitor the developments in this respect at EPO and DG level. This year the pulse survey was conducted from 26 May to 11 June 2010.

B. SURVEY CONCEPT

5. The so-called pulse survey focuses on a few major aspects of staff satisfaction, namely satisfaction with the work and with the employer, which form the basis of the Staff Satisfaction Index used in the BSC. For the first time, a new set of questions on employee engagement were incorporated to obtain a baseline measure of the current engagement levels in the EPO. Engagement refers to rational, emotional and behavioural components influencing the staff's connection with and commitment to their organisation.
6. For reasons of efficiency, only 7 questions on satisfaction with the work and the employer and 6 questions on employee engagement were put to a randomly selected sample of EPO staff members. In order to understand better the trends in staff satisfaction, an opportunity to give open comments was also provided.

7. Results were collected and reported at the overall EPO and DG level and the respective BSC performance indicator was updated.
8. The survey was conducted in co-operation with Towers Watson, a new service provider selected after expiry of the contract with Research International.

V. ARGUMENTS

A. SURVEY RESULTS

9. A brief summary of the overall results is given below. More details can be found in the full report (Annex I).
10. 59% of the 1 718 randomly selected staff members responded to the survey. The main findings of the survey were as follows:
 - There is an overall downward trend in staff satisfaction, which remains 14% below the target defined for the BSC.
 - The results indicate notable variations between the different DGs.
 - The trend of staff liking their work (satisfaction with the work), but not the overall working environment and the EPO as an employer (satisfaction with the employer), has continued over recent years.
 - Overall work satisfaction continues to be relatively high, with more than two thirds of respondents being satisfied with their job and finding it interesting, whereas the perception of being "respected and valued at the EPO" remains at a low level.
 - The overall perception of the EPO as an employer is low and has declined, e.g. only half of the respondents would recommend the EPO as a place to work. Only a third of respondents state that they would stay at the EPO, even if offered a job with a similar salary and benefits package elsewhere.
 - The score for Employee Engagement, e.g. understanding of the organisation's goals and how employees can contribute, is low compared to other organisations.
 - The open comments give an indication of the underlying issues affecting the current level of staff satisfaction. Again, the trends from previous years continue, with concerns being raised about issues related to managerial

practices and EPO governance. The respondents wish to see improvements in the strategic orientation of the Office and in social partnership, which requires action by all parties. Requests for more inclusive decision-making processes and transparent management communication are voiced, as is a need for initiatives supporting professional development.

B. COMMENT ON CSC SURVEY

11. After the Office had postponed its full staff survey to 2011, the Central Staff Committee decided to launch an Office-wide survey on their own initiative. It was sent to all staff, including temporary staff and contractors, and contained a set of 160 questions.
12. It may be important to note that, whilst the EPO pulse survey dealt with staff satisfaction and engagement, the CSC survey and the corresponding report (which has been submitted to the AC in a separate document, see CA/155/10) was mainly focused on potential health risks and stress factors.
13. The CSC survey model, focus and background are clearly different from the EPO approach and the results do not allow any statistically reliable comparison with the EPO survey results.
14. However, there is a certain overlap in the conclusions drawn by the respective surveys, which point in the same direction, namely on the main topics on which staff would like to see improvements.

VI. CONCLUSION

15. Initial analyses of the Pulse Survey and CSC survey identify similar areas for improvement. There is a certain overlap in findings, which provides a broad basis for the discussion of required developments. It has been agreed that both sides will take into account conclusions from the respective surveys during the ongoing discussions in the framework of the concerted agenda between the Office management and the staff representatives.

VII. ALTERNATIVES

16. Not applicable.

VIII. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. Not applicable.

Overall results of the pulse survey on staff satisfaction

1. BACKGROUND

Since 2006, the EPO has been conducting biennial Office-wide staff surveys to collect reliable management information on the functioning and health of the Organisation as a whole. A full survey of this nature was planned for 2010 but then postponed to 2011 due to budgetary constraints. In order to bridge the time gap between the Office-wide staff surveys, the Office ran a sample survey on staff satisfaction. Its main purpose was to measure the overall "temperature" in the Office, update the corresponding Staff Satisfaction Indicator in the EPO Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and monitor the developments in this respect at EPO and DG level. This year the pulse survey was conducted from 26 May to 11 June 2010.

The survey was run in co-operation with Towers Watson, a new service provider selected after expiry of the contract with Research International.

This report presents the overall results of the 2010 EPO pulse survey on staff satisfaction, based on a sample of 1 718 staff members. The survey received a response rate of 59%. Although this is 6% lower than in 2009, it still provides reliable results.

	Response Rate
EPO Overall	59%
DG0 – Presidential Area	63%
DG1 – Operations	61%
DG2 – Operational Support	59%
DG3 – Appeals	59%
DG4 – Administration	52%
DG5 – Legal and International Affairs	59%

A representative sample of the EPO and each of the DGs was selected to participate in the pulse survey. A statistical method of random sampling was applied in order to achieve representative samples and reliable results for the whole Office, as well as at DG level (with a further breakdown to PD level (IM and Patent Administration) in DG 2). Data is reported for each of the DGs and the DG scores are weighted relative to their proportional size in the Office to create an overall EPO score that is representative of the Office as a whole.

2. METHODOLOGY

The 2010 survey contained 7 questions from the previous pulse surveys, plus 6 new Tower Watson engagement items. An open comment field for making suggestions for improvements was also provided.

The pulse survey on staff satisfaction provides an Overall Staff Satisfaction index, consisting of two further sub-indices:

- Employee Satisfaction (satisfaction with your employer) – refers to the relationship between employer and employees, and perceptions towards the EPO as an employer
- Work Satisfaction (satisfaction with your work) – relates to the employees work and their immediate work situation.

In addition to the above, a new index from Towers Watson was included to obtain a baseline measure of current engagement levels within the EPO.

- Employee Engagement - refers to rational, emotional and behavioural components influencing the staff's connection with and commitment to their organisation.

Results are reported as a percentage of "positive or favourable" answers to the positively phrased statements. The results of the questions used to determine the above indices are reported and have been compared to the results of the similar pulse survey conducted in 2009. Due to the change of survey provider, there will be no external benchmark for "overall staff satisfaction". Instead, there is an external benchmark score for the Employee Engagement index.

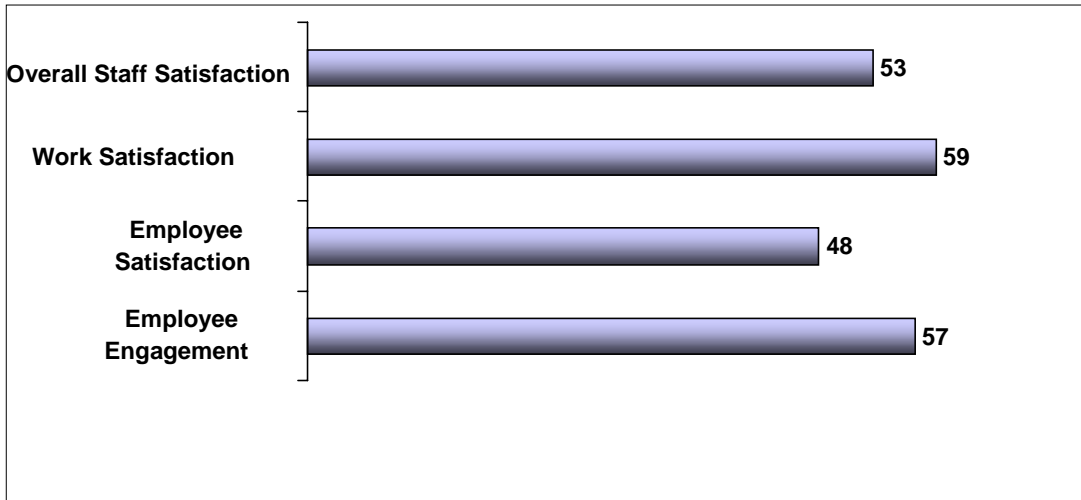
3. MAIN FINDINGS

- 1) *The response rate of 59% is adequate but somewhat lower than in 2009*
- 2) *There is a notable downward trend in overall staff satisfaction, which remains 14% below the internal target defined in the BSC.*
- 3) *Satisfaction with individuals' work continues to be higher, based mainly on 67% being satisfied with their job, and 63% finding it interesting. These measures show smaller changes compared to 2009.*
- 4) *The overall perceptions of the EPO as employer have worsened and remain quite poor.*

- 5) *The results on engagement and staff liking their work, but not the overall working environment and the EPO as an employer, are a cause for attention. This has been an issue in the past EPO surveys and the trend is negative.*
- 6) *It should be noted that the overall downward trend in staff satisfaction conceals marked variations between DGs:*
- a) *DG 0 retains high scores but these have declined since 2009, especially on questions about the individual relationship with the EPO.*
- b) *DG 1 scores have generally declined to below the EPO average, particularly on satisfaction with the work itself.*
- c) *DG 2 has shown little change in results and scores well on questions about satisfaction with the work itself.*
- d) *DG 3 has favourable scores on most questions compared to the EPO and these have not changed much since 2009.*
- e) *DG 4 has the highest scores and has shown the largest improvements since 2009 in both core categories. DG 4 also scores higher for employee engagement.*
- f) *DG 5 has polarised scores: satisfaction with the work itself is on a par with the EPO as a whole and has not changed, whereas the scores for questions about satisfaction with the organisation have fallen.*
- 7) *On Employee Engagement, compared to other organisations (including EU agencies) in Tower Watson's International Organisations Norm, EPO scores are low, especially in relation to Cognitive Engagement. This relates to the understanding of the organisation's strategic goals, values and how employees can contribute.*

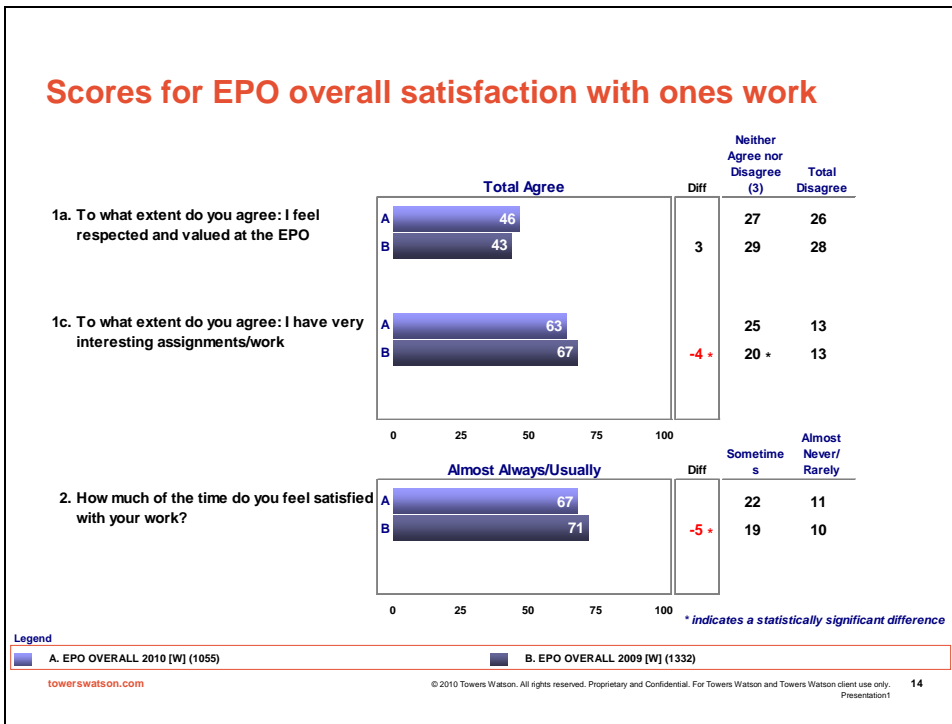
4. OVERALL RESULTS 2010

The graph below lists the results for the categories of questions used to calculate the level of satisfaction with the work and the employer, as well as staff engagement.



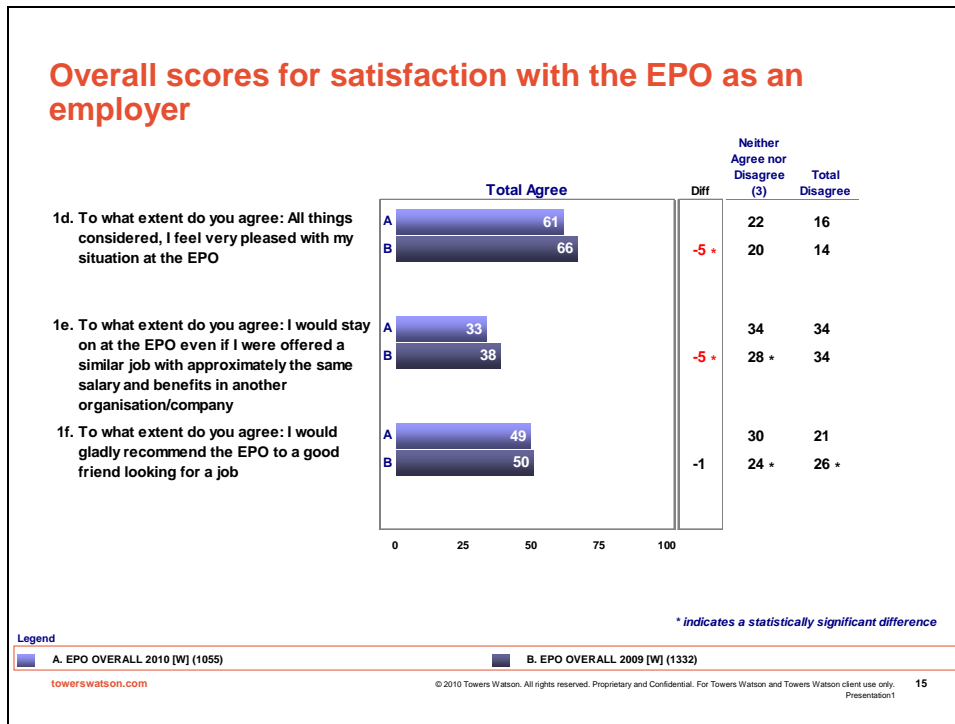
It can be seen from the overall category scores that, as in previous surveys, questions on Work Satisfaction (relating to the individual and their job) achieve a higher score than those on Employee Satisfaction (relating to the individual and the organisation).

4.1. WORK SATISFACTION



The results above indicate that overall work satisfaction continues to be relatively high. Most respondents (67%) are satisfied with their job and 63% find their job interesting. The latter has declined by 4%. Although the perception of being "respected and valued at the EPO" has improved by 3% from last year, the overall figure of 46% of staff who respond positively remains at a low level.

4.2. SATISFACTION WITH THE EMPLOYER



The results above indicate that there has been a slight decline in employee satisfaction. The overall perceptions of the EPO as employer show low satisfaction and engagement with the EPO. 61% of respondents say they are pleased with their situation at the EPO (5% fewer than in 2009), however only half of the respondents would recommend the EPO as a place to work. An area for attention is that only a third of respondents (5% fewer than in 2009) state that they would stay at the EPO, even if offered a job with a similar salary and benefits package elsewhere.

5. COMPARISON OF RESULTS

5.1. OVERALL STAFF SATISFACTION IN DIFFERENT DGs

Scores (%) of satisfaction: Breakdown by DG

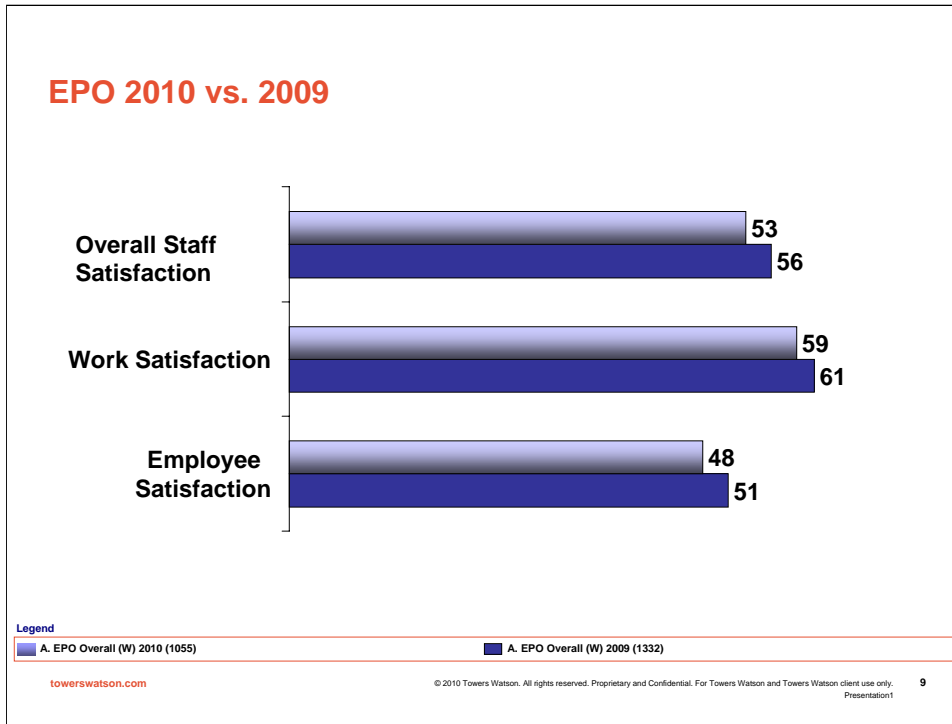
#	Category	EPO overall	DG0	DG1	DG2*	DG3	DG4	DG5
1	Overall Staff Satisfaction	53	60	51	55	59	65	48
2	Work Satisfaction	59	70	56	60	72	70	56
3	Employee Satisfaction	48	52	46	51	48	61	41
4	Employee Engagement	57	66	54	61	58	68	57

* Weighted average of Patent Administration, IM and DG2 rest.

Breakdown by DGs shows that DG 4 and DG 0 achieve higher scores than the EPO as a whole. However, DG 0, DG 3 and DG 4 differ significantly in higher work satisfaction. An overall downward trend in staff satisfaction conceals marked variations between DGs. All detailed DG-specific results have been provided to the respective DGs.

5.2. HISTORICAL COMPARISON OF OVERALL STAFF SATISFACTION

The graph below displays the changes in BSC indices between 2009 and 2010. Compared with the results for 2009, the scores show an apparent downward overall trend for all three indices.



After some improvements in previous years, the work and employee satisfaction rates have dropped two percent points below the 2009 level. Satisfaction with work seems to be somewhat more stable than the attitudes towards the EPO as an employer.

Change compared to 2009 broken down by DG`s

#	Item Text	EPO	DG0	DG1	DG2	DG3	DG4	DG5
1	Staff Satisfaction	-3	-8	-5	0	0	7	-4
2	Work Satisfaction	-2	-3	-4	0	1	7	-3
3	Employee Satisfaction	-4	-12	-6	-1	-1	6	-5

Improved scores for DG4

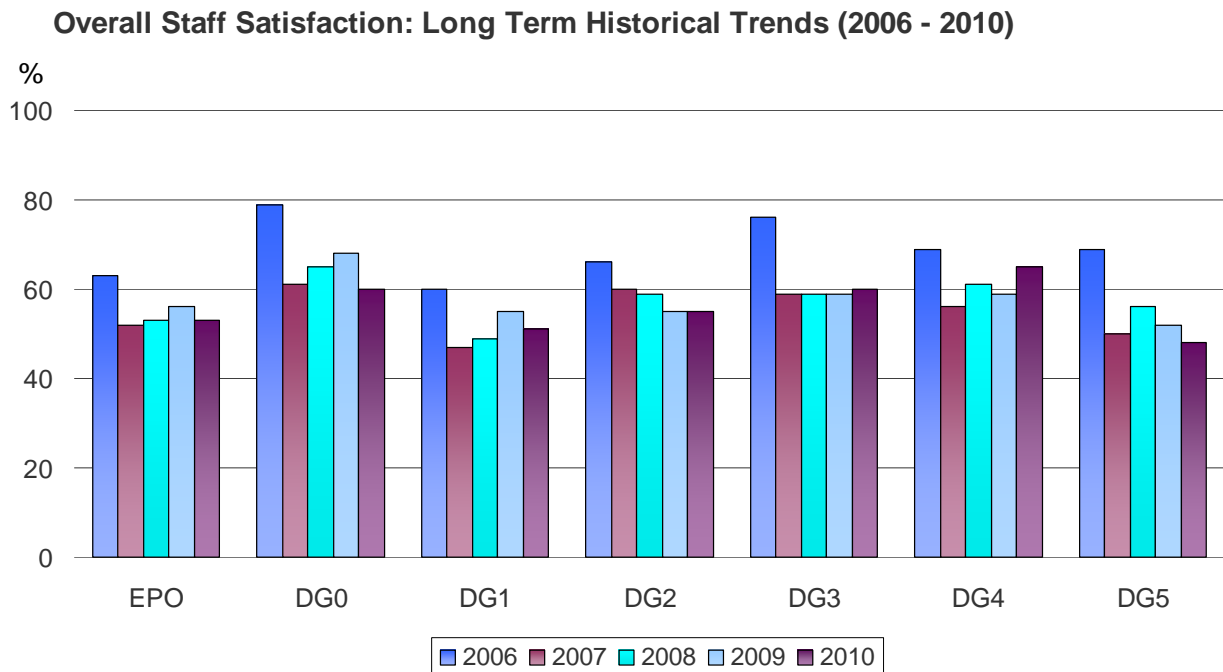
Little change for DG2 and DG3

General slight declines for DG0, DG1 and DG5

The general trend is a slight decline in overall staff satisfaction. The overall result is influenced by the encouraging improvements in DG4. The negative development in DGs 0, 1 and 5 requires attention. The comparison also shows a notable decrease in Employee Satisfaction in the Presidential Area, although it continues to score above the EPO average in all three categories.

5.2.1. Long-term historical trends in overall staff satisfaction

The graph below displays changes in overall staff satisfaction between 2006 - 2010 in the various DGs.



As can be seen from the graph, comparison at DG level reveals different patterns of change, with no consistent trend.

5.3. COMPARISON WITH AN INTERNAL BENCHMARK.

The overall staff satisfaction score of 53% has declined by 3% to its 2008 level. This result remains 14% below the target defined for the EPO Balanced Scorecard.

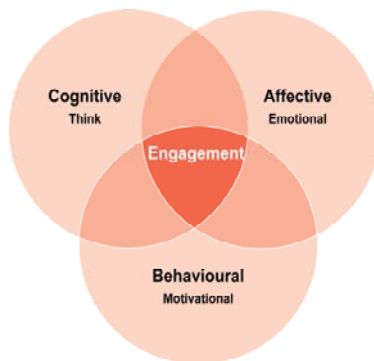
6. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

This year's survey was conducted in co-operation with Towers Watson, a new service provider for future Office-wide staff surveys. Towers Watson introduced a new index that was included to obtain a baseline measure of current engagement levels within the EPO. According to Towers Watson, employee engagement refers to the broad and deep connections people have with an organisation. And it encompasses three dimensions: A cognitive or rational component indicating how well employees understand the organisation's strategic goals and values and how they can contribute to them, and to what extent they derive meaning from their work. An emotional aspect referring to how much affective attachment and positive feelings the staff bring to their work and their organisation. In addition, there is a motivational part, influencing the staff's actual behaviour and actions, i.e. predicting their willingness to invest discretionary effort to perform their roles well.

Employee Engagement and why is it important?

To be fully engaged, employees must:

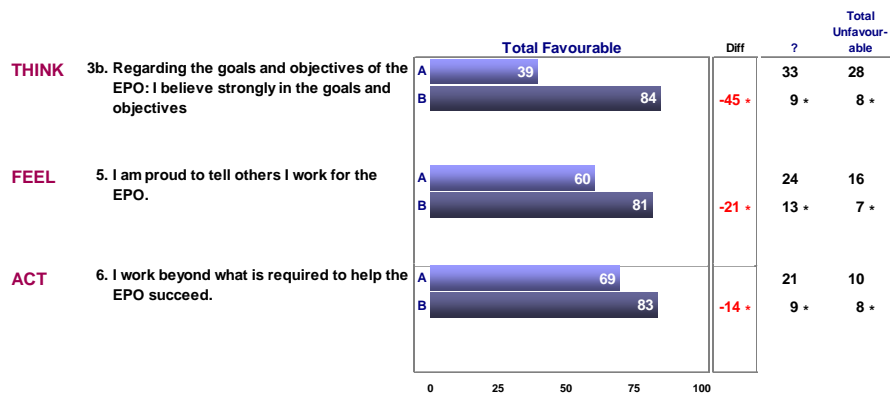
- **THINK** – Support the organisation's strategic goals, values, and how employees fit
- **FEEL** – Emotional attachment to the organisation
- **ACT** – Motivation and willingness to invest discretionary effort, to go above and beyond



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Employee Engagement



Legend

A. EPO OVERALL 2010 [W] (1055)

B. TOWERS WATSON INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS NORM

* indicates a statistically significant difference

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7

Results indicate that the EPO employee engagement scores are significantly below the external benchmark. This is especially true for the rational component related to belief in the goals and objectives of the EPO. It should also be noted that 65% of respondents agreed that they are aware of the goals and objectives of the EPO.

Looking at the differences between various DGs as presented in the table below, it can be noted, as for other indices, that higher scores are achieved by DG 4 and DG 0.

Employee Engagement by DG

A. EPO OVERALL 2010 [W]
 B. DG 0 - PRESIDENTIAL AREA 2010
 C. DG 1 - OPERATIONS 2010
 D. DG 2 - OPERATIONAL SUPPORT 2010 [W]

E. DG 3 - APPEALS 2010
 F. DG 4 - ADMINISTRATION 2010
 G. DG 5 - LEGAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS 2010

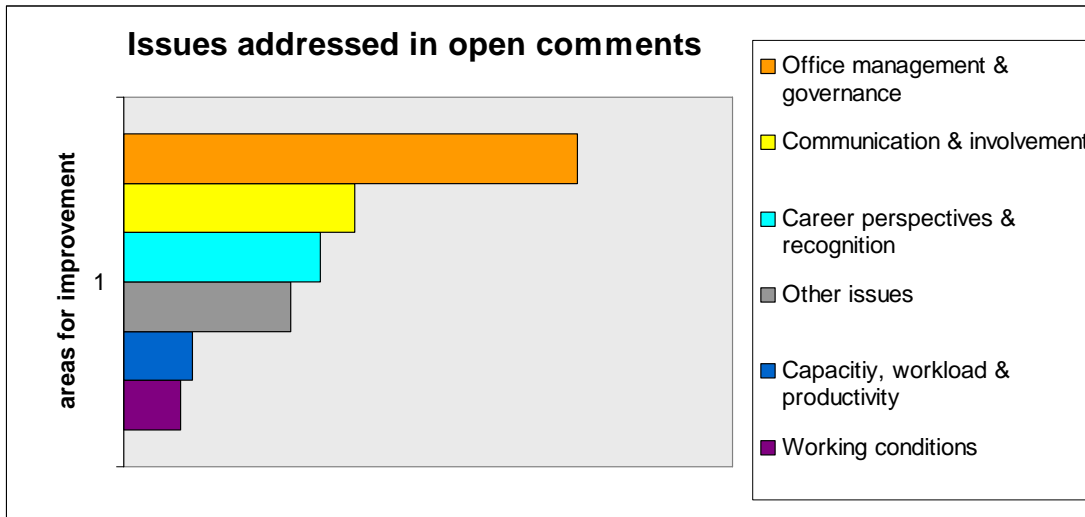
	#	Item Text	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
THINK	3b.	Regarding the goals and objectives of the EPO: I believe strongly in the goals and objectives	39	11	-3	6	-5	12	-8
FEEL	5.	I am proud to tell others I work for the EPO.	60	9	-4	4	3	14	-1
ACT	6.	I work beyond what is required to help the EPO succeed.	69	9	-4	3	6	11	9

Coloured cell indicates a statistically significant difference

7. ANALYSIS OF OPEN COMMENTS

While the quantitative results provide overall measures and give an indication of the level of satisfaction among the surveyed population, the comments made by respondents help to understand what issues influence their opinion and which aspects are of particular relevance for them.

Having been asked for the area in which the Office should improve in order to become a better place to work, the participants raised the following topics (the table lists them in order of their relative importance and quantity):



It appears that the overall concerns of staff have not changed over the past few years, the issues identified during the previous surveys are again highlighted, although with slight changes in the details (e.g. issues related to the Strategic Renewal Project have disappeared from the comments, whereas a fear of worsening employment conditions seems to have grown).

7.1. OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Issues relating to EPO governance and management activities are still top of the list. Topics like the perceived lack of common values and goals and their transmission from top management to staff, discontent with the handling of change and project management in the EPO, low confidence in the leadership qualities of EPO managers, as well as a working atmosphere that is adversely affected by the behaviour of both sides and offensive publications in the ongoing social conflict, are the factors mentioned most frequently.

"... The Office's real problem is that our management changes too quickly, lacks continuity and is often not competent to handle the problems faced. The current management is not in it for the long haul, was appointed by political powers, only cares about its own future and financial gain (lucrative contracts, bonuses on arrival and departure) and has no interest in the Office's future, unlike the actual staff, who spend their entire working life at the Office."

"The EPO remains dogged by the 'Examiner paradigm': most senior management positions are occupied by people who have an engineering background, rather than a management background or even a background in their specific area of competence. The consequence of this is that most decisions are taken based on a very technocentric focus, favoring tools over processes and numbers over people. The EPO needs management with a much broader perspective, leaders rather than executives."

"Before someone is made a manager they should be assessed to see if they actually are competent to work with people."

"Clarify its relationship with the Administrative Council and the member states, and enable the Office to perform its proper functions without continual interference from the Organisation."

"... We need to get back to a thorough, well-thought-out approach and stop diving into the headlong rushes in which even far-reaching reforms are sometimes introduced here (e.g. financial debate, pension scheme, health care, etc.) ... Well-planned measures instead of self-righteous action for action's sake! ..."

"Come with one view/mission/approach and stick to it! Do not keep changing the approach every few years without finishing/achieving the previous one ... "

"Since the time that I joined the Office, I cannot remember a month going by without either a call for industrial action, or an actual strike taking place. This suggests to me that the Office has a long way to go with industrial relations, both from a management and union perspective. Both side seem to be entrenched in the 1970s, hardly befitting for what we stand for. Therefore, (easy to say, but difficult to achieve!), to make the EPO a better place work, a thorough and meaningful review of the manner in which staff are communicated with by management and represented by the union should take place, with the end result being adult discussions and more harmony."

"A better relationship and understanding between high management and staff, especially with staff representation and staff unions, finding better and more efficient ways of working together in topics that are very sensitive to staff."

"Stop the bickering between the Unions and management and get down to some real negotiations."

"The staff reps should stop distributing mischievous comments and rather support the EPO and management with constructive feedback. By the way, managers are also EPO staff, but staff reps seem to forget that."

"Preserve, or rather restore, social peace at the Office. But management and the staff representatives can only do that together. I personally find it more difficult than before to identify with the staff representatives' views. I still find the working conditions at the Office - compared with the outside world - very satisfactory. But I get the impression that, over the course of their working life at the Office, some colleagues increasingly take these good working conditions for granted or even come to see them as something to criticise ..."

"... it is high time we were able to work in a peaceful social climate. The social partners need to "tone it down", get round the table, reach a consensus on the main policies and the major reforms needed so they finally settle down and we can all concentrate on the most important thing, i.e. examining and granting patents. I am fed up with this climate of suspicion and, sometimes, insults between the social partners, who give you the impression they have different interests (and maybe they do) but who should be working together on reconciling them ...".

7.2. COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

As a second priority, the need for improved communication and more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes is raised by the respondents. Communication in the Office is often perceived as a one-way process, with the management communicating downwards to staff and not taking the staff perspective sufficiently into account. Furthermore, many respondents claim that the decisions taken by management are not sufficiently explained or lack comprehensible reasoning that would enable staff to support these decisions.

"Explain changes better to staff - remove uncertainty (about changes, social security, etc.)".

"Respecting the highly qualified staff, consulting them and taking into account their advice. Explain the decisions taken, in particular when the decision differs from the advice given by and the views of the staff..."

"... Middle management wasn't asked beforehand what other forms 'rebalancing' could take. So what are they managers for then? ...".

" Listen! Listen to others and take what they say on board when making decisions. We make up a whole, from the most junior employee to the President. Everyone has the same aim: to make the Office what it is today and keep it that way. But to do that, you need to listen at all levels. And take account of the different points of view in their decisions."

7.3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A number of respondents voiced their complaints about limited development and career opportunities offered by the EPO and dissatisfaction with performance evaluation schemes or the recognition of performance and valuation of staff contributions in general.

"There is room for a marked improvement in the recognition individual employees receive for their work from top management. The grading of many jobs is still very inflexible and constrained by bureaucratic rules. More flexibility and credit for the employee's level of performance and knowledge would go along way to re-motivating many colleagues."

"Change the reporting system. Move to a points system (like for air miles); that way, everyone, with time, would have a chance. Right now, the system gives a distorted picture. If you're not in the top third, then why work more? ...".

"Socialistic attitude: the fact that high performance is not much recognised and underperformance is massively tolerated, is disturbing Self-service and civil servant mentality is widespread We would be bankrupt if we were not an international organisation without competitors".

"There is too little appreciation for individual performance. I would like to get more recognition for my performance (but not necessarily in the form of more money)."

"... Support staff development; give those who want to learn and develop access to training. Too often, it is very difficult to go on training and you have to wait a very long time. Offer personal coaching programmes ... promote work mobility to allow staff to develop in other areas ...".

7.4. OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

At the lower end of the scale, but still with a significant number of comments, two other topics remain: one is the stress caused by an imbalance between workload and capacity, or productivity pressure, and negative impacts on the quality of work through the focus on financial savings.

"... The extreme EPO production pressure is detrimental to staff health & wellbeing and furthermore to the patent system itself ...".

"The major problem we have been facing for almost six years is the constant increase in workload, without an accompanying increase in staff or other means to deal with it. In our unit, we have already long since passed the point of a normal workload. The top management knows this, but says it can't - allegedly for financial reasons - do anything about it ...".

"... Make it easier to transfer staff AND POSTS to areas of the office under acute strain, and/or to hire extra temp staff or consultants or contractors. Some areas are hopelessly overworked, yet we are told there is a shortage of work amongst Formalities teams. Match resources with capacity & demand!"

Another point is the perceived reduction in job security and a threat of worsening of employment conditions:

"Stop damaging our Pension Scheme and Health Insurance via the Administrative Council"

"... The sort of communications that ...[DG2]... have been issuing this year have had an extremely disturbing, de-motivating and negative effect on my colleagues and me. I would never have believed that job security would be a problem for people working here, but this no longer seems to be the case. This is extremely worrying for me."

Besides the above topics, which seem to be of wide common interest, other comments were made on a wide spectrum of more isolated topics, ranging from very specific personal situations to issues of broader importance but only voiced by few individuals.

"More teamwork for examiners."

"... We need a new fitness room because there is a two-year waiting list, when those suffering from RSI/back problems are advised to strengthen their muscles ...".

"... an opportunity for staff to take a sabbatical, subject to certain conditions. This could be 'purchased' by accepting salary cuts over a certain period, as is done in the private sector, but would certainly do a lot to keep staff in a healthy state of mind and provide a new source of motivation."

8. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the survey show a slightly negative trend and staff satisfaction has dropped again after a slightly upward trend in the last two years. Whereas the improvements in DG 4 provide a real encouragement, greater analysis of the specific DG situations is still needed and it is important to analyse further the suggestions put forward by respondents.

As in previous years, individual job satisfaction is at a reasonably good level. The lack of balance between staff liking their work but not the overall working environment remains a cause for concern. While it is neither uncommon nor unnatural for staff to identify more with their work than their employer, the current level of identification with the Organisation is poor compared to the external benchmark.

For Employee Engagement, the EPO scores are low compared to other organisations (including EU agencies) in Tower Watson's International Organisations Norm. This is especially the case for Cognitive Engagement, which of course also affects the emotional and behavioural aspects of engagement. Efforts will need to be made to increase individual awareness of and support for the goals and objectives of the EPO to enable the engagement results to improve.

The suggestions made by the respondents on being asked for the area where the Office should improve in order to become a better place to work also provide valuable insights. The issues to be tackled which were raised in the open comments concern managerial practices and governance issues. The respondents wish to see improvements in the Office's strategic orientation, in transparency in management communication and in social partnership. Initiatives supporting professional development of the staff and a better working atmosphere and social interactions strengthening the common identity should be further promoted.

Towers Watson and PD Human Resources