

Training and Competencies

Employees will only be fully engaged in the management of knowledge and intellectual property when the business imperative is clear and demands on their time justified. The development of an educated and enabled workforce is therefore often the rate-determining factor when seeking to improve the management of these intellectual assets.

Ultimately employees at all organisational levels must learn to treat the management of knowledge and the pursuit of intellectual property rights as integral parts of their normal duties; not activities to be carried out when, or if, time permits. Unfortunately, when resources are scarce, and there are conflicting demands on overstretched employees' time this focus may be lost. In these circumstances, while training is clearly vital, on its own it is not sufficient to effect change, and both job descriptions and technical competencies should be adapted to include knowledge and intellectual property criteria, thereby requiring employees to demonstrate that they understand and have discharged their responsibilities.

Signs of a well structured training and education programme:

- The organisation's technical competencies include both knowledge and intellectual property criteria.
- Employees at all organisational levels understand that the management of knowledge and the pursuit of intellectual property rights are integral parts of their normal duties.
- There are a range of training media available that give rapid insight into business needs, tools and the organisation's overall approach to intellectual asset management.
- There are crib sheets, short guidance notes and template deliverables available to help employees quickly and effectively discharge their responsibilities.
- There is an intranet site that describes individuals' responsibilities, together with approved tools and processes.

The Challenge : Intellectual asset management, especially intellectual property management, is typically regarded by employees and management as someone else's responsibility, an activity that should be carried out by a central function without their input. The reality is different; intellectual asset management is the responsibility of almost everyone in an organisation.

Solutions : Individuals clearly need to be aware of where they have responsibilities, have the necessary skills (or access to training) and be subject to performance monitoring. This can be achieved by a mixture of initiatives including:

- Training should be available, not only in the form of stand-alone specialist intellectual property and knowledge management courses, but also by integrating key messages into existing courses such as those covering commercial awareness and project management.
- Guidance should be available, not in the form of lengthy procedures, but summarised in, crib-sheets, template deliverables and succinct guidance notes defining responsibilities and minimum actions.

- ② An intranet site, ideally using multimedia, should be established providing information to individuals with specific intellectual asset accountabilities and anyone wishing to improve their understanding of this topic.
- ② Where appropriate, job descriptions should mandate that employees have an understanding of intellectual asset management. This will be aided if the organisation already uses a system of Technical Competencies that describe the skills post-holders should possess and demonstrate (see table below for typical intellectual asset skills).

Target Employee	Intellectual Asset Skills
Project managers	Is able to identify the key activities projects should undertake to capture, protect, maintain and share intellectual assets to enhance organisational effectiveness.
Inventors	Is able to source information on published third parties patents, and is aware of recent third party patenting activities in their technical field ¹ .
Marketing personnel	Is aware of the general coverage afforded by their organisation's patent and trademark portfolio, so that they can identify potential infringement when monitoring competitors' activities.
General	Understands, and can describe, his or her role in the protection of the organisation's proprietary know-how.

Key Employee Groups : Team leaders and project managers are, for most organisations, the key group to convert in any improvement plan. If this organisational level accepts the importance of knowledge and intellectual property management then they will drive the organisation's performance forward in a way that senior management cannot hope to achieve alone.

Training : Training must inspire, and to do this it must provide rapid insight into; business needs, solutions, and the organisation's overall approach to intellectual asset management. Themes can include:

- ② Ten commandments, i.e. dos and don'ts for everyone.
- ② Guidance for project managers or their nominees on how to capture, protect, maintain and share intellectual assets.
- ② Guidance for those needing to raise contracts in instances where there are knowledge or intellectual property management challenges.

¹ A few organisations, mostly based in the US, have banned their employees from searching external patent data bases for fear that they will:

- Copy ideas patented by others.
- Identify instances where their employer is potentially infringing a third party's patents and respond in such a way that increases the potential liability.

It is IP&AM's belief that organisation's are best served by having a trained workforce aware of their legal freedoms and restrictions.