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From ideas to impact: enhancing patent transfer in Chinese universities

Eddie Zheng, Partner at Corner Stone & Partners, highlights the challenges and progress in patent transfer and transformation at Chinese universities in light of the introduced policies to promote the commercialization of research.

2024 in review

Page 8



Means-plus-function claims

Page 18



Patent protection for digital twins

Page 23



The culture of happiness

Diane Silve, Director & Senior Trademark Counsel at Mondelez International, shares insights on fostering a positive and productive team culture through the lens of happiness and collaboration.

Have you paused, even for a short moment, to consider your team's culture and the importance it has for you and your colleagues?

Over the years, I realized that culture could have a huge impact on how a group functions. While not intending to provide HR guidance as to how the culture of IP teams should be, I would like to share some of my own reflections based on observations made throughout my experience of 25 years in the IP profession, having worked in different IP structures (IP firm, in-house), team environments, and countries.

"Team Culture" is commonly defined by various authors with a few recurrent keywords such as Values, Goals, Beliefs, Behaviours, and Work Environment, all shared by a team. Team Culture may be used in combination with terms like "high



Diane Silve

performing," "achieving," and "competitive," or even sometimes having negative connotations such as "toxic" or "culture of fear". The culture of a team will not only influence a team's performances but, first and foremost, how each member of that team may feel daily. This, to me, is of the utmost importance as it will determine how a team will eventually work as an entity. I will not discuss here what could make a "high-achieving team" or a team with a "culture of excellence." Nor will I talk about what we would not want to see in a team. Instead, I will focus on simple and affordable steps we could all take, should we want, to build and foster a happy, kind, and positive culture within IP teams, which I would refer to as the *Culture of Happiness*.

While I am very privileged to work within a team where I feel happy, cared for, valued, and heard by leaders and my colleagues, I have also experienced during my career different types of culture. Rich off these different experiences, I can appreciate the effect team culture has on how I, and my IP colleagues within each team, feel and have felt overall.

Because people spend most of their time at work, feeling happy there, or at least being in an environment that is not detrimental to their mental health, will have a major impact on their life and their wellbeing. I believe that happy and valued employees will sleep better and will have more energy to practice physical activity or, for instance, to make conscious food choices. Also, there is evidence supporting the link between employees' happiness and their performances and productivity – on their own and/or within a group – focus, and sense of commitment to their team.

I have observed that leaders that wanted to build a culture of happiness for and with their team were intentional and authentic about it. It was not enough for them to think this would be the right type of culture they wanted for their team to make it happen. I noticed the team culture



There is evidence supporting the link between employees' happiness and their performances and productivity.



Résumé

Diane Silve is Director & Senior Trademark Counsel at Mondelez International. She has more than 20 years' experience as an IP lawyer. She has worked both in-house and in IP firms for various industries and in different countries. Diane is also a registered Yoga teacher and qualified in personal performance coaching and naturopathy. Diane is passionate about wellbeing and generally wants to understand and promote how IP professionals could take more care of themselves.

was at the top of those leaders' strategic roadmaps. They understood that a strong culture would be the cement to all the other priorities of their team. These leaders were walking the culture talk. For instance, they would not only say that caring was important, but they would actually care, asking questions and wanting to know more about their colleagues, their struggles, and happy moments. They would also have their colleagues' back when needed, which would inspire trust. For those leaders, a culture of happiness would not be just a box to tick. I could see how they would be strongly committed to their team, investing time and energy in the team's culture, but above all, they would be interested to understand their team, its members, and their needs.

As individuals, we all have different needs, preferences, or, for instance, work rhythms. With all these differences, it can be tricky to appreciate what makes a team's identity, its essence. Especially when the team is spread over different functions (e.g., Trademarks and Patents), offices, countries, and even sometimes in different parts of the world and/or with different mother tongues across team members. Compared to other fields of law, the IP world is quite particular as teams often work internationally and with colleagues across the globe. I observed over the years that leaders who wanted a culture of happiness equally appreciated the differences and the commonalities existing within their team. Building on those as strengths to bring their team together and, with everyone, to create a strong culture based on the uniqueness, shared values and sense of purpose of their team.

The culture of a team should not sit solely on

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Knowing that everyone's contribution to the team's culture is important and equally valued irrespective of the role and the seniority of the person.
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its leaders' shoulders. Creating and fostering a culture of happiness is the responsibility of each team member, for their own good first, for their colleagues, and broadly for the group. From the leadership team to individual contributors, everyone has an important and unique role to play.

There are so many aspects that could create a strong team culture. I will not go through all but will share what are, to me and based on my observations, the essential pillars of a culture of happiness (the different Cs of Culture), which can be nurtured by individual members and/or as a group:

- *Care* – caring for others with simple gestures such as bringing a coffee to a colleague who is not at their best, asking for news about a colleague's sick child, being especially kind and attentive when a teammate is going through hard times, or handing over a birthday card.
- *Connect* – organizing regular touch points with the team as a whole but also within smaller groups to discuss work projects or new case law, but also to share about how people are, what they are looking forward to, what makes them happy, what they find difficult and also to have fun and celebrate together.
- *Celebrate* – cheering on the greatness of the team and its members with special moments which don't need to



be formal and could be as easy as taking some time at the end of a meeting to mark recent successes like a team award or a big win in a complex litigation, celebrating birthdays and work anniversaries, welcoming newcomers; gathering around a home-baked cake before a colleague's wedding or celebrating the different cultures and traditions within the team; it could also simply be sending a sincere congratulation or thank you note to a colleague who did a great job.

- *Cohesion* – promoting unity amongst team by doing/creating together beyond pure work, like undertaking a group volunteering activity, working together towards helping others, having a group pro bono project with a special IP focus, learning a new skill as a group, or just having fun together around some good pizza.
- *Communicate* – discussing with as much transparency as possible about the team's priorities and goals, coming changes, and budget; asking for feedback on what works or not for the team, what could be changed/improved/stopped, or, for instance, talking about the latest survey results and sharing insights.
- *Culture champions* – when the size of the team allows, creating accountability within the group by having dedicated and voluntary "culture stars" who will help drive the team's culture agenda and organize related activities (from training to fun events).
- *Casting* – carefully considering the team's culture in a recruitment process to anticipate what the new hire could bring to the team and/or how they would blend in.

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As I heard recently about a great team's culture example, “It all starts with Me.”
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- *Contribute* – knowing that everyone's contribution to the team's culture is important and equally valued irrespective of the role and the seniority of the person and remembering that not everyone contributes in the same way, which also makes the strength of a team, making culture a team goal for everyone and recognizing all individual contributions.
- *Cost-free* – creating a culture of happiness does not require any budget, but it implies everyone's commitment and intention.

We are lucky to have different tools and technologies available to bring a team together. It could be as varied as the classic in-person team meeting/training but starting with an informal "bring your own coffee and croissant," virtual coffee chats talking about last holidays, special recognition/awards, celebration slides, online trivia, virtual tour of the other side of the world office, monthly "getting to know your colleague" interviews, having a picnic all together at lunchtime in the park nearby or quarterly newsletter. There is no limit to a team's creativity when wanting to promote a culture of happiness.

The above might help to reflect on what we value in our team culture and maybe to consider at least one thing we could do differently, at our own level – being an individual contributor, a manager, or a leader - to build, improve, or foster our team's culture. In the current turmoil of our world with all the uncertainties it carries and the various pressures we may experience as an IP professional, one can see it as a shared responsibility to try all we can to create a happy place for ourselves and for those around us, also at work. There is no magic formula that could be applied to all and any teams across the IP profession (nor generally). There may be work environments where any of the above ideas might not be applicable. However, we can all attempt to cultivate a certain sense of culture of happiness at work. And create consequently a virtuous circle. Happy teams may inspire others in the same organization or beyond. Little by little, this could lead to a broader movement, impacting our IP environment and others in different areas. In any case, it cannot hurt.

As I heard recently about a great team's culture example, "It all starts with Me."

