

Audit and Evaluation of the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) Operations and Customer Relations

Part II: Verification of the PCT Culture of Customer Service

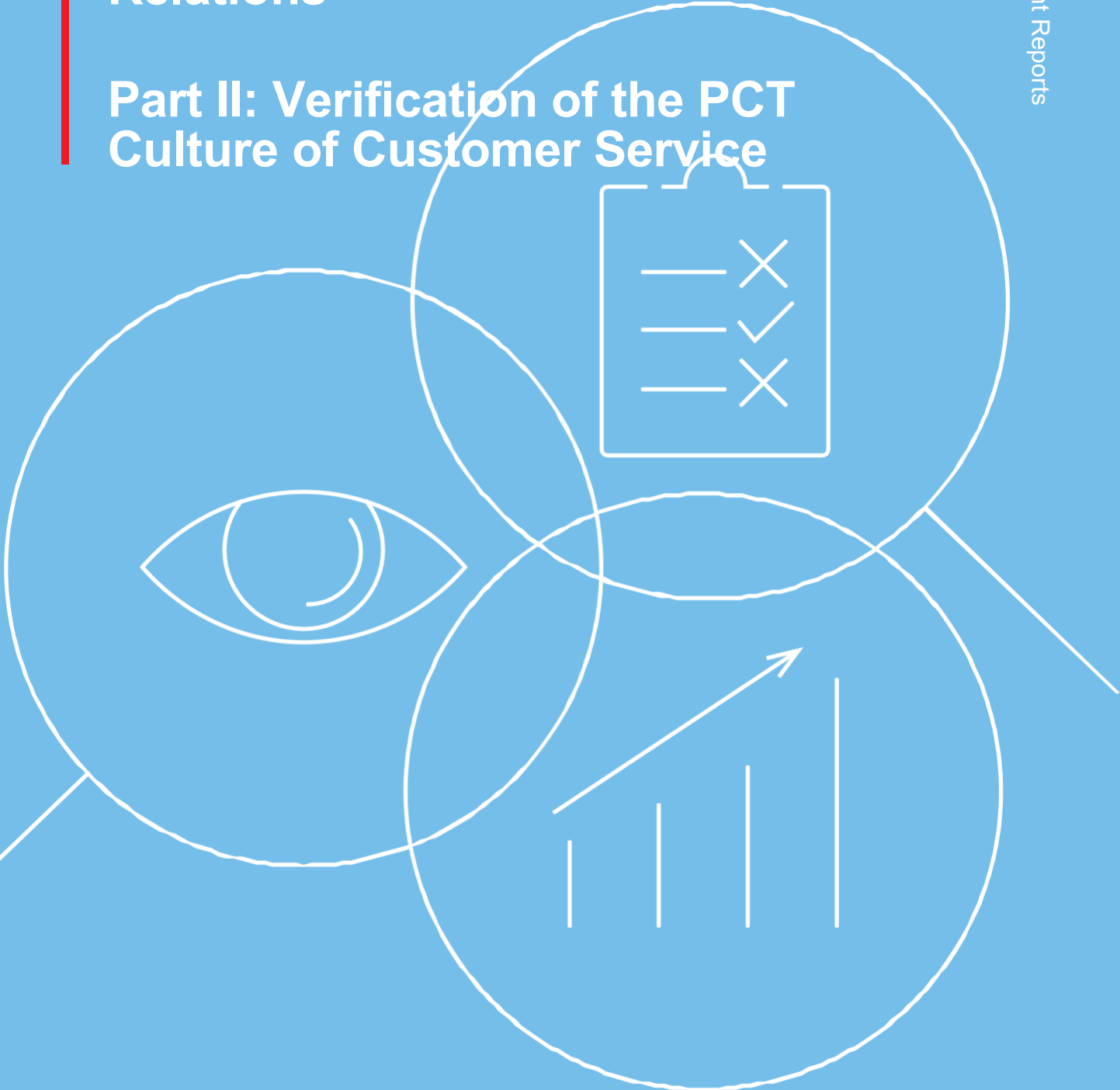


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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ePCT	Electronic Patent Cooperation Treaty portal
EPO	European Patent Office
HR	Human Resources
HBR	Harvard Business Review
HRMD	Human Resource Management Department
IOD	Internal Oversight Division
IP	Intellectual Property
IT	Information Technology
MTSP	Medium-Term Strategic Plan
PCT	Patent Cooperation Treaty
PTS	Patent and Technology Sector
PCT LIAD	PCT Legal and International Affairs Department
PCT LURD	PCT Legal and User Relations Division
SG	Strategic Goal
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Patents and Technology Sector (PTS), provides a unified procedure for filing and processing patent applications that facilitates the seeking of patent protection for inventions in 157 countries.
2. Fees associated with the PCT system constitute WIPO's primary source of revenue, amounting to 76.4 per cent.¹ WIPO acknowledges the indispensable role of its PCT customers in contributing to its mission and strives to prioritize their needs and provide exceptional customer service.
3. The specific objectives of the verification were to:
 - (a) Verify whether the culture of customer service is effectively implemented and aligned with the PCT's related performance objectives, expected results, and relevant strategic Pillars of the Organization's Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP);² and
 - (b) Identify opportunities to enhance services and customer relations through adaptive learning and behavioral science.
4. The main focus of this verification was the PCT Legal and International Affairs Department (the Department), which is responsible for the development of policies and the provision of strategic direction to preserve and strengthen the role of the PCT as the central node of the international patent system and to support the PCT system stakeholders, including Member States, the user community, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
5. The verification main findings are the following:
6. The Department's activities of customer service are in line with WIPO's Strategic Goals, objectives and core values and contribute to WIPO's Strategic Pillars 3 and 4 of the MTSP.
7. While a documented customer service and marketing and communication strategy are yet to be developed, the Department has continuously operated and developed initiatives to contribute to a culture of customer service. For instance, between 2020 and 2023, it allocated 209,415 Swiss francs³ in conducting a biennial customer satisfaction survey.
8. The verification found that activities and contributions to customer service are spread thinly across various workplans. In several cases, they are not linked to expected results and performance measures that are still to be developed for internal management purposes. Moreover, the lack of an impact framework makes the Department vulnerable to various risks such as loss of institutional memory, a lack of guidance for the Organization's culture, underreporting of contributions or inconsistent approaches to customer service.

¹ WIPO Annual Financial Report and Financial Statements, Year to December 31, 2022, Page 8, <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo-pub-rn2023-24-en-annual-financial-report-and-financial-statements.pdf>

² WIPO, WO/PBC/32/3, Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2022-2026 https://www.wipo.int/edocs/mdocs/govbody/en/wo_pbc_32/wo_pbc_32_3.pdf

³ Including personnel and non-personnel budget. Source: WIPO Business Intelligence Dashboard, Program Management Performance & Budget, Budget Utilization, April 2024

9. The PCT Legal and User Relations Division (PCT LURD) within the Department, through the Customer Experience Section,⁴ conducts a biennial customer satisfaction survey, which is distributed to a representative sample of users. As reported, the response rate for the 2023-2024 PCT Customer Satisfaction Survey was 12 per cent with 1,763 participants out of 22,971 having fully completed the survey, 919 customers who opened the survey but did not complete it, and another 1,012 customers, who only partially filled it out. This indicates that the survey process could be refined to encourage more customers to participate and provide valuable feedback.

10. The verification recommends that the Department:

(a) In coordination with the Customer Experience Section, review the frequency and length of the existing customer satisfaction survey, improving the means to provide real-time client feedback systematically;

(b) In collaboration with the PCT Services Department, develop an impact framework, such as a theory of change, to establish clear linkages between initiatives aimed at enhancing a culture of customer service and their contribution to customer satisfaction; and set SMART performance measures to monitor the effectiveness of the training in enhancing the PCT's customer service culture;

(c) In collaboration with the PCT Services Department, document the PCT's customer strategy to ensure a clear and concise understanding of the Organization's culture of customer service goals and objectives across the board and a standardized approach to measuring and communicating these goals and objectives;

(d) Develop a specific, easily accessible, and shared with other business areas repository for preserving institutional memory and sharing customer service lessons learned and good practices on gathering customer satisfaction metrics data, assessing the impact of a customer service culture on customer satisfaction, among others;

(e) Create more opportunities for continuing knowledge-sharing across WIPO business areas and sectors by (i) engaging relevant WIPO staff collaborating with the Department in PCT customer service conferences and workshops; (ii) setting up communities of practice to exchange lessons and good practices on customer service; (iii) identifying experts who can act as bridges between business areas and sectors to facilitate knowledge-sharing across teams;

(f) In collaboration with the Human Resources Management Department (HRMD), update the job descriptions of existing staff and ensure that job descriptions of new staff reflect the Organization's commitment to customer service; and

(g) In collaboration with HRMD, improve the existing HR contingency plan, which should include concrete actions (i) to establish expert pools readily available when necessary to fill in gaps due to staff turnover or mobility; and (ii) to seamlessly integrate new team members into the PCT's customer service culture.

⁴ Infrastructure and Platforms Sector.