

Harnessing the power of intellectual property – Strategy and programs of the WIPO Worldwide Academy [☆]

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Abstract

The WIPO Worldwide Academy's strategy aims to achieve four "Is," namely to be international, interdisciplinary, interactive and in-depth in its five programs; Policy Development Program, Professional Development Program, Education Degree/Diploma Program, Research and Executive Program, and Distance Learning. Building upon its eight years of existence and initial achievements, the WIPO Worldwide Academy will continue to strengthen its programs and partnerships with academic institutions all over the world. The Academy's objectives, target audiences, content, initial achievements and future challenges are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In today's knowledge-based economy, creativity is a powerful resource that can be harnessed by any country seeking to develop and strengthen its economy. The ability to innovate and create and to generate ideas is inherent in each one of us. However, not all of the good ideas and imagination can bear fruit. A successful process of innovation is a complicated one requiring a number of elements such as a business-friendly environment, an efficient infrastructure and sufficient investment to allow entrepreneurs to undertake a series of actions to set up and develop their enterprises. Many realize the important role of intellectual property (IP) which stimulates human intellect and empowers people, particularly those with the power of creative imagination. Others understand its renewed potential in the context of a knowledge-based economy which is sup-

ported by risk-taking entrepreneurship seeking more value-added products and services. Intellectual property is not new. But its modern strategy and management are new [1].

In many countries, only a few people possess enough knowledge and skill sets to assist their nationals in transforming creativity into valuable economic assets through the IP system. The lack of human resources capable of understanding the value of IP and the lack of use of the IP system is a major hindrance for development. Such a deficiency is mostly due to a lack of political support and adoption of policies that integrate IP into national development. Due to this lack of knowledge, some decision-makers think that the IP system is exclusively for the elite multinational companies. That perception discourages nationals from using the IP system. It is this vicious circle that the international IP community wishes to break. It is also one of the most urgent and important challenges facing WIPO Worldwide Academy, a body set up in March 1998 as a central coordinating mechanism for human resources development undertaken by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), to serve as an educational institution which provides teaching, training, and research services in intellectual property.

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2. Overview of the strategic direction

Our current analysis of the situation surrounding academic and training institutions of IP is a mixed one. While there is increasing awareness of the potential of IP to promote economic, social and cultural development, much needs to be done to foster partnerships and improve international cooperation among academic institutions to promote the full integration of IP into teaching curricula. This is of particular importance given the cross-cutting nature of IP and the need for an interdisciplinary approach to IP education and IP research.

As IP systems in different countries continue to dynamically evolve and IP management also becomes sophisticated, IP training and education now require a complete life cycle from primary education to training programs for adults. The role of public organizations like WIPO should be to ensure that groups often neglected or forgotten by market mechanisms should also be covered by the educational programs. Furthermore, educating younger generations to harness creativity is important since the students of today are the decision-makers of tomorrow. For this reason alone, it is important to find ways and means to provide educators with appropriate and effective mechanisms to boost understanding of creativity and innovation for the development of national and global economies, and in that context, understanding of the role of IP.

It is to be recalled that the WIPO's mission is to be achieved by creating an environment and infrastructure conducive to an enhanced understanding of the contribution of IP for economic, social and cultural development. In order to realize that mission, the Academy takes a leading role in the preparation, coordination and implementation of programs for human resources development worldwide. For example, in 2004 and 2005 respectively, some 216 and 169 officials including IP office staff, patent agents, representatives from R&D institutions from developing countries and countries in transition were trained. The Academy's Distance Learning Programs have become one of the most standardized training tools in the world and trained more than 40,000 people in over 160 countries [2].

The challenges faced by the WIPO Worldwide Academy in meeting the continuous demand for IP education and training can be summarized as follows:

- Need to further enhance the quality of services and diversify the content in order to be more interdisciplinary;
- Dynamically evolving dimensions of the IP system and diversified views thereon;
- High expectations of Member States for the Academy to provide more assistance; and
- Calls for promoting international cooperation among IP academic institutions.

The first point requires an additional explanation. Given that IP is a tool for national development and an entrepreneur's wealth creation, the use and management of IP require broad knowledge and astute strategy about how best IP should be adapted to and integrated into diversified economic, cultural and social needs.

For instance, if a question of IP management arises in the context of maximizing the value of a company and shareholders interests, the evaluation of the company's IP needs to be made. Few schools have fully reflected in their curriculum an emerging perception that IP is not only a legal title but also an economic asset which has a constantly changing market value.

Another example is a question arising from the need for public health. An appropriate balance between public policy objectives seeking access to essential drugs, and incentives for researchers and producers of new drugs has become a crucial question which needs thorough consideration worldwide and further debate on the policy options from political, economic, social, legal and ethical dimensions. They are not questions exclusively for policy-makers to answer. They are also questions which may well decide the fate of companies which are involved in the research, development, marketing, distribution and use of such products. There are many more examples indicating the growing impact of IP on our lives and businesses. The programs should address diversified needs of different audiences (producers, distributors, consumers and so on).

Programs also need to be practical and tailor-made reflecting different cultures and business environments. For instance, universities do not usually provide practical training programs in such areas as patent drafting and patent information search. Basic knowledge and skill sets about these practical aspects are increasingly important for both engineers and managers, because they are too crucial to leave it entirely to lawyers to decide, particularly when certain IP rights or applications are likely to affect the fate of the firm's core technological competence and strategic positioning in the market [3].

However, the fact of the matter is that, in most cases, IP training programs, if available at all, form only a marginal part of one time off in-house training programs which are provided to newly recruited staff. In some countries, programs of IP management specially designed for managers have emerged as an elective and intensive course at MBA or MOT (Management of Technology). They still remain highly technical and specialized disciplines. As a number of contributors to the *World Patent Information* suggest, business managers also need general knowledge about practical aspects such as how they could use patent information to evaluate strategic options in the market [4], and what implications specific techniques for drafting core patents may have in taking management decisions of business alliances with some firms and legal battles with others. There are many cases such as the BlackBerry® [5] which have taught us that IP is one of the essential elements for

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