

## **Commitment to the Effective Continuity of Government**

Ms. Cohn has demonstrated a strong commitment to effective continuity of government through her leadership and many initiatives, which have resulted in the retention of Trademark's most promising future leaders and in institutionalizing the development of individual managers and career executives at the USPTO. She takes a systematic and comprehensive approach to human capital management and understands the connection between an organization's strategy and its human capital needs and plans, from recruitment, to development and engagement, to work-life balance.

Ms. Cohn has overseen the development and implementation of a Trademark Strategic Human Capital Plan that emphasizes communication, training, leadership development, succession planning, and work-life balance initiatives. With the e-publishing of an employee magazine and newsletter, regular all hands meetings, management conferences, and employee focus groups and surveys, communication is a fluid two-way street between management and employees. Trademark employees have proved this strategy a success by answering the Federal employee viewpoint survey for two years in a row with no answers showing a true weakness and a large majority of questions answered positively as true strengths. Attrition in the trademark organization has been less than 2% for several years.

Ms. Cohn has been instrumental in working with Trademark employees and their union representatives to ensure that employees reap the benefits of the electronic workplace. Early on, Ms. Cohn recognized that the shift to electronic processing would present quality of life opportunities to USPTO employees while generating operating efficiencies for the Office. Ms. Cohn has shown tremendous flexibility and innovation in implementing the Trademark work-at-home program. She has been at the forefront of advocating the concept ever since it first surfaced in the Federal sector in the mid-1990s. Through this program, Trademark employees are able to work from home virtually full time. However, in setting up the Trademark program, Ms. Cohn was confronted with requirements beyond those in most work-at-home environments. For a Trademark examining attorney to work at home effectively, he or she needed to conduct on-line searches of a large database and have access to electronic research materials to complete examination of trademark applications. Based on Ms. Cohn's construct, the work-at-home technology was developed that essentially makes work-at-home transparent to users and customers. About 90% of the Agency's examining attorneys now participate in the program and are highly satisfied with the project, and their union officials cite the program as an example of how management/union partnerships' can succeed for everyone. The program has been so successful in the USPTO that other parts of the Agency that were strongly opposed to the project are now using it as model for similar projects.

USPTO's surveys and focus groups have indicated improved employee satisfaction as a result of the program. Participants cite an enhanced ability to balance work and family issues because of time saved in commuting and the Agency has benefited from higher productivity. Customer satisfaction has remained high because the program is designed

to be transparent to the customer. The quality of work has been good, if not better than the general workforce, and the level of customer service has been excellent. Fewer interruptions and distractions and a more focused thinking time is available to plan, research and analyze work; therefore, better decisions are made.

Building on the successes of the early telework program, Ms. Cohn was the driving force behind the concept of work-at-home employees “hoteling” when they do need to be in the Office. This program allows an employee who works from home to call the Office and reserve a fully equipped cubicle space at the USPTO even though his regular desktop and office is at his house. This setup allows employees to telecommute for the vast majority of their work week and share pooled office space those few hours that they need to be at the office, greatly reducing the need for office space requirements and the associated cost. Through her efforts, in March 2003 the Trademark Work-at-Home program adopted the use of hoteling for all participants, resulting in the relinquishment of 45,000 square feet of office space, equivalent to an annual rent savings of \$1.5 million.

With the signing of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, Ms. Cohn’s vision of a robust telework program that enhances the Agency’s ability to recruit and retain employees regardless of where they live has come to total fruition. Ms. Cohn, an early proponent and architect of the USPTO pilot program mandated by the Act, has helped the Federal Government advance its telework programs and allowed the USPTO to continue to innovate and model improvements in telework business strategies. Under the Act, the USPTO has developed and implemented a unique government pilot program where employees may change their duty station to their homes, located anywhere in the continental United States, and return to USPTO headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, for a reasonable number of trips without cost to the agency. This program is a “win-win” for the Agency and the employee, as it allows the USPTO to retain the most experienced employees and allows the employees to move closer to family, to relocate with a spouse with a distant job, or simply, to reside in a part of the country that has meaning to the employee.

The Agency has received numerous awards for the Trademark telework program (e.g., the International Telework Association Award and the Council of Governments Agency Excellence in Telework Award, both in 2001, and the Telework Coalition Government Telework Award in 2003) and Ms. Cohn, a recognized expert on the subject of telecommuting, is often called upon to speak to other agencies and groups about the USPTO’s success with the concept.

Ms. Cohn has remained committed to a clear vision, despite many obstacles. She has undeniably played a crucial role in the breakthroughs that have allowed for the development and delivery of systems to capture data electronically, making things happen when others were only talking about similar projects. She has been instrumental in changing customer expectations about access and delivery of products, and in creating a culture that works to achieve “quality and customer service.” She has worked closely with colleagues inside the Agency to “sell” her vision of an electronic, virtual office.

The general acceptance of these changes is testimony to her success in communicating the need to change and in building critical coalitions. There was, for instance, broad skepticism regarding whether the work-at-home program she initially proposed could "work." External customers were openly hostile to the proposal and other agency managers believed it was a mistake. Through extensive contacts with both groups, Ms. Cohn reduced the open opposition to the project. Its success was partially based on the fact that she was able to convince others to at least allow the organization to pilot the program and allow it to expand if the pilot was successful. Its expansion to more than 90% of the Trademark examining workforce is testimony to her ability to sell tough proposals.

In summary, Ms. Cohn has an unparalleled ability to see where the Trademark Organization needs to be, and the creativity to move in that direction. Under her leadership the Trademark Organization is poised to continue the success it has achieved, leading the Agency in meeting its strategic goals through strong financial management, and record performance in consistent high-level quality and timeliness. She clearly has assured that the USPTO has a solid foundation for success in the 21st century, remaining resilient in the face of fluctuating and unpredictable workloads, balancing resources to ensure consistent high-level performance results are maintained. As such, she richly deserves to be recognized for the Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership.