

## IBM logs on to e-learning

When the highest ranking technology company of the Forbes “Super 100” (based on composite ranking in sales, profits, assets and market share) wanted a partner to provide management education in Europe it naturally looked to the world’s leading distance learning MBA provider.

“Henley Management College is committed to e-learning in executive education – and IBM, as a technology company, wants to be at the forefront,” says Walter Stepanek, Manager of Academic Partnership Programmes, Europe Middle East and Africa (EMEA) in Human Resources EMEA. Henley was already using Lotus Learning Space – created by Lotus, an IBM company – when it was approached by IBM to provide an MBA programme for the company. Ongoing development of Lotus Learning Space has given Henley the opportunity of working in partnership with IBM to develop its Learning Space technology. This partnership proved beneficial to all Henley’s distance learning programme participants – Lotus Learning Space is one of the most advanced distance learning technologies in the world. As well as providing all the course material online, course rooms and a coffee room give participants real time access to colleagues studying around the world, enabling them to discuss problems as they arise.

In 1998, IBM started a corporate MBA programme at Henley with a pilot intake. This year up to 200 employees will start on this corporate MBA, which is a programme tailored to the company’s needs. “We had the first graduations in October last year. Already we have a second intake going through this programme, and those who are studying are recommending it to their own employees,” says Walter.

In addition, IBM utilises the Henley consortium MBA which is run in conjunction with, among others, Ford, Vodafone and Electrolux, giving participants and their companies the opportunity to learn from different organisations.

Henley and IBM are spearheading a blended learning approach in their delivery of the MBA programmes. There are 20 to 25 residential school days in the programme over three years, and the core of the programme is delivered by e-learning, utilising virtual team working. “Many people doubted that effective executive education could be delivered in this innovative way. We have proved them wrong,” says Walter.

Walter has practical examples to illustrate how employees in IBM who have studied or are studying for an MBA are achieving success. “A significant proportion of people who are studying have been promoted to management positions – and in IBM, this means managing people as well. A significant proportion have been designated “Executive Resource”, which means they have been identified as high potential.

“At IBM, employees are offered stock options either for significant achievement, or if they are identified as a strategic resource for the company. From our MBA group, the percentage of those holding stock options is higher than that in the overall population,” says Walter.

To date, 750 IBM employees have enrolled for an MBA at Henley. “We have built a high level of trust with Henley; when one partner calls, the other tends to respond positively and quickly.

“In the future, we will be collaborating closely with Henley in the area of e-learning in general, what the future market trends are, and how an organisation can prepare for these. We need to prepare our executives for a lifelong learning journey. Given the half-life of knowledge and skills these days, executives must learn to learn remotely,” says Walter.