IBM Transfers Best Business Practices to Slovenian Industry

By Boris Čerin

IBM Slovenia has been operating successful for 13 years now, and at the beginning of this year the leadership of the company was handed over to the new managing director of IBM Slovenia and the Countries of South Eastern region, Biljana Weber, who gained the title of MBA after postgraduate studies in Britain. She has begun her career at IBM 13 years ago, entering management in 1996 as head of the Personal Computers Unit, after which she performed various management functions at IBM Slovenia. Then she worked for five years in Vienna, the last two as head of marketing for IBM Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa (CEMA). In conversation with her it was clear to me that she is an excellent manager with a range of experience in the area of international sales channels, in business development and in marketing leadership. She has also proven herself through her ability to build networks of business partners and through excellent cooperation with the top managers of IBM's clients. She is also the first woman CEO of IBM Slovenia, and one of the rare female CEOs of major IT companies in Europe.

Quark: How would you compare your work in Vienna with your new duties in Ljubljana?

Working in the management of a regional organization enables a person to recognise the wider aspects of how a global enterprise operates, and in contacts with the managers of subsidiaries in various countries to compare the similarities and differences in the way they operate. In this respect the CEMA region is exceptionally interesting – on the one hand it is a region with one of the highest growth rates in the whole of IBM, while on the other hand operations are relatively complicated owing to the profusion of countries (39), languages (21), cultures, religions ... My new responsibilities present me with new challenges and opportunities – I am especially pleased that I will once again be in direct daily contact with our clients and business partners – after a few years of more strategic and corporate work on the regional level, a person likes to get back to more daily contacts with the everyday market pulse. I believe that together with the management team of IBM Slovenia and South East area I can contribute even more successfuly to the transfer of IBM's global knowledge and experience to our environment, something that will be reflected in the commercial success and increased satisfaction of our clients, and ultimately in the good

business performance of IBM Slovenia and South East area.

Quark: What are the main tasks of IBM Slovenia?

The main area of work for IBM Slovenia is still the sale and support of the highest quality information technology.

Director of IBM Slovenia and the Countries of South Eastern Europe, Biljana Weber.

Like everywhere else in the world, in Slovenia alongside the classical sale of hardware and software, services are becoming increasingly important. In addition to services that are closely connected to IBM products – such as the design, installation and maintenance of our IT systems – business consultancy services are becoming increasingly important, and following

the acquisition of the consultancy firm Price Waterhouse Coopers Consulting, IBM is now one of the leading world providers of this service. IBM can therefore offer the transfer of the best business practices from the most progressive global environments to Slovenia's economy and administration. This involves numerous conceptual approaches for optimising operations in various sectors, process and data models, methodologies of introducing changes ... In a world where speed of adaptation and change is becoming one of the primary requirements for operating, familiarity with and use of such solutions can be one of the key factors for the success of our clients. Although such solutions are not cheap, it is already generally accepted around the world that learning from one's own mistakes is much more expensive and often enough even fatal, and above all too slow ... Of course from the international aspect IBM Slovenia can boost a strong team of around 60 experts, who work at the Ljubljana competence centre, from where they ensure support for number of IBM products for the whole of Europe. IBM Slovenia thus ranks among the major exporters of Slovenian skills and expertise.

Quark: What is the role of IBM's business partners?

IBM devotes great attention to cooperation with business partners. Through its own sales and service organisation IBM can only cover a portion of its potential clients, mainly the large organizations. So a large proportion of the market is covered directly or independently by our business partners, where of course we pay close attention to their high professional ability and generally to their operations, which must ensure the highest possible client satisfaction. IBM's model of cooperation with business partners is designed for the long term, and requires on both sides a great amount of diligence and

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investments but it provides for certified business partners in addition to the top IBM technologies at favourable prices IBM's support in any kind of difficulty, which is very important for the end user. In Slovenia, too, we have a growing number of business partners who are aware that for a long-term successful business model, which must be based on clients satisfaction, it is also important to have qualified and professional personnel of the highest quality.

Quark: Three years ago IBM introduced the concept of "E-business on demand". How are you establishing this in Slovenia?

E-business on demand involves a long-term conceptual approach into which IBM is gradually incorporating all its products and services. The basic concept is quite simple: we wish to help our clients set up and provide IT support for the kinds of integrated business processes within their organisations and with their business partners, suppliers and customers that will enable them to respond flexibly and rapidly to any kind of demand from their customers, to market opportunities or external threats. In the future, therefore, the development of information technology should head in the direction that we are already used to in electricity

supply – always available to clients, you pay for it by use, and the technical details of the power supply system in the background are of no interest to any of users. In Slovenia the idea of e-business on demand is for the moment being established primarily on the level of individual technical solutions. But some Slovenian organizations are also starting to realize that IT is not their main business, and they are starting to think about possible optimizations, so we are gradually anticipating greater demand for complex solutions.