Globalization has dramatically transformed our world and how we interact with each other. It has ushered in an era of unprecedented collaboration, transparency, and openness in how government and private industry think and act. Collaboration has contributed to such positive outcomes as the digital revolution, growth in per capita income, and the mobile workforce that have shrunk the world, integrated national economies into the global economy, and fostered political and social systems committed to aligning the interests of citizens and governments. These global trends have influenced the ICT industry, which has likewise been driven toward new levels of collaboration, transparency, and openness. We now rely on ICT products and services in every aspect of our lives, at home or at work. And more often than not, the ICT industry offers customers a broad range of choices because of increased competition. Nor is there any sign that the pace of innovations and choices is about to slow.

But growth of ICT products and services has created complex challenges in areas such as security, privacy, reliability, data management, and interoperability. As with other global challenges, there is no one single approach that will work for all situations and no one company can solve any of these problems on its own. Even if one company had the answer, customers do not want to be locked into one vendor; they want choice and competition. ICT companies (and companies in other sectors) are now collaborating, sharing information and ideas, and being transparent in ways and levels they never have before. The business of innovation is radically different today. Innovation increasingly takes place not in centralized R&D labs of large companies but in outside networks of innovators. Innovation itself has become dispersed and unpredictable; few if any companies can today hold all of the pieces of their own technology in their own hands. This new landscape has been aptly described by U.C. Berkeley Professor Henry Chesbrough as “Open Innovation.”

At the same time as there is heightened collaboration in the ICT industry, there is heightened competition. Increased competition and collaboration have contributed to the increased need for technical interoperability. (Interoperability is simply connecting people, data, and diverse systems.) With more and more vendors offering innovative products and services in the same categories, customers can choose based on numerous factors including security, reliability, interoperability, price point, or other criteria. The result is that customers now operate a heterogeneous ICT environment, with products and services from multiple vendors – and with varying degrees of interoperability. It is no surprise that interoperability has increasingly become an important feature to customers, and that they are looking to their vendors to improve this feature as appropriate. At Microsoft, we have clearly aligned our product and policy position, to meet this new era in computing, communications and ubiquitous connectivity.

This book clearly underscores the importance of interoperability within public administrations. It is a great collection of experiences, insights and practical guidelines for key policy and technical decision making.
makers in their ambition to enhance the citizen experience in dealing with integrated online administrative services. This book describes well the strategic, conceptual and architectural principles to adhere to, to interoperate and to make it work.

Prof Yannis Charalabidis has been entrenched in this subject since its beginning. He is one of the few academics who combine a scientific research oriented methodology with a broad experience on field trials, active policy discussions and commercial offerings and solutions. He masters the art to conceptualize the challenges of interoperable systems, with a clear focus on delivering ultimately “end-user”, “value-added” citizen proof services. He balances dogmatic positions with pragmatic results oriented approaches. His Government Interoperability Center, linked to the NTUA, is a nice ICT-tope (like bio-tope) to test these waters.

It is my pleasure to contribute to this foreword, and strongly recommend this book to all those who are open minded on achieving “interoperability” as a means to deliver real value out of ICT in our connected world.

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Wilfried Grommen holds a masters degree in civil engineering and electro-mechanical engineering with a specialization in microelectronics from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. He is Regional Technology Officer for Microsoft, acting as the spokesperson from Microsoft in the dialogue with governments in CEE around key technology policies (security, privacy, interoperability, standards, innovation). He joined Microsoft in 2001 as general manager for Microsoft.NET and Developer Technologies in the EMEA region. As such he managed overall.NET adoption, particularly among technical decision makers within the developer and architect communities. He served for 3 years as program director for the EMEA president in organizing the citizenship initiatives and CSR programs throughout the region.