Preface

The focus of this book is IT-Enabled Global Customer Service. Global companies are developing and facing fresh challenges at this time. Electronic commerce, electronic transactions and inter-organizational systems have been the subject of lively debate over a decennium, but real-world progress has been slower than expected.

The objective here is to combine conceptual, theoretical and practical thinking in this area. The idea of editing a book on the themes related to the topic was born among a group of business executives and university professors, who meet regularly in discussing timely managerial trends and developments. We work under the unofficial title of the Systems Group, and this publication is an effort to distribute the spirit of these discussions to a wider audience.

Consequently the structure here is a little different from a normal textbook. Our aim is to integrate theoretical thinking with practical illustrations of what actually happens. Executives and managers have contributed case papers on the issues they themselves have faced and handled. In their own way and style, they relate instances and stories from business situations and the lessons learned.

The approach is global in the sense that the authors come from the U.S. and Europe, and the case examples are all drawn from companies that operate worldwide. We have invited professors Alan Carsrud (The Anderson School at UCLA), F. Warren McFarlan (Harvard Business School), Wesley Johnston (Georgia State University), Lex Higgins (University of Colorado), David L. Hawk (New Jersey Institute of Technology) and Joachim Griese (University of Bern) to bring their understanding to bear and create a comprehensive and multifaceted overview. Harriette Bettis-Outland acted as co-author with Wesley Johnston on the business-to-business relationship analysis. Malin Brännback and Alan Carsrud have a joint chapter on an interesting special industry: biotech and IT. Pekka Huovinen and David Hawk have collaborated on a conceptual paper linked to their experiences in a number of construction projects.

Professors Ari Vepsäläinen (Helsinki School of Economics), Timo Saarinen (Helsinki School of Economics), Jussi Puhakainen (Tampere University) and Hannu Salmela (Turku School of Economics) present their theoretical views on customer
service, supported by case examples. Researchers Katariina Kemppainen, Jukka Kallio, Markku Tinnilä and Jarkko Vesa have been co-authors in these chapters.

One of the overriding aims of the book is to illustrate real-world development in the topic area in companies that operate globally. These valuable business insights are provided by Matti Perttula (Director, KONE), Juha Pärnistiö (Regional Director, ICL Invia), Kauno Mattila (Vice-President, ABB Group), Jorma Hurskainen (Director, Metso Automation), Panu Routila (Director, Outokumpu Copper) and Markku Rajaniemi (Vice-President, Nokia Mobile Phones). The Chairman of the Systems Group, Miikka Jahnukainen, has been one of the unifying forces in putting the book together and drawing conclusions from the case examples.

I express my warmest thanks to all the writers for their valuable contributions in drawing together the contemporary situation and examining further challenges in this field. I am grateful to Ms. Katja Aliranta for gathering together the articles and arranging the book in its final form. Mr. Alex Frost has proofread the English language of non-native authors, and I would like to thank him for his flexible assistance. I also extend my thanks to everyone who has added their commentary to the chapters and helped in finalizing the articles.

All the authors are grateful to Idea Group Publishing for accepting our proposal and publishing the book. Senior Academics Editor Mehdi Khosrow-Pour assisted us in making the proposal, and Michele Rossi has been very helpful at every stage of the editorial process; thank you, Mehdi and Michelle.

Our intention here is to offer new and practice-oriented views on the changing nature of customer relationships. Through this publication we wish to share with our readers, both academic and practitioners, the experiences gained in our careers at universities and in global companies.

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March 30, 2002