The Future Digital Economy
Digital Content – Creation, Distribution and Access

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Presentation by Andrea Pontremoli, CEO and Chairman, IBM Italy
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Session 9: Policy Roundtable: Identifying priority issues, tools and policy challenges: Moving forward

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When we look at the new digital scenarios, we see three forces that are shaping the global environment. The first one is technology. The physical world is taking on a digital dimension as it merges with information and communication technology. Virtually everything is becoming digital. On one end, we are gradually being surrounded by things that incorporate computing and communication power. On the other end, we have enormously powerful systems like IBM's Blue Gene, whose performance is in the range of 360 teraflops. The combined capabilities of pervasive computing and large computing power enables us to do things that were not possible in the past. For instance, research projects in the genomics and proteomics fields are now feasible while in the past they would have exceeded the life time of a researcher.

The second force pushing transformation is the uptake of open standards. The Internet and the Web would not exist without the capability to exchange data in a standardized way across borders and among different types of computing systems. Standards are also taking hold across industries, whether they are healthcare records, financial trading systems, security databases or inventory control systems.

The third catalyst of change is integration, at all levels in business and society. Businesses and institutions can now integrate operations and people on a scale never before possible. Organizations are becoming flexible as processes and operations can be integrated horizontally, across the enterprise and beyond, connecting customers, partners and suppliers around the world. Companies and institutions evolve from standalone entities to elements within an ecosystem.

A new model of innovation is emerging, which is open, collaborative, multidisciplinary and global. Communities of expertise communicate and collaborate across traditional corporate and national boundaries.

As this new model is driving progress in all fields of economy and society, we need to rethink our approach to innovation and the way we support creativity and new ideas.

One major issue is intellectual property. We must find a new balance between protecting the interests of individuals and companies that create truly new and useful inventions and the interests of innovative communities and creative ecosystems. For example, early in 2005 IBM granted access to more than 500 software patents to individuals and groups working on open source software like Linux and more recently gave access to its patent portfolio for the development of selected open healthcare and education software standards. Perhaps we should think less about intellectual property and more about intellectual capital, assets that are leveraged and used to create value.

Also, we must focus on developing the next generation of innovation leaders. Technology is now a central component of any business strategy. In fact, it is the application of technology to business designs and core processes that is helping enterprises around the world prepare to compete in a globally integrated economy. And it's this combination of technology with strategic insight that produces innovation.

Innovation requires all of us, working together. If we demonstrate that kind of collaborative leadership, we will create new opportunities and a wealth of benefits to share.