Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to contribute the Foreword to this Handbook. Qualitative methods have the potential to transform the research agenda in international business and, indeed, can be said to have already done so in some areas of the literature on the subject. As this book shows, however, there are obstacles in the way of pushing this forward. Qualitative research is not an easy option. It can often be expensive, time consuming, risky and even dangerous to the health of the researcher! Those of us who have done ‘fieldwork’ will (almost universally) extol the insights provided. My first experience of real fieldwork was during my PhD research (at Lancaster University) on foreign direct investors in Ireland. I had dutifully read the literature, decided my objectives, constructed my questionnaire and boldly set off to the Irish Republic. The encounter with real managers in real foreign firms transformed my understanding. As I read this volume, smiles of recognition appeared on my face many times. So, too, did new levels of understanding.

This book conveys the sense of actual researchers (of different genders, nationalities and outlooks) genuinely confronting real philosophical and practical problems. It will be an inspiration to confused researchers (admit it, all researchers are confused – that’s why we do research). It is full of practical advice ranging from the philosophy underlying the research to when to use a tape recorder in interviews.

The editors and authors are to be commended for an engaging, useful and thought provoking end product which will be read with pleasure (and I hope will provoke some anger too) and will be a useful guidebook. It is my hope that this book will stimulate more, and better research in the international business field.

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