Foreword

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I am delighted to have been asked to write a foreword for this exceptional book. Helle Neergaard and John Parm Ulhøi have compiled a remarkable collection of work that both represents the range of methods and demonstrates the depth of insight that can be achieved through qualitative approaches. This book is not simply a handbook of qualitative research methods, though it well achieves this aim; it is also an important contribution to the field of entrepreneurship research. The development of an academic field occurs in fits and starts, often sparked by the publication of an important article or book. Certain publications emerge, usually unplanned, as being significant points in the development of a discipline that act as 'moments of reflection' within a subject, enabling a periodic stock-taking of the subject's domain, content, approaches and boundaries. This book provides a 'moment of reflection' for entrepreneurship research.

There has been a tendency within entrepreneurship, as with many of the social science and management disciplines, for individual researchers to be associated with either qualitative or quantitative methods, the two approaches erroneously juxtaposed in opposition. One of the founders of entrepreneurship research in Europe, James Curran, viewed research as a craft, and researchers as skilled craftsmen and women capable of using all of the methodological tools at their disposal. No researcher can be expert in all methodologies and personal preferences may favour one approach over another, but every researcher should be aware of the range of available approaches. As the editors state in their introduction, this book represents a 'methodological toolbox' that can be used to refresh the memories of some researchers and introduce new methods and techniques to others.

Three issues emerge from reading this book. First, the book makes plain the sheer range and diversity of qualitative research methods and their potential contributions to our understanding of entrepreneurship. Second, qualitative research emerges as a deeply personal experience, and researchers' passion for their subject shines through each chapter. Third, qualitative approaches, most often associated with the European research tradition, are becoming increasingly valued by North American scholars. Good research is not based on the geographical location of its practitioners, nor on their specific methodological traditions, but on how deeply they

engage with their academic and research subjects, their ability to draw together theory and practice, and the truths that emerge from their studies.

This book widens the options for entrepreneurship researchers, allowing them to ask more interesting questions and accommodate greater complexity in their research findings. In so doing, researchers can more accurately reflect the lives of entrepreneurs and their experiences of entrepreneurship.