

# Preface

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The origins of this book lay in a somewhat contorted attempt, that was eventually successful, to access research funding to conduct a comparative research project entitled *Collective Learning in the Knowledge Economy: Milieu or Market?* The aim was to examine advanced technology industry, including that located in clusters, in different countries with liberal and coordinated regulatory regimes, to see if firms in a proximate milieu such as a cluster performed better or worse than similar firms not located in clusters. A first effort, including German and Norwegian partners as well as the Austrian and UK ones, was in 2001 sent to the European Science Foundation collaborative research scheme, in which at least three needed to succeed with their own national research councils for the research to proceed. Only the Austrian proposal succeeded as the other three were not supported, hence the successful proposal also ‘failed’. But in coordinated market Austria the applicants were encouraged to submit a further proposal, whereas in liberal market UK that was barred. This was discovered when an improved version, helped by taking account of assessor comments, was submitted only to be refused entry because revised proposals were disallowed. Clearly no opportunities for making learning gains in the UK research funding arena then.

Determined to keep trying with what peer-reviewers had thought a worthy project and spurred on by the success of the Austrian proposal to acquire national research foundation funding, the further improved proposal was sent to a UK private research foundation where it was turned down moderately brutally, and a little depressingly. Meanwhile the Austrian work was about to commence – utilizing almost exactly the same methodology. At Franz Tödttling’s final urging, a completely revised version was written, which given its multiple polishings was probably the best the UK applicant had ever put together. It was submitted, accepted for review and, finally, in 2003 was successful. So ESRC Award Number RES-000-23-0192 is duly acknowledged, as is the Austrian Science Foundation for enabling the research on which this book is based to be conducted. Work started about six months after the Austrian project, we met for catch-up and planning meetings, and got on with the research. The Austrian partners then had to seek further funding from a different source (the Foundation of the City of Vienna for the Support of Sciences) to conduct

interviews with biotechnology firms and intermediaries, and the research finished in early 2006. Hence the results readers will see were the product of hard-fought struggle and not a little tenacity of the kind entrepreneurs are often familiar with but which academics too often file away and forget. Entrepreneurs in our experience will press on against waves of failure because they simply believe in an idea and that eventually someone somewhere will buy it. This is because they usually do not have many ideas to play with, whereas for academics ideas are the coin of the realm. This argument about the importance of tenacity in academic research is one we are happy to share with and urge upon readers of this book. We also wish to express thanks to Edward Elgar and especially Matthew Pitman for their help and understanding as we brought this publishing project to fruition.

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