The theme of the Third Klein Symposium on the Management of Technology originated in research that my Penn State colleagues and I undertook for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The Manufacturing Extension Partnership within NIST has responsibility for enhancing the productivity and effectiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United States. These firms are defined by the US Department of Commerce as having 500 or fewer employees. A major premise underlying our research was that SMEs must become more innovative in order to compete effectively in the emerging global economy. Recent entrepreneurial start-ups already have this capability and can serve as role models for others, but many SMEs (97 per cent of all exporting firms in the US) are not innovative and face increasing competitive pressure from low-cost foreign producers. Operational efficiency is necessary but not sufficient to compete in such a world. Differentiated and less price-sensitive products are becoming increasingly important to competitive success.

When our research began in 2003, I was a relative newcomer to the study of SMEs and, more specifically, to aspects of internationalization, which include importing, exporting, foreign direct investment and strategic alliances to sell products abroad. An extensive international network of scholars has been writing in this field for years and has produced a significant body of literature. My colleagues and I faced a steep, but fascinating, learning curve. When exploring themes for the Third Klein Symposium, the idea of linking its theme to our continuing NIST work seemed quite natural and promised great synergy. It also implied hard work and the opportunity to work with a new community of scholars, and ideally to form some new lasting friendships.

Thirty-two academics were invited to write papers for the symposium that was held at Penn State on 12–14 October 2005. The invitations included a list of issues and questions to serve as catalysts for what these academics might like to address. As appropriate for a symposium that concerned the global economy, the academics included representatives from the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada and Singapore. The first two days of the symposium were devoted to brief overviews of the papers, and to comments and critiques of them. Authors were expected to revise their papers accordingly. On the third day of the symposium, senior executives from the public and private sector were invited to present their experiences with internationalization or their views on the role of SMEs in the global economy. Their presentations were made to a large and more general audience. Four of the presenters were winners of US federal or state awards for exceptional export performance. Two Canadian firms were recognized as among the ‘Top 100 Employers’ and/or ‘50 Best Managed Companies’ in Canada. The Dean’s Office of the Smeal College of Business contributed financial support for this day of executive presentations.

My deep and enduring gratitude and affection go to Robert and Judith Klein, who endowed my professorship at Penn State. The symposium that bears their name would have been impossible without the financial support that their endowment provided. I am
privileged and fortunate to consider them as dear friends as well as benefactors, a rare and wonderful combination that few faculty members with endowed positions enjoy. As was the case with this symposium and the two preceding ones in 1990 and 1997, Bob and Judy Klein were continually in my thoughts during the planning and hosting of these events, and in the preparation of this book.

I struggle to find words of praise that are expressive and profound enough for the many contributions that Barbara Kinne has made to this entire endeavour. She has taken the initiative from preliminary planning of the symposium to final delivery of the manuscript, undertaking many tasks before I thought of them or hesitated to ask her to do because I feared imposing on her good nature and personal time. My effectiveness as an academic and an administrator has increased considerably since she became my administrative assistant in 2004. I can now undertake many more initiatives and be in many more places because of her skill and dedication to excellence.

Finally, but very importantly, I thank my wife, Liz, with whom I share everything in my professional and personal life. We both knew that holding the symposium in the same year that I assumed new duties as Associate Dean for Research would test our endurance and patience. I do not think I could have borne the long hours of work if we could not share brief interludes of conversation and support. Being an academic herself, she understands the seduction and consequences of overcommitment. I hope that I am nearly as worthy of praise and appreciation from her when it is my turn to reciprocate, an occasion that will surely arise soon.