Preface

The original Handbook on the Knowledge Economy was published in 2005 and one of our motivations for putting it together was to increase knowledge about knowledge and to present what is known about knowledge in an accessible form for researchers, policy professionals, managers and students. The evidence suggests this approach met with some success. Sales of the original Handbook have been healthy and the book and individual chapters in it have been widely cited in scholarly journals, professional journals, books, theses and dissertations, as well as in various government and industry publications in many countries. Like its predecessor, this volume attempts to maintain a similar stance and have a similar impact.

The central theoretical organizing principle of the Handbook is that knowledge has no practical meaning in the absence of people and life. This second volume therefore maintains the focus on people and social concerns that was central to its predecessor. The reason for this is both theoretical and instrumental. The theoretical reason is because contemporary research has clearly shown that human social behaviours are fundamental drivers of knowledge systems. The practical reason is that because people and social factors are central to knowledge systems, there is no choice but for knowledge research, knowledge management and knowledge policy production to understand and work with these fundamentals if they are to achieve positive outcomes.

Knowledge enacted in life always has some political dimension to it. In some uses it is big ‘P’ Politics and in other uses it is small ‘p’ politics. Sometimes we call this political dimension persuasive, or purposive, or strategic, or goal oriented, but it is still political. Academic books always have purposes and goals that encompass big or small ‘p’ politics. In this light, we acknowledge that always close to its surface is this book’s editors’ and authors’ collective senses of democracy, openness, humanity and respect for knowledge of many different kinds and origins. Indeed, some chapters in this and the previous volume directly address the dynamics of politics and power in and around knowledge. Others offer insights about how to be more open or humane. Sociological, social philosophy and social psychological dynamics inform yet more chapters, including those chapters written from legal and economic perspectives.

Collectively, the two volumes of the Handbook on the Knowledge Economy cover a considerable amount of territory in pursuit of enhancing
the world by dealing better with knowledge and knowledge-based activities. Having said this, we still cannot claim to have covered all the bases. Knowledge is an aspect of all human activity and there is still a need for knowledge research, knowledge management and knowledge policy to continue to push back the limits of their foci.

We acknowledge Edward Elgar, the company and the man, for supporting this series (and other books we have published on knowledge). We have known Edward for many years and have always enjoyed the personal touch he brings to the arduous job of book publishing. It is appropriate to acknowledge here the contribution that Edward has made to intellectual life through his work as a publisher. His proclivity to give voice to those who have something different to say, something challenging to say, or something difficult to say has made a difference and we value that. We also enjoy the enthusiastic and effective way the publishing team at Edward Elgar always approach completing a book. We also thank all of our contributors who have taken the time and effort to write for this book. Writing a chapter for a book like this is a non-trivial task and it takes a great deal of time; something none of us have much of.

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Brisbane, March 2011