How can sustainable change and development in organizations be studied with an interactive research approach? This is the main question addressed in the work of the HELIX VINN Excellence Centre, and also in this book. It originates from the idea that one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary private and public organizations is to continually develop their capabilities for innovation and sustainable development.

The research programme within the HELIX Centre has been in operation for almost ten years and has involved approximately 50 researchers (including PhD students) from Sweden and abroad. The basis for this work has been a partnership approach, whereby research groups from the university, private firms, the public sector and labour market organizations work together in a so-called Triple Helix collaboration. The programme’s main focus is on issues that have high priority in the field of work life research as well as in policy debates, such as those involving most governments, the European Union Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In line with this, an overall objective of the research at HELIX has been to contribute to the development of new types of work and ways of organizing and developing work.

The HELIX research programme, like this book, spans a number of different perspectives and has been organized into five sub-programmes: ‘Production and organization development’; ‘Learning, change and innovation’; ‘Health, competence and work ability’; ‘New forms of organization’; and ‘Entrepreneurship and innovation’.

The research and innovation activities carried out at HELIX have been framed within an interactive research approach. This means there has been a strong emphasis on the dual task of contributing both to long-term theory development and innovation processes. The programme has used a mix of methodologies, ranging from descriptive-analytical studies (such as surveys or qualitative case studies) to different types of evaluation or follow-up studies, to studies based on different forms of interventions. Regardless of the type of study, a strong focus on reflective, theoretical work has been a common theme.

A starting point for this book was the International HELIX Conference on Innovative Practices in Work, Organisation and Regional
Development – Problems and Prospects organized by the HELIX research Centre and held in Linköping on 12–14 June 2013. Over 250 researchers, policy-makers and business representatives from over 20 countries participated and contributed to the event. Selected works from this conference provide the basis of this book.

The groundwork of the book began in the autumn of 2013 when researchers from HELIX discussed potential themes and which chapters to include. In line with the HELIX programme, we wanted to reflect a wide variety of perspectives on the subject. One of the more important activities was a two-day retreat in August 2014, during which the authors were able to discuss drafts of chapters, both their own and those of other authors.

The preparation, revisions of various chapters and editing of this book has been an inspiring journey. First, we would like to thank Gunilla Rapp for excellent support in keeping a record of all contributions and for putting the book together. We also gratefully acknowledge the review work that has been carried out by included authors and other colleagues. In particular, we would like to thank Martina Berglund, Jostein Langstrand and Anna Fogelberg Eriksson for their valuable inputs and comments to the book. We also would like to thank James Morrison and Ingela Dellby and her team for checking the language of the book chapters. Last but not least, we would like to thank our main funder VINNOVA – Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems, and our partnership for their generous financial support over ten years.

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