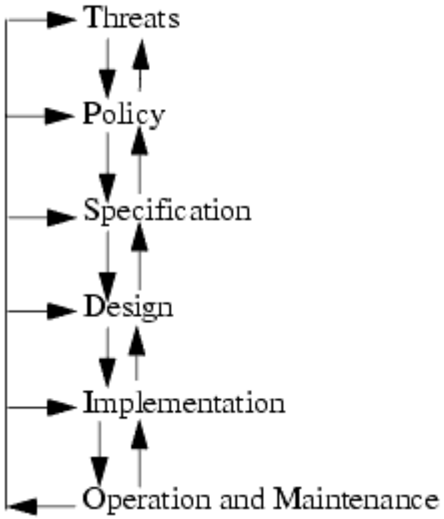
1.8. Tying It All Together

The considerations discussed above appear to flow linearly from one to the next (see Figure 1-1). Human issues pervade each stage of the cycle. In addition, each stage of the cycle feeds back to the preceding stage, and through that stage to all earlier stages. The operation and maintenance stage is critical to the life cycle. Figure 1-1 breaks it out so as to emphasize the impact it has on all stages. The following example shows the importance of feedback.

Figure 1-1. The security life cycle.



EXAMPLE: A major corporation decided to improve its security. It hired consultants, determined the threats, and created a policy. From the policy, the consultants derived several specifications that the security mechanisms had to meet. They then developed a design that would meet the specifications.

During the implementation phase, the company discovered that employees could connect modems to the telephones without being detected. The design required all incoming connections to go through a firewall. The design had to be modified to divide systems into two classes: systems connected to “the outside,” which were put outside the firewall; and all other systems, which were put behind the firewall. The design needed other modifications as well.

When the system was deployed, the operation and maintenance phase revealed several unexpected threats. The most serious was that systems were repeatedly misconfigured to allow sensitive data to be sent across the Internet in the clear. The implementation made use of cryptographic software very difficult. Once this problem had been remedied, the company discovered that several “trusted” hosts (those allowed to log in without authentication) were physically outside the control of the company. This violated policy, but for commercial reasons the company needed to continue to use these hosts. The policy element that designated these systems as “trusted” was modified. Finally, the company detected proprietary material being sent to a competitor over electronic mail. This added a threat that the company had earlier discounted. The company did not realize that it needed to worry about insider attacks.

Feedback from operation is critical. Whether or not a program is tested or proved to be secure, operational environments always introduce unexpected problems or difficulties. If the assurance (specification, design, implementation, and testing/proof) phase is done properly, the extra problems and difficulties are minimal. The analysts can handle them, usually easily and quickly. If the assurance phase has been omitted or done poorly, the problems may require a complete reevaluation of the system. The tools used for the feedback include auditing, in which the operation of the system is recorded and analyzed so that the analyst can determine what the problems are.