

for over 150 years; we should know how to do this)—but the problem boundaries are harder to draw, and there is a much more complex and dynamic context around the problems we are facing today. That context ultimately defines what practices will work, and which will fail.

Even organizations that fully realize the fluid nature of the world around them often feel they cannot move forward without first defining the problem. But by defining the problem, they inadvertently freeze the context too, and more often than not this is a grave mistake that will come back to haunt them as they try to implement their new solution. One of the core lessons that we will draw from the expert designers' practices that will be introduced in the next chapters is that new approaches can be developed to deal with open, complex, dynamic, and networked problem situations without prematurely fixing the problem formulation.

But before we start prescribing a “cure” that will help organizations deal with problem-solving in a different way, we first need to explore what lies behind their current conventional problem-solving practices. And we need to ask ourselves what makes these practices so resistant to change, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that they do not deliver the expected results anymore. To put it in terms of medical diagnostics, we need to get beyond the symptoms of these problem-solving breakdowns, and examine the syndromes that are at the root of it all. The examples described above illustrate a variety of degrees and kinds of “stuckness” that organizations (whether public-sector organizations or commercial companies) experience these days. Let’s explore the underlying syndromes that all have in common (see figure 1.2).

“THE LONE WARRIOR”

First of all, we can observe that in all these cases the problem-solving situation was set in such a way that one major party rightly or wrongly felt that they “owned” the problem and needed to drive the problem-solving process, and they honestly believed this approach to be in everyone’s best interest. In cases like these, one party seeks total control over the problem-solving process, and usually positions itself outside the problem-solving arena (everything else needs to change, but never them). While that may be a good and efficient way to work in conventional problem situations, we can see that in situations like the high-speed train problem, where other stakeholders seek to influence the solution, conflicts arise immediately. There has been no process to create a basis of trust and understanding between the lead organization and these