who remain are basically stuck. Polite society tends to look away from these issues, and (literally) does not want to go there. The question of what to do now rests with the social housing providers, often local councils or social housing authorities. Most of these housing authorities were originally set up as organizations to efficiently roll out large housing projects. To give them credit, many of them now support their communities of tenants with very committed networks of social workers. But their conventional problem-solving strategies still concentrate on the "bricks and mortar," and when the social problems become overwhelming, they seek physical solutions (pulling down the buildings, and starting all over). This tendency is reinforced by the media, which invariably portrays these neighborhoods as drab, gray, and menacing. But we will see later in this chapter (and in case study 15) that this requires new thinking. There are other ways to address these dauntingly complex problem situations, if we start from the realization that *this problem is not about the buildings*.

THE CHALLENGES

Now we need to spend a couple of moments on understanding these challenges better. First we will look at the nature of the kind of problem we are up against, and ask the question, "What do we actually mean when we talk about 'open, complex, dynamic, and networked problems'?" (see figure 1.1). Then we will look into what makes these problems hard to solve, identifying the counterforces in organizations that keep them from addressing these problems effectively: the five syndromes of conventional organizations.

So what do we mean when we say that these contemporary problems have an "open, complex, dynamic, and networked" nature? Point by point:

"OPEN"
An open problem is one where the system border is not clear, or where it is permeable. It is important to realize that normally when we start out solving a problem we draw a mental circle, nominating things to think about and what to leave out. Anything beyond the circle we call "context," and that will not play a part in our thinking about the problem. Yet in some cases now, we find problem situations in which it is very unclear where this circle should be drawn, where we really cannot say what can be safely excluded and ignored. Any rash