In a worst-case scenario, the organization might be holding on to its conventional practices for dear life, often not even knowing why. This grasping is accompanied by a degree of defeatism or melancholia, a nostalgia for the times when the world was still understandable, a golden age that is now long gone.

This pattern of behavior, effectively the locking down of a problem situation, leads to a deeply engrained inability of organizations to step beyond the boundaries of their earlier ways of thinking. Creativity consultants then provide workshops to help people "think outside the box"—which may help a little, but organizations often do not realize what a real change in their own practice will mean, and do not realize that the boxes they are trying to escape from are completely self-made. Later in this book we will see how design practitioners manage to escape creating these thought traps for themselves. The "self-made box" is an important syndrome because in a truly bound situation, even very mild and reasonable people can be strangely persistent, relentlessly pushing a certain problem-solving approach for lack of alternatives. They are blocking new thinking and reinforcing the patterns of the "self-made box."

"TAKING THE RATIONAL HIGH GROUND"

Deep down, all organizations that display clear signs of these first three syndromes are convinced that their way of dealing with the problem situation is completely rational, and that they couldn't have done anything else. This belief in their own rationality, and the deeply rooted conviction that there is only one rational position, can make organizations strangely inflexible in their problem-solving approach. This inflexibility persists even to the point of inducing a curious repetitiveness, where we see an organization using the same disastrous approach over and over again. The same government that planned the high-speed train link also constructed a major freight line running right through the country a couple of years later. That project displayed exactly the same dysfunctional pattern as the one before (de Vries and Bordewijk 2009). The strong pattern that emerges here goes beyond clinging to cherished assumptions or preconceptions: at its core is the conviction that the organization's problem-solving actions are completely rational and deeply self-evident. This is reminiscent of the way generals in the First World War kept ordering waves of attacks on the enemy trenches—only to have their troops mowed down time and again. Even when this sometimes happened several times a day, they persisted because they just had no other strategy to break the stalemate. Thus