

rational thought is disembodied, and (5) rational thought is dispassionate. Later they add one more point: (6) a distinction is commonly made between practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning (where we hold that rational action must be firmly based on the results of theoretical rather than practical reasoning). Dreyfus, in his critique of the rationalist paradigm in the field of artificial intelligence (Dreyfus 1992), has pointed out an additional assumption: (7) rational thought and action take place in a “closed world.” By this he means that rational thought lacks the capacity to admit new information once problem-solving has commenced (see appendix 2 and Simon 1973): everything that is needed to solve the problem has to be knowable before the problem-solving process begins (see figure 7.2).

In our society, we are encouraged to strive toward realizing this ideal of rationality. Yet we fail constantly because in real life these seven assumptions are almost never met. To illustrate this, just contrast the real-life process of planning a high-speed train link (case 1) with the assumptions of the “theory of rational action,” point by point.

(1) *Rational thought is literal*—yet, within the context of planning the high-speed train, it is clear that the same words mean different things to different people. The contrast between a rural area described as “uninteresting” (by one of the planners) or as “where we belong” by one of the locals could not be greater. There is no way that this problem-solving process can be built on a common ground of literal concepts. (2) *Rational thought is logical*—but it is clear that the assumptions of the various stakeholders which form the basis of their own “logic” are very dissimilar. There is no dominant or overarching logic in this problem arena, so people will try to impose their own version on others. This is power play: the ones who can dictate the terms and metaphors that lead the discussion are sure to get their way. (3) *Rational thought is conscious*—but many stakeholders who need to be taken into account actually will not be conscious of their own standpoint, assumptions, and preconceptions. Even professional organizations like the government, which tend to claim they have rationality on their side, rarely know their own motivations and preconceptions. (4) *Rational thought is disembodied*—this assumption doesn’t hold either. The people living around the projected track initially felt in shock, nervous, and sick to the stomach, and their anger rose as the consultation process unfolded and they felt ignored. As a result, they lacked the capacity to have empathy for other stakeholders or to contribute to the resolution of the problem. (5) *Rational thought is dispassionate*—none of the parties in this problem arena can