



# ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CONTRACTS

New and Traditional Colleges

PAUL S. GOODMAN

OXFORD

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To Denise  
A Waterfall of Ideas

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## PREFACE

Around 20 years ago, I received a call from the provost of Carnegie Mellon. He wanted to meet. Over the years we had other interactions, but what seemed strange to me was that he was coming to my office versus the more traditional way of setting up an appointment and visiting him.

The focus of this conversation was that the University had signed a memorandum of understanding with ITESM, a large private university in Mexico, and Paul Christiano wanted me to explore partnership opportunities with this university. This was the beginning of a more than 20-year exploration building global alliances for Carnegie Mellon. As discussed later in the book, these have taken many forms such as extending master's degree programs, particularly in information technology, to other countries and universities. There also has been the creation of educational networks composed of universities within or in different countries designed to help underserved educational populations with different forms of technology-enhanced learning. In other instances Carnegie Mellon has been a design partner in establishing new institutions of higher education. In most cases these educational innovations are still functioning. In the case of the original partner (ITESM) there have been a variety of initiatives in executive education, PhD education, and a joint master's program. These global activities have continued and been extended under the current provost, Mark Kamlet.

All of these global activities have paralleled my research agenda, which has focused on organizational change, organizational assessments, and team research, for some 40 years. For many years, these two paths of institution building and research were independent but complementary.

The book creates a convergence of these two paths in my life. It is inherent in the research focus of this book—creating new organizational learning contracts and assessing their impacts. It also is reflected in my choice of providing both a theory and practice component in the book. This practice component is reflected in the contributions of two individuals—Rick Miller and Steve Miller (not related)—who personally led the start up of two new colleges (chapters 7 and 8). I appreciate their collaboration. I drew on my personal experiences for the chapter on Design (chapter 9).

Writing is essentially an individual task. The responsibility for the design, implementation, and writing falls to me, with the exception of the two invited chapters.

At the same time, books are rarely the product of one person. My wife—Denise Rousseau, an organizational psychologist—read, critiqued, and edited all the chapters. In our marriage we have had this wonderful opportunity to provide critiques of each other’s work in an open, thoughtful way, and at the same time, have an evolving wonderful marriage.

Gerard Beenen, then a doctoral student and now a professor at California State University, Fullerton, was an integral part of this book. He has played all the important roles including interviewing, data coding, data analysis, and writing, particularly chapter 4 on “Expectations.” But more importantly, he has been the closest colleague to work through the big conceptual and more detailed part of writing a book.

Cathy Senderling has been the editor of this book. From year one in my career as an assistant professor, I always have believed in using independent editors. Cathy and I have worked together for a number of years. She has the qualities of being a good technical editor, but more importantly, she sees the big picture and has many important insights on structure.

Betty Cosnek has been my administrative assistant for 14 years. She always has been supportive and understanding. In respect to the book, she has managed the administrative parts of planning and implementing all the field work, as well as the creation of the manuscript. She is a good friend and valued colleague.

Others have contributed. Nora Balint is a relatively new member of our office. She did a great job on all the detailed aspects of building a book, such as problem solving, typing, references, ensuring tables are correct and in the right place. Nicole Jackson was one of our interviewers; she is working on her PhD. We had a big coding job to put the qualitative interview responses into some quantitative form. A group of students, led by Nicholas Yoder, helped in that task.

I appreciate the cooperation of our field sites. They were quite open, and we had access to students, faculty, and staff before and during our two-wave data collection. Following IRB protocol, we have not identified students, faculty, or sites.

This project was supported by NSF grant #0451310. We could not have done the research or book without this support. “Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.”

PART ONE

*Theory and Empirical Results*

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Imagine two very different universities, Alpha and Omega. Both recruit top-notch students and excellent faculty. Students spend about \$250,000 to be educated at these private universities, both of which place graduates with large and small private- and public-sector employers or graduate programs at prestigious universities. But there the similarities end. Students at Alpha enter with a general idea of what the school will be like, while Omega students start school with very specific expectations about what they will learn and the means by which their learning will occur. Alpha's students mainly expect their school to provide them a challenging education and help them get a good job after graduation. Their instruction mostly consists of traditional methods such as lectures, labs, and some projects. These students are fairly satisfied with their education upon graduation. Students at Omega, on the other hand, expect a lot more than a challenging experience and a job. They expect to develop specific skills such as teamwork and qualitative and quantitative problem solving. They expect to develop these skills through specific forms of instruction including team-based projects that solve real-world problems, peer instruction, mentoring, participation in research projects, and some traditional methods. Omega students are highly satisfied with their learning experience upon graduation and remain very committed to their institution. Employers also are extremely satisfied with Omega's graduates because they are better prepared to solve real-world problems. Employers of Alpha's students, on the other hand, are satisfied with hiring Alpha's graduates because Alpha's selection process ensures most students have abilities that are well above average. Many employers of these graduates, however, spend significant time and resources on training them to solve real-world problems, since their education did not provide them such training—a problem rarely reported by employers of Omega's graduates. There is not a lot of transfer of learning between the learning experience of Alpha and the work setting.

This book develops and tests a framework for understanding, diagnosing, and evaluating differences across educational settings such as that described above, using a concept called an “organizational learning contract.” An organizational learning contract (OLC) is a shared agreement among major parties in an educational institution regarding their roles and responsibilities with respect to learning. The relevant parties are students, faculty and staff, as well as alumni and external parties in some cases. The contract is “organizational” because it is initiated by the educational institution and represents a common or shared understanding among the parties about the learning process. In other words, the contract is between the institution and its members.

The contract we are talking about here is focused on learning. It spells out the actions each party should take, as well as defining what, how, when, and where learning unfolds in the institution. It is a collective psychological and normative contract, in that individual members collaborate in support of learning based upon their shared beliefs about how learning will take place. One finding from our research is that students, faculty, and staff in highly ranked traditional institutions have little understanding of any OLC, despite the large amount of time and resources invested in four years of college. Students and faculty in some of the newer institutions presented in the book have much clearer understandings about what, how, when, and where learning will occur.

Institutions have different organizational learning contracts. Some are very explicit while others are more implicit. Explicit means the institution uses many different socialization mechanisms to create a shared understanding about how learning will take place. Implicit means the opposite. Students, faculty, and staff have generic expectations, such as this college will require hard work, it will help me get a job, and so on. These expectations come from prior socialization experiences in high school and from family and friends, and not from the institution of higher education. Some contracts are quite specific as to what, how, when, and where learning will occur; others are more vague. Some contracts deal with many dimensions, while others are narrower.

## INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS

The OLC concept has a number of intellectual origins. In the organizational psychology literature, there is an impressive stream of research (cf. Rousseau, 1995) on psychological contracts. These are psychological understandings between employers and individual employees about their roles and obligations. Failure to fulfill these understandings leads to violations and lower effectiveness (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). It is important to note these psychological contracts are at the individual level. An OLC is at the institutional or college level. However, both rely on individual psychological beliefs and expectations in creating certain phenomena. In addition to the psychological contract research, there also is

an educational literature on learning contracts. This parallels the literature on psychological contracts, as the contractual relationship is between a teacher and the student. The task is to build an individualized learning plan between the professor and student in a given course. Again, the OLC differs because it is an understanding initiated at the institutional level; specifically, all students are parties to the contract, and there is a shared understanding between students, faculty, and others about the basic elements of the OLC. All course and non-course learning experiences are part of the OLC.

Another relevant literature deals with organizational change (cf. Goodman, 1982; Goodman, 2001). The question is, how do OLCs come into being? To build psychological understanding among members of an institution requires careful consideration in the design, implementation, and institutionalization of the contract. One does not casually mention the contract in a recruiting visit and leave it at that. Rather, one has to embed the contract among all the relevant players and reinforce it through their practices in the institution. This is a difficult change challenge. Designing the basic elements of the contract is one phase. However, to make it operational one needs to go through the change phases of implementation and institutionalization.

There are other literatures that factor into the OLC concept. Interest in student expectations and satisfaction is related to the OLC (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Unmet expectations within the OLC can result in student dissatisfaction (e.g., Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). The role of student engagement and learning also has connections to OLC (Kuh et al., 2005). Organizational learning contracts can be specified in a way that enhances or detracts from student engagement and learning. Research on institutional image, culture, and mission (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Pike, Kuh, & Gonyea, 2003; Belanger, Mount, & Wilson, 2002) also parallels the formation of the OLC. Schools that have a salient identity, a shared set of values and beliefs, and a clearly defined mission may be more likely to have an explicit OLC. Note, however, that this is not necessarily the case. The OLC focuses only on learning, while an institution's image, culture, and mission may or may not be pertinent to specific beliefs about what competencies are to be learned, and how and in which environments these competencies will be learned. Thus, the OLC is both complementary to and distinct from psychological contracts, student expectations, and institutional attributes.

## **MY ROLE**

My background and orientation toward research within and about organizations, rather than a specific focus on higher education policy or research, inform this book's design. I have done research primarily on organizational effectiveness, change, and workplace teams. My studies cross many sectors (e.g., factories, financial offices, mining, hospitals, etc.). I am not a "higher education person." However, as a field

researcher, I study organizations to understand how they function by doing intensive studies rather than general surveys or experiments. Doing in-depth organizational studies in various industries provides me a range of perspectives for understanding organizational processes and assumptions that may be less accessible to higher education researchers and administrators.

My venture into the educational sector came about through my role in educational innovation in my university. For the last 20 years I have worked for the Provost of Carnegie Mellon University with a focus on building global educational alliances. Over these years, I have built educational networks (i.e., collaborations among multiple universities to provide education to underserved populations), developed specific global Ph.D. and Master's degree programs for the University, and participated in the design of new universities in Latin America and Asia. I have approached all these educational innovations from the perspective of organizational change and effectiveness. Many of these initiatives are still in operation. My first-hand engagement in these higher education changes provides insight into the issues surrounding the design and implementation of organizational learning contracts in universities.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE OLC**

One requirement in introducing a new concept like the OLC is to address its contribution to theory and practice. OLCs can offer new perspectives to higher education and organizational researchers, as well as an opportunity for practitioners in the higher education field to sharpen their focus and enhance their educational programs.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY AND RESEARCH**

Organizational learning contracts provide new insights into the literatures on learning, organizational change, organizational effectiveness, and psychological contracts. For example, we examine learning at the college level. We explore whether there is some understanding about learning outcomes and learning environments and how these understandings are learned and shared. This is very different from individual level studies on learning. Or we look at how the different learning environments contribute to personal models of learning. That is, what did the students learn about how to learn? In the change area, we explore, among other issues, the change mechanisms to create an OLC within the college community. We also examine the impacts of developed OLCs on various indicators of organizational effectiveness. In the literature on psychological contracts there is an emphasis on examining the consequences of violations or unmet expectations. In our study we will focus on the opposite case where expectations are met or exceeded.

Our main theoretical contribution will be in the development of the OLC. We want to explore how to operationalize this concept, identify differences across institutions, and assess its effectiveness. Answers to these issues will be relevant to researchers in the three literatures mentioned above as well as in higher education.

### **Contributions for Practice**

This book will inform not only redesign in existing organizations but also the design of new organizations and institutions. If you are setting up a new educational institution, school, or organization, you need to think about how it will be different. You will be competing for students who might choose to go to established institutions. The challenge is to chart out the distinguishing features of your institution. In the context of OLC, an organization's leaders need to ask, "What features distinguish our contract from those of others?" Starting a new institution, in a sense, requires creation of a distinctive OLC.

At the same time, existing institutions are continuously facing a need to adapt to new challenges (e.g., financial constraints, new types of competitors). The environment of higher education is changing. Consequently, existing institutions must position themselves clearly in relation to alternative institutions. If two schools, for example, have equally strong reputations in undergraduate education, how can potential students determine which one may be a better fit for their goals and interests? The OLC provides a framework for helping institutions not only redesign themselves, but also position themselves relative to one another. Literatures on learning, organizational change, and design provide direction for the redesign process. The OLC also helps potential students, faculty, and administrators evaluate their interest in a particular institution. Whether it is a new or existing institution, OLC design is a critical process.

Another contribution is in the area of diagnosis and analysis. The OLC permits us to explore the intended outcomes from a college leader's or faculty's point of view and observe what actually occurs within that educational institution. Consider these two examples. I talked with a dean of a highly ranked educational institution about the college's OLC. We both agreed that having explicit learning outcomes should facilitate learning. The dean said the institution had eight 'metaskills' (e.g., quantitative analysis, team skills) students should acquire. These eight skills purportedly were well accepted by faculty, students, and staff. We subsequently went into this institution to do some systematic data collection. No student was familiar with all eight metaskills; in fact, we found that most had an incomplete understanding of only two or three. In point of fact, no real contract focused on learning outcomes existed. I went to another well-regarded school that claimed having its students do research was a defining characteristic of the institution. The school stated that doing research put students in a mentoring relationship and created a different learning environment. Follow-up assessments, however, indicated

this school's students generally had no understanding that research was a learning opportunity available to them.

Both examples show the diagnostic value of the OLC. Properly executed, OLCs help educational institutions determine what has been promised and what has been realized with regard to learning. If there is a discrepancy between the promised contract and the contract in people's heads, then new processes need to be put in place. The question for the first institution, for example, was what mechanisms needed to be put in place to ensure the eight metaskills were a known part of everyone's contract and how could this understanding be sustained over time? This book will draw from the change literature to review key processes for implementation and institutionalization of the OLC.

Another example of the value of the OLC to practitioners is in the curriculum area. Organizational learning contracts should contain learning outcomes and learning environments. Learning outcomes represent the "what"—specifically, the knowledge, skills, and abilities you want the students to acquire. Learning environments refer to how, when, and where learning happens. Lecture, discussion, group projects, and peer teaching are all examples of learning environments. Mapping the relationship between learning environments and outcomes is fairly complex. Some environments work better or worse with different learning outcomes. For example, team skills are difficult to acquire via lecture; instead, group project work with feedback is probably more effective. The OLC provides a framework for designing and evaluating linkages between learning environments and outcomes.

One tool for mapping these linkages over a student's four-year educational period is to develop a matrix of learning environment by learning outcomes. Table 1.1 illustrates an outcome by course matrix for a business college. One can trace different learning environments by each learning outcome. Note the differences in learning approaches. This is an illustrative matrix compared to a more

**Table 1.1.** CURRICULUM MATRIX—INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT—FIRST SEMESTER

Learning Outcomes	Learning Environments	
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2
Business Problem Solving	Lecture course in Economics	Case discussion course in Organizational Behavior
Collaborative Skills	Team Project on Economics	Team Skills Workshop
Global Multi-Cultural Ethical	Self-paced Language course Great Books Discussion	Self-paced Language course Great Books Discussion
Leadership	Great Books Discussion	Leader Skills Workshop
Learning to Learn	Apprentice on Selected Country with mentor	Apprentice Assessment and Redesign—Curriculum with mentor

comprehensive matrix. The learning outcomes appear in the left column. Two quarters of data are shown. We inserted some, but not all of the learning experiences. In cell 1 there is a lecture course in economics. For collaborative skills there is a team project in economics. For global multi-cultural skills there is a self-paced language course. A discussion on Great Books contributes to ethical and leadership skills. Doing an apprenticeship with a professor on a selected country forces the student to think about how to learn. Since the problem is on another country, it enhances both 'learn to learn' and multicultural skills. In quarter 2, you see similar and different learning experiences for each of the outcomes.

This matrix would be extended for all four years. It is a visual way to show: (1) whether the learning outcomes are being reinforced, (2) whether different learning environments are being used, and (3) whether learning outcomes are being reinforced by different learning environments. The matrix can be used in building a new curriculum or reviewing a current one that needs to be revised.

Another diagnostic function of the OLC is to identify sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in educational institutions through assessment mechanisms. Most institutions are interested in this kind of data in order to build lifelong participants in their educational community. Satisfied students eventually become satisfied graduates. And satisfied alumni can become future employers, donors, contributors, and so on. The advantage of the OLC as a tool to accomplish these goals is that it contains highly specific expectations between the organization and its students about what will be learned and how. Therefore, the fundamental question over the ensuing four years is whether these expectations are being met, exceeded, or not met. All three categories are important for assessing some aspects of organizational satisfaction and effectiveness.

In summary, the specific expectations contained in the OLC can help inform research in a number of arenas, as well as helping institutions get better at designing, diagnosing, and redesigning the systems and processes that contribute to effective educational outcomes. All of these factors contribute to making the OLC an important tool for both theory and practice.

## **CURRENT TENSIONS AND THE OLC**

Another way to think about this book is to look at the broader context in higher education. There are several reasons we should spend intellectual time and resources doing in-depth studies of this sector.

First, tertiary institutions are a critical part of the economic and social institutions of our society. In today's knowledge-based economy and society, universities, as engines of knowledge creation and transmission, become a more integral part of our daily lives (Duderstadt, 2000). Therefore, focusing on the distinctive roles of new tertiary institutions provides insights into how they may evolve and the

implications of their evolution on existing institutions in particular, and society in general.

Second, although universities are major engines in our knowledge economy, there are forces working against their viability. These forces are driving the evolution and adaptation of new forms of higher education. The *financial* pressures are extreme for both public and private universities. Declines in public allocations, declining endowments, and increasing demands for student aid all place burdens on a university's economic viability (Rhodes, 2004). In addition, the *globalization of education* has paralleled the globalization of the economy. The emergence of educational gateways in locations like Singapore, which attract international universities, suggests we need to think globally when looking for new forms of higher education. It also increases the competitive environment for higher education. At the same time, *student demands* are changing. More students with diverse backgrounds want access to higher education, and their needs are more complicated (Zemsky & Duderstadt, 2004; Sax, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, Mahoney, 2001). The *information technology revolution* is further changing the structure and processes of the university (Goodman, 2001; Duderstadt, 2000). Newer forms of competition, such as the geographically distributed educational networks, represent alternatives to the more traditional forms of higher education. The growing role of multimedia technology is also changing how students learn. Finally, increasing pressures for *accountability* in institutional performance from public and private funders raise more questions about the role of the university (Rhodes, 2004). The implications of these forces or pressures include expanded and diverse providers of education, giving potential students more choices; fewer physical campuses; faculty operating independently of any one college or university; unbundling of the teaching, research and service functions; and so on (Levine, 2001). Whether all of these or other consequences occur is not the critical point. The basic idea is that several significant forces are threatening the viability of some educational institutions, while creating opportunities for new forms of institutions to emerge and evolve. The level of competition from traditional sources and new providers is becoming stronger over time. These external forces call for a redesign process in the field of higher education. The OLC and its components provide a framework for this redesign. Organizational learning contracts hold the potential to help new and existing institutions do more with less by focusing their energies and resources on the achievement of specific learning outcomes and new learning environments.

## EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

The general literature on higher education includes theoretical papers, qualitative pieces, and large-scale survey studies. Our strategy was to do an intensive longitudinal study of OLCs in three institutions. We collected data via one-on-one interviews from a sample of students over time. This strategy made sense given

our focus to highlight the OLC. We wanted to see (1) how to measure the OLC; (2) what the differences are across institutions; (3) what the implications are for different contracts across institutions on student expectations, satisfaction and effectiveness; and (4) what we can learn about the practices of designing, diagnosing, implementing, and sustaining the OLC. These types of issues led us to do a more intensive study than a large sample study with a survey method. The latter type of study would not be able to answer these specific research questions. In addition, all our data have been coded, with appropriate checks for reliability, and quantitatively analyzed. This strengthens our ability to respond to the four research questions raised above.

Another unique feature of our empirical work is that we have selected two new institutions and one established or traditional institution as our sample. The new institutions had been in operation for around five years, while the traditional institution has been in operation for approximately 100 years. We examined both new and traditional institutions because we wanted to maximize the potential differences we might find in the institutions' OLCs. Our assumption was that new institutions might try to differentiate themselves through more explicit OLCs than an older, more established school.

All three institutions value both research and teaching and are not primarily focused on being high-quality teaching institutions. Additionally, all of these institutions have a physical location. That is, students are physically present rather than operating in a geographically distributed manner. Virtual universities (Cruz, 2001) are an interesting new form of higher education, but that is not our focus. Third, our institutions are autonomous. That is, the basic processes of designing the institution, implementation, and operation are done by each college. There may be ties to a larger institution, but independence is key.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, some of the colleges offer graduate degrees, others do not.

Given these similarities, the next question focuses on how the new and traditional institutions are different. Table 1.2 provides a general contrast between a new institution and a well-known traditional institution. Both organizations attract high-quality students and faculty. These specific differences in our sample will be explored in more detail in chapter 3.

Note that we are not arguing that these are the necessary or sufficient features of new forms of higher education. Different schools may have different combinations of features. But there are some basic structural differences between new and traditional institutions (Table 1.2). In the traditional institution, work is organized around departments, performance is defined in terms of research output with

1. There are examples of new colleges created by and within existing institutions (e.g., University of Michigan, George Mason), but these colleges are physically and organizationally highly interdependent with the larger institution (Duderstadt, 2000), and hence, would not be included in our sample.

**Table 1.2.** CONTRASTING NEW AND TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

New	Traditional
<i>Organization</i>	
Interdisciplinary areas Interest groups	Formal Departments
<i>Performance Criteria for Professors</i>	
High-Quality teaching High-Quality research papers Patents Entrepreneurial startups	High-Quality research papers High-Quality teaching
<i>Employment Policy</i>	
No Tenure/Tenure	Tenure
<i>Learning Environment</i>	
Problem/project-based	Lecture with some problem/ project-based
<i>Culture</i>	
Continuous Innovation	High-Quality Work

expectations about high-quality teaching and the result of good faculty performance is tenure, a characteristic of most elite research institutions. The new institution differs with respect to its organizational form, performance criteria, and employment policy dimensions. In the process of teaching, the students in the new institution play very different roles. They are involved in the design of the curriculum and play active roles in teaching. Their learning environments focus on active learning and use a variety of learning approaches, such as group projects, peer teaching, and mentors to create explicit learning outcomes. Some of these features might also be present in the traditional institution, but their emphasis in the new institution is much stronger.

Another way to understand the new institutions in our study is to contrast them with a group of other new institutions that shares elements of the traditional institutions we studied. The key distinction is between new (in terms of age) and innovative (in terms of new ways to learn). Throughout the world, there have been new startups of institutions of higher education that in many ways are the same as the traditional organization we studied (see Table 1.2), in terms of their approach to learning. These startups have, to some degree, been reactions to existing public institutions, which essentially had “monopoly” positions discouraging innovation, with little faculty or student identification with these institutions. In contrast to the

large public institutions, the new schools were smaller, more student-focused in terms of services and generally privately sponsored—but, like the traditional schools, these new schools were still organized by departments, and their approach to learning was the same as the large public universities (with the exception of smaller class sizes). That is, they looked pretty much like the traditional institutions in terms of learning, but were smaller in size and somewhat more student focused. This is quite different from the new institutions we studied. The new schools in this study have a completely different organizational structure than traditional schools and, more importantly, the students are involved in the key decision-making processes in the school. The differences between the new schools we studied and traditional schools go far beyond class-size reduction. The learning model in the new schools we studied is dramatically different. The students are involved in active learning, not just listening to lectures. Throughout their college years they are involved in mentoring, peer teaching, and project-based learning. Thus, there are fundamental differences between the new, innovative colleges we examined here and a new start-up that still shares many core elements with older, traditional schools.

## **PREVIEWING SOME CRITICAL ISSUES**

Before we conclude this chapter, it is important to preview some of the critical issues inherent in this book, regarding the concept of OLCs.

### **The Change Dilemma**

The OLC is about building a contract with members of an institution of higher education. It represents a shared understanding about who should do what, where, and how about learning. Explicit in this concept of OLC is change. Remember that we pointed out above the strong external forces that are challenging the viability of institutions of higher education, all of which represent initiators of change. At the same time there are equivalent counter-forces resisting change and attempting to maintain the “status quo.” Since introducing and sustaining an OLC requires substantial organizational change, the fundamental question is whether it is likely to happen. Are the forces against change stronger than the net benefits of specific forms of OLCs?

Our basic response to this change dilemma is that new institutions will arise. These could be brand-new institutions or spin-offs from an existing institution (e.g., an honors college). Our expectations are that some of these will be in North America, but many more will be in other countries. One challenge when starting a new organization of any kind is differentiating what you plan to do from what is already being done. In the field of higher education, the OLC is

one way to signal how your institution will be different. The other response to the change dilemma is that existing institutions could use parts of the OLC for diagnosis and redesign. For example, the dean mentioned earlier who claimed that his faculty, students, and staff understood the learning outcomes, could use the empirical data he received suggesting otherwise to initiate changes without building a brand-new learning contract. That is, parts of the OLC could help in diagnosis and redesign.

## Levels of Analysis

Another fundamental question is whether the OLC is at the institutional or college level. Think of a university composed of different colleges. One college might be in engineering, another in fine arts, and still another in business. These are pretty different content or disciplinary areas. From our perspective, the OLC exists at the *college* level. The contract for a college of fine arts would be different from that of a college of computer science. In the next chapter, we will explore in more detail the issue of the OLC and levels of analysis. There are a variety of interesting issues, such as whether there can be both a college OLC and also some system-wide learning outcomes at a higher level of analysis (i.e., the university). How does an OLC work in a liberal arts college? Would the contract be the same for all the departments (e.g., chemistry vs. English)? We preview these issues here because we think they are important. The issues are further developed in the following chapters.

## Generalizability

Two types of generalizability are relevant here. The first is whether the OLC is generalizable across disciplines. That is, can you build OLCs for a fine arts college and for a computer science college? Our position is that OLCs will work across disciplines, but there will be differences in the learning outcomes and learning environments. That is, designing and evaluating experiments in a science college probably would not be relevant in a fine arts college. The idea of stating outcomes and specifying the links between learning environments and learning outcomes would be the same for both colleges, but the content of learning environments and outcomes will be different.

The second generalizability question deals with what types of institutions of higher education would fit with the OLC construct. Our basic position, given the change dilemma mentioned above, is to focus on four-year, face-to-face institutions. The basic rationale is quite simple. Building a shared understanding about learning is a complicated change process. It requires multiple socialization processes, rich reinforcements, and on-going feedback. These conditions are more feasible to achieve at a regular four-year, face-to-face institution. In institutions that focus on

distributed learning or primarily evening classes, it will be much harder to build an effective OLC. The socialization processes in the latter types of institutions are much more restrictive.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

This book is organized into two parts. The first section provides a theoretical perspective for organizing our thoughts on the concept of an OLC. We then present some empirical data contrasting new and traditional institutions. Specifically, we look at how expectations, learning environments, and selected effectiveness outcomes differ among these institutions. In part two, the practice section, we invite some of the designers and leaders of new institutions to reflect on what they have learned. These new innovative institutions have already passed the five-year mark. At least one class has graduated from each new institution, so there is a rich set of experiences to process. We ask the designers and leaders of the new institutions to reflect on their challenges and actions over the timeline, which begins with the conception of each new institution to its design, implementation, and transformation to its current state of equilibrium. These “lessons learned” should be valuable to people involved in starting new institutions, as well as those who are involved in redesigning existing institutions. Another chapter examines the role of a designer of these innovative institutions. A final chapter integrates the book’s two parts with issues of theory and practice.