Let’s suppose that you are the director of a stage play in its first rehearsal. Before the rehearsal begins, you have met with the three principal actors and perceived that one of them had not rehearsed his lines very well; he kept asking where the script reader was and if this person would be close by to feed him lines. You also had a conversation with the lighting director who told you that that a bank of lights was out. The lighting director was hopeful that the lights would be ready when needed a third of the way through rehearsal. The sound manager let you know that she had not yet been able to secure a device to produce an important sound for the play. As you entered the auditorium, the producer approached and indicates the performance was already over budget by $20,000.

You are now seated in the second row of the auditorium and yelling “Action!” The light gets brighter, and there’s activity on the stage. You see two of the three principal actors on stage, but where is the third actor? Shortly, the third actor runs onto the stage and almost trips over a rug that should have been placed somewhere else. Everyone gasps, but the action continues. Given the potential rug tripping hazard, all three actors have their backs to you, and you can hardly hear them. Suddenly, there is a loud voice, your voice, in the theater yelling “Cut!” Many discussions now take place about how things need to be done
differently in the next rehearsal. As director, you now have to decide which situations need your attention.

Like this director, executives, managers, scientists, engineers, politicians, school administrators, and even parents face similar current, messy situational conditions they want changed into something less messy or more beneficial in a future situation. They all recognize that past decisions and solutions along with the original pathways of carrying out those decisions may not work in future situations. This example reveals the central concepts of this chapter.

The director faces a number of messy current state situational conditions, among them an actor who apparently seems unprepared (a perceived condition), a lighting director failing to have all the necessary lights ready (an actual condition), a sound manager not having the necessary equipment to produce a critical sound (an actual condition), a producer who is concerned about running over budget (an actual condition), a stage manager placing a prop incorrectly (could be an actual or perceived condition depending on what the script designated), and the onstage, first rehearsal being a catastrophe (an actual condition). At this point, the director's thinking might be cluttered with conditional issues, such as why are these people not doing their jobs, what to do about these situational conditions, which conditions clearly need to be rectified now, which can wait, and what would improved conditions in the next rehearsal look like? Furthermore, the director may be thinking about the pathways (called transition journeys) needed to convert the messy, current state conditions into improved, beneficial future state conditions.

The director needs other thinking and analysis aspects. The seven thinking elements framework previewed in the previous chapter is to be applied in the current and the future state situational analyses. Both situational analyses include three new terms: identification, clarification, and prioritization. These represent three sequential protocols for information gathering and analysis. Throughout the five-step decision-making process, a different three-phase thinking protocol will be applied; remember that it has a specific sequence and is different from the seven thinking elements framework.