Several important conclusions result from the lessons found in *Mind-set*, *Outliers*, and *Learned Optimism*. First, groups have mind-sets just as people do. We're all familiar with institutions or units within institutions that embraced change gladly while others were resistant to the very idea of change. But mind-set can change. For this reason, we don't have to give up if we find ourselves working in an environment that seems hide-bound, inflexible, and convinced that our current way of doing things is the only possible way of doing things. That's not the nature of academics or administrators; it's simply their current mind-set. Second, creativity and receptivity to change are the result of mind-set. Even people who don't view themselves as particularly innovative can become adaptable and innovative if they devote prolonged, consistent effort to developing these new habits. In higher education, we disprove the maxim that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" on a daily basis. When a new technology comes along, we may grumble a bit, but soon we become familiar with it or perhaps even excel at it. When the curriculum has to be modified because of the demands of an accrediting agency or state legislature, we initially fume that these new requirements are impossible, but gradually we start to implement them (and sometimes discover that we prefer them). Faculty members at institutions on the quarter system or with a 4–1–4 calendar resist conversion to the semester system just as loudly as do those at schools on the semester system believe it's impossible to change to quarters or adopt a January term, and yet institutions do it all the time, and they become even stronger for the transition.

Third, although it may take a prolonged, consistent effort to effect a radical change in mind-set, some improvements can occur much more rapidly. Seligman (2006) found that clinically depressed and pessimistic patients often began to respond to his optimism exercises within only a few weeks. The same thing can occur within an institution or academic unit. But the complete transformation of a program from rigidly unimaginative to highly innovative will probably require a significant investment of time. Even so, institutions and units usually take their cue from opinion leaders. Once those major opinion leaders begin to demonstrate a new mind-set, others in the area will begin acting differently as a result.

Innovation Killers and Innovation Midwives

The single most important thing academic leaders can do to help their programs move from a fixed, pessimistic, or can't-do mind-set to a growth, optimistic, or can-do mind-set is to identify the innovation killers in their environment and replace them with innovation midwives. An innovation killer is any commonly repeated saying that reinforces the idea that change

unreasonable. As you go through the following list of statements, you'll undoubtedly find many that you've heard at your own institution, perhaps even coming from your own mouth:

- We tried that before.
- Has anyone ever done that before?
- We haven't got that kind of time.
- We've already got too much to do.
- Our budget's too limited.
- With the reductions we've had lately, we're just trying to stay afloat.
- That'll never work.
- That's not my job.
- That's not how we do things here.
- It's impossible.
- Maybe next year.
- You may be right, but …
- The trustees/president/provost/dean would never go for that.
- My mind is already made up.
- I don't think it's all that important.
- It's good enough already.
- If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
- That just sounds crazy.
- You don't know the people I have to deal with.
- If we've got money for that, why don't we ever seem to have enough money for raises?

These sentiments kill innovation because they reinforce the assumption that change is a bad thing. They stifle creativity before it has an opportunity to flourish.

Innovation midwives, by contrast, assist the birth of creative ideas by reinforcing the notion that change is a good thing; in fact, it's the norm. These statements convey a welcoming attitude toward lateral thinking and experimental approaches. Repeated often enough, they can shift the mind-set of an entire academic unit. Here are a few examples of innovation midwives that need to be heard more often at colleges and universities:

- Before we make a final decision, let's review all our options.
- Where can we go for additional inforamation on that?

o You can always change your mind, you know.

o In light of the new information, I've changed my mind.

o Excuse me. I don't think I really understood that.

o I'd like to get your help with an idea I'm working on.

o How could we improve … ?

o What would happen if … ?

o Wouldn't it be fun if … ?

o What might we have missed?

o What would we do if cost were no object?

o Who else will be affected?

o Who else has a suggestion?

o Why do we always do it like that?

o I don't know much about that. What can you tell me?

o What are some of your own ideas on … ?

o How many ways could we … ?

o You know, it's so crazy that it just might work.

o Why don't we try it for a year and see what happens?

o Wow! Thank you! That's a great idea! Let's explore it together.

Innovation midwives underscore the idea that nothing can remain unchanged for very long and that not all good ideas have to come from a single source. They imply that creativity isn't just accepted; it's expected—of everyone. They reward people for coming up with new ideas and, as Linus Pauling said, "The best way to get good ideas is to have lots of ideas" (quoted in Brandt, 1986, 65).

Conclusion

Effective change leadership in higher education does not occur when legislatures, governing boards, or presidents impose a new vision for an institution from the top down. The distributed organizational structure of colleges and universities guarantees that such a process will be acrimonious at best and highly destructive at worse. It will intensify the us-versus-them dynamics that all too often exist between the faculty and administration. Because supervisor-initiated change processes require such a large investment of energy, resources, and political capital, few of them succeed beyond their initial phases. The only creativity they

promote is to encourage the faculty and staff to find creative ways of scuttling the process.

A far more effective way of bringing about meaningful change in higher education is for academic leaders to create a widespread culture of innovation in which change is seen as originating from above but generated throughout the institution. In a culture of innovation:

o New ideas are encouraged, recognized, and rewarded, even when they're not practical or implemented. Academic leaders understand that people stop innovating when they believe their suggestions are going to be mocked, ignored, or disparaged.

o As many people as possible are given the freedom to do their work in their own way. Effective change leaders don't micromanage. If they need to set goals, they provide the necessary resources to achieve those goals and allow people to have as much freedom as possible to decide how to achieve them.

o Most decisions don't have to be cleared through a person's supervisor. The constant need to check with one's boss stifles creativity. Even when supervisors insist that they just need to be in the loop on everything that happens in their area, they create a chilling effect that curbs innovation and promotes a fixed mind-set.

o People feel comfortable talking with anyone in the organization (including the upper administration and the governing board) about issues of common concern. Academic leaders understand that although a chain of command may be required for certain approval and evaluation purposes, colleges and universities really have a flat administrative structure. Any member of the system should feel empowered to talk to any other member of the system without repercussions for going over someone's head or violating their sphere of authority.

o People are appreciated for what they do.

o People are appreciated for who they are.

No unit or institution is like every other. Ideas that work in one environment may be impossible somewhere else. Different traditions, values, and personalities mean that each system must be understood on its own terms. For this reason, I devote the next three chapters to examining institutions and programs that implemented successful change processes for different reasons and in different ways, thus coming to realize just how diverse change leadership in higher education actually is.