

# *Preface*

**T**wo guiding principles form the basis for this book. First, we believe that understanding should precede evaluation, especially in the case of how and why schools perform at specific levels. Second, we believe that educators and education researchers can and should use examples of organizational improvement outside education as frameworks for finding new understanding in the realm of schooling. It is our hope within this volume to illuminate compelling lessons of organizational success that inspire new ideas for effecting change and turning around failing schools.

The pathway we pursue to meet those assessment and building objectives is as follows. In Part I, we construct a comprehensive framework for understanding organizational turnaround and scaffolding that we spotlight in Figure 1.1. All the central elements found in later chapters are introduced here. Parts II through IV are devoted to exploring the pieces of the framework in considerable detail, again relying on the research on organizational turnaround in a wide array of industries and in an assortment of organizations in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors of the economy. Part V attends to what is known about turnaround in the PreK–12 education industry.

We begin in Chapter 1 by examining the theoretical, empirical, and applied literature on organizational decline. We provide an overview of the concept, explore key elements, examine functions, and review models. In a similar fashion, we unpack the constructs of organizational failure and turnaround. In particular, we underscore the three distinct ways the concept of turnaround is treated in the literature—as a condition, as a process, and as a consequence. We also surface the two-phase model of turnaround that grounds the volume: retrenchment and recovery. We close the introductory chapter with an inspection of an assortment of important themes (e.g., context) that are ribboned throughout the book.

In Part II (Chapters 2–5), we offer an in-depth inspection of the period of disintegration in the turnaround story. This includes from the time when early warning signs of trouble begin to surface through the emergence of organizational crisis and failure. We explore in considerable detail the following key constructs: symptoms of decline, causes of organizational decline and failure, emergence of crisis, and dysfunctional reactions to disintegration and the accompanying negative consequences to individuals and the organization.

In Parts III and IV, we shift to the topic of reintegration and to the work of turning around troubled organizations. Phase 1 (Chapters 6 and 7) of reintegration is known most generally as the period of retrenchment. The focus here is on measures designed to prevent the final collapse of the institution. The three most critical activities in the retrenchment phase are as follows: getting the right leadership on board; diagnosing the situation; and taking emergency action, especially in terms of finances. Phase 2 of the turnaround is known as recovery. It is comprised of five sets of actions, each of which is thoroughly examined in Chapters 8 and 9: developing a focused operational vision, capturing operating efficiencies, revitalizing organizational processes, reconstructing the organizational work ethic, and improving products and services.

In the final section of the book (Part V), we review what is known about turnaround work in the PreK–12 educational sector. We begin in Chapter 10 by populating the landscape of school turnaround, acknowledging that our efforts are hindered by the recency of turnaround work in schools and the promulgation of turnaround strategies unanchored in the theoretical and empirical scholarship reviewed in Parts I–IV of this volume. Chapter 10 opens with a broad overview of turnaround in education. It then provides an analysis of the causes of decline and failure in schools. It closes with the articulation of three lenses that can be employed to view turnaround in education—type, level, and intensity. Using the same lenses, in Chapter 11 we inspect the efficacy of turnaround initiatives in schools, acknowledging at the outset that our task was made problematic by the limited supply of empirical data at hand and by the oftentimes less-than-robust methods employed to assess the impact of turnaround initiatives.

We believe that our findings will be of interest to a diverse group of educators and policymakers. All those with an interest in the impact of systemic accountability will find the book of use. So also

will those who include educational reform and school improvement in their work portfolio. Colleagues in states and districts charged with crafting turnaround initiatives and tools will be drawn to the conclusions unearthed from business firms and government agencies. Finally, the large cadre of developers who work to translate scholarship into useful frames for PreK–12 educators will find an abundant supply of building material herein.