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Methodological Guides

Guide 6: the breakthroughs

The "breakthroughs" are **proposals for strategies and actions that constitute a major break with the past, leading to a structural change in a given milieu or field**. They are extracts from the [Proposal Booklets](#) written by the Alliance's topical workshops and colleges in 2001.

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Objectives

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The Alliance aims to capitalise on methods and reflections in order to identify new forms of action capable of influencing the major challenges facing the contemporary world. During 2000 and 2001, it is using the topical, socioprofessional and geocultural workshops to formulate "proposals for the 21st century" that will result in the publication and diffusion of a collection of Proposal Booklets ([Guide no. 5 on the Proposal Booklets](#)).

Regarding the subject of social change, as elsewhere, two types of change must be taken into account:

- * adaptive changes that belong to the existing system, but which improve it by correcting negative effects, limiting malfunctioning and accentuating beneficial effects;
- * structural changes that call the existing system into question, change the frame of reference and provide an essentially different approach.

The Proposal Booklets identify strategies for both adaptive and structural change in fields as diverse as financial markets, education, industrial ecology, urban management, fishing, etc.

Against the backdrop of the Proposal Booklets, the Breakthroughs aim more specifically at:

• Identifying the proposals from among those put forward that constitute elements of structural change

Confronted by the magnitude and complexity of today's challenges, promoting a more responsible and united world involves not only remedying and improving the present system but also radically changing lifestyles and the way our societies are governed.

Thus the breakthroughs are the **quintessence of the Proposal Booklets**. For each subject, they highlight the methods and reflections that permit conceiving and implementing the changes necessary. They identify the main proposals, those that are the most innovative and promising.

• Providing a window to the different Proposal Booklets

The Breakthroughs document is an attractive **abstract** (about two pages) of the Proposal Booklet that can be easily translated into many languages and widely diffused. Thus it can be used to make the Proposal Booklet known to a wider audience and draw all those who

hope to approach the subject dealt with in greater depth.

Furthermore, all the Breakthroughs will be **grouped in a single document** that will be used as the preparatory document for the [World Assembly](#) at Lille (France) in December 2001. This document will be translated into the seven languages of the Assembly (English, Arab, Chinese, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian) and widely diffused among the Alliance's partners, the media and the general public. It will reflect the remarkable diversity of the subjects dealt with by the Alliance and provide a summary of each of them. Thus it will serve as the introduction to about forty Booklets available on this occasion.



How to

1/ How to draft the breakthroughs

The challenge of the Breakthroughs is to propose strategies that constitute major advances. Providing a manual on how to achieve this is no mean task but it is possible to suggest **a few directions** that permit changing value systems and bring innovations to light.

* **Observing the margins of the system:** changes often appear at the borders of systems, whereas the interests vested in the existing order at the heart of the system are always so strong that they are blind to new realities, preferring to preserve what they hold. Analysis of the margins shows that changes have much more chance of occurring there where the contradictions of prevailing systems are most flagrant. This is to say that attention should be given to what is invented today in "marginal" or dominated groups of the population.

Example: Social money: by setting up barter clubs and using alternative forms of money, populations hard hit for want of monetary resources have been able to find a way out of exclusion and powerlessness. They generate their own activities and consume goods and services that would have been inaccessible in traditional economic circles. Social money does not mean returning to primitive forms of barter, it is a re-interpretation of the social role of money and its use for the common good. It reinvents the market, re-examines the traditional perception of money and contributes to rebuilding social fabric. From being a "marginal innovation", it has now reached a critical mass (it concerns more than 10 countries in Latin America and nearly a million people).

* **Breaking down false truths:** innovations appear when our perceptions of our surroundings, our value systems and mindsets change. We need to break down false truths and situations. The current state of the world is presented as the logical and obvious conclusion of evolution. When one realises that one is heading down a dead-end, the best way out is to return through history to arrive upstream of the process in order to identify its branches, examine the possible options and explore those that were ignored.

Example: The role of local territories: It is generally accepted that globalisation has destroyed the role of local territories. By going back in history, from the 16th to the 18th century in the West, it can be seen that the economy and politics became increasingly structured as territorial links disappeared to the profit of the consumer and citizen, abstract entities akin to isolated cells. Thus, by identifying this major branching away, we cease to perceive the disappearance of local territories as an inevitable occurrence but rather as a historic event that can be dated. Consequently, we are much freer to question current functions and especially those of the future with respect to the territory, so that local territory can become the

cornerstone of future governance.

*** Transposing approaches to enrich perceptions of problems:** Transposing approaches, mechanisms and knowledge from one domain to another can shed new light on problems and lead to innovative solutions.

Example: Extending the notion of personal bankruptcy to nation-states: Bankruptcy is an old notion in commercial and business law that defines the limits between defaulting on payment - which leads to the ruin of the defaulting company, but also penalises its creditors - and the personal property and freedom of the company boss. This delimitation has not always existed. Not so long ago, a businessman who went bankrupt was automatically imprisoned. The combat against exclusion, at least in Europe, includes the campaign to extend this practice reserved for companies to the notion of civil bankruptcy. It allows over-indebted persons to make a new start. Why not extend this concept of civil bankruptcy to nation-states at international level?

*** Turning the centre and outskirts inside out:** This entails removing what is in the centre (since considered primordial, having priority, preponderant, etc.) to the outskirts. On the contrary, what is in the outskirts is removed to the centre. This would permit re-examining the orders of priority and links of causality between the components of a system.

Example: The principle of active subsidiarity: since the beginning of time governance has always been exercised from the centre, for it is here that society is managed on a territorial scale while that which was sent to the marches represented the link between the two scales of the territory. Being sent to the marches means being sent to the non-thought or slightly thought. Today, the principle of reversing the structure of governance amounts to saying that it is the links between different territorial scales which are decisive while the problem of managing a given territory is almost secondary.

*** Learning from concrete experiences and exchanging experiences:** Using real situations for inspiration enables identifying factors leading to change and observing the impact of seemingly minor innovations. This approach avoids the all too frequent snare of assimilating concrete innovations with adaptive changes on one side and conceptual innovations with structural changes on the other. Moreover, comparing and exchanging experiences makes it possible to shed light on the similarity of certain issues despite the diversity of situations. Comparing real situations makes it possible to identify the problem or question underlying it and adopt several common principles ([Guide no. 2 to know more about the experience files](#)).

To obtain a more detailed presentation of directions for formulating breakthroughs and methods to bring about social change, refer to the complementary text [Formulating breakthroughs in the Proposal Booklets](#).

A few additional comments:

- * the breakthroughs can be used to identify novel strategies that have already proved their worth and which are based on real experiences in a given field. They can also be limited to identifying the beginning of change, a shiver portending the future.
- * There is no necessarily clear border between adaptive

and structural changes, or quantitative and quantitative ones. Changes that appear inconsequential or superficial can lead to radical change if one is stubborn enough and if they are diffused and gain general acceptance.

* Appreciating the true value of breakthroughs often requires hindsight.

* In most cases, breakthroughs result from consideration in a given area and directly extracted from a Proposal Booklet. Then comparison with other Proposal Booklets and other analyses may back up the feeling that the breakthrough in question is a major upheaval that will lead to collective identification of other breakthroughs.

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2/ How to present the breakthroughs document

* **On 1 to 2 pages** the Breakthroughs document must group the major breakthroughs identified by the workshop or college. It is neither a full list of proposals, or the contents of the Booklet but an **abstract** presenting the quintessence of the Booklet.

* This document is intended to be both an abstract in the Proposal Booklet and a text that can be used independently, or in a document grouping all the breakthroughs. **It must be capable of standing alone.**

* It should consist of an introductory paragraph (setting out the context of the workshop, the topic, the work done) and the list of the major breakthroughs identified along with explanations and, if necessary, examples. Wherever possible, the workshop or socioprofessional college must explain why it is a breakthrough and a structural change.

* The Breakthroughs must be **finalised in at least 2 languages** (in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese) by **October15**. They will then be translated into the other languages of the Assembly and gathered in a single document grouping all the breakthroughs. This overall document will be sent to the participants of the World Assembly and the media in November.

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Whom to ask for assistance ?

· Overall follow-up and co-ordination of the Proposal Booklet collection: Olivier Petitjean olivier@fph.fr, Michel Sauquet michel@fph.fr, and the other publishers of the booklets [GO](#)→

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Available resources

· Formulating the breakthroughs in the Proposal Booklets, Pierre Calame, November 2000, 8p [GO](#)→
 · List of contacts with the collection publishers [GO](#)→

To go further:

· Horizons for the 21st century: a step towards formulating common horizons within the Alliance for a Responsible and United World, Pierre Calame, September 1999, 16p (cf. p 9-16) - available in French only [RTF](#)↴
 · Seven changes for tomorrow's world, Pierre Calame, April 2000, 9p - available in French only [RTF](#)↴

Other methodological guides mentioned

· Guide no. 2 on the experience files [GO](#)→
 · Guide no. 5 on the Proposal Booklets [GO](#)→

