

6th February 1974.

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REVISED NOTES ON THE
PROPOSED CONFERENCE SERIES ON
SOCIAL CATALYSIS (*)

to be held under the auspices of
MANKIND 2000
in PARIS.

A first set of notes (1 to 5) was prepared on behalf of Mankind 2000 and discussed in Paris on January 25th. The enclosed notes (6 to 8) represent the revision of the concept as presented. Notes 4 and 5 remain basically unchanged.

These notes are being sent to the members of Mankind 2000 for their comments and suggestions. A further meeting to consider these revised proposals will take place on March 6th in Paris.

(*) Provisional title (see Note 6).

Revised concept of the theme of the proposed conference (arising from a meeting on January 25th).

1. It was agreed that the conference should address itself to those constructive approaches to social change which were :

1.1. Non-directive

Namely forms of change which are not originated as central directives to be implemented locally.

1.2. Non-manipulative

Namely forms of change which can be facilitated and encouraged rather than having to be imposed with some ulterior motive, whether beneficial or not.

1.3. Non-deterministic

Namely forms of change which are open-ended rather than involving the creation of a closed system.

1.4. Non-technocratic

Namely forms of change which are particularly oriented to person-oriented rather than system-oriented technology. Such technology should enable the person to grow in new ways natural to himself rather than require that he adapt to sophisticated and elegant conceptions of how he should behave.

2. After careful consideration of the conference title, it was agreed that "social engineering" although useful in that it implied a step-by-step methodical approach to social construction, had a unfortunate history which associated it with many of the points identified above as undesirable.

The term "social construction" was held to be not sufficiently explicit.

A general discussion suggested that using an "engineering" model always implied an engineer and raised the question of his intentions; there was a 19th century connotation to this model (an "Eiffel tower" approach to social development). Other models which seemed more appropriate were the chemical, the biological, and possibly the electronic.

The biological and electronic models did not suggest any useful term. The chemical model suggested "social catalysis". This suggests the notions of :

2.1. A passive agent facilitating changes inherent in the environment with which it is in contact. The agent does not itself derive any inherent benefit from the change which it makes possible. The agent, as opposed to the engineer, makes possible but is not manipulating to his own ends. Clearly the social catalyst must be designed, but its use is limited to facilitating. This constraint is a safeguard which may constitute the best that society can do at the moment -- in the spheres where any form of social reconstruction is being conceived.

- 2.2. Energizing role. The catalyst modifies the energy requirement to accomplish some end. It does this without supplying energy but just from the way it is constructed and the way it operates. It erodes barriers to change.
 - 2.3. Synthesis. By choosing a chemical model, the notion of synthesis is suggested. Catalysts are mainly used to achieve different forms of chemical synthesis. This is the notion of building up, building more complex, and achieving some measure of synergy.
 - 2.4. Precision. The notion of objective rigour is retained, but mitigated by the notion that a given catalyst facilitates a wide variety of change.
3. No final decision was taken on the conference title. It was felt that other views should be obtained, in the light of the above suggestions.

Revised details of nature of conference.

1. Location : Such a meeting to be held in Paris or environment every two years approximately. Setting to be carefully chosen to reflect the concerns of the organizers and facilitate creative discussion.
2. Date : June 1975 (tentative)
3. Report date : Manuscripts to be prepared by 1 January 1975.
4. Number of participants : 150 - 200.
5. Next organizing meeting : 6 March 1974, Paris.
6. The conference should not be an occasion for reading papers which have been prepared in written form by participants.
7. Papers will be prepared and circulated well before the conference in the form of a pre-conference report. Mankind 2000 will be responsible for the editorial work and the collection of the papers, but not for publication costs.
8. The conference itself will take place in a carefully chosen setting which will facilitate dialogue and small-group processes amongst participants. Aside from the choice of setting, the challenge to the organizers will be to provide a facilitative mechanism which enables small-groups to come together on a wide variety of topics as they emerge during the conference period. The Société Internationale des Conseillers de Synthèse will be responsible for the organization of the meeting.
9. The conference setting should provide suitable facilities for display of maquettes and models illustrating points made in the papers and acting as a catalyst to discussion. The opportunity should also be provided for film and other presentations to those interested. Such presentations should not be made in plenary sessions, of which there should be very few.
10. An important feature of the conference would be the opportunity to participate in arranged visits to different examples of social catalysis, whether in the form of building complexes, community centres, or other approaches which lend themselves to exhibition in this way.
11. It is recognized that some people would only wish to prepare for inclusion in the report, others would only wish to participate in the discussions, others would only wish to be exposed to the audi-visual displays, and others would be more especially interested in the external visits. There would however be a relatively high degree of overlap between these categories.
12. The distinction between the categories of "participant" (see last point) would be used as a means of controlling conference participation. For example, it is recognized that some groups want to present their achievements and it would be difficult to exclude them even though their achievements are non-achievements or failures in terms of the goals of the organizers. The approach would be either to accept their papers for circulation and not extend invitations or alternatively to only extend invitations to the meeting. The aim is to avoid clogging the meeting with unhelpful examples whilst leaving participants to take up whatever examples they wish in small group sessions of their own conception. Policy in this connection must be carefully considered.

Revised concept of the programme outline of the conference.

N.B. The term "social catalysis" will be used in the following note although some more suitable term may be selected later.

Given the careful distinction between the papers in the report and the actual discussion at the meeting, the following list of points may be thought of as the "contents page" of the report rather than the "agenda" of the meeting. The latter would be much more discussion oriented within the evolving framework of small groups, responding to issues as they emerge and "inspired" by the materials presented in the report, the displays and the visits. The report is also conceived as having its own life after the meeting -- perhaps serving as material for other meetings - but in any case to be published to achieve a wider distribution.

Given that the mix of participants actually present in Paris may of necessity not cover the whole field of social catalysis, it is important that the report should provide such coverage, even if some sections are only covered by a summary article. Only by this juxtaposition of approaches can their interrelationship be seen and the occasions when one should use one rather than another. The summary article would be mainly used to cover the high-powered projects which are well described elsewhere and should attempt to draw attention to any general principles which have emerged and should not focus on particular projects.

Preference should be given to papers which argue from working examples to general principles, rather than those which are only descriptive or only theoretically. Of greatest utility are papers which present "generalized blueprints" which can be widely used within communities.

Summary of organization of report.

N.B. An amplified description of the papers under each heading has been given in Note 4. The numbering system and emphasis has been modified, but the difference is evident from the headings below.

1. Summary article or papers : Dimensions of social catalysis
2. Summary article or papers : Mapping and tracking complex psychological structures.
3. Approaches to social catalysis.
 - 3.1. Conceptual structures and processes
 - 3.1.1. Papers : Low resource projects
 - 3.1.2. Papers : Catalytic products
 - 3.1.3. Summary article : Centralized, closed, high-resource projects
 - 3.1.4. Summary article : Decentralized, open, high-resource projects

- 3.2. Information systems
 - 3.2.1. Papers : Low resource information systems
 - 3.2.2. Papers : Catalytic products
 - 3.2.3. Summary article : Centralized, closed, high-resource systems
 - 3.2.4. Summary article : Decentralized, open, high-resource information systems
- 3.3. Social organizations and administrative structures.
 - 3.3.1. Papers : Low resource organizational structures
 - 3.3.2. Papers : Catalytic products
 - 3.3.3. Summary article : Centralized, closed, high-resource organizational structures
 - 3.3.4. Summary article : Decentralized, open, high-resource organizational structures
- 3.4. Building and urban complexes
 - 3.4.1. Papers : Low resource projects
 - 3.4.2. Papers : Catalytic products
 - 3.4.3. Summary article : Centralized, closed, high-resourced projects
 - 3.4.4. Papers or summary article : Decentralized, open, high-resource projects
- 3.5. Energy, water, transport and communication technologies
 - 3.5.1. Summary article or papers : Low resource technologies
 - 3.5.2. Summary article or papers : Catalytic products
 - 3.5.3. Summary article : Centralized, closed, high-resource projects
 - 3.5.4. Summary article : Decentralized, open, high-resource projects
- 4. Summary article or papers : Interaction between social catalysis approaches.
