

Postface
BEYOND FIGURES

It is often said that the economy boils down to numbers. And of course, budgets, balance sheets, analyses and projections are all expressed in numbers and graphs. Arithmetic and geometry are essential to the daily life of a group like ours. While this is true, it should be noted however, that figures and curves are only a single language. They are not reality, they only express it. And the reality that they express in their own clear but partial way is a human edifice; not only an edifice in which men and women participate, but an edifice made by them and for them.

In our activity, the human factor is not simply one variable amongst others. Yet classical or neo-classical economic theories treat it so. Under the famous denomination "*homo æconomicus*" they consider man from an exclusively economic perspective (hence the Latin name) as a player in a predictable system, defined by the rationality of his choices. Even when this is refined, taking into account his passions or his lack of information, *homo æconomicus* remains within this framework as an assignable variable. But a man, however compliant he may be, is singular in that he is, at least partially, unpredictable. And this is enough for him not to enter into a system. A man chooses, he decides. He invents a future that neither the present nor the past are able to predict. This capacity is our true wealth.

Certainly decisions are not taken in a vacuum. A whole raft of data: economic, financial, social, and organizational amongst others, configure the environment of our decisions.

We live in a world governed by functional rules. But these rules are not absolute. They are not binding on us. They allow us to decide. We can submit to them. But we can also measure them and use them as yardsticks to develop unexpected solutions. In both cases, we decide. If we submit, we only do what is necessary. If we decide to invent, then we become daring.

On other occasions, I have expressed myself by saying that the hardest thing is not to do but to have the courage to do. I recap.

To do is easy, because doing is based on some knowledge, on routine and predictability. To dare to do is much more difficult. Being daring implies the unknown. When one knows what needs to be done, one does it. One only dares when one doesn't know, or rather when one has overcome ignorance or when one no longer regards ignorance as weakness.

I know it is disturbing to mention ignorance in the context of an enterprise such as the Altrad Group. But I think that ignorance, or, to be precise, a lack of knowledge of the future is a blind spot in our theories and our management. We fear it, we avoid it and we try constantly to reduce it. We see it as a fault whereas it is really a challenge. We see it as an impediment to taking decisions whereas it actually provides an opportunity to decide. Ignorance of the future is what represents the human part of our enterprise. It is what we must learn to look in the face. If we only ever acted in the light of infallible predictions, we be entrepreneurs, we wouldn't create anything new, we wouldn't take decisions, we would not forge our future.

By "we" I am obviously thinking of entrepreneurs who embody a project, not about speculators seeking to profit from it; I think about those who have a long-term vision, about those who are interested primarily in the sustainability of their business.

Here are a few ideas that I wanted to share with you today and I could summarize them using a well-known aphorism: *We are not what the world makes us but what we do with what the world makes us.*

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