

HOW TO PARTNER WITH AI IN YOUR BREAKTHROUGH WORK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COLLECTIVES (WITHOUT LOSING WHAT MAKES YOU HUMAN)

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Introduction: Why AI + BIQ?

Organizations today face a unique opportunity: artificial intelligence (AI) can dramatically accelerate breakthrough work – but only if integrated thoughtfully within a causal framework.

Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ) is the capability to recognize and work with the hidden forces that actually drive sustained organizational flourishing.

Most leaders operate blind to the deeper causal dynamics in their organizations, focusing largely on what's tangible and visible. BIQ enables teams to discern what's really shaping their results and work with the forces limiting or generating breakthrough.

The five causal forces of BIQ are:

- 1. Breakthrough Future** - A desirable yet seemingly impossible future reality your collective works from, not toward. Not incremental - transformational by orders of magnitude, so audacious it disrupts the status quo and calls forth something new.
- 2. Social Structure** - The formal and informal mechanisms that shape behavior - roles, norms, policies, meeting designs, reward systems. These aren't just background; they actively enable or constrain what feels possible for your team.
- 3. Agency** - The capacity of individuals and collectives to reflect together and act intentionally. This isn't just the sum of individual capabilities - it's the emergent ability of your team to operate as a collective, not just report to each other.
- 4. Organizational Context** - The situational factors and environmental conditions surrounding your work - market signals and pressures, competitive dynamics, internal culture and conditions. Context isn't passive background; it's causally active in shaping what your team can achieve.
- 5. Providence** - Openness to transcendent guidance and resources beyond human control - wisdom, timing, connections, and support that can't be manufactured. Organizations that exclude this may systematically constrain their capacity for breakthrough.

Most teams use AI to optimize existing processes - drafting faster, analyzing more efficiently, generating ideas more quickly. This is useful, but it misses AI's transformative potential. AI's superpower emerges when you ask: "What becomes possible if we partner with AI to help us rethink things - not just optimize what we're already doing?"

So here is an even more transformational question: If you were designing your breakthrough campaign from scratch with AI as your partner - with no legacy constraints - what would that reinvention look like?

This guide explains how to integrate AI into the BIQ Order of Operations - the structured approach to breakthrough - and provides perspective-based prompts for continuous exploration and execution.

Part 1: AI in the BIQ Order of Operations

The BIQ Order of Operations provides four phases for breakthrough work. (For the complete framework, see *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthrough?*). This section shows you how to actively partner with AI in each phase - the specific prompts, strategic advantages, and collective practices that accelerate breakthrough.

Phase 1: Awaken to Causal Patterns

Do What's in Parentheses First

AI as Cross-Domain Pattern Detector

In Phase 1, you develop shared awareness of how causal forces currently operate in your organization. (See Chapter 8 in *Flourishing Together* for the complete Phase 1 approach.)

AI's Unique Value: Your collective dialogue is limited by your direct and personal experience. AI can bring pattern recognition from across industries and contexts - expanding what you can perceive.

How to Partner: Have team members individually query AI, then reconvene to test AI's insights against your lived reality. Because AI processes information with fewer of the biases that often constrain human sense making and pattern recognition, it can surface perspectives teams overlook. Ask: "Does this pattern show up here? Where's the evidence?"

Phase 1 Example Prompts:

- ☐ "In [your industry/sector], what structural mechanisms most commonly constrain collective agency when teams pursue breakthrough goals?"
- ☐ "Organizations like ours [describe characteristics] often face predictable contextual forces that derail breakthrough. What patterns emerge?"
- ☐ "When teams have strong individual talent but less strong collective performance, what causal patterns typically explain this?"

"Use AI's breadth to enrich your collective dialogue and sense-making, not replace it.

Phase 2: Frame Your Breakthrough Future

Solve the Exponents

AI as Boldness Stress-Tester and Possibility Expander

In Phase 2, you articulate a breakthrough future that's transformational, not incremental. (See Chapter 8 in *Flourishing Together* for how to frame breakthrough futures collectively.)

AI's Unique Value: AI connects dots across domains, surfaces analogous breakthroughs you haven't considered, and pressure-tests your frame.

How to Partner: Draft your breakthrough future collectively first. Then use AI to stress-test it and expand possibilities. Bring AI's insights back to your team to refine your frame.

Phase 2 Example Prompts:

- ☐ "Here's our breakthrough future [describe it]. Given our context [describe it], what causal dynamics would need to shift most dramatically to realize it? What are we underestimating?"
- ☐ "What breakthrough transformations in adjacent industries could inform possibilities we haven't imagined?"
- ☐ "If our breakthrough future feels too safe, what would a truly audacious version look like?"
- ☐ "Identify and interpret emergent signals in our market - what potential paths might these take and how might they affect our breakthrough future?"
- ☐ "What second-order consequences - both risks and opportunities - are we likely not considering? How might we mitigate the risks early?"

AI can't write your breakthrough future - but it can help you make it more compelling and grounded.

Phase 3: Turn to Tangible Matters

Multiply and Divide

Primarily Human and Collective Work

Phase 3 is about creating an inventory of what currently exists. This preparation phase helps you catalog your current tangible organizational elements - initiatives, offerings, operations, resources, technology, team composition, processes, tools. You're preparing to engage these tangibles through your BIQ lens, not yet deciding what to change. (See Chapter 8 in *Flourishing Together* for the complete Phase 3 readiness work.)

Your Work in Phase 3:

- Create an inventory of your current tangibles - list your actual initiatives, offerings, operations, resources, processes, technologies, things that exist now
- Collectively establish evaluation criteria: Based on your breakthrough future, what makes something "aligned to breakthrough" vs. "anchored to the past"?

This work will prepare your team for the courageous decisions Phase 4 requires.

Why This Sets You Up for Phase 4:

The inventory and criteria you develop in Phase 3 become the foundation for AI partnership in Phase 4. AI is probably not equipped to do this inventory - it doesn't know, with contextual meaning – the history, purpose, significance – of what exists in your organization. But once you have that inventory and clear criteria, AI becomes a powerful objective partner in Phase 4's socially charged work of subtraction and addition.

Phase 3 is the human preparation that makes Phase 4's AI partnership valuable.

Phase 4: Subtract Before You Add**Reverse the Order****AI as Objective Analyzer in Socially Charged Territory**

Phase 4 requires stopping work that no longer serves breakthrough before adding new work. (See Chapter 8 in *Flourishing Together* for why subtraction comes first and how to build the social fortitude this requires.)

AI's Unique Value: Because AI is uncoupled from your organizational social dynamics, it can analyze your work without political constraints. This separation - AI as source, humans as reporters - reduces social tension. Your team evaluates AI's recommendations rather than critiquing each other's projects.

How to Partner: Share your full portfolio and breakthrough future with AI. Let it identify misalignment. Then your collective exercises the courage to makes sense of this and act.

Phase 4 Example Prompts:

- ☐ "Here are our current initiatives and practices [list]. Here's our breakthrough future [describe]. Map each to: (1) Aligned to breakthrough, (2) Maintaining the past, (3) Unclear. Explain reasoning."
- ☐ "Which structural mechanisms or practices were designed for a context and priorities that no longer exists?"
- ☐ "If we designed from scratch with our breakthrough future as north star and no legacy constraints, what would we NOT include?"
- ☐ "What work consumes significant resources but contributes minimally to breakthrough? Show us the misalignment."

AI brings objectivity uncoupled from social constraints; your collective brings wisdom and courage to act.

Part 2: Beyond the Phases - AI for Continuous Exploration

While the phase-based applications in Part 1 align AI with your breakthrough campaign, AI can also support ongoing exploration across strategic perspectives. These prompts help collectives maintain continuous engagement with their breakthrough work between formal phases.

Think of these as tools for sustained real-time collaboration between AI and your breakthrough collective - ways to keep sensing, discovering, and adapting as your breakthrough work unfolds.

Future Sensing

Use AI to scan trends, anticipate disruptions, and identify emerging opportunities that could accelerate or derail your breakthrough work.

Example Prompt: "What future scenarios in [your industry/sector] are likely to affect our breakthrough future [describe it]? What emerging or converging trends should we be monitoring?"

Market Insight

AI can analyze demographic shifts, emergent signals, behavioral patterns, and unmet needs to deepen your understanding of who you're serving and the problems you're solving.

Example Prompt: "Describe the likely future lives of our customers/stakeholders [describe who they are]. What problems will they face that our breakthrough [describe it] might solve? What are we not considering about their evolving needs?"

Hidden Pathways

Challenge AI to surface non-obvious routes to breakthrough by drawing on analogies from other domains or revealing opportunities currently hidden from view.

Example Prompt: "What potential pathways, opportunities, or strategies to our breakthrough future [describe] might currently be hidden from our view? Where have similar breakthroughs emerged through unexpected routes?"

Constraint Analysis and Solution Generation

Use AI to reframe problems, identify root causes, and generate solution options you haven't considered.

Example Prompt: "Here are the constraints we face in reaching our breakthrough goal [list them]. Help us reframe these challenges and generate potential solutions we might not have imagined."

Talent Development

AI can help you define capability gaps and design development pathways aligned with your breakthrough future.

Example Prompt: "Given our breakthrough future [describe], what capabilities will our team need that transcend current ways of working? How might we identify, develop, and empower this kind of talent?"

Process and Resource Optimization

Free your team's capacity by using AI to identify efficiency opportunities and automation potential, unlocking time for breakthrough pursuits.

Example Prompt: "What workflows, technologies, or resource allocations [describe these], could we streamline to unlock significant time and capacity for breakthrough work? Where are we spending resources on low-value activities?"

Data-Driven Insight

AI can help you see patterns in your own operations that indicate breakthrough opportunities or early warning signs of derailment.

Example Prompt: "How can we use our current data [describe what you track] to better measure breakthrough progress and reveal what's possible, what's next, or what we've been blind to?"

Building Your AI + BIQ Working Rhythm

Encourage team members to experiment with these prompts and share what works. Create psychological safety for "AI experiments" just as you do for breakthrough attempts.

Consider establishing:

Weekly check-ins: Members share AI-surfaced insights about emerging patterns or opportunities

Monthly reviews: Use AI to pressure-test progress and surface blind spots

Quarterly strategic sessions: Bring AI-generated analyses to inform major decisions

Teams that learn to work with AI most effectively often discovers other powerful applications and AI uses to support their breakthrough.

PART 3 : MAKING AI YOUR BIQ CO-DESIGNER

AI dramatically expands what your collective can perceive, imagine, and analyze. But breakthrough work ultimately requires distinctly human capabilities that AI enhances but cannot replace.

The Social Foundation You Cannot Bypass

Here's what matters most: Getting a better answer, pathway, or solution is not all that breakthrough collectives need.

While AI can help your team uncover possible courses of action, what you fundamentally need is the deep social fabric that validates and legitimizes action - the shared conviction born from meaningful exchange that a particular course is not just viable, but right for your unique circumstances. This collective solidarity provides both the foundation for confident decision-making and the social safety net that allows groups to take necessary risks together.

Organizational breakthroughs cannot bypass the essential process of navigating shared understanding and consensus through dialogue. They must travel the path through your team's social interactions and be sustained by the very relationships that hold the group together.

AI gives you better inputs for dialogue. But the dialogue itself - the collective sense-making, the building of shared conviction, the social courage that emerges from genuine exchange, the collaboration to make advances - remains irreducibly human work.

The Human Capabilities AI Amplifies

While AI augments your breakthrough work significantly, these human capacities remain essential

Reflection: The internal conversation where agency deliberates and drives action. AI surfaces possibilities; people discern meaning and choose direction.

Truth Orientation: Relentless commitment to uncovering reality. AI analyzes data; people commit to what's objectively real despite social pressure or preference.

Collective Emergence: The synergy that arises when diverse people co-create through rich social interaction. AI analyzes and connects dots; people bring the broader contextual awareness that interprets what those patterns mean for their specific situation and create breakthrough via collective thinking, emotional awareness and collaborative action.

Social Fortitude: The courage to act despite structural constraints and social resistance. AI recommends objectively; people courageously act in diverse or politically charged territory.

Providence: Openness to transcendent resources, guidance, and timing beyond human control. AI optimizes based on data; people remain open to wisdom and resources and attuned to circumstances and opportunities that can't be manufactured.

The Bottom Line

Think of AI as a co-designer that expands what your collective can perceive, imagine, and analyze - but the breakthrough work itself remains rooted in the five causal forces. AI helps you look more expansively at causal patterns, imagine bolder futures, make more objective decisions and accelerate some actions.

But it's your collective agency that reflects and acts, your breakthrough future that orients, your social structures that enable, your contextual awareness that grounds, and your openness to providence that elevates.

The question isn't whether to use AI in your breakthrough work. The question is how to integrate it in ways that amplify rather than replace the distinctly human and social capabilities that breakthrough requires.

Going Deeper

This guide focuses on AI partnership strategies. For the complete BIQ framework - the "why" behind each phase, how to build collective capability, and deeper exploration of the five causal forces - see *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthrough?* [Amazon link]

As you practice the Order of Operations repeatedly, AI becomes increasingly valuable. Return to the book to deepen your understanding; return to these prompts to accelerate your work.

About the Author

Dr. Michael E. Nagel is a researcher-practitioner who has spent 25 years uncovering why some organizations break through and flourish while others plateau – and who developed Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ™) to reveal the hidden science that makes the difference.

His career spans KPMG; Palladium – the global strategy firm connected to Harvard Business Publishing and Robert Kaplan and David Norton's Balanced Scorecard work – where he rose to Senior Vice President; and the Center for Creative Leadership, one of the world's premier leadership development institutions. This practitioner arc – across hundreds of organizations worldwide – drove the research that became BIQ.

His DBA research at the University of Manchester was examined by scholars at Oxford and the Herbert Simon Institute, selected for intellectual rigor. Michael Emerson, Ph.D., Baker Institute at Rice University, called it "excellent, important, smart, and timely work."

He is author of *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthrough?* and founder of Collective Breakthroughs.

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Collective Breakthroughs

Unlock power to achieve what's next

The paradigms shaping modern organizational practice are incomplete – not wrong in every way, but incomplete in ways that matter. They address the visible surface of organizational performance while missing the deeper causal forces that actually determine whether a collective breaks through or stays stuck.

Collective Breakthroughs is an independent source of research, education, and development centered on the science of collective breakthrough – advancing Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ™) as a truer, more powerful way to achieve extraordinary results.

Three ways to bring BIQ into your organization:

→ Learning Solutions: Keynotes, executive sessions, and interactive experiences grounded in BIQ research

→ Leadership Team Development: Retreats, custom team sessions, and BIQ-powered design for intact teams

→ Strategy & Culture Development: Longer-term partnerships for organizational strategy and culture

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