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What is relationship management?
by *Andrew Humphries and Linda McComie, SCCI Ltd*
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Management of relationships is vital to the well being of the organisation and its up-stream and down-stream partners. The most valuable of all business relationships are likely to be those that are collaborative. Where organisations work together using their specialised resources innovatively to achieve aims and objectives that could not be realised on their own, collaborative relationship management principles will apply.

However, managing them is often seen as a 'black art' where we don't know what to do, we don't know that we don't know what to do, it's somebody else's job or we haven't the time or money to do it. Look for a course in a business school and you are unlikely to find it. They do Customer Relationship Management and Supplier Relationship Management, but not Enterprise Relationship Management - the process for coordinating all the business activities that are essential to the success of a joint/multi-party endeavour.

Relationship management is one of the most important management systems that should be in place and as such it should be clearly documented both in policy and in practice. It uses its own virtuous action cycle that acknowledges the joint nature of the endeavour and ensures that performance increases become inevitable.

The partners Review the quality of their collaborative relationship and its achievements, Adapt their way of working to keep their relationship in-step, agree Improvements to their processes and behaviours and Operate together.

By formally managing the essential activities of the joint enterprise it becomes proactive and accountable. It must be supported by objective relationship performance measures that create clear joint understanding between partners and ensure you 'get things done' to time, cost and quality. This management system has the ability to always capture joint value within your collaborative business relationships.

The idea of a management plan to keep track of the activities that support a business relationship is not a new one. It could be an Alliance Project Plan or Partnering Plan. We use the term Enterprise Relationship Management Plan because it covers the joint enterprise and is the key document used to support our proposed management system. Contents:

- Organisational Arrangements - Who's who and what they do
- Business Case – Objectives and Value Proposition
- Asset Register of Resources and Capabilities - What we all bring to the table
- Risk Assessment - Keeping an eye out for the unexpected
- Commercial Agreement - Flexible contracting
- Management Activities - Operations and processes
- Continuous Improvement & Innovation - Building on success
- Knowledge Management - How we share IP
- Communications - The pattern
- Exit Arrangements - Pre-nuptials

The ERMP should be appropriate to the size of the relationship. It must be simple, clear and available to all those who need to access it for both reference and to record activity and must be kept current.

About the Authors
Andrew Humphries and Linda McComie are acknowledged experts in the field of business relationship management. Their company, SCCI Ltd, specialises in transforming business relationships and alliances around the world into more effective and efficient revenue generating operations.

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