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## Blog

**The role of the relationship manager**  
 by **Andrew Humphries and Linda McComie, SCCI Ltd**  
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The Relationship Manager (RM) will play a pivotal part in ensuring the smooth running and therefore, the performance of business-to-business relationships. The RM will be responsible for developing, implementing and then maintaining the collaborative business relationship management process throughout the organisation and becomes the repository for knowledge and experience in collaborative working.

Externally, the RM manages the relationships with networks of organisations, often involving dependencies. It is likely that this web of relationships is highly complicated. Where you find strong relationship management there is less friction and scattering of resources which allows the partner organisations to move forward and achieve their aims.

Central to the RMs role is synchronizing work with his/her opposite number(s) in partner companies. An appropriate level of authority is essential to enable this to happen. This good governance involves consistent management, cohesive policies, guidance, process oversight and leadership. Regular meetings will discuss past performance, current issues, forecasts and plans. Actions will be agreed, resourced and monitored and people assigned will be held to account for their area of responsibility. The overall aim is to maintain the relevance of the joint enterprise in line with objectives and against a background of changes in the external environment. When the relationship comes to an end, the RMs will work together to facilitate an orderly exit.

The BSI's Collaboration Standard – BS 11000 offers a ready made framework for managing business-to-business relationships. It provides a motive for maintaining your processes at peak performance and is a mark of a quality organisation which can give you a competitive edge.

The guiding principles are as follows:

1. **Business as usual** – Relationship management is an integral part of your business and should not be seen as a 'bolt on'.
2. **Seek authoritative advice** – Decide how the value of your collaborative relationships can be improved.
3. **Review what you do** – Identify the things you need to do to improve the way you work with your partners.
4. **Talk to your partners** – Discuss and agree an improved structure for working together.
5. **Implement and document** – Jointly start doing what you agreed and keep records.
6. **Manage the on-going relationship** – Stick to the principles.
7. **Continuous improvement** – Make performance improvement inevitable by frequently reviewing with your partners how you are working together.

Good relationship management has the capability to give you startling results. Do as little or as much as you need to do and the increase in business performance will repay your investment many times over.

Although relationship management is an iterative process that moves around the Relationship Management Cycle and can be entered at any point, in practice it does have three distinct operational phases. These are the Decision Phase (choosing a partner), the Operations Phase (working together) and the Exit Phase (a clean break) which we will cover in our next three blogs.

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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