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## **Trust is a Process. A New Direction in Business Education**

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## **Abstract**

The paper briefly overviews the growing literature on ‘trust’ and proposes a new definition. The authors define Trust as a process, as a verb, as action that enables the individual to be pro active in improving relationships. The Relationship Audit is described as a tested aid to monitor different aspects of working with others inside and outside the organisation.

**Key words:** trust, business education, relationships, organisational change

## **Introduction**

Several authors have called for the fundamental review of management education (e.g. Mintzberg, 1994, Senge, 1990 Hock 1999.). Our traditional educational approaches are deeply rooted in a mechanistic view of management evoking the illusion of control and predictability (Peter Berends, P. and Glunk. U. 2006). Daily experience in the workplace shows that events are not necessarily predictable and control is a double edge sword that when misused causes more harm than good. The ever more sophisticated information and decision support systems cannot take away the need for human judgment in a social context. How can we prepare individuals and organisations for sound human judgement, for sometimes on the spot decision making? Most of the textbooks treat the subject of management and management development in a highly detached way, focusing on general tasks and roles of position holders. This suggests that the manager as a person is not of great importance to managerial effectiveness. Practice, however, shows the opposite. Success in managerial or leadership roles depends to a great extent on the level of maturity, growth, self-awareness and Personal Mastery (Covey, 1992, Platts, 2003) of the individual.

Apart from a few initiatives business schools still need to come to terms with these facts and redesign the curriculum providing opportunities for self-discovery, personal development, reflection, questioning and individual growth.

In this paper we shall report on a successful initiative in Cambridge that offers a new approach to leadership and management development by redefining the concept of ‘trust’ and highlighting the importance of the individual’s intent in the development of meaningful relationships.

Trust is a frequently mentioned requirement of leadership and it is listed as a pre requisite for knowledge sharing in organisations.

Trust is the theme of a growing body of research that tries to define, categorise and quantify this elusive phenomenon. Research in the field of knowledge management and knowledge creation concludes that trust is a prerequisite to creativity in an organisational context. Knowledge is locked into the minds of individuals and we need to trust and be trusted in order to make full use of our potentials. Organisations need to ensure that productivity is not wasted on distrust, suspicion, and self-protection by providing an atmosphere of protection and security. Only in this way will employees focus fully on creation, rather than mere survival.

The paper examines some definitions of trust and suggests a different approach, a new mental model for creating trusting relationships.

The authors try to gain a deeper understanding of how we trust, why we trust, who we trust and how we build trusting relationships in the workplace and in society.

They draw on their own and other researchers’ findings in organisational change and culture and give specific examples to support their views. The aim is to invite academic and business communities to review both the content and the methods of business education exploring new

ways of introducing practices that will enhance the work and life experience of individuals and communities and support the development of trusting relationships.

### **What is Trust?**

Trust is a key component of human life. We need and use trust in different forms in all areas of life, whether it be at work, in friendships, or in relationships. There are ample examples of trust as a scarce resource and it is often noticed and defined by its absence. We easily pick up signals of suspicion and can be acutely aware of its scarcity in the workplace, even if the issue is never spoken about. Trust, either through its presence or absence, has a direct impact on the quality of our working and personal relationships. (Illes and Buchowicz, 2005).

There is no universally accepted definition for trust. It fascinates us yet it is a complex phenomenon with many intangible qualities that we can observe but cannot necessarily define or categorise. Trust means unlimited liability relationships. Power based relationships on the other hand signal limited liabilities. As a key component of successful and lasting relationships it arises in a variety of contexts, in a wide range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, organisational behaviour and culture studies, just to name a few. Trust is often defined by its absence.

It is a standard part of organisational check lists and labelled as a ‘must have’, ‘should have’ or ‘important to have’. Research articles tend to look at the external facets and characteristics of trust.

In January 2006 one of the authors spent three weeks travelling in India visiting academic and health institutions, rural and urban areas, observing the ever growing contrasts between the past and the future, between technological advancement and basic human necessities. India gave her the experience of a crucible, a melting pot of our global reality, our heritage, our discoveries, achievements, generosity and also our mistakes, greed, and hunger. The trip also made her conscious of our individual and collective responsibilities for the choices we make and the changes we initiate. India is an ideal location for reflecting on trust, meaning, purpose and contribution.

As educators we have the privilege of touching the minds and hearts of thousands of students who come from all over the world seeking for knowledge and direction. We feel that working through text books and preparing students for exams is not the answer any more. The changing nature of education signals that the challenge is to assist the next generation to develop the moral fibre, the character that will enable them to make ethically sound decisions. The task of an educator in this context is more of a mentor, facilitator, and co-learner, than interrogator, powerful authority and the source of THE answers. The educational context can also provide opportunities for reflection on the nature of our interactions and exploring new ways of building trusting relationships.

A graffiti seen during the trip in India sums up in a creative and thought provoking way the task and our starting point when we as educators think about building trust through business education.

“21st Century Lifelessness

Our communication wireless

Our business cashless

Our telephone cordless

Our cooking fireless  
Our youth jobless  
Our religion creedless  
Our food fatless  
Our faith godless  
Our labour effortless  
Our conduct worthless  
Our relation loveless  
Our attitude careless  
Our feelings heartless  
Our politics shameless  
Our education valueless  
Our follies countless  
Our arguments baseless  
Our commitment aimless  
Our poor voiceless  
Our life meaningless  
Finally, our existence – Useless???

This is one snap shot of reality. It is one way of looking at our world. Some might find it bleak, however, for us it is an encouraging list. Our read of it is rather positive. It is objective, factual, detailed and observant. The anonymous author looks around the world and after preparing a detailed inventory comes back to the most ancient human questions without explicitly asking them: What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of our existence? And perhaps we might also guess or implicitly suggest questions like: What can I do to make sure that my existence is useful and my life is meaningful?

These are questions that occupied the minds and hearts of teachers and students throughout history up to the turn of the century perhaps when inward looking, reflection and philosophical debate gradually went out of fashion in education and was replaced by tangible, factual and rational targets and topics. Schools and education used to be primarily about character building, self discovery, and preparation for life by acquiring the skills and tools that enabled individuals to survive and prosper in all areas of life. In the process of discussing and debating the universal dilemmas of human existence teachers and students got to know each other and shared their hopes, doubts and fears. They encouraged, supported and challenged each other and in the process lasting relationships were built, characters were formed and meaning was found.

It is useful to remind ourselves that the word ‘school’ derives from the Greek word ‘scholé’ meaning free space. Originally a school was a retreat where people could reflect together with others on how the world weaves into a whole, what we and others ought to do, how the good life may be defined, attained and lived. School is a place where, for a while, we are relieved of the task of making a living, or taking care of others, or serving specific interests. Schooling is: making use of this free space to inquire into ideas that guide our doings, to remind us of our initial intentions, to explore the meaning of words and concepts that inform our activities. As inquiry, schooling intends to update our practice. It is a joint effort, since our words and ideas need to be ‘honed’ by those of others. In the progression of inquiry a team is forged in which participants can develop their own understanding, their personal view of excellence in action. And this in turn opens the way towards a vision shared by all. (Kessels, et.al. 2004)

Schools in their original sense have played an important role in the formation of character over the centuries. So perhaps it is timely to go back to the roots of education and re-introduce some aspects into our business schools so that students would get an opportunity to ask themselves the soul searching questions before they set their foot on the corporate ladder. (Illes, 2004)

The key stakeholders of business education are students, academic staff and employers. The university and /or the business school is expected to satisfy demands and generate enough revenue to expand, grow and innovate for the benefit of the stakeholders and society as a whole. When universities and business schools are run like factories then the focus is on profitability, efficiency and standardization. Position holders focus on budgets, generating revenue, and meeting targets. In order to ascertain the implementation of objectives and strategies more bureaucratic measurements are introduced, academics spend less time with students and more time with administration. Human contact, meaning and the joy of individual and collective growth is almost totally lost in the process.

In *Meaningful Manufacturing*, Platts (2003) reminds us of the true meaning of work. Pointing to Plato's definition of work as 'work is effort applied to difficulty, it always has internal and external results'. Platts describes work as two transformational processes, materials transforming into products and people transforming towards maturity. He argues that Taylor's development of scientific management is a retreat from engaging in relationships and has hence demeaned the process of work. If people are not being transformed, it is not work. Platts says that the key to achieving this transformation is positive intent, the unconditional giving of the self. When work is not meaningful any more the organisation loses its soul (Mintzberg, 1994).

It is not untypical to observe the following vicious circle: a culture of distrust in the organisation; competitiveness of ego driven individuals who focus on personal agendas, and career building at the expense of colleagues and students. Students pick up the culture and in their behaviour often model the same behaviour. In their group work and general interaction with each other they mirror the attitude and level of maturity of the environment. The negativity of this circle creates fear and participants operate in survival mode that consumes existing energies and resources and does not allow time and opportunity for growth and creativity.

This vicious circle is man-made and can be broken. It requires the right intent from position holders, the intent of genuine care for the well being and growth of the individual members of the organisation. It needs to be built on the premise that it is not actually possible to lead someone, but that people allow themselves to be led. Schuitema's (2000) care and growth model takes transformational leadership to a different level. He argues, "*what is at issue between the employer and the employee is not the price of a commodity called labour, it is the legitimacy of a relationship of power and any relationship of power is legitimate if the aim of that relationship is the empowerment of the subordinate*".

His research is based on asking groups of literally thousands of people from all levels of hierarchy and different cultural backgrounds, to write a description of the ideal boss, the boss they would work for because they wanted to not because they had to. Every time he gets a very similar answer.

Schuitema argues that you give this person the right to tell you what to do. He points out that the traits fall into two categories, "care" and "growth". He is at pains to point out the intent with which you display these characteristics is imperative to the legitimacy of the power. The intent must be pure, and benevolent. That is, a leader must show they care because they have a real interest in the person not because they feel that way it will increase profits. He goes on to define the role of a leader as:

- Helper
- Example
- Advocate
- Teacher

The model has been criticised as a soft option, Schuitema explains that this is not the case as to grow someone you need to teach him accountability, and your integrity is at risk if you don't always do the right thing even if that is painful to you.

This model is particularly relevant in an academic context where opportunities for teaching by example are so readily available both inside and outside the classroom.

Building trust is an individual choice and responsibility. In an educational context the initiative has to come from the teacher. How prepared are we as educators to show our vulnerabilities? What is our true intent? Do we signal good will? Do we encourage students to challenge us and are we prepared to be honest about our not knowing?

Are we consciously and continuously working on deepening the level of trust and reducing the resistance and fear towards exploring, investigating and experimenting?

Do we give feedback on performance without judging the individual? Is failure truly an outcome or an interim stage of the learning process?

## **Trust Literature**

Research in the field of knowledge management and knowledge creation concludes that trust is a prerequisite to creativity in an organisational context. Knowledge is locked into the mind of individuals and we need to trust and be trusted to make full use of our potentials. We need to feel protected and cared for so that we can focus our energies on creation rather than survival. Pfeffer (1998) argues that if an organisation is expecting full productivity of their people through hard work and commitment, it will ultimately have to make sure that the message conveyed is one of protection and security.

Trust as a key component of successful and lasting relationships comes up in a variety of contexts in a wide range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, organisational behaviour and culture studies just to name a few. Trust is often defined by the lack of its presence. It is a phenomenon that one can read about in a variety of contexts yet we do not seem to have a universally accepted definition.

It is a standard part of organisational check lists and labelled as a 'must have', 'should have' or 'important to have'.

Let us start with a brief overview of the trust literature that looks at the external facets and characteristics of trust. These frameworks linguistically treat the phenomenon of trust as a noun or a gerund and conceptualize it as a cause of certain actions or behaviours.

Attempts to uncover the experiences alluded to by the term trust have been made in a number of disciplines, including philosophy (e.g. Baier, 1986; Hosmer, 1995), sociology (e.g. Gambetta, 1990; Barber, 1983) and psychology (e.g. Deutsch, 1962; Erikson, 1965). Each discipline focuses on a particular element of trust and there is no or very little communication between the disciplines. Dikken (2000) divides trust into three broad categories. *Dispositional trust*, the psychological disposition or personality trait of an individual to be trusting or not; *learnt trust*, an individual's general tendency to trust, or not to trust another individual as a result of experience; and *situational trust*, that which is dependent 'on the situational cues that modify the expression of generalised' tendencies.(Worchel, 1979).

Other research has pointed at the different types of trusting relationships that exist within any organisation. A successful organisation is built on a foundation that includes lateral, vertical and external trust (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1995). Lateral trust as defined is developed between equals, vertical trust can be built between supervisors and subordinates and external trust happens between organisations and clients and or suppliers.

Six, F. (2004) in her in-depth literature review of trust uses the following categories:

1. Trust is a necessity in a context of high ambiguity and uncertainty, and in contexts of high complexity
2. Trust can provide a sense of security which will help survival in these contexts
3. Trust can help with risk-taking necessary for survival in these contexts
4. Trust enhances ability to change and support (radical) change
5. Trust assists in learning, creativity and innovation
6. Trust is a lubricant for social relations that improves efficiency
7. Trust fosters and maintains cooperation, as it encourages information sharing, enriches relationships, increases openness and mutual acceptance and enhances conflict resolution and integrative problem solving
8. Trust reduces the need for detailed contractual and monitoring devices and is thus important in governance issues
9. Trust has intrinsic values

Many of the academic theories of trust follow the principles of Rational Choice Theory. Rational Choice Theory applies principles like clear analytical assumptions about people's personal goals and uses analytical methods that are unambiguous.

Other academic theories follow the two basic assumptions of Relational Signalling Theory:

1. Human behaviour is goal directed
2. Human behaviour is context dependent, depending on the frame that the individual is in. Lindenberg (2003) identified three frames. The hedonic frame's main aim is to feel good or better right now; the gain frame's main goal is to improve one's resources and the normative frame's goal is to act appropriately.

Academia tends to treat subjects such as trust as abstract nouns. The above listed theories and frameworks look at trust as something tangible and quantifiable, something that reduces complexity. In linguistic terms 'trust' is a noun or a gerund, it is something that we have or do not have. The essential viewpoint is also utilitarian. You want to trust because it 'does' something.

Taylor's research (1989) shows that the word 'trust' is used with a variety of meanings, yet



the conceptual papers do not seem to be able to explain the elements and the true essence of trust, nor do they offer any examples as to how to move towards developing this idea of trust at a practical level.

### **Trusting as a Process**

We start with an *old* paradigm that takes an internal view of trust. This paradigm has been with us since Plato and Aristotle who argued that ethical behaviour and virtue are the foundations of democratic society. Rather than looking at the external world for trust, we suggest a process that starts internally with the intent of the individual. We suggest that trust is a result of our actions and behaviour rather than a cause of it. Trusting is a process rather than something you ‘have’. So we are emphasising trust as a verb rather than a noun.

The ability to trust is the first and most basic stage of personal development, which is well documented and researched in child psychology (Erikson, E. 1963). We first experience and learn to trust and distrust during the early years of childhood and that its development is a direct outcome of parental inputs. These experiences then go on to shape the further stages of our personal development. Our early experience of good will is an experience that we use as an internal reference point when we trust or distrust others.

Good will is practical rather than theoretical and it is rooted in intent. For example:

- “1. My intent is to serve, to create, to give.
2. I sustain this as my practice in life.
3. I radiate good will and
4. that results in trust.”

In other words trust is a *response*. Once present it is a *lubricator* but it is not itself a *cause*. When we look at trusting as a process we start to think about our own intent. At this level trusting becomes a practical and personal issue for the individual. Putting it very simply, if there is no trust around me I can always ask myself two questions: How have I contributed to the lack of trust? What can I do to change my relationships into trusting ones? This approach creates a proactive and responsible attitude to our environment, and also places some of the responsibility for a trusting atmosphere on individuals, rather than ‘the organisation’ in the abstract.

The literature on professional practice, and on the process of developing trust and the experience of trusting, uses a different vocabulary. This involves looking at *trusting* as a verb, as a process, and moreover, a process which has a precursor, because real trusting only emerges in response to the demonstration of goodwill and good intent. The ability to translate good will into actions that give embodiment to the intention is an ability - a virtue - that one can grow, cultivate and share and can use as a guiding principle in life. When this becomes embedded as a way of behaving and is reciprocated, trust emerges and can be recognised to be present. But in this context, the word is a descriptor of the result of a process being lived of the processes of good will. It is not something which in some way exists in abstract on its own.

What we are returning to is the older literature - which predates all the academic literature - on the development of trust as practice. Plato said that philosophy should not be written about, it should be practised. Aristotle uses “virtue” to mean “excellence” – excellence of the

activity by which the potentialities peculiar to man are realized. (Fromm, E.,2003). Aristotle highlights the importance of right action and argues that "...it makes perhaps no small difference, whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or activity. For the state of mind exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well." (Aristotle, 1925. 1098, 32.). The good man for Aristotle is someone who by his activity, following the guidance of his reason, brings to life his potentialities.

Of modern authors on leadership Steven Covey (1992), Peter Senge (1990), John Kotter (1996), Jim Collins (2001), Edwards Deming (2000), for example are very clear on the processes. The old literature includes Confucius, Lao Tzu, all the Saints, all the Sufis, all the Quakers, Adam Smith (particularly in "The Theory of Moral Sentiments"), Samuel Smiles (1958), and more recent writers such as MacIntyre (2004) and Himmelfarb (2005). Current research and teaching on leadership in the Institute for Manufacturing in the University of Cambridge is a modern embodiment of the practice of this path.

### **Tools and Models for Trusting**

Work on the development of productive relationships within the construction industry has given rise to a well developed model of the development of reciprocated trust in the process of mentoring and an articulation of the nature of the leadership required to develop what the Cambridge researchers have come to call 'relationship competence'(Tomasevic, V. 2003).

An interesting observation made concerning the relationship between the mentor and the mentee in the teaching process is that in the early stages the mentee has to trust the mentor but there is a key point in the process beyond which the trusting reverses direction and the mentor has to trust the mentee who is beginning to make the understanding on his own and thus needs to be free to exercise his own judgement concerning real situations. At this stage the mentor is acutely empathetically aware of how the mentee is progressing but carefully does not intervene. The reflection points noted down in the diagram (see appendix 1) indicate the changing nature of the intention as the process progresses.

This mentor-mentee model has been developed further into an audit tool assessing the status of any relationship in supply chain management. Yuen Yoong Leong (2005) has tested and applied the model in developing biopharmaceutical networks.

In appendix 2 we show the Relationship Management Review Audit Tool and in appendix 3 the Template for Visualising Relationship Management Practice Scores.

It is a useful tool for looking at the current level of trust in organisations. This tool enables the user to study the level of technical, managerial and relationship competence and also the contracts, free mental space and goodwill trust development in the organisation. It is a diagnostic tool that helps working groups to prepare an honest inventory of the internal and external relationships. It is a useful starting point for improving relationship competence and building trusting relationships both in the workplace and in the classroom. The tool is accessible and downloadable free of charge from:

[http://www.i10.org.ukservices/learning/elearning\(2006\)](http://www.i10.org.ukservices/learning/elearning(2006))

## Conclusions

In this paper we drew the attention to the fundamental nature of trust as action in business education. Building trust requires time and free space for individuals in organisations. By consciously providing time and free space in the curriculum of business education we could actively promote reflection, mindfulness and personal responsibility in relationship building. If this approach became an integral part of business education it would create a different culture and would influence and help the very much needed transition from competition to collaboration in the workplace and in society as a whole. It could prepare the ground for a paradigm shift when the key question would shift from the current ‘what is your competitive advantage?’ to the more meaningful and forward looking ‘what are your collaborative advantages?’

If we give a student an opportunity to think about change in the spirit of Marcus Aurelius then change will become a natural part of daily life rather than a shock.

*“Is anyone afraid of change? Why, what can take place without change? What then is more pleasing to the universal nature? And canst thou take a bath unless the wood undergoes a change? And canst thou be nourished unless the food undergoes a change? And can anything else that is useful be accomplished without change? Dost thou not see then that for thyself also to undergo change is just the same, and equally necessary for the universal nature”* (Marcus Aurelius Antonius, 1961)

Perhaps it is time to remind managers, future managers and management educators that “All is flux, nothing stays still” (Heraclitus, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC), that “Nothing is accidental, all things happen for some reason or necessity”. (Epicurus, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC), that “You cannot explain everything to everyone” and “No man is free who cannot master himself” (Pythagoras 570-500 BC.) But first of all, perhaps we need to remember and remind our students to use and build on the available collective knowledge of previous generations. This knowledge is timeless, it promotes the development of a morally and ethically sound character that is necessary to make the right decisions even in difficult circumstances. This knowledge gives stability, continuity and a clear direction that is so necessary to counter balance the rapidly changing, uncertain, fast and demanding reality around us.

Business education that provides such a balanced education through the content and delivery of its curriculum will build trusting relationships inside and outside the walls of its institution.

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# Mentoring

Step	Activity		Milestones for reflection
	Mentor Responsibility	Student	
1	Exploring willingly and openly		Establish relevant topics: trust, empathy, civic responsibility, perceptions, professional pride. Explore ones role as well as companies historically to gain "long-term perspective". Discuss benefits of professional education.
2	Guiding	Repetition	Reassessment of fundamentals. Does mentor see where this leads? Dissect each positive tool and negative trend in behaviour.
3 TRUST TURNING POINT	Offering critique	Reflecting on observations	Evaluate relevance & importance of aforementioned topics. Why are some more present than others? What led to this priority order? What would be the preferred order? How do all priorities fit with each other?
4	Encouraging	Hypothesising	What should be done to change priorities? What needs to be resolved "internally"? How does the student (mentor) feel? Does the student feel the new way forward is good? How reliable is the new plan?
5	Empathic trusting	Evaluation and revision	What can be the biggest obstacles? Is there a genuine intent in student? Is this exercise in the spirit of good-will and trust? What is the emotional state of student? Can the student now be left and trusted to perpetuate this model on his own?

## Relationship Management Review Audit Tool

Relationship Aspects	Score	Comments
<p><b>Technical Competence</b></p> <p>1 There is a clear understanding of the core competencies required for the project</p> <p>2 If partners have no prior experience in a particular task, one could sense their (tacit) ability to accomplish it with effort</p> <p>3 Project teams involve all appropriate skills at an early stage</p> <p>4 The ability to show other people particular skills and enable them to develop them is present</p>		
<p><b>Managerial Competence</b></p> <p>5 Partner's lack of financial security can be compensated by their financial management competence</p> <p>6 There is joint discussion about a feasible timeline</p> <p>7 You and your partner manage risk through developing and managing positive relationships instead of moving in negative and defensive ways</p> <p>8 The companies share common values (difficult to determine early on, but can be used to determine the expansion of future relationship)</p>		
<p><b>Relational Competence</b></p> <p>9 There is a clear point of contact in both companies and he or she is deemed to have the appropriate authority</p> <p>10 Project managers ensure that they are always contactable</p> <p>11 Measures are thoughtfully put in place to ensure regular contact with contractors / partners</p> <p>12 There is a communication process that is conducted in an open two-way manner</p> <p>13 There is a company-wide culture driving a problem-solving (as opposed to fault-finding) attitude</p>		
<p><b>Contracts</b></p> <p>14 The remuneration terms in the contract are considered fair</p> <p>15 Expectations are clarified and equal (when relevant)</p> <p>16 Standard pieces of work are defined and prices specified</p> <p>17 A technical agreement (specifying ownership of responsibilities) is in place</p> <p>18 The contract is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is amended appropriately as both companies' circumstances evolve, i.e. treating the contract as a living document</p> <p>19 You are aware that arguing with contractors / partners by referring to contractual terms should be the last resort</p>		
<p><b>Free Mental Space</b></p> <p>20 Project teams manage the trade-offs between the contributions from all areas so that the outcomes reflect the best judgement of all involved</p> <p>21 The teams hold problems open in the interested, listening kind of way that leads to understanding and then to a solution</p> <p>22 Individual egos are kept in balance</p>		
<p><b>Goodwill Trust Development</b></p> <p>23 Relevant knowledge of the contractor(s) / partner (s) is valued</p> <p>24 There is a strong intent for the project to succeed on both sides</p> <p>25 There is a reciprocity mindset between the teams</p> <p>26 There is a high level of respect between the teams</p> <p>27 Proactive goodwill is evident in action at all times</p> <p>28 Competence on the four foundational skills (empathic listening, unfreezing frozen emotions, transcendent thinking and achieving insightful consensus) is visible in operation</p>		

Template for Visualising Relationship Management Practice Scores

