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The Human Connection is the Foundation for any Competent Partnership

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Source: <https://welldoing.org/article/upgrade-better-human-connection>

1. Introduction

From interpersonal interactions to digital communication, connections and partnerships are a noteworthy aspect of our day-to-day lives. The formation of such effective, meaningful

and competent relationships presupposes something critical: a human connection. The human connection arguably far supersedes the partnership one, and examples to support this abound; for instance, why do individuals learn more from teachers that they 'like' as opposed to teachers they do not? The development of such a connection is what enables a group of people to truly support one another, allowing each and every person involved to discover their unique potential, thus becoming the best version of themselves. It is only after this process is genuinely completed that we can feel comfortable to 'ACT2Gether' in a competent and effective manner.

As Karinthy theorised, anyone in the world can be connected to another through six or fewer social connections, the six degrees of separation (Smith, 2008). Friends of friends can connect you to any and every other person in existence. But what is a connection? Is it something physical, established between two parties allowing them to communicate? Is it something electrical or astronomical that helps people share information across realms of data and spiritual or digital signals? Or, rather, is the connection something chemical or biological, something that connects us as human beings, as partners in a relationship?

Competent meaningful partnerships can be developed and strengthened through one simple act: establishing a human connection. Doing so allows people to trust one another and develop a sense of comfort and understanding. Once you understand how someone functions best, you can move forward, knowing and accepting the strengths and shortcomings of that person.

2. What makes a competent partnership?

Competence can be defined in many ways. In some media, it is the ability to successfully and effectively complete a task, while in others it gives you the authority to deal with specific matters. For the purpose of this article, competence can simply be understood as the state of being where you are trusted to carry out a task, with the expectation that said task is carried out successfully and to the best of your ability. Thus, a competent partner is someone who you can wholeheartedly trust to complete a task that falls within their areas of expertise.

To have a 'good' and healthy partnership there needs to be an element of trust and comfort between all parties of the partnership. This is however often obstructed by humanity's reluctance to express weakness and vulnerability. The act of trusting someone and risking betrayal and heartbreak is often a deterrent. So, first we must understand ourselves and others. Through mutual understanding and development, we can lay the bricks to form a competent partnership through human connection.

2.1 Mutual development and understanding

Human beings all function in similar yet different ways, each with their own capacities and approaches to the same everyday tasks. This creative difference in expression is beautiful, but can sometimes create rifts, leading us to distance ourselves when instead we could explore why these differences and behavioural patterns exist. Once this is determined, the

best course of action can be identified as one which allows us to come together to draw out one another's strengths through this uniqueness.

We need to understand how and why we function in a certain way. Our partner(s) also need to do the same, as one-sided development does not result in healthy partnerships. There needs to be equity in partnerships, ensuring a balance is maintained so peace and functionality can continue effectively.

One effective means of understanding ourselves internally is through the use of the Head, Hand and Heart perspectives model, used across many sectors, including education and self-learning (Gazibara, 2013). With this model, we understand that everyone is influenced by a combination of perspectives in their everyday existence and actions. Other schools of thought enhance this model by supporting the existence of a fourth perspective which assimilates each of the others, giving meaning to why they exist: the soul, or the spirit. Those who primarily use the perspective of the head tend to seek rationality and structure in tasks and choices made, more so than feelings and emotions. Those primarily using the 'hand' instead prefer to take action and do things now; worrying later about the consequences of their actions. In contrast to those who primarily use the 'head' perspective, 'hand' people are more 'try-think-try' than 'think-try-think'. These people believe that direct experience is the most important in learning processes, and hence only through living experiences can they truly prosper and develop themselves. Then we have those who primarily use the perspective of the heart; individuals ruled by this perspective first think about the emotions and feelings of themselves and others before carrying out tasks. These individuals learn from experiences by witnessing how they felt by during the journey as well how they felt at the outcome of a situation.

Individuals usually associate with one of the perspectives more than the others, and this can lead to different issues arising. As someone more aligned with one of the perspectives, you may begin to have concerns about the others, as outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Understanding the reservations that champions of each perspective may have against one another. Read horizontally, left to right

		PERSPECTIVE		
		HEAD	HAND	HEART
PERSPECTIVE	HEAD		Disdain of action with lack of forethought, obstruction of rationale	Fear of emotion due to lack of control in emotions, chaotic
	HAND	Impractical, over-thinkers, theorists		Emotions are a weakness, feelings are a waste of time
	HEART	Cold, distant, emotionally inadequate, lack of people skills	Unaware of the consequences of their actions, pities, lack of understanding	

Source: Head, hands and heart, 2002.

It is important to acknowledge which perspective you attribute to yourself and which perspective your partners attribute to themselves. Once you can watch and listen to others, acknowledging their preferred perspective, you can begin the process of mutually understanding what is needed by each party in order for the partnership to succeed.

2.2 Growth and discerning systemic processes

Now that we share this understanding, it is essential that all within the partnership understand that it is within human nature to have imperfections. No matter what level of understanding we share, we don't always work the way others would like us to. Some people like to work during the day, whereas others work much better at night. Some people may respond well to positive reinforcement whereas others prefer constructive criticism. These subtle differences, if not acknowledged and acted on, can lead to complications later on. You cannot assume that your partner will react in the same way as you to a certain situation.

So, we need to properly acknowledge our partners, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and discern their systemic processes. How do they work? What makes them tick? What do they like or dislike? Once you begin noticing these processes and understand the implications they have on your partner's emotional and physical well-being, you can begin to appreciate when and where to work with your partner best and what climates and conditions allow them and yourself to work optimally. This will lead to a stronger, more effective and meaningful partnership. Such healthy partnerships allow spaces initially occupied by fear of betrayal to be replaced by a sense of trust and ease. And this is due to the human connection developed between the individuals, and the understanding of each other's behaviours which truly allow all partners to excel.

In spite of all this, knowing what needs to be done to grow and develop mutually within a partnership is not enough. Individuals need to understand how and why this growth is possible, leading us to the following point.

3. Why do we learn more from teachers we 'like' as opposed to those we do not?

3.1 Emotions & humanity

Why is it that we learn more and assimilate knowledge from teachers we 'like' rather than those we do not? Why are humans able to go to greater lengths for those they care for rather than ones they do not? You see this phenomenon in schools, work and even in our interpersonal relationships themselves. To bring us back to our internal reflections, it is due to the fact that humans are innately beings of the heart, and so feelings and emotions hold great power over us.

This state of existence is innately rooted into our very core as human beings but is also something that one develops through upbringing and early childhood developmental growth; the balance between nature and nurture.

Behaviours can be learnt and assimilated into the core of our beings, not just in animals but even in human beings through positive and negative reinforcement and through living experiences. However, the existence of these behaviours can be attributed to basic ethical philosophies that are implicitly taught to all throughout life. Hedonism (Veenhoven, 2003) and utilitarianism (Tobler et al., 2008; Duignan and West, 2017) are both examples of such ethical philosophies that capture why humans behave in certain ways, allowing themselves to be governed by emotions as they are. Hedonism argues that the most important thing in life is the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Utilitarianism takes this further, believing that humanity will and should always choose to seek out the greatest good for the greatest number of people. These implicit beliefs and teachings can be attributed to why individuals act in certain fashions. You learn more from teachers you like due to the positive rewarding feeling obtained from pleasing the individual that you care about. If you did not care about the teacher, there is no extra hedonistic push from a pupil to thrive and succeed, hence one performs less well. This principle can also be applied in other settings: pleasing a friend, your family, a mentor and even through pleasing yourself through achieving personal goals and overcoming challenges.

Once we acknowledge why we as human beings behave due to these specific means, we can begin to appreciate the steps required to internally develop ourselves to better engage in mutually beneficial partnerships. This allows us to understand ourselves as human beings, after which we can begin to allow ourselves to be more vulnerable and trusting towards our partner(s).

3.2 Selfless vs. selfish – individual growth before partnership growth

Some struggle with this realization as it poses the question of whether human beings are selfish or selfless beings. Is altruism in our nature, or is egoism at the core of humanity? Some question the existence of selfless actions themselves, as according to hedonism, we are always seeking our own pleasure. Actions undertaken by humans are for personal gain, hence people are selfish. Others argue that selfless actions do indeed exist. For example, a mother will carry a baby for nine months, costing her own comfort and well-being, just so the baby can grow and live their own unique life. People may argue that there is reward in childbirth itself and having a child, however, this would not justify surrogacy. You can argue there is reward in supporting another family, however, does the rewarding feeling outweigh the pain of carrying a child for nine months only to give them away; does this action demonstrate the core principle of hedonism? This is a difficult question to reflect upon, as we can question whether each and every action was done in a selfish or selfless manner.

From a young age we are taught that selfishness is wrong and immoral, that we should live through being kind and supportive of others. This is contradictory to the teachings of hedonism and utilitarianism, as they almost always prioritize the pleasure of the individual first. Why then are we as human beings, taught that to be selfish is wrong? In airplanes individuals are instructed to put on their own oxygen mask first if an emergency occurs. In such a situation, you may want to help those around you with putting their masks on, if they seem to be old or frail or young. The utilitarian approach supports this as the more people you help the better, no? This however is what people are advised against, as the first action

to take in such situations is to put your own mask on first. This self-sufficient response may seem quite selfish and it is, as you ensure your survival first.

Nevertheless, you can only help others if you manage your own survival first. Thus, we see that sometimes being selfish is not necessarily a bad thing, regardless of what we are taught. In reality, the ability to be selfish and selfless are both essential qualities needed by each of us, as it is only through appropriate use of both trains of thought that we can truly begin to grow and develop ourselves and engage with competent partnerships in the future. In order to be selfless and support one another in a partnership, we must be selfish first to understand our respective wants and needs within the partnership. Once these have been acknowledged, we can begin to connect as humans, understanding the choices each makes in our own respective fashions and why we behave the way we do. After we begin to 'see' one another and express vulnerability through mutual understanding and behavioural development, we can generate an affinity of sorts with our partner(s).

3.3 Challenges and resolutions

As mentioned, having affinity with an individual or belief can be powerful, as it provides you with the strength to go above and beyond the call of duty. However, misinterpretation of this affinity can lead to issues and complications arising, proving harmful both to the relationship and your personal well-being.

There are many different types of relationships: with friends, family, a mentor, a professor, a romantic partner and more. Each relationship differs in subtle ways, with many overlaps across the board, and different types of relationships can often be misconstrued for one another, brewing possible danger. For example, in romantic relationships, many individuals want their partners to be their best friends, leading to a blurring of the lines between these romantic and platonic relationships. The problem here is that if the partners view this relationship from different perspectives, then the expectations and assumptions from both sides will differ. Hence, it is vital that we always communicate effectively to ensure all parties are on the same page, reducing any imbalances that may potentially arise.

Relationships can also be developed in the 'wrong' manner, and thus have the potential to evolve into something more damaging as opposed to something mutually beneficial, allowing both parties to grow and develop. There are numerous types of these 'toxic' relationships. These can be expressed through the biological teachings of symbiotic relationships (Brenner, 2018). A symbiotic relationship dictates the interactions between different species allowing for the survival of one or more said species within the relationship.

One form of a symbiotic relationship is through mutualism. In this form of partnership, both parties benefit from the situation. This type of relationship is what should be sought after, a relationship in which there is mutual benefit for all parties and through which partners do what they can to support the other, as a 50:50 approach may not always be possible (Dore, 2019).

A more toxic symbiotic relationship exists in the form of parasitism. Here, one species, the parasite, gains from the relationship where the other species, the host, suffers. This form of toxic relationship is destined to break apart because mutual understanding and trust is required for a strong and healthy partnership – a human connection is required. In parasitic relationships, one party is always at a loss, and so cannot benefit from the partnership in any capacity. This means that the individual can never truly engage in the partnership nor form a strong connection with the other, as ultimately there is no care or support within the relationship.

The final type of symbiotic relationship can still cause problems and result in the dissolution of a partnership due to imbalances and lack of human connection. A commensalistic relationship is one in which one species benefits while the other is neither helped nor harmed. The simple fact of there being an imbalance in this relationship means that it can never reach a point where both parties feel fulfilled. This can never become a truly competent partnership in which there is mutual benefit and growth.

Finally, another danger associated with relationships can be the loss of personal identity and uniqueness. During the developmental stages of life, individuals can unknowingly be influenced into adopting another person or a mentor's quirks and characteristics. This may not necessarily be a bad thing, as many individuals aspire to be like someone they look up to, however, it can lead to the loss of personal identity due to external factors and pressures. There is a risk that inspiration in these circumstances gives way to imitation, and so an individual is unable to truly express themselves and become who they are meant to be, meaning people cannot unlock their unique potential. In this case, it is almost impossible to establish strong and true human connections with others, because to establish a human connection, you must first look inward and accept and develop your own unique person. Imitation will not allow this.

Ultimately, there are many challenges with relationships, but most can be easily overcome through regular communication as this enables a clear understanding within parties of what is and is not expected from the partnership. This clarity and trust allow individuals to be more comfortable and understanding of one another, enabling a human connection to be established between them. Further, through internal and external reflection, you can identify key practices undertaken by yourself and your partner; this leads to understanding how best to interpersonally and interdependently behave and act, allowing the development of a trusting human connection, strengthening your partnership even further.

4. How do we ACT2gether to develop and build on these human connections and relationships

In summary, there are several qualities that are required in developing strong human connections. We have to reach the point where we care and have a stake in the partnership itself. We need to care for and develop trust with our partners. After this, through active engagement and mutual understanding, we can begin to sow the seeds of meaningful and competent partnerships.

Now that we can appreciate what is required to build these connections, we can delve into the process required of us to begin to ACT2gether, not only with our partners in a one-to-one, group or community setting, but also in an internal individual setting.

4.1 Building a home, a town and a community

Think of a partnership between individuals as a house that is being built. When building this house, both parties need to be able to take and give bricks to build the home. One by one, a brick is donated from each side. In the end, the house that is built has been equally developed by both parties, hence both parties feel a sense of ownership and care towards the house. The house now becomes a home, something to cherish for both individuals. In cases where one party gives or takes more than the other, the house that is erected in the end is not mutually owned by both parties, as one party has had more influence than the other. This means that it does not give a sense of comfort and fulfilment when living there, as it does not feel like a home. This is the same in partnerships and relationships where one side has dominance, the other does not have a chance to feel truly safe and secure, hence trust cannot be developed or felt, ultimately dooming this partnership to fail. When building together, the home developed should be a safe space for all owners. In human relationships that work cohesively and meaningfully, all parties can feel happy and feel a sense of fulfilment. This happens when both parties give and take the same amount, when there is a mutually agreed balance between the parties.

However, this does not necessarily mean that equality trumps all when setting up partnerships, as naturally this process will never occur in a 50:50 manner. Some individuals will always have higher stakes than the other, more investment, more to lose. This does not mean, however, that a home for both individuals in the partnership cannot be built. For example, in a teacher-student partnership, the teacher will have more knowledge and expertise to share, and the student may have little to none; this does not mean that the partnership developed will prove unsuccessful. What can damage this partnership is how interactions take place, and what kind of human connection they possess. Ultimately through understanding and trust, you can identify a balance in the relationship that both parties are comfortable with, a balance that ensures equity and resonance, leading to success.

Building a town or community is, in reality, no harder than building a home. A partnership between two individuals, a small group or even a large mass of people within one collective movement, is relatively easy to develop and uphold effectively. Once we acknowledge that a balance and understanding is needed within partnerships, we can look at the processes and methods used to achieve this.

4.2 How to lay the bricks and foundations

Reaching this point of mutual understanding may seem like an arduous task but in reality, it is simple. We must be able to partake in copious amounts of what some refer to as 'core capacities'. (O'Toole, 2016) These are processes that can be practiced and enlivened to help develop mutual trust and care in partnerships: the fundamentals of a human connection. One such process of using the capacities is detailed below.

First, we need to simply relax; reach a point of tranquillity within ourselves so that we can allow our minds to open and prepare to interact with another separate being to ourselves – something foreign. Relaxation brings openness to the chaos of the foreign and unknown, so we do not fear it. Once relaxed, we gain the ability to do numerous things, as our internal energy is now less focused on self-survival and protection against the unknown, instead we can now use our energies to better build bridges between us and the individual(s) we wish to form a connection with.

Now we are able to notice things about the other individual, discerning the patterns and systemic processes they undertake. We recognize the interdependency of their entire being; how their tone of voice resonates with their emotions at that moment; how subtle muscular movements indicate whether they are comfortable or not, and more. We can thus subtly sense what the individual likes and dislikes, empathizing with them along the way and relating them to ourselves. How are we the same? How are we different? Step by step, recognizing the other individual as their own unique being who in reality is not too different from yourself, as we all share the same perspectives within us, the same core capacities and the same ability to unlock our unique potential.

Now that we are more comfortable with the other, as they are not so foreign anymore, we feel less threatened, our fear of vulnerability is diminished. The hedonistic impulses telling us to avoid pain are now more silent, as we dissociate this new individual from all of those feelings. Now we become more inquisitive and inquiring. We ask questions to track mutual experiences and ambitions, finding more commonalities each step of the way. We ensure that we are actively listening with our eyes, ears, heart and soul, all the while continually reflecting and reaffirming within ourselves that this individual does not pose any threat to us. In reality, a partnership with them would be enlightening, educational and even 'fun'.

You then reach a point in which you feel connected to the other, through a mutual understanding developed through the use of your core capacities. You begin to hold a stake in your partnership, as now you are invested. Now that you care, you want to go above and beyond to ensure that the work done through this partnership is successful and fulfilling and reaches the standards desired by you and your partner. A human connection has now been developed between you and your partner. You now have the tools and requirements to help build strong and healthy relationships, to build a 'home' together.

Without this human connection, it would be near impossible to reach this point of genuine mutual understanding, care and acceptance. Hence, it would be impossible to develop a healthy, meaningful and competent partnership.

5. Conclusion – becoming champions of our own unique potential

Now that we understand the steps needed to form strong connections, we must become our own champions; to allow ourselves to use our unique potential to fully engage in these connections with others. If we do not allow ourselves to properly engage in these connections, then we damage the human connection, and thus negatively affect the overarching partnership.

The core capacities can be used externally in developing our relations with others, but for the journey that starts with the self, we need to come back to the introspective perspectives: the **head, hand, heart and soul**. These perspectives allow us to reflect internally, to bear witness to who we are. We can identify what kind of person we are and how we tend to approach different tasks and situations. After recognizing this, we can truly begin to accept ourselves and who we are, and then identify the extent to which we can provide in a relationship. We can then mutually understand what to give or take in terms of bricks when building our homes together, and hence we can reach a balance, knowing that all parties mutually understand and are comfortable with this balance that we share.

It is said that life is like a school, and through life we learn what our souls already know. The soul, or our core for those who believe not in the soul, connects our emotions, our rationality and our drive to act together. Through understanding ourselves and our 'souls' in this regard, we can graduate from our schools, having unlocked our unique potential. Once we have reflected and assimilated the perspectives in this manner, we are ready to set forth into the world, using our unique potential to engage in meaningful and competent partnerships with individuals we have developed a deep human connection with.

Ultimately, it is essential that we form a human connection in order to truly find a way in which we can all wholeheartedly and comfortably ACT2gether.

6. Authors



Arshad Mozumder. Arshad is a caring young individual who discovered his passions through supporting and developing intergenerational collaborative initiatives, as well as working with and coordinating teams of young people. He has combined this with his keen interest in healthcare and well-being, resulting in his ambition to pursue a medical career, focusing on young people and the holistic approach to medicine.



Andri Pandoura. Andri is a headstrong, caring young person who always aims to support and look after her peers. She is currently studying Law in the UK and has been involved in numerous European child rights and participation projects from a young age. She has a keen eye for detail and is a true philosopher at heart.



Kassandra Beltran. Kassandra is a courageous young person who is not afraid to speak her mind and call things out when they go against her beliefs. She uses this passion and drive to fuel her work, enabling her to work diligently in her medical studies, as well as excel in her child rights and participation work in Cyprus, and across Europe.



Polyxeni Papageorgiou. Poly is a strong, loving and caring law student who had the honour to learn and experience the magic of children's participation from a young age. She saw the effects it had on our world with her own eyes. She has been involved with children's participation since she was 15, advocating for children's rights, equality and respect.



Rebekah Scerri. Rebekah is a wonderful young woman, who aims to always seek the best outcome for those around her. She is currently a medical student and has a deep passion for supporting and maintaining the well-being of others. She has been deeply involved in developing the rights and the participation of children in Malta, and she loves Harry Potter!



Roxanne Landais. Roxanne is a young caring person who strongly believes in intergenerational partnership. She is studying to be a midwife and is very interested in children's rights, well-being, education and involvement. She has been involved in children's participation for 4 years, working towards helping children's voice to be heard.

7. Dedication

Jean Gordon was an exceptional woman, to all who knew her, and to all who only heard stories. I and my co-authors all met Jean at various points in our own lives, but the impression she left on us all was magical. Some met Jean once a year, some every few months, but it did not matter, Jean was Jean. Jean was the type of woman who remembered every little detail of your life, from what foods you enjoy, to how your family was, to what your dreams and ambitions were. I will never forget how every time I met with Jean, she continued to ask about my journey to pursue a medical profession, and how she would always encourage and support me towards it. Jean saw something in me that I didn't know I had, and my only regret is not being able to show Jean that I made it. I started Med school, I achieved the dream that she believed I could achieve, something she sometimes believed more than I did.

Jean taught us a great many things, one of which was that the bonds you form between people themselves; the human connection that you share, holds such great power and influence in your life, that together you can do almost anything, regardless of differences in age, gender or background. Jean taught us the power of the human connection and how it is a necessity in any competent partnership between children and adults and more, and that is why we have decided to write an article delving into this notion of a human connection further. And to further showcase our gratitude to Jean and her faith in us and our dreams, we have done so in a way that truly showcase the kind of people we are: medics, scientists, philosophers and dreamers.

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