

Seven behaviours that set
the best client-agency
relationships apart from
the rest



aprais

Key findings

1. While the fundamental characteristics of client-agency performance remain crucial, it has become important also to factor in the behaviours that help build strong relationships and produce good work.
2. Our analysis has identified the seven key behaviours that set the best teams apart from the rest.
3. We can also track how the significance of these behaviours has changed over the past decade, how clients and agencies are more prepared to challenge the status quo.
4. Functional competencies such as timing, process and financial management are no longer the highest-scoring characteristics for clients. Trust is now the benchmark.

5. The Covid pandemic has further changed the landscape and both parties have demonstrated an ability to adapt to new challenges universally in creative and media relationships.

Drawing on more than 20 years of experience evaluating over 24,000 relationships, Aprais have been able to identify the characteristics of the best and worst-performing agencies and clients.

Historically, these comparisons were based on disciplines specific to each business function. Ten years ago, our data showed that functional characteristics such as timing and process management were what defined the top performers.

Today's business environment is radically different from that of 10 years ago, and the pace of change has increased exponentially within the past few years.

To discover how this rapid change has affected day-to-day client-agency relationships, we reviewed our data to compare the characteristics of top and bottom performers with those a decade ago.

This report will show the performance gap in behaviours of the top and bottom-scoring marketers and agencies. It will also highlight several of the behaviours that present opportunities for clients and agencies to distinguish themselves.

Functions

Using one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance

Behaviours

The way in which someone conducts oneself or behaves

The seven key behaviours

We assigned behavioural traits to each core question in our extensive database of evaluations. We then analysed the database to determine the behavioural traits that impact the effectiveness of the client-agency relationship. From this exercise we defined seven core behaviours.

Although one of the key behaviours is communication, it is important to note there is a difference between communication as a verb – the act of making contact with one another – and communication as a behaviour.

Successful communication requires both parties to share information openly and honestly in an appropriate manner, and we can see from our data that frequency of communication alone will not achieve this. It is the quality and openness of the communication that matters, not the amount of communication between client and agency teams.

Challenge

Uses initiative to challenge the status quo and does not allow conflict to go unaddressed.

Accountability

The team sets and takes responsibility for actions.

Trust

The team is trusted to deliver and behaves with integrity.

Functional

Competence to do the day-to-day work.

Goals

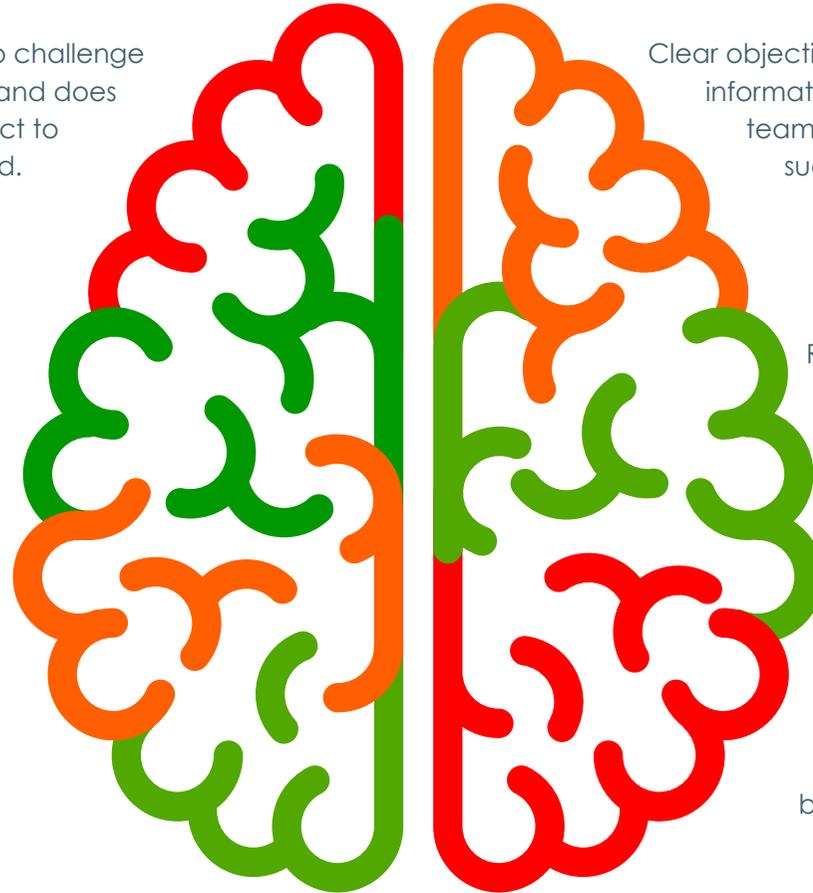
Clear objectives are in place, information is shared, the team is stretched and success measured.

Communication

Regular dialogue to ensure facts are shared in a timely fashion.

Resilience

Can withstand and bounce back from a crisis.



Have these metrics changed over time?

The order of importance for traditional disciplines such as timing, process and financial management, briefing and leadership has changed little since 2010 for clients and agencies.

The seven behaviours, on the other hand, have moved significantly, especially in the latest data taken during the pandemic (to 23 September 2020).

Clients as scored
by their agencies vs 10 years ago

1	Trust	+1
2	Resilience	+1
3	Accountability	+1
4	Functional	-3
5	Communication	=
6	Goals	=
7	Challenge	=

Agencies as scored
by their clients vs 10 years ago

1	Communication	+1
2	Resilience	+4
3	Trust	-2
4	Accountability	-1
5	Goals	=
6	Functional	-2
7	Challenge	=

Clients as scored by their agencies

Functional capabilities decreased in importance

- Although the scores for all of the behaviours have improved for both top and bottom-performing clients and agencies over the past decade, their relative importance has changed.
- Functional competence improved least and has gone from the top behaviour 10 years ago to fourth in 2020.
- Trust is now the top behaviour, across every region.

Agencies as scored by their clients

Communication increased in importance

- Most behaviour scores have improved since 2010, with the notable exception of trust.
- This fell for both top and bottom-performing agencies, driven by evaluations carried out in the Americas and Asia.
- As a result, trust has moved from the highest-scoring behaviour of top-performing agencies 10 years ago to third place in 2020, replaced at the top by communication.

The growing importance of challenging norms

The challenge scores have improved substantially for top and bottom-performing clients and agencies since 2010.

This suggests clients are more prepared to change processes, resolve issues and take risks than they were a decade ago.

Equally, agencies feel empowered to challenge traditional processes and solutions and think more laterally.

The improvement has been particularly marked across EMEA, where top client scores jumped by nearly 8% over the 10-year period and agency scores grew by more than 12%.



More agile ways of working

Throughout the Covid pandemic there has been a focus on the resilience of client-agency relationships. Both parties have had to adapt to new ways of working, within the restrictions of lockdowns. Resilience scores have risen for both clients and agencies across our global database, in comparison with 2010.

Resilience is now the second-highest-scoring behaviour for top agencies and clients. However, there are significant differences within the resilience scores by region and agency type.

All regions have seen improvements in both parties' resilience scores for creative relationships and top performers in media, reflecting the significant changes that had to be made to respond to the restrictions of working remotely, such as the changing consumer media preferences and often reduced budgets.

However, only EMEA saw improvements for top performers in digital, with declines in the resilience scores especially for agencies in the other regions.

Download our free report:

[Resilience – a new 'business-critical' requirement for teams](#)

Where do top performers excel?

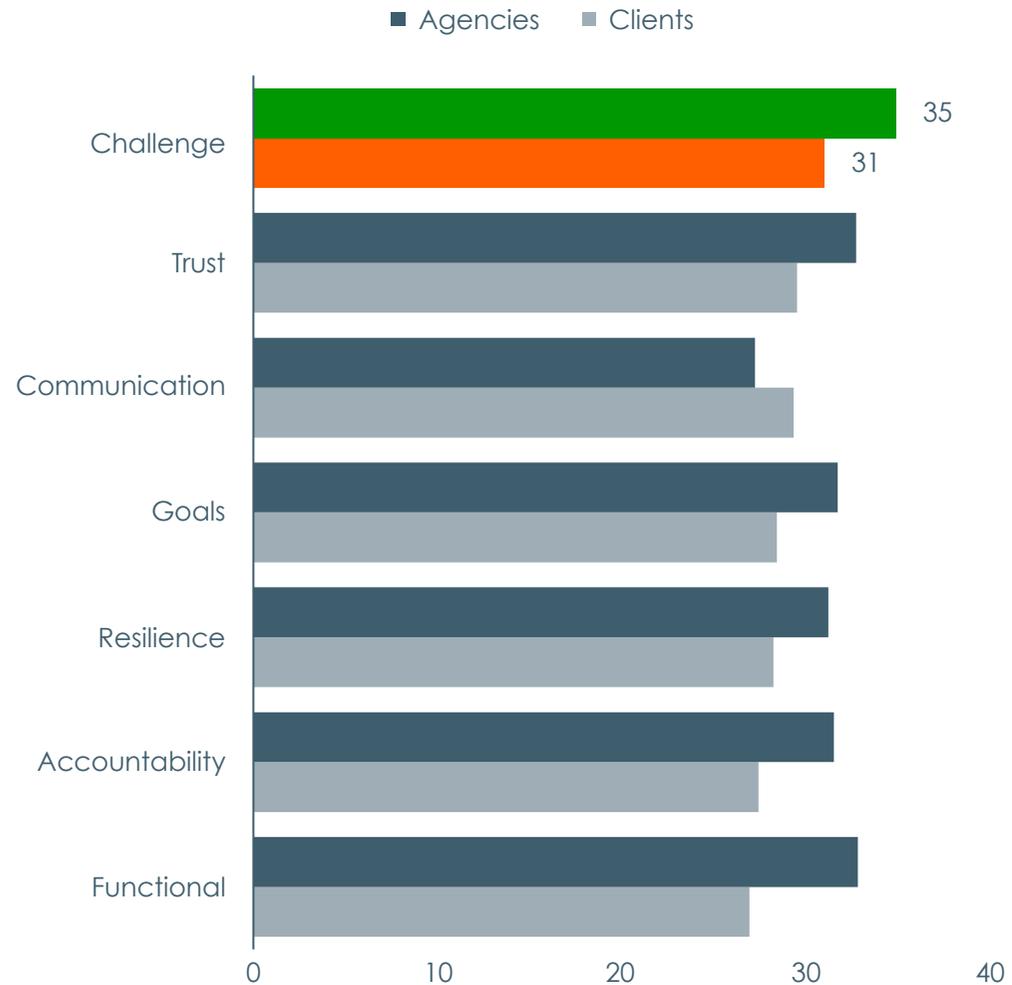
The chart opposite shows the gap between the top and bottom-performing clients and agencies, by behaviour.

The greater the gap, the greater the opportunity for poor performers to improve their performance relative to the best.

Challenge is the behaviour that shows the biggest difference between the top and bottom performers.

It is important to note that although the gaps may differ in scale, each of these behaviours play an indispensable role in building stronger relationships.

The gap between the best and worst behaviours



In summary

The marketing communications industry has undergone dramatic changes in the past 10 years. In that time, the behaviours of clients and agencies have changed, but particularly so in terms of the changes agencies have observed in their clients.

While the functional characteristics of client-agency performance remain crucial, we must recognise that human behaviours underpin all team performance. They need to be better understood and managed.

Our analysis suggests that the ability to bounce back from adversity (resilience) and the need for courage to challenge the status quo present opportunities for clients and agencies to distinguish themselves.

Methodology

By comparing the profile of clients and agencies with the top 10% scores in our database against the bottom 10%, we can pinpoint where they differ and define the strengths of the top performers; globally, by region, by functional discipline and by behaviour.

Aprais conduct agency-client evaluations across all global regions.

Data comparisons are from September 2010 to September 2020.

If you would like to know more about client-agency team behaviour in specific regions, agency types or client sectors, please [contact us](#).

About Aprais

7

We are the global pioneers in building stronger business relationships.

Since we established the category we have advised the world's leading marketers and agencies on more than 24,000 relationships, across 92 countries, in 13 languages.

This has enabled us to build a large bank of data that allows companies to accurately compare their business relationships with those of their peers.

Contact and follow us

Request a demo:

carolina.motta@aprais.com

Request a free consultation for your

organisation: aprais@aprais.com

Learn more: www.aprais.com

aprais