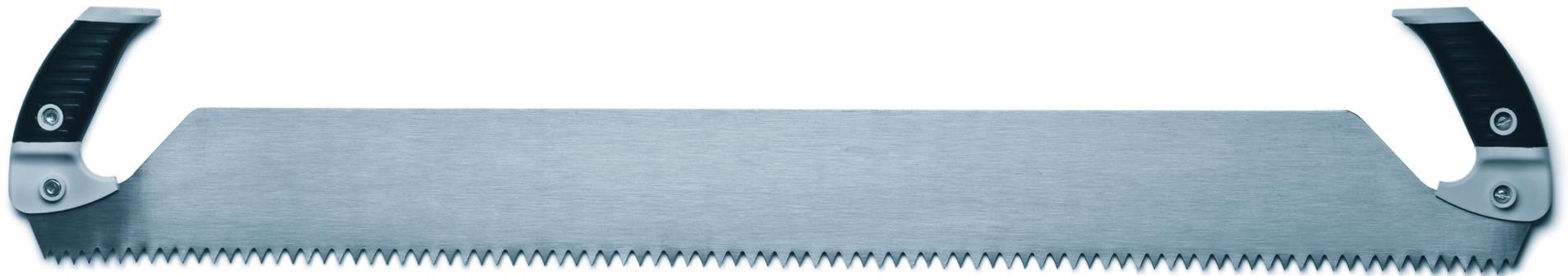


How we work together now

Collaboration in business relationships



aprais

Connected but distant: how we work together now

The Covid era radically altered the way we work together, with long-lasting repercussions for the marketing industry.

Although physically teams were kept apart, according to Salesforce research¹ the majority of marketers say they now feel more connected to their managers, customers, marketing colleagues and partners. Seventy-five percent of marketers say the pandemic has permanently shifted how they collaborate and communicate at work.

But the same research revealed that 69% of marketers say it's harder to collaborate now than before the pandemic.

Managing multiple internal and external partners has long been a challenge for marketers.

Now they must also juggle inter-agency team functions as well as disciplines across publishers; data, research, social, influencers, niche consumer targeting specialists and more. All this while trying to ensure that the teams are briefed holistically, brought in at the right time and play fairly to ensure that all the consumer touchpoints are addressed effectively and within budget.

collaboration

noun

UK  /kə,læb.ə'reɪ.jʊn/ US  /kə,læb.ə'reɪ.jʊn/

the situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing:

This environment poses greater challenges among partners, as well. Agencies must put self-interest aside and collaborate with friend and foe alike, with the single ambition of driving the client's business forwards.

In Aprais terms, the collaboration 'discipline' is an amalgamation of questions related to the agency's cooperation, communication and coordination with and among the other partners involved in a client's business.

For marketers we do not directly measure the way clients encourage collaboration among their agency partners. Instead, we cluster questions related to the way a marketer fosters an open partnership with the single agency under evaluation and how they motivate the agency to deliver their best, in a positive and respectful way.

Our rationale is that if a marketer fosters a collaborative spirit with one agency, it is likely to do so with and among the other partners it works with.

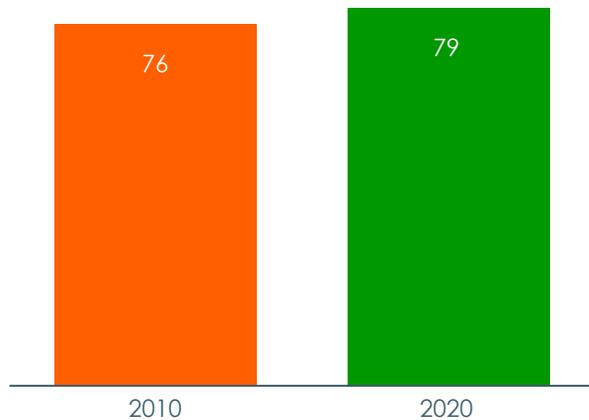
Even though the definitions applied to agencies and clients are somewhat different, for the purposes of this report we have labelled both 'collaboration'.

Collaboration over a decade

Over the past 10 years we have observed general improvement in client-agency scores across all the disciplines in our database, with variations by region and by agency service type.

But, as the chart below indicates, collaboration as scored by clients of their agency, has barely improved. Scores have moved by a modest three points over the decade compared with more pronounced improvements in account management (13 points) and strategy and analysis (19 points).

Client evaluation of agency collaboration



Source: Aprais database

How collaboration affects client-agency relationships

To understand the relative importance of collaboration on the overall evaluation scores, we rank how each discipline correlates to overall score.

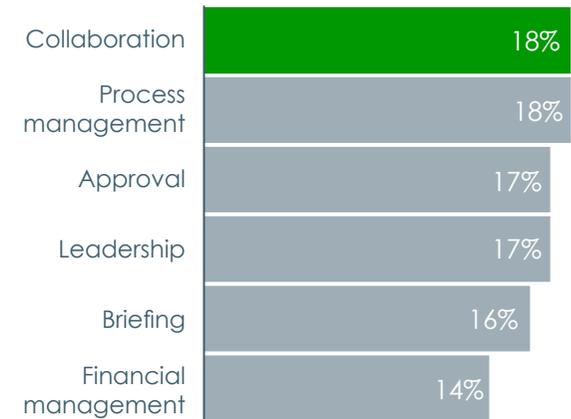
As the charts indicate, collaboration has the strongest influence on the score agencies give their marketer clients (18%). Surprisingly, collaboration is ranked behind other drivers such as account management and strategy, for clients' evaluation of agencies (16%).

To be clear, all these disciplines are important to the relationship and will affect overall scores.

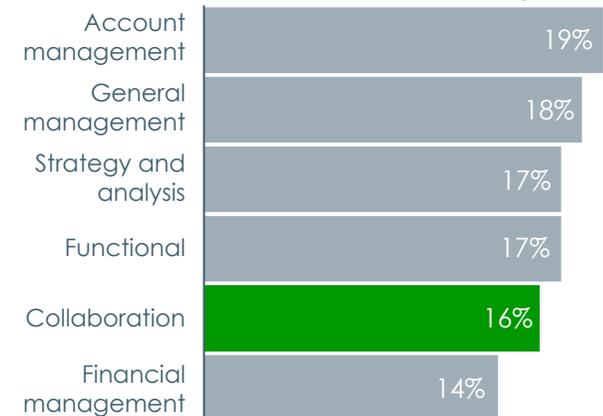
We believe these findings reflect the importance agencies place on clients creating an environment that enables them to do their best.

Aprais believe that multiplication of agency partners places greater responsibility on them to collaborate. The fact that this ranks lower than other drivers in the eyes of marketers does not diminish the vital and growing importance of collaboration.

Relative importance on evaluation score of the marketer



Relative importance on evaluation score of the agency

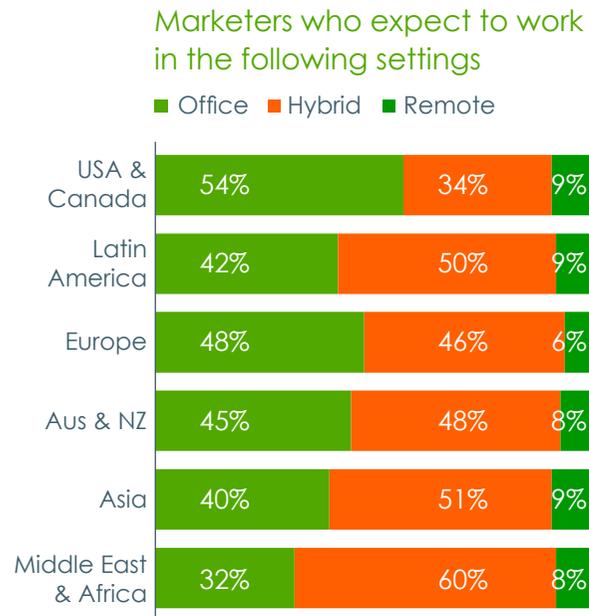


Source: Aprais database

Collaboration, region and culture

The move to remote working over the pandemic has shifted into a longer-term hybrid model. But the Salesforce survey mentioned earlier indicates some crucial differences between the regions.

The chart below shows that 57% of marketers in the USA and Canada anticipate returning to the office full-time. That's a striking contrast to marketers in the Middle East and Africa where less than one-third expect to work in an office full-time.



This is interesting given that although many marketing teams have been physically apart, they don't necessarily feel disconnected from each other.

In fact, the Salesforce report concludes that the majority of marketers say they feel more connected to their managers, customers, marketing colleagues and partners.

Sixty-two percent of marketers say they feel more connected to their partner organisation than they did a year ago.

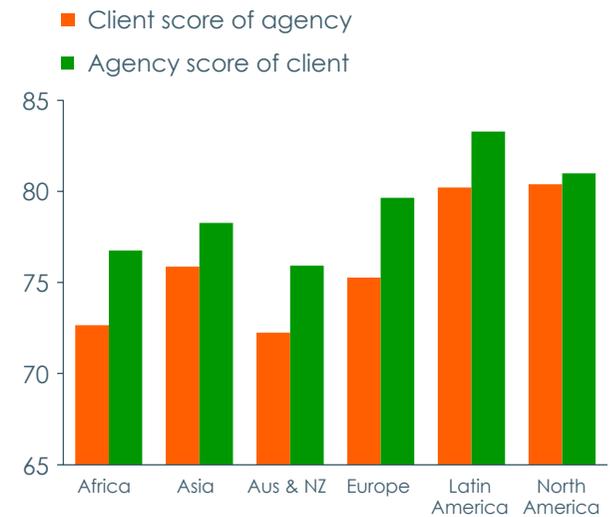
Aprais data historically shows that marketers and agencies in North America and LATAM tend to score higher than their counterparts in other regions.

The chart to the right shows how collaboration scores differ by region. North America and Latin America indicate greater collaboration both on the agency and on the client side. The chart also indicates that

in Australia and New Zealand clients and agencies score each other relatively poorly on collaboration. This cannot be easily explained as a cultural difference, given their Anglo-Saxon predominance.

We can theorise that in these highly sociable antipodean societies, the expectations for collaboration are greater, and their disappointment is expressed through their scores.

Collaboration by region



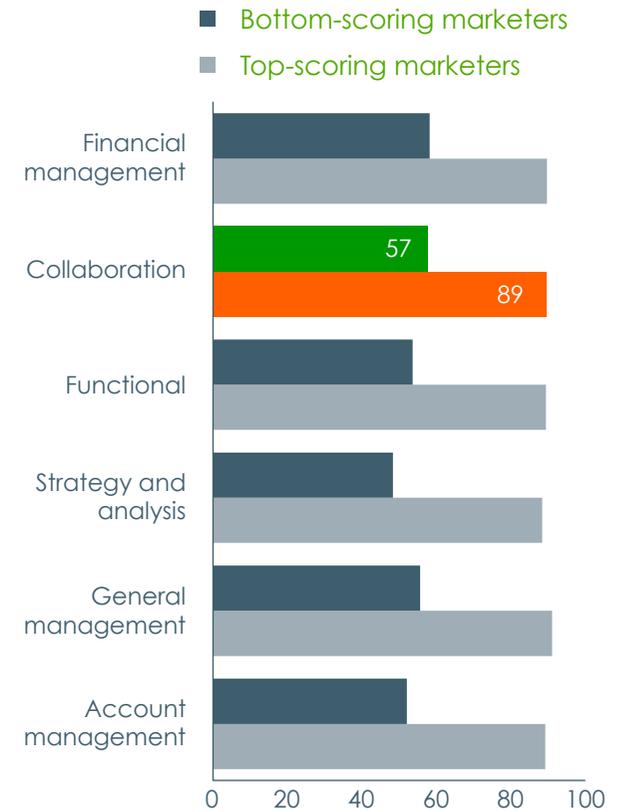
The best versus the rest

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

The charts to the right show the different profiles of the best versus the rest. The difference between the two indicates the potential for poor performers to improve. In terms of collaboration, weaker-performing agencies and marketers have an opportunity to improve scores by 32 points.



Source: Aprais database



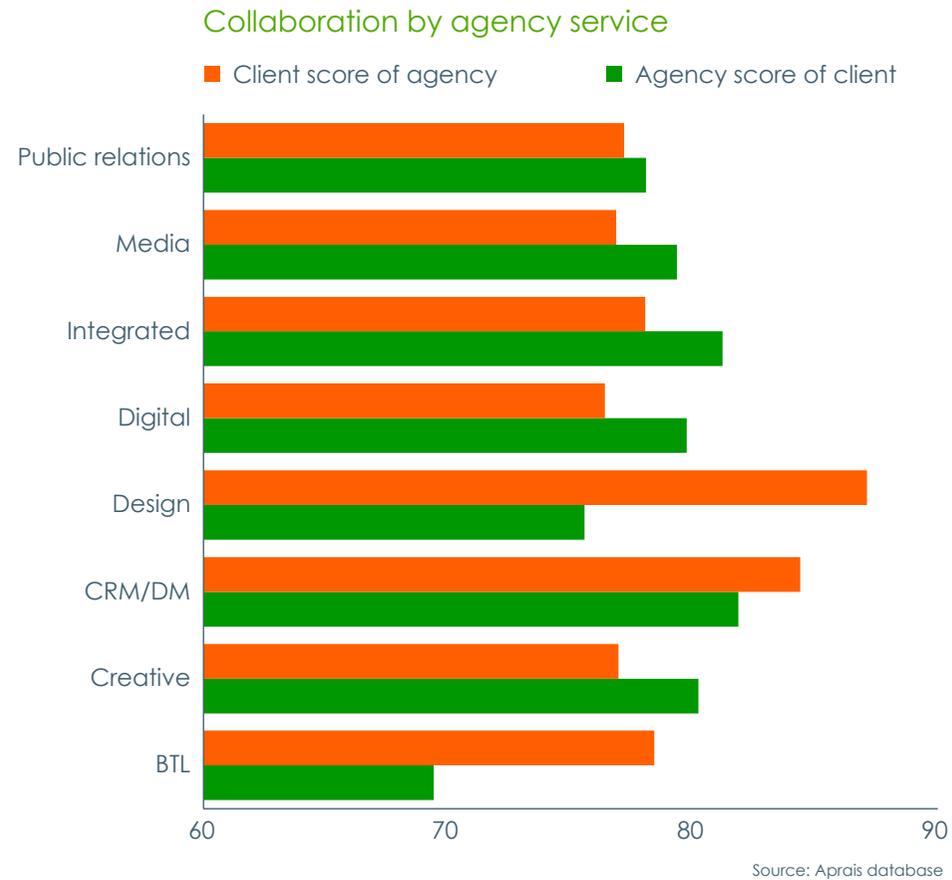
Source: Aprais database

Collaboration by service

The chart opposite compares scores of client and agency by the different agency types.

The greatest contrast in scores occurs in design, where clients tend to score their agencies significantly higher than the agencies score their clients.

Client and agency scores are most in alignment in public relations.



The benefits of collaboration across the board

The charts opposite show the score difference between the highest and lowest-scoring (10%) clients and agencies on the criteria of collaboration.

In other words, clients who are rated highest for their collaboration by their agencies are rated 14 points higher than the weakest on process management, 12 points higher on collaboration and so on.

For agencies, the best collaborators see significant increases over poor collaborators in terms of media planning and digital. The low score for media buying may be explained by the highly transactional nature of the discipline.

Higher collaboration scores point to higher relationship scores overall, reinforcing the value of collaboration to client-agency teams.

The benefits of collaboration for clients



Source: Aprais database

The benefits of collaboration for agencies



Source: Aprais database

Digital versus physical connectivity

The Salesforce data cited at the beginning of this report showed marketers felt more connected to one another since the pandemic despite the change in working practices.

However, a study² conducted over the first six months of 2020 among 61,182 Microsoft employees in the USA showed that firm-wide remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed.

The study used rich data on emails, calendars, instant messages, video/audio calls and workweek hours to estimate the causal effects of firm-wide remote work on collaboration and communication.

Together, these effects may make it harder for employees to acquire and share new information across the network. These changes in collaboration patterns may impede the transfer of knowledge and reduce the quality of workers' output.

Platforms versus the water cooler; virtual versus face-to-face

Software solutions may aim to improve and enhance collaboration, but the challenge for companies is to replace the 'water-cooler' moment.

Research from the University of California³, found that the reciprocity that comes with making small talk can create a meaningful connection between two people and result in increased task enjoyment. In a work setting, this also translates into more engaged team members and increased collaboration among teams.

Some of the more common ways companies are encouraging 'water-cooler' moments among their virtual teams include:

- virtual clubs
- virtual team-building activities
- virtual happy hours
- team chat apps

As we learn to live with Covid and travel restrictions ease, we believe that face-to-face interactions among agency and marketers' teams should also resume. This may never happen to the same degree as pre-Covid but certainly it should be enough to remind us of the value of spontaneity, creativity and humanity of in-person interactions.

'... firm-wide remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed ...'

Yang, L., Holtz, D., Jaffe, S. et al.²

²The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers.

³ Psychology research shows 'water cooler talk' can have big benefits.

In conclusion...

Collaboration is a vital ingredient of high-scoring client-agency teams, with a high score in collaboration for both sides indicating higher scores across other functional disciplines.

Collaboration has improved very little over the past decade – by just three points in comparison to other areas that have seen double-digit increases in scores.

Remote working and working from home haven't necessarily impacted collaboration, but there is a danger of collaboration networks becoming more static and siloed. Clients and agencies alike would benefit from the reintroduction of some physical meetings and interactions that facilitate connection and engagement among individuals and teams.

Collaboration is more than just communication. As highlighted in our study '[How does contact frequency affect team performance](#)', communication between teams relies on appropriate and open sharing of information and facts. Collaboration, on the other hand, is about actively driving a constructive relationship among the teams involved.

About Aprais

At Aprais we help companies doing business with each other, improve their business relationships. We are the world leader in team performance evaluations.

Over the past 20 years, we have measured, monitored and improved client-agency and client-supplier relationships for many of the world's leading companies.

By benchmarking results from more than 24,000 evaluations, we identify problems that limit client-agency value. Once identified, we help change team behaviour through training and workshops to unlock business potential.

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