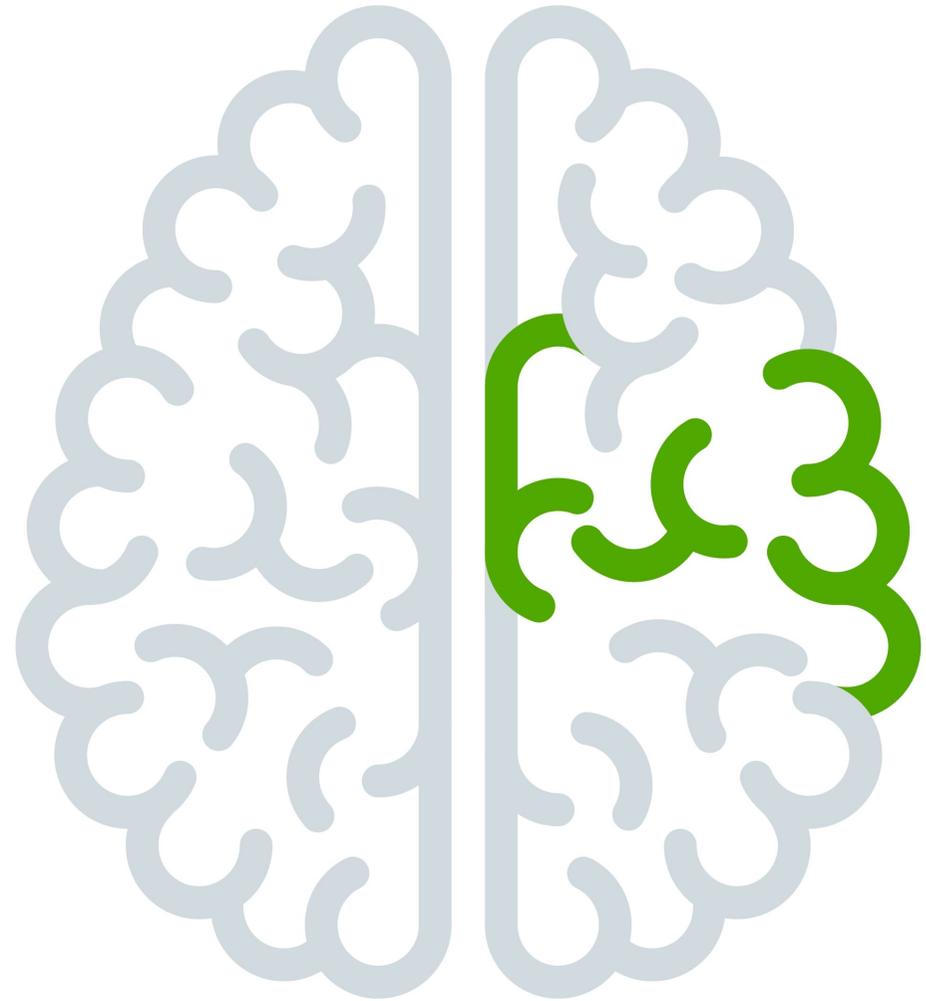


Trust

One of the seven key behaviours vital for building stronger business teams



Introduction to behaviours

Performance evaluations have historically focused on teams' and individuals' specific functions as defined by the scope of work.

This monitoring of scope-specific performance remains crucial. However, it is also important to consider the human behaviours that help build strong relationships and produce good work.

How behaviours make a difference

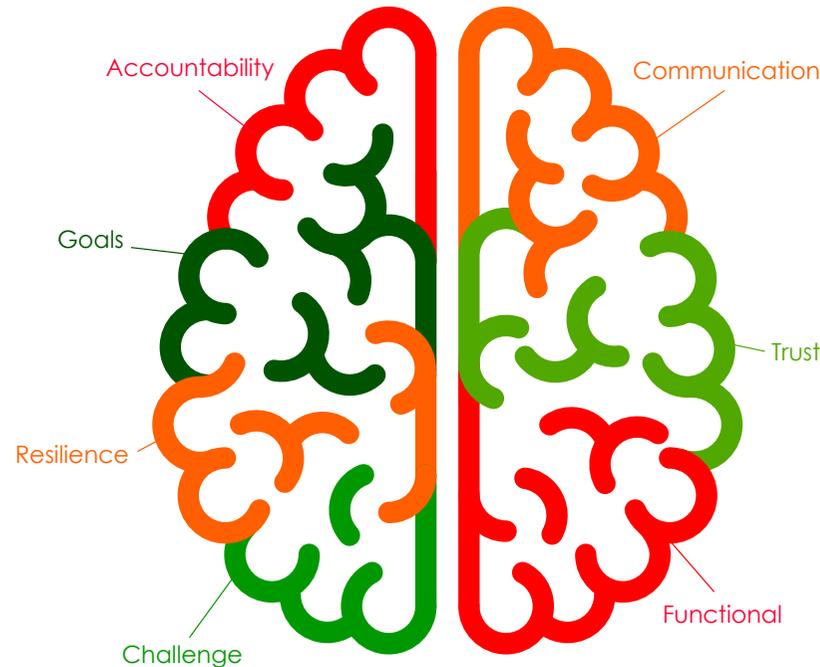
Analysis of our extensive database identified seven key behaviours, shown in the graphic opposite. These behaviours help define what sets the best teams apart from the rest.

Each of the core questions in our database has been assigned to one of these behaviours, allowing us deeper insight into team performance.

Unlike scope-specific disciplines, which can differ depending on the team role, behaviours are common to all.

As these seven behaviours are identical for all job functions, we can directly compare teams in a single relationship or against our broader benchmarks.

In this series of reports we outline the behaviours and their increasing or diminishing impact on team relationships.



What's in this report

We will focus on trust.

We explain our definition of this behaviour and how it was derived from our database of more than 24,000 evaluations we've conducted over the past 20 years. We compare the top and bottom performers

and assess the impact of trust on overall performance.

Most importantly, this report suggests ways for both agencies and marketers to improve trust and, in so doing, build stronger relationships with their business partners.

Trust

'Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.'

Stephen Covey

Modern human business relationships are never binary. They are so much more complex than that. The range of stakeholders both internal and external, with differing agendas, create a matrix. Constantly navigating through this are the marketing teams and their marketing services suppliers.

Regardless of the issues that may ebb and flow between business relationships in the course of time, it all seems to boil down to mutual trust.

Trust has been the focus of a great many academic studies that underline the critical importance of this behaviour in business relationships.

It is a process that evolves and develops over the course of the relationship. A study¹ from Baylor University suggests that in business relationships, trust develops in stages.

This begins with **exploration**, during which buyers examine the reputation of sellers to determine whether they are worthy of trust.

Next is the **expansion** phase, where trust grows as conflicts are resolved, communication is improved and sympathy develops between parties.

The relationship may then enter the **maintenance** stage, when parties are simply focused on continuing their relationship.

From a B2B perspective it is also useful to consider the different forms of trust put forward in the same study:

1. **Calculative trust** – buyers are essentially calculating the risks associated with trusting this seller.
2. **Cognitive trust** – the buyer makes assessments and calculations based on the relationship's history.
3. **Affective trust** – a sense of bonding or devotion between the two partners. These warm feelings are an external representation of the trust that has been built over the life of the relationship.

Being aware of these stages and forms might help marketers and agencies develop strategies to build stronger trust with each other.



¹ [The Fundamentals of Trust in Business Relationships](#), Houcine Akrouf PhD and Mbaye Fall Diallo PhD, 2018

How trust has changed

When it comes to client-agency relationships, it is important to understand how trust has changed relative to other behaviours and to overall relationship scores.

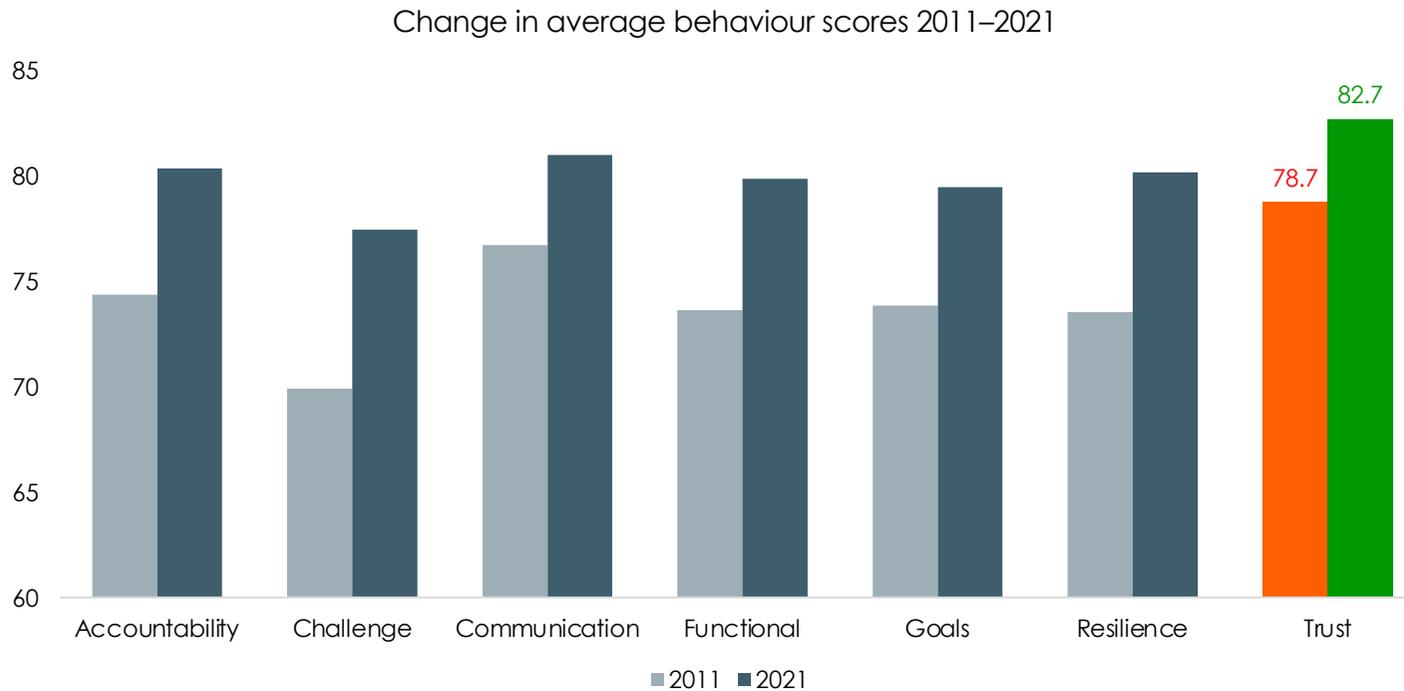
Over the past 10 years, we have seen steady increases in the average evaluation scores given by marketer and agency of each other.

With this in mind, we wondered how each of the seven behaviours has changed over the same 10-year period.

The chart below shows the change in average behaviour scores of all teams (marketer and agency). Positive changes are evident, albeit to different degrees, for each of the behaviours.

Scores for trust improved by 5% from 79 in 2011 to 83 in 2021.

Though this increase is modest relative to other behaviours across the decade, the importance of trust cannot be understated. It was the highest-scoring behaviour in 2011 and remained so in 2021.



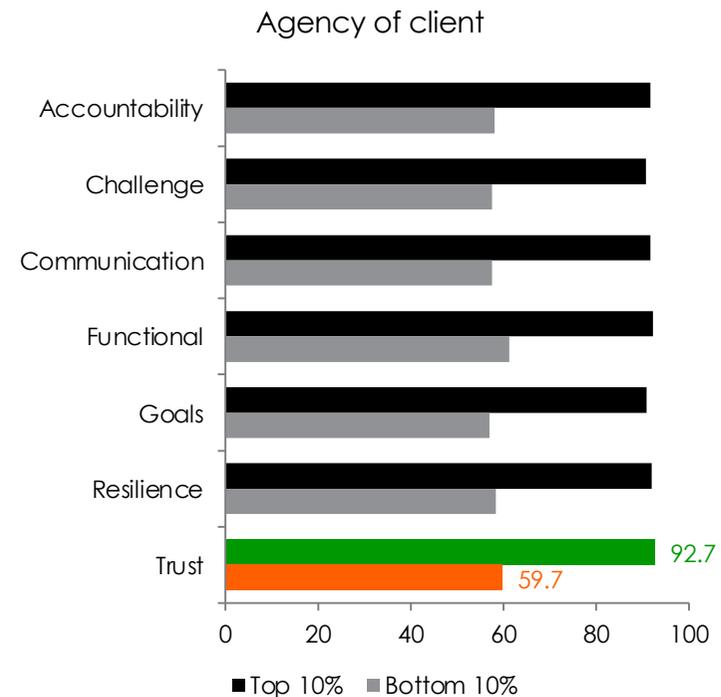
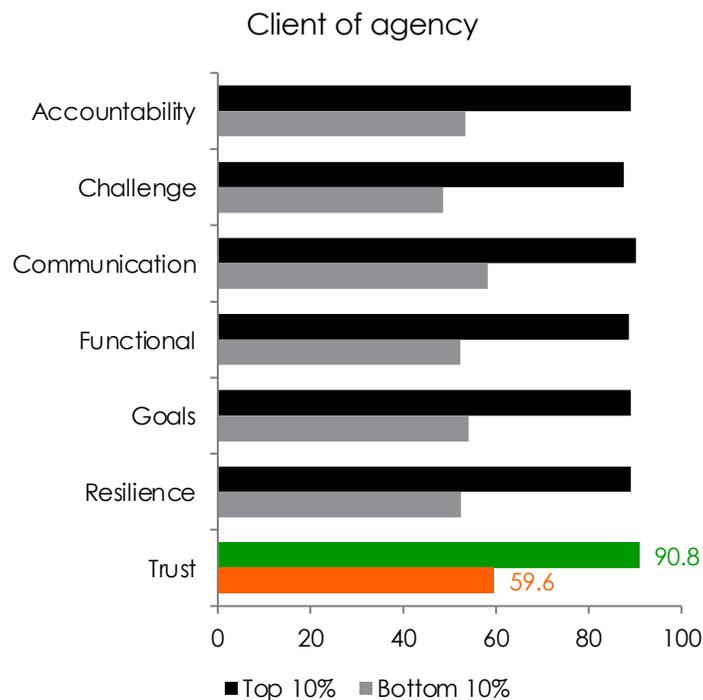
The best versus the rest

By identifying the clients and agencies with the top 10% scores in our database, and comparing their profiles with those of the bottom 10%, we can pinpoint where they differ and define the strengths of the top performers. This analysis shows that those who perform best overall score very highly for trust.

The charts below reveal the different profiles (top 10% versus the bottom 10%). The gap between the two indicates the potential for poor performers to improve.

Weaker agencies and marketers should be aiming to close the gap in trust with their top-performing peers.

In the case of agencies there is a 31-point potential to improve, whereas the gap for their marketer clients is 33 points.



Just how important is trust?

We have also analysed the impact of each behaviour on the overall evaluation – in other words, the priority for improvement.

This helps teams identify which behaviours to focus on.

Based on a correlation analysis across our database, the tables opposite show the behaviours ranked in terms of how they influence the overall relationship scores for the best (top 10%) and the worst (bottom 10%) performers.

In most cases, and not surprisingly, the fundamental ability to do the job (functional) ranks as the most influential behaviour.

For the agency evaluation of a client, the ranking of trust moves up one step from the bottom 10% of clients to be the third most powerful behaviour among the top 10%.

Similarly for agencies. Trust is a differentiator between the top and bottom performers, moving up one place from a ranking of sixth to fifth.

Agency scores client		
Rank	Bottom 10%	Top 10%
1	Communication	Functional
2	Functional	Communication
3	Resilience	Trust
4	Trust	Resilience
5	Accountability	Accountability
6	Goals	Goals
7	Challenge	Challenge

Client scores agency		
Rank	Bottom 10%	Top 10%
1	Functional	Functional
2	Resilience	Accountability
3	Challenge	Resilience
4	Accountability	Goals
5	Goals	Trust
6	Trust	Communication
7	Communication	Challenge

How to improve your trust scores

The root of any team evaluation is the questions that are asked. Assembling and phrasing these questions in collaboration with our clients is both an art and a science.

By analysing the impact specific questions have on evaluation scores we can identify actions that can be taken to improve aspects of a business relationship.

The lists below indicate what agencies and marketers can do to improve their trust.

What agencies should do

1. Positively promote a culture of trust, with open and honest communication.
2. Ensure that all financial aspects of the relationship are managed with honesty and transparency.
3. Collaborate in a friendly, professional way with all communications partners, with a constant focus on building the brand.
4. Agency staff should be enthusiastic, engaged and seem to enjoy working on the client's business.
5. Maintain a strong relationship at a senior level within the client organisation.

What marketers should do

1. Ensure that the agency is aware of any budgetary constraints and then compensated fairly based on delivering the scope of work.
2. Keep promises and consistently deliver on commitments.
3. Celebrate success and work collaboratively to resolve problems.
4. Work to ensure a constructive working relationship within and among the roster agencies.
5. Understand and respect the agencies' different ways of working and their internal processes.

In conclusion

Along with the other behaviours we have identified, trust is an important aspect for teams to acknowledge and to improve.

To use a much-quoted maxim, trust is earned when actions meet words. Never could this be more true than in the context of business relationships between marketer and agency.

As with most behaviours, trust at the team level comes from trust at the individual level.

There is a significant opportunity for poor-performing marketers and agencies to close the gap on their better-performing peers by improving their levels of trust.

Our data shows that clear improvements in trust scores are possible just 18 months from the introduction of a formalised, objective and regular evaluation process with Aprais.



This series

This report is one of a series focusing on team behaviours.

Each report focuses on one of the seven behaviours we measure:

1. Accountability
2. Challenge
3. Communication
4. Functional
5. Goals
6. Resilience
7. Trust

About Aprais

We are the global pioneers in building stronger business relationships.

Since we established the category 20+ years ago 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

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your organisation: aprais@aprais.com

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