

Do stronger relationships produce stronger results?

Brought to you by Aprais in collaboration with WARC



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Key findings

Does the strength of relationship between marketer and agency correlate with effective work?

Using two unique sets of data this research has, for the first time, answered this question with an emphatic 'yes'.

The implications are profound for marketers and their agencies – and arguably for any business relationship.

The analysis has revealed that teams that won effectiveness awards are stronger, on average, both when clients score their agencies and when agencies score their clients.

As uncertainty continues to dominate the business world, the importance of strong relationships that can navigate through upheaval is clear.

In an industry where business as usual is becoming rare, this report demonstrates where the strongest, most effective, relationships excel. It points to where brands and agencies should focus their efforts in developing an effective culture in the partnerships they develop.

The research highlights three key areas where these effectiveness award-winning relationships excel:

Trust

The team can be relied on to deliver and behaves with integrity.

This was the highest-scoring behaviour as viewed by both clients and agencies. Also a clear and positive differentiator when comparing award-winning teams with the overall average.

Challenge

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

This is the behaviour that shows the greatest difference between average relationships and the award winners.

Strategy

Among the job-specific skills, strategy is the discipline for which winning teams show the biggest increase in score compared with average relationship scores.

Background

This report gives an overview of a joint study undertaken between Aprais and WARC.

The aim was to test the hypothesis that stronger relationships produce stronger results.

To do this we cross-referenced two well-respected and established databases: the WARC Effective 100 Database and the Aprais database.

WARC Effective100 Database

The WARC Effective 100 is a ranking of the world's most-awarded campaigns and companies for effectiveness.

It tracks the results of effectiveness award shows around the world, and acts as a benchmark for excellence in effectiveness, allowing marketers to compare their performance with that of their peers.

The Aprais database

The Aprais database has been built over 20 years and contains more than 25,000 evaluations of client-agency relationships.

Using a 100-point scale for maximum sensitivity, the database comprises more than 18 million data points.

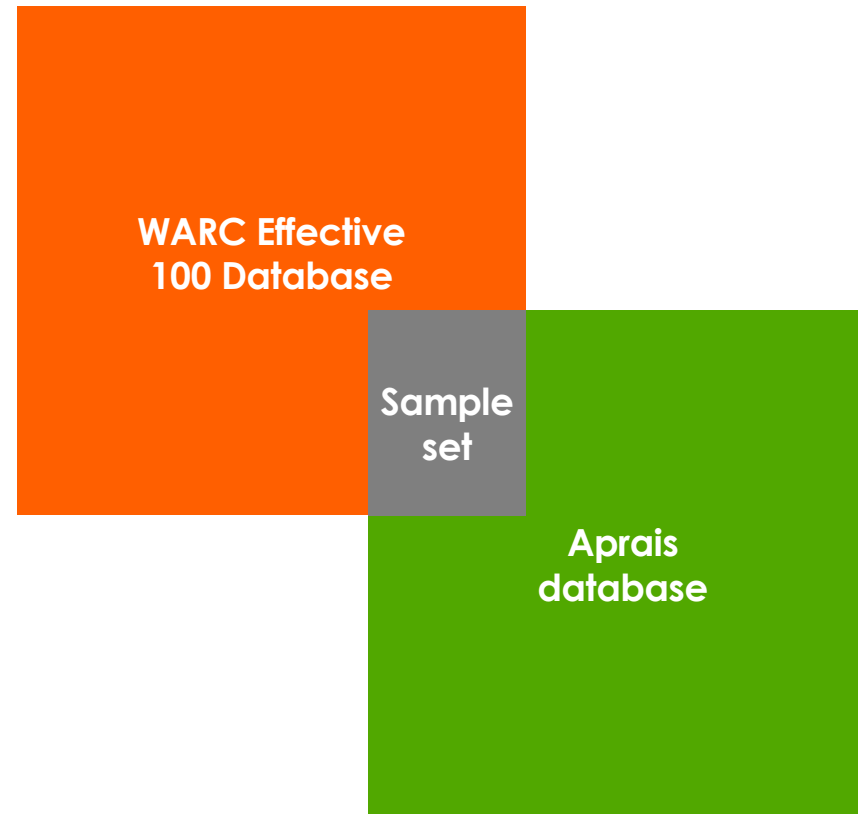
It is an unrivalled bank of data that provides benchmarks to guide companies towards stronger business relationships.

Process

We cross-matched over 1,800 winners of effectiveness awards world-wide from the WARC Effective 100 with more than 25,000 client-agency evaluations conducted by Aprais.

- The analysis included all effectiveness awards tracked by WARC between 2013 and 2022.
- To be included, teams must have been assessed by Aprais in the 12 months before the award was given.
- They must have worked on the specific brand, not just the parent company.
- And they must be in the geographic region in which the work was awarded.

This process gave a sample set of 282 evaluations of agencies that went on to win effectiveness awards and 278 evaluations of award-winning client relationships.



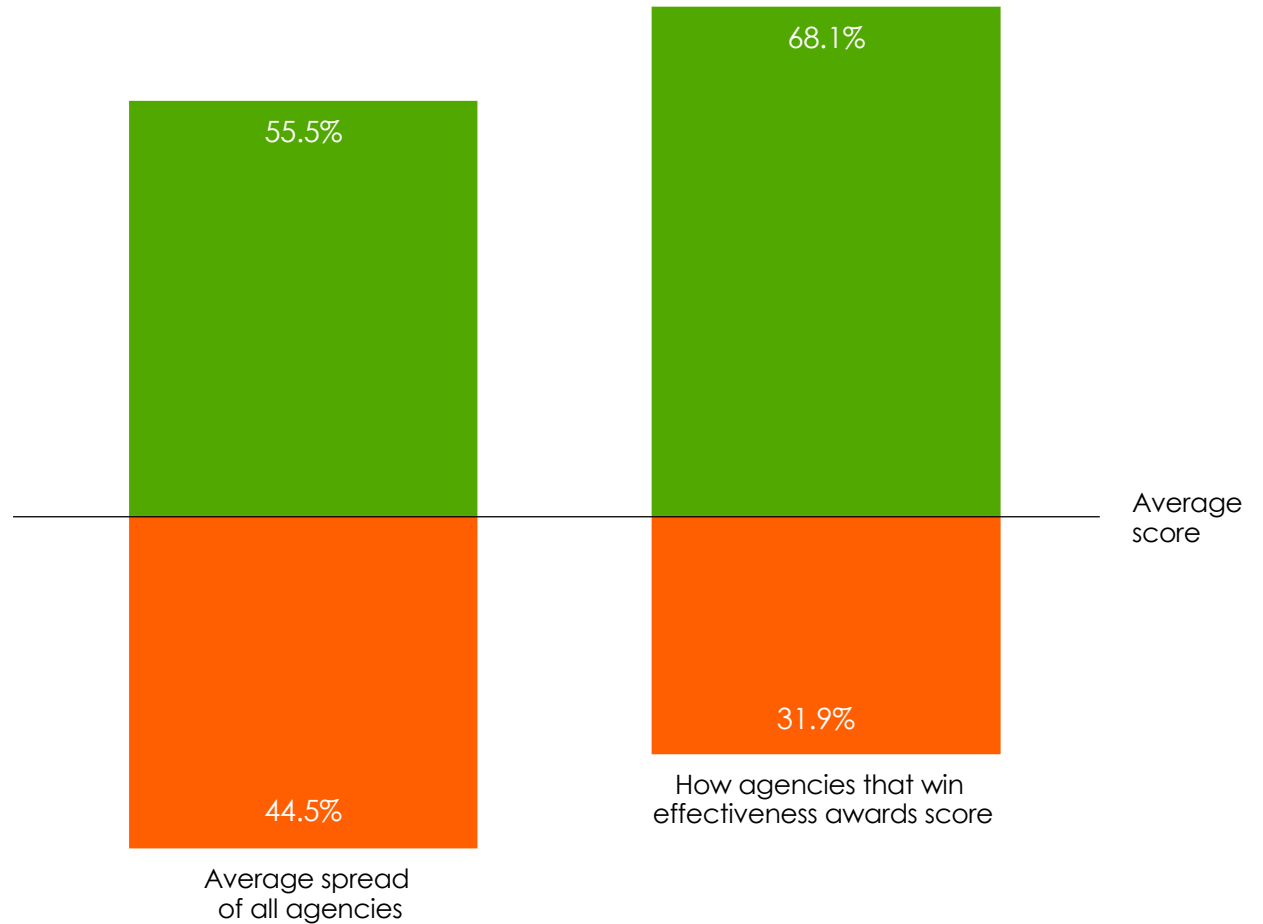
Analysis – Client score of agency

The left-hand column on the chart shows the percentage spread of scores from the entire Aprais database of more than 25,000 evaluations.

The column on the right shows the shift when the scores are taken from the 'sample set' agencies who have won effectiveness awards.

You can clearly see that there are almost twice as many winning agencies with scores above as below the average.

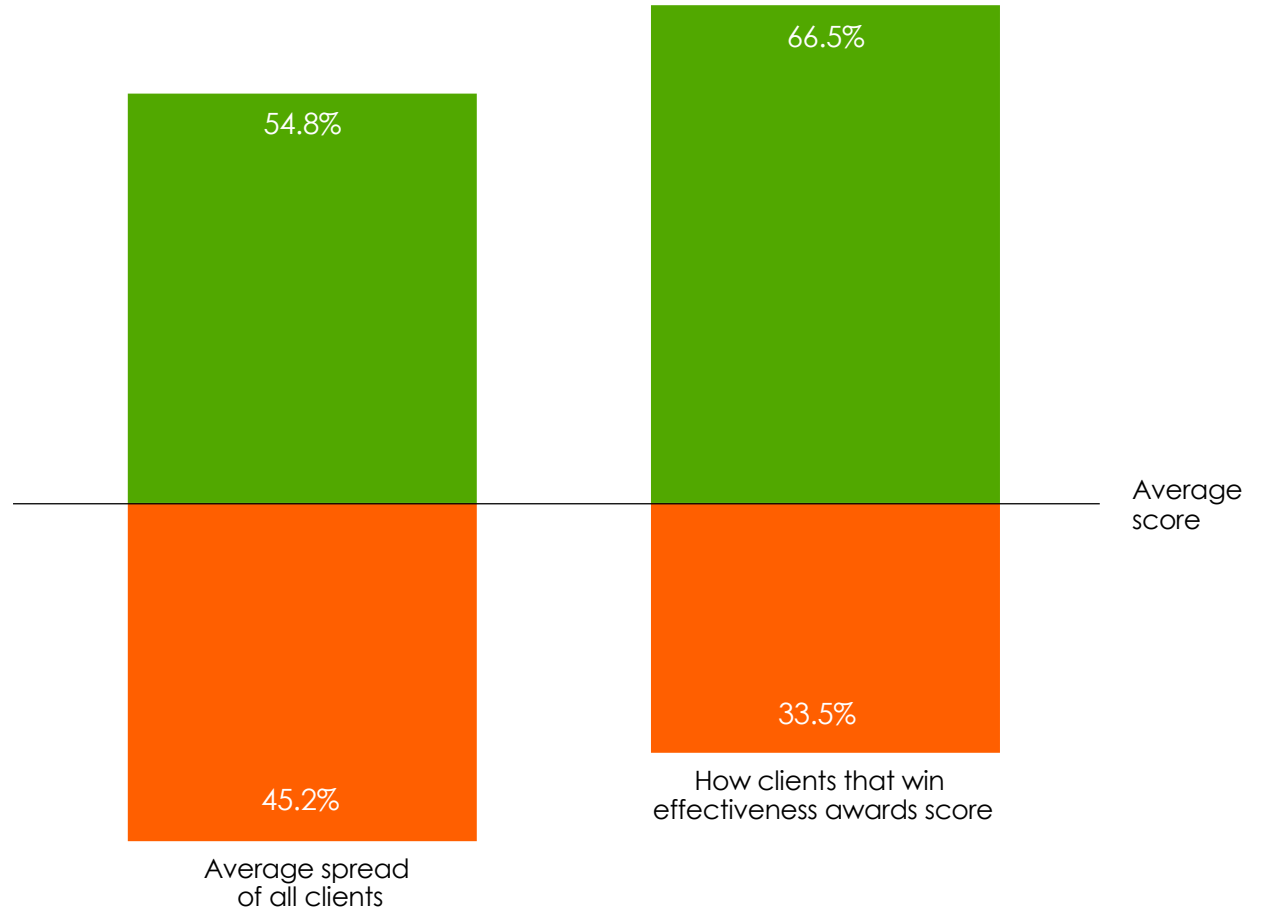
In fact 68.1% of the awarded agencies in the sample set were above the average score.



Analysis – Agency score of client

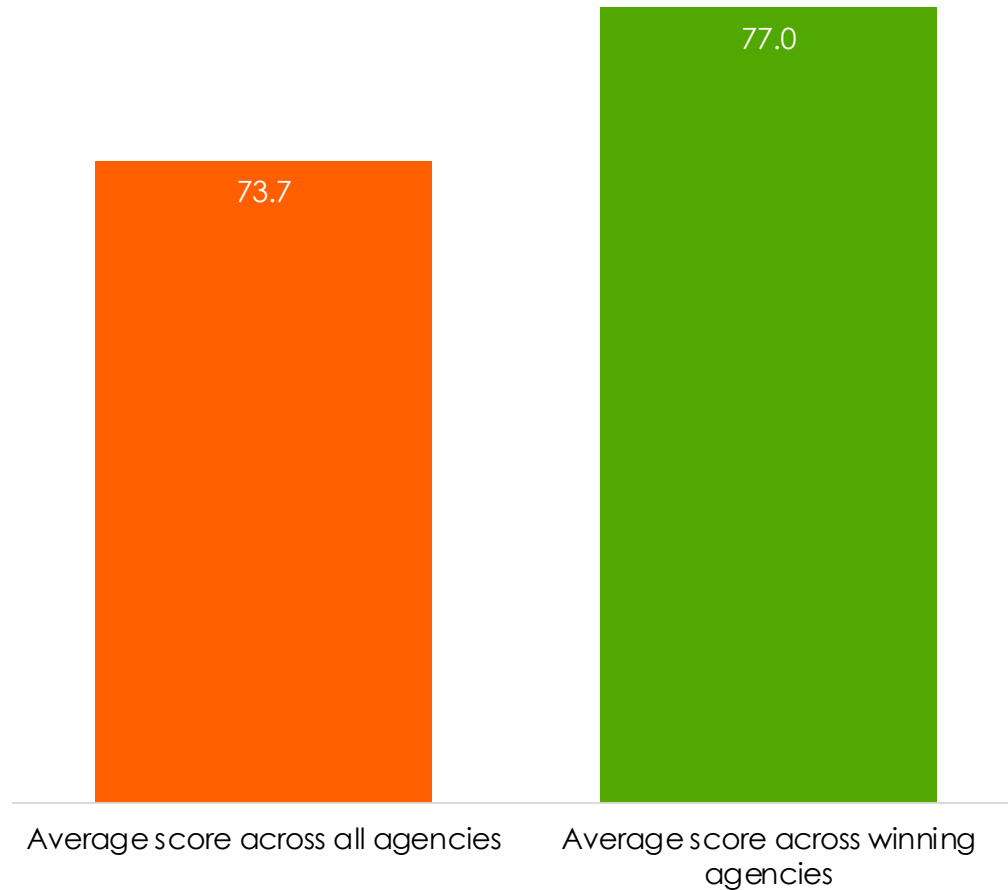
The process was then repeated where the agency had scored the client.

As you can see, the results strikingly match the clients' scores of agencies. This time with 66.5% of the awarded clients in the sample set being above the average score.



Analysis – Winning agencies score higher

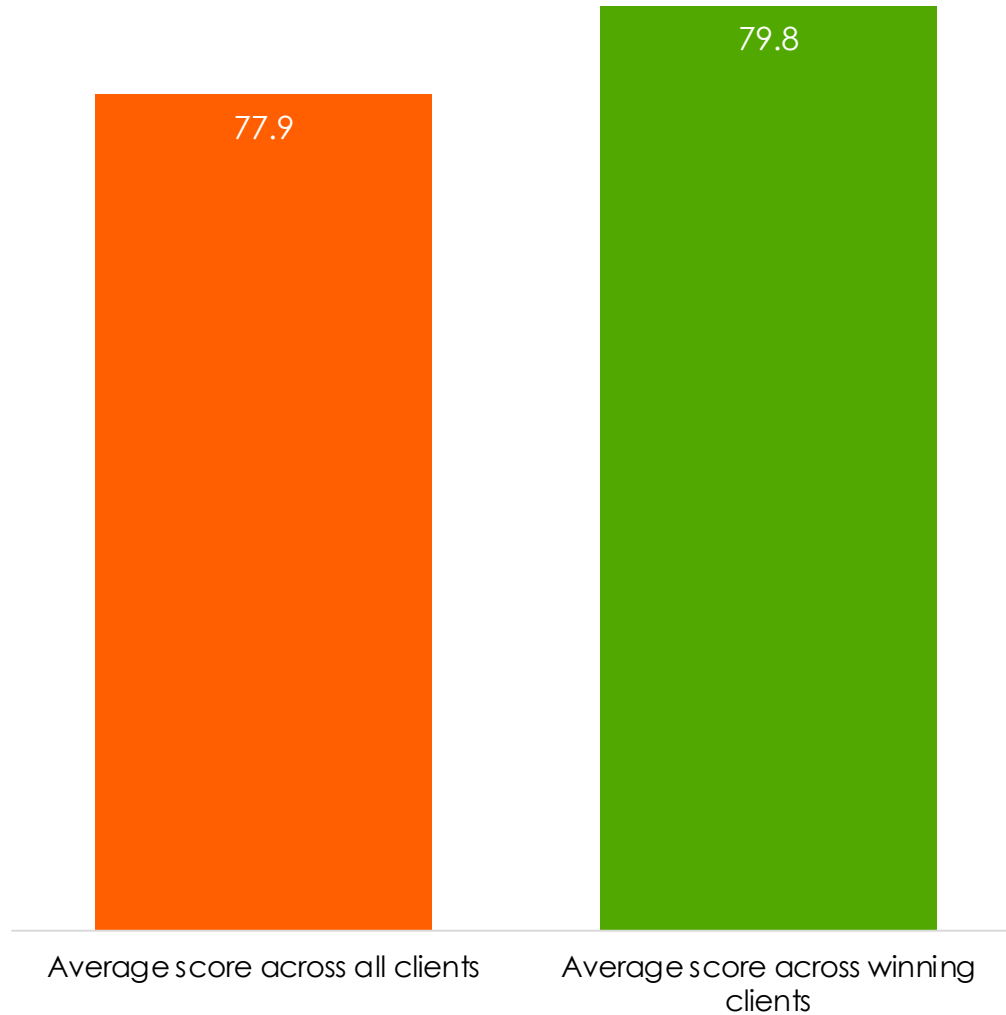
You can see from this chart that the average score across winning agencies is 3.3 points higher than the average score across all agencies, clearly showing that client-agency relationships that score strongly lead to a strong showing in the effectiveness awards.



Analysis – Winning clients score higher

When the comparison is repeated with the agencies' score of clients, the average score across winning clients is 1.9 points higher than the average score across all clients.

Again a sizeable margin affirming that client-agency relationships that score strongly lead to a strong showing in the effectiveness awards.



Skills that distinguish winning teams

On-the-job skill among team members is the most critical factor for creating successful client-agency relationships.

These skills are scope-dependent and as a result vary from marketer to agency and between agency types.

All questions in Aprais evaluations feed in to these clustered disciplines, allowing us to compare skills performance over time and across teams.

Analysis of the effectiveness award winners led us to wonder whether award winners excel in particular skills when compared with their peers.



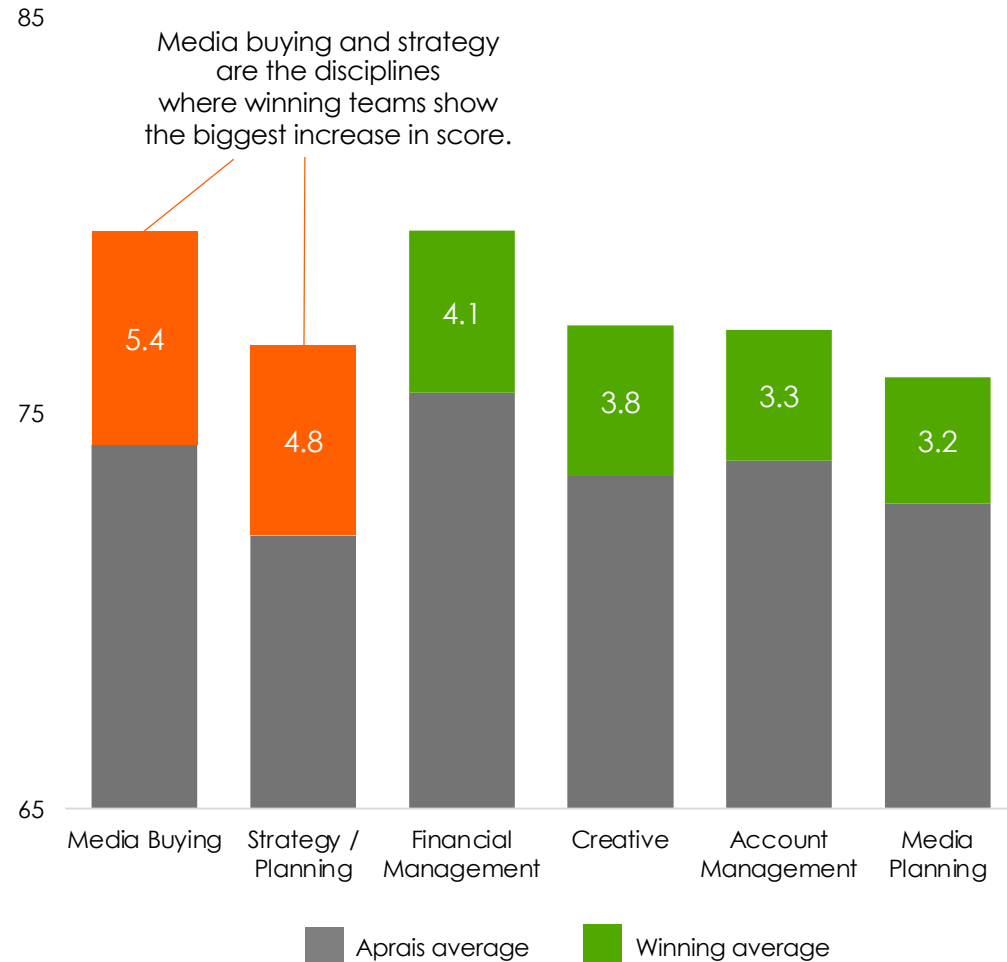
Are effective agencies scored differently on disciplines? ⁹

When compared with the average scores across the Aprais database, we found most disciplines scored higher for the winners.

By understanding these differences, teams may have guidance on how to close the gap with award winners.

The chart opposite indicates a selection of agency skills where the gap between winners and the average is evident. Strategy and media buying are areas where the skill gaps are greatest.

Client scores of agency disciplines

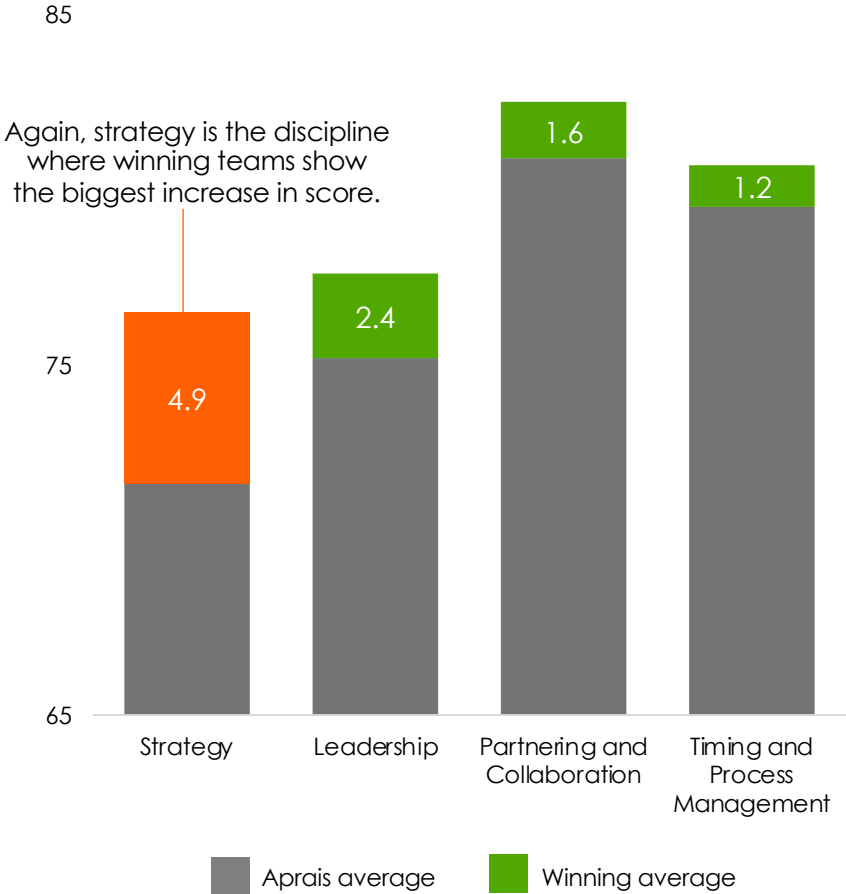


Are effective clients scored differently on disciplines?

When looking at discipline scores for clients it is again clear that winning teams score higher across the board.

What is interesting here is again that strategic thinking is the discipline that sees the biggest increase.

Agency scores of client disciplines



Effective behaviours

To better understand and compare team behaviours, Aprais assigned behavioural traits to each core question in the Aprais database.

We then analysed the database to determine the behavioural traits that impact the effectiveness of client-agency relationships.

From this exercise we defined seven core behaviours.

Unlike functional disciplines, these behaviours are common to all companies and job roles. They can therefore be compared regardless of team or industry.

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.

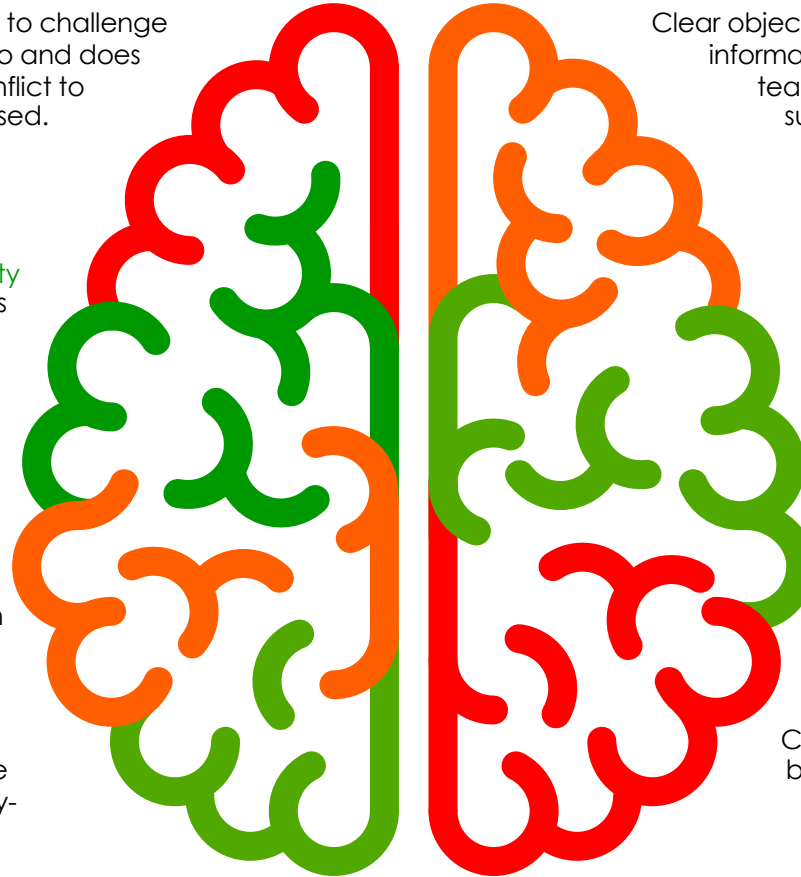
Trust
The team is trusted to deliver and behaves with integrity.

Functional
Competence to do the day-to-day work.

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

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

Resilience
Can withstand and bounce back from a crisis.



Do effective agencies behave differently?

Understanding these behaviours can help define what sets the best teams apart from the rest. The question is, do effectiveness award winners behave differently?

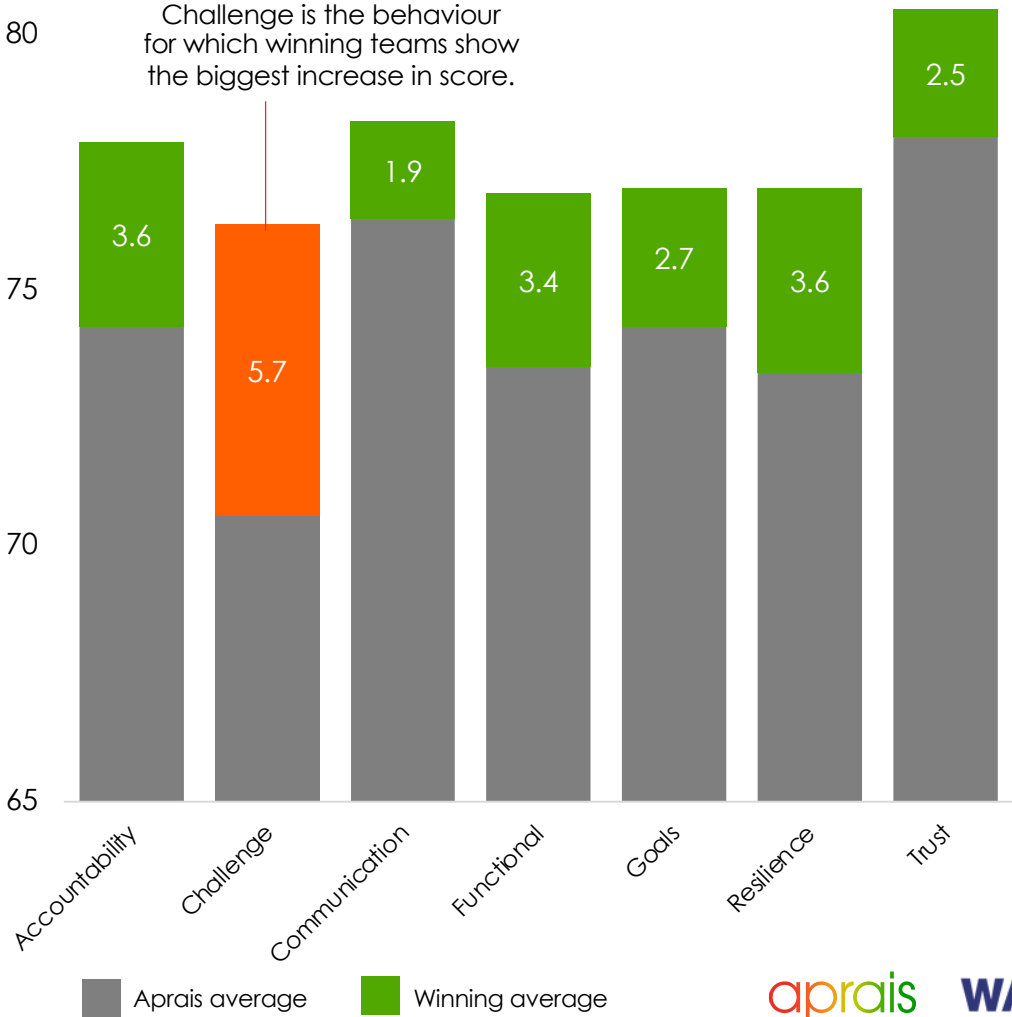
From the chart opposite you can clearly see three key factors:

- 1. Award winners have higher scores across all the behaviours.
- 2. Trust is remarkably important.
- 3. Challenge is the area that has the greatest difference.

In a business context, challenge requires courage. This is particularly difficult for agencies in cultures where a master-servant relationship with suppliers and subordinates is a business normal.

To find out more about challenge and the other key behaviours we measure, visit: aprais.com/reports/behaviours-reports

Client scores of agency on the seven key behaviours



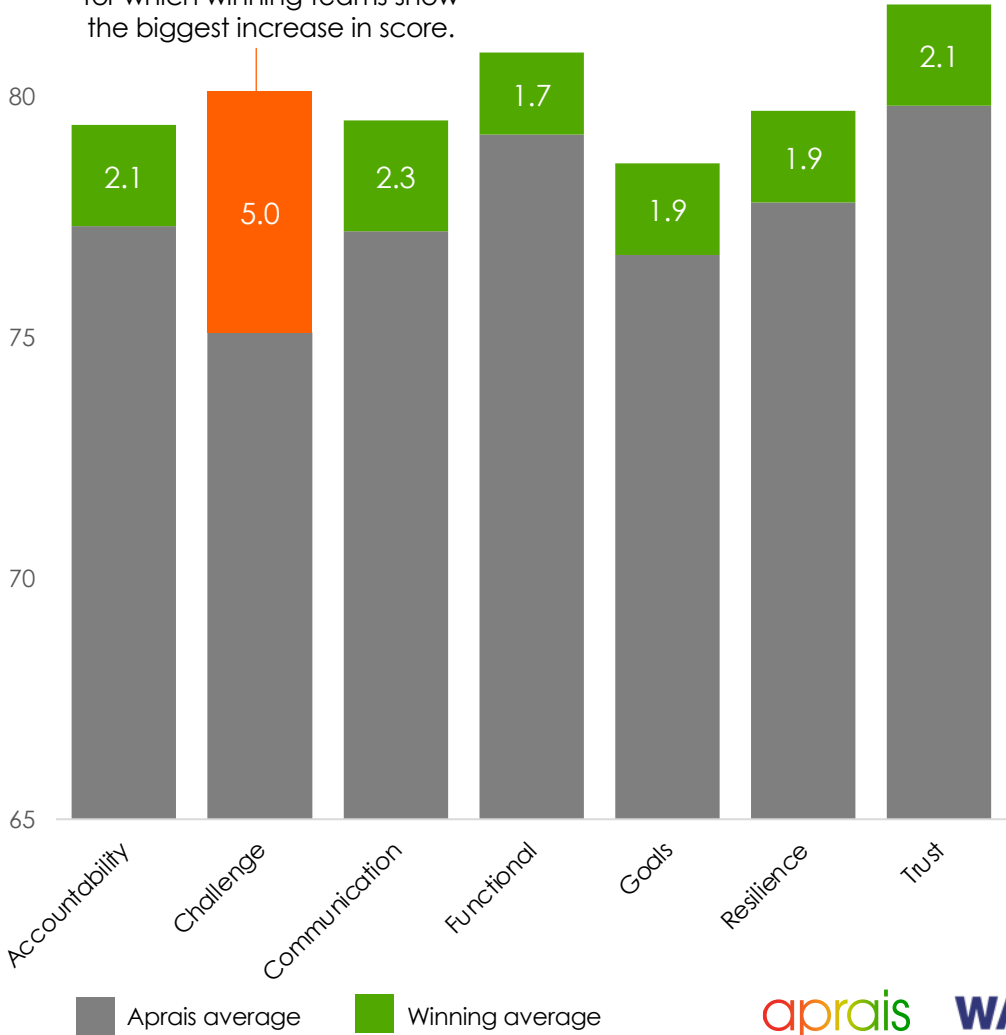
Do effective clients behave differently?

From the chart opposite you can clearly see three key factors:

- 1. Award winners again have higher scores across all the behaviours.
- 2. Trust is also the most important behaviour.
- 3. And challenge is again the behaviour that has the greatest difference.

Agency scores of client on the seven key behaviours

Again, challenge is the behaviour for which winning teams show the biggest increase in score.



The conclusion

Looking again at the hypothesis:

Do stronger relationships produce stronger results?

- Our analysis clearly shows that teams that won effectiveness awards and appeared in the Aprais database also had stronger client-agency relationships.
- This is validated by cross-referencing the Client of Agency results with the Agency of Client results.

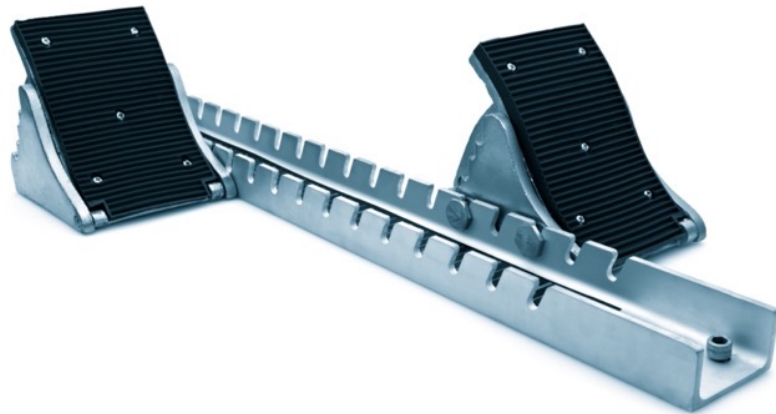
The clear verdict here is that to achieve more effective work, you need stronger relationships between client and agency.



Next steps

Questions clients should ask when assessing the relationship with agency partners:

1. Do I truly believe that client-agency relationships should be a partnership as opposed to a master-servant relationship?
2. Do I accept that opening up to finding out new things about my organisation could be the best way to ensure that it learns what it needs to do to get the best out of the other party?
3. Do I embrace the statistical robustness of large-scale data and external benchmarking to underpin confident decision-making?
4. Am I committed to acting on the findings and investing the necessary resource in terms of time, people and/or money to ensure meaningful progress is made?



About Aprais

We are the global pioneers in building stronger business relationships.

Since establishing the category some 20+ years ago we have advised the world's leading marketers and agencies on more than 25,000 relationships, across 92 countries, in 13 languages.

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

Using this unique database, we are able to provide valuable counsel to marketers and agencies on how to build stronger business relationships.

Contact us:

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About WARC

For over 35 years, WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective.

Across four pillars - WARC Strategy, WARC Creative, WARC Media, WARC Digital Commerce - its services include 100,000+ case studies, best practice guides, research papers, special reports, advertising trend data, news & opinion articles, as well as awards, events and advisory services.

WARC operates out of London, New York, Singapore and Shanghai, servicing a community of over 75,000 marketers in more than 1,300 companies across 100+ markets and collaborates with 50+ industry partners.

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