



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

2021



Key findings

1. While the fundamental characteristics of client-agency performance remain crucial, it has become important to also 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 last decade, how clients and agencies are more prepared to challenge the status quo.
4. Functional competencies like 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 & media relationships.

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

Ten years ago, our data showed that Functional characteristics like Timing and Process Management were what defined the top performers.

Today's business environment is radically different to that of ten years ago, and the pace of change has increased exponentially within the last year.

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.

FUNCTIONS

To use one's own knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance

BEHAVIOURS

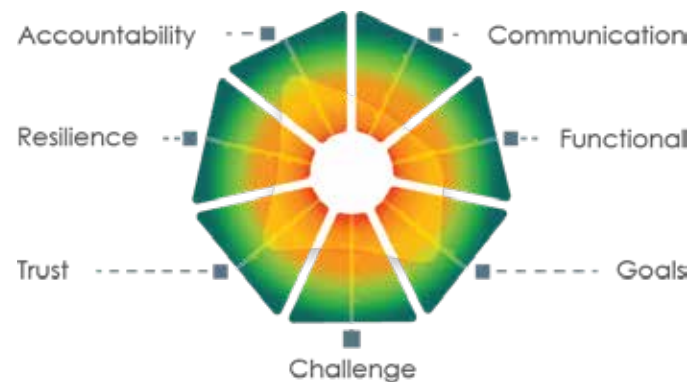
The way in which someone conducts oneself or behaves



Defining key characteristics

We normally split characteristics into discipline types covering areas such as Briefing, Strategy and Collaboration, to provide benchmarks from the very first round of evaluations.

We have now also assigned Behaviours to each core question in our database to look deeper at the drivers behind these Functional disciplines and their impact on team relationships.



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

Functional capabilities decreased in importance

- Whilst the scores for all of the Behaviours have improved for both top and bottom performing clients and agencies over the last 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 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.

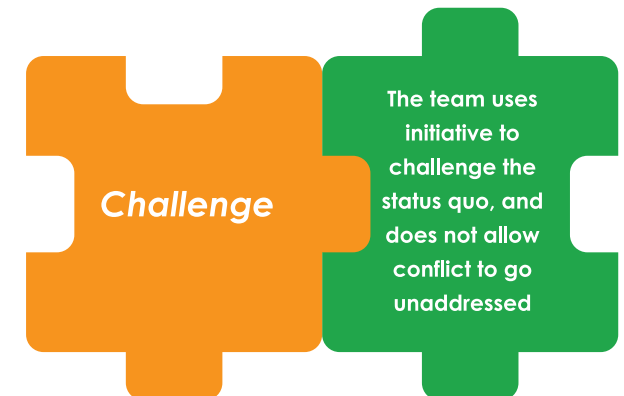
The growing importance of challenging norms

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.

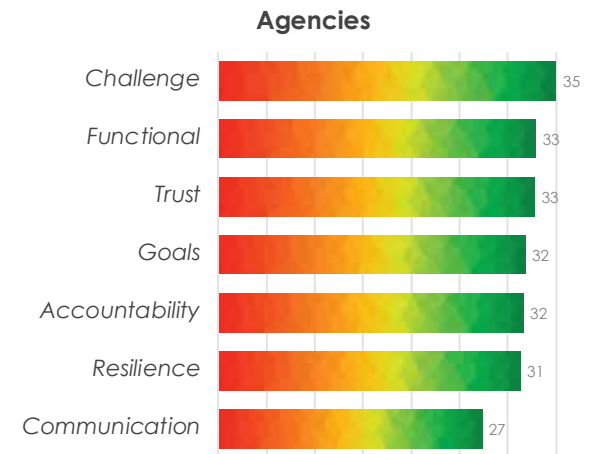
However, only EMEA saw improvements for top performers in digital with declines in the Resilience scores especially for agencies in the other regions.

Download our free report: "Resilience – a new 'business-critical' requirement for teams"

Where do top performers excel?

The charts below show the gap between the top and bottom performers, by Behaviour. The Behaviours have been ranked by the size of that gap.

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





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 fundamental characteristics of client-agency performance remain crucial, we must recognise that human Behaviours underpin all team performance and 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.

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 worlds' leading companies. By benchmarking results from more than 23,000 evaluations, we identify problems that limit client-agency value. Once identified, we help change team Behaviour through training and workshops to unlock business potential.

Methodology

By comparing the profile of clients and agencies with the top 10% scores in our database of more than 23,000 interactions, 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.

Aprais conducts 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](#).

Contact and Follow us

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