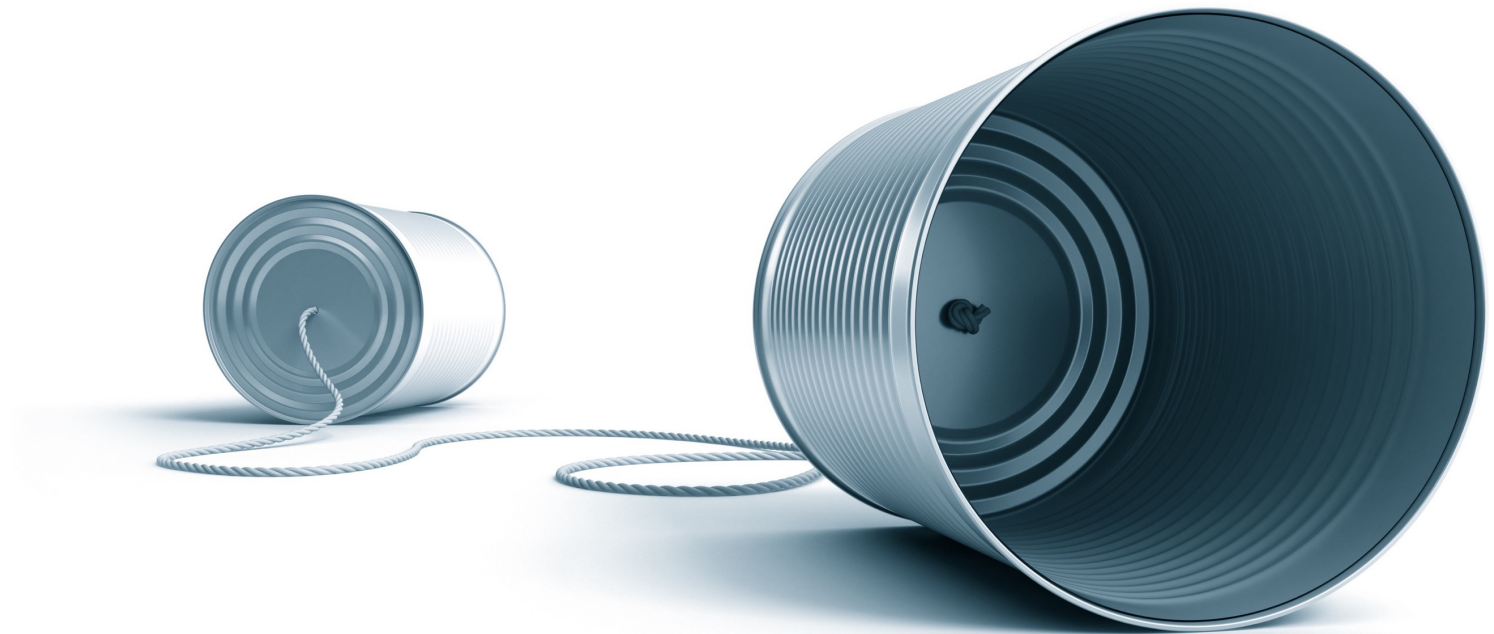# Understanding business relationships in the telecoms category

2023

aprais

Relationships matter

Over the years, we have compiled extraordinary evidence that stronger relationships build stronger business because they:

- produce higher quality, more effective work

- are more cost-efficient

- build valuable shared knowledge

- motivate staff to go the extra mile for each other

- bridge the gap between corporate cultures

- expand the scope of work

- instil more trust.

It's clear, then, that team relationships are important, both internally and with external stakeholders.

But how are these business relationships affected by their marketing category? And how can teams in the telecoms category improve?

"We are proud of the results we achieved together and really appreciate the efficient and well coordinated project management with regular status meetings, updates with all teams and planned approval procedures."

Telecoms agency lead

Categories matter

Client-agency team relationships are significantly influenced by the marketing category in which they operate.

Each marketing category possesses unique characteristics, challenges and dynamics that directly impact how clients and agencies interact and collaborate.

Telecoms
Client-agency team relationships can be significantly affected, both positively and negatively, by the unique characteristics of the consumer telecommunications category.

On the positive side, the category presents immense opportunities for collaboration and innovation. The fast-paced nature of the industry, with constantly evolving technologies and trends, demands a close partnership between clients and agencies.

The need for agility and responsiveness fosters a sense of teamwork, where agencies can provide valuable insights and expertise to help clients stay ahead of the competition.

Furthermore, the complexity of the telecommunications market often requires specialised knowledge and skills that agencies can bring to the table, enhancing the client's capabilities.

However, the category also poses challenges that can strain client-agency relationships.

One major factor is the highly competitive nature of the industry. The intense pressure to acquire and retain customers often leads to increased demands on agencies to deliver exceptional results. This can create tension, because clients may have high expectations while agencies navigate the complexities of the market.

Additionally, the regulatory environment in telecommunications is often complex, with strict compliance requirements. Agencies must navigate these regulations while delivering creative and effective campaigns, which can lead to additional challenges and potential conflicts.

As this report will show, there are opportunities for both agencies and marketers to improve against their lower-performing peers in terms of both functional disciplines and behaviours.

About this report
This report is based on our experience advising some of the world's leading marketers and agencies in the telecommunications category. It is part of a series focusing on business relationships in 11 of the product and service categories we have evaluated.

The analysis is extracted from a database of more than 26,000 evaluations Aprais have conducted globally over the past two decades.

Our quantitative evaluations use a 100-point scale that enables us to create accurate benchmarks for comparison, trends and insights.

We also analyse the qualitative comments entered with each evaluation to provide context to the scores.

This report will examine team characteristics that set the best teams apart from the rest. It will cover both marketers and agencies in the telecoms category.

Telecoms versus all categories

Across all categories and most regions of the world, our data shows that agencies score their marketer clients higher than clients score their agencies when assessing their relationships.

The global average across all categories for marketers scoring their agencies is 74.2, whereas agencies score their clients 77.9.

Generally, we find that businesses in less-regulated categories like non-alcoholic drinks and confectionery tend to have more positive views of their relationships than those in more technical and regulated categories such as healthcare and finance.

Keep in mind that a perfect relationship should result in the same score for both parties. Few relationships are perfect, however, and in the case of client-agency, many are not equal.

Two notable observations arise from the charts opposite. First, that both marketers and agencies in telecoms score each other lower than the all-categories average. This may support our assertion above that scores tend to be harsher in more technical categories.

The other observation is that the agency and client scores are virtually identical.

As mentioned earlier, this is unusual (as is reflected in the all-categories average) but, as with any relationship, an equitable view of each party's performance is a very positive sign. It reflects alignment in many aspects of the relationship.

■ Client scores agency   ■ Agency scores client

Telecoms
72.8
72.7

All categories
74.2
77.9
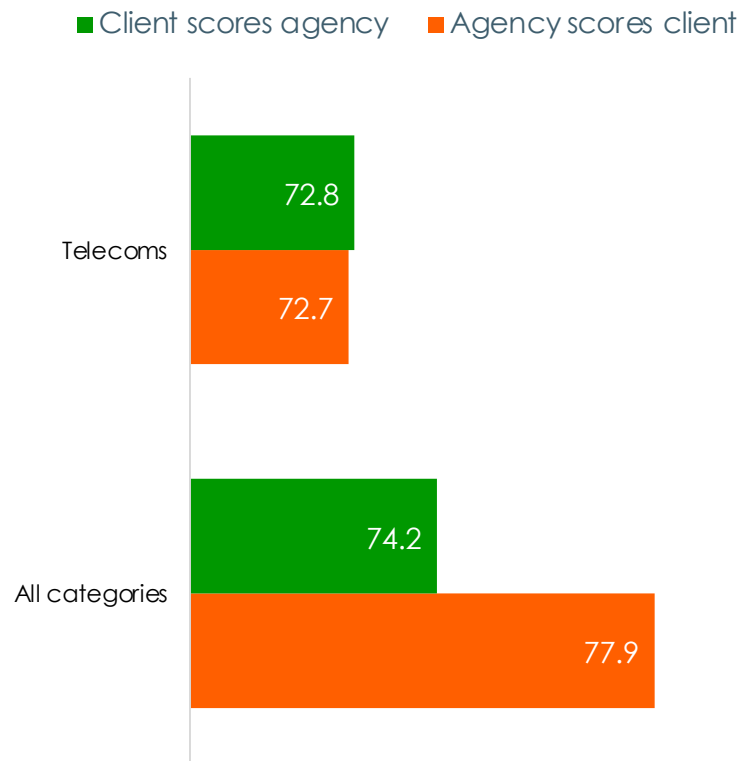
Team characteristics – functional disciplines

At Aprais we use two main concepts to identify, compare and improve team characteristics:

- Functional disciplines: On-the-job skills, using one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance.

- Behaviours: The way in which teams conduct themselves or behave.

The charts below show the gap in scores between the top 10% and the bottom 10% for a selection of disciplines, and compare the gap in telecoms with the all-categories average.
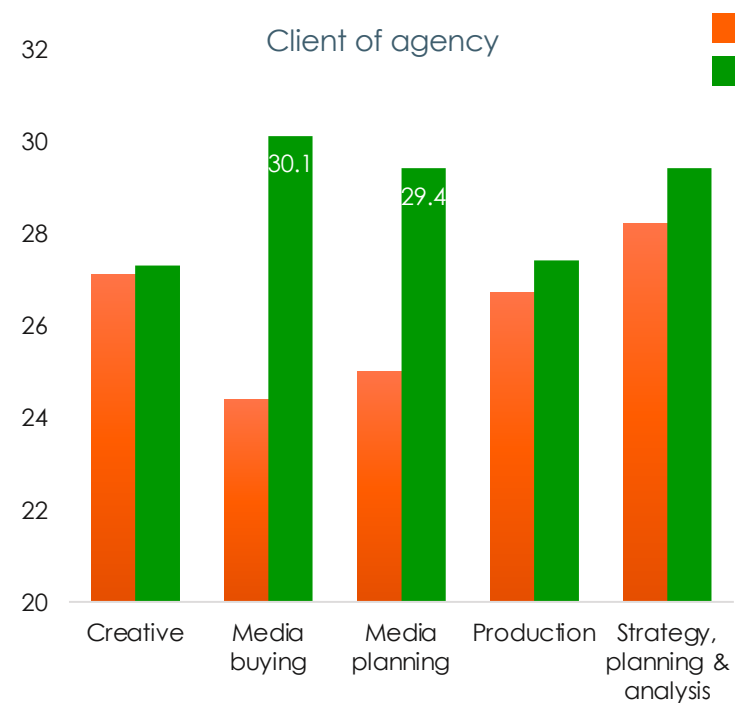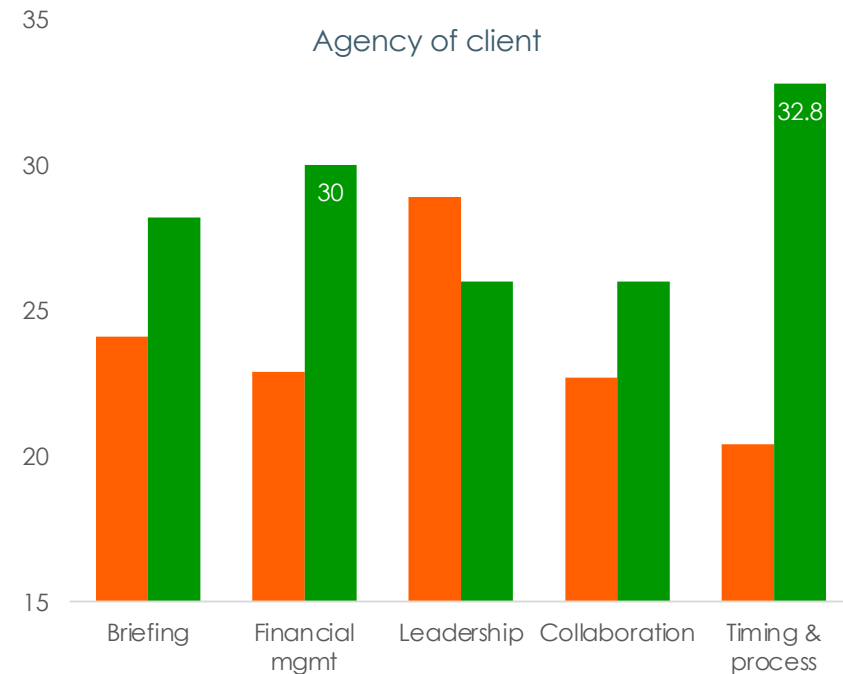
What does this tell us?

The height of the bars indicates the extent of opportunity for poor-performing teams to close the gap on their best-performing rivals.

Media buying (30.1) and planning (29.4) present clear opportunities for weaker agencies to improve against their better-performing rivals.

Marketers can improve in the area of timing & process (32.8). This means allowing enough time for agencies to respond properly. Financial management also shows a large gap (30). To understand the importance of this finding, see our report on this subject[1].

Client of agency — All categories (orange), Telecoms (green)
Creative, Media buying (30.1), Media planning (29.4), Production, Strategy, planning & analysis

Agency of client — Briefing, Financial mgmt (30), Leadership, Collaboration, Timing & process (32.8)

Source: All-categories 26,000 Aprais evaluations.

[1] Financially considerate marketers get better staff allocation from their agency.

Team characteristics – behaviours

Agency of client
Client of agency

Accountability
80
75
70
65
60
55
50

Trust

Challenge
73.1
69.8

Communication
75.6
71.7

Resilience

Functional

Goals
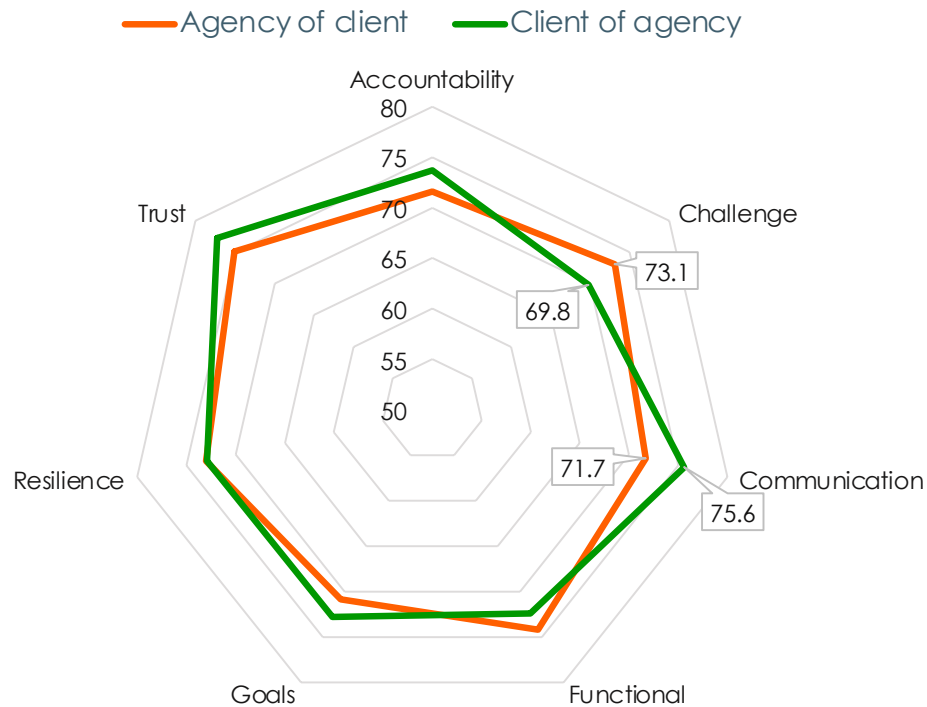
Accountability – Sets and takes responsibility for actions.

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

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

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.

Resilience – Can withstand and bounce back from a crisis.

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

Through rigorous analysis of our extensive database, we have defined seven behaviours that have the greatest influence on team performance[2].

This chart compares the behaviours of each team in the telecoms category.

Typically, agencies score their clients higher, but take note of where there are greater or lesser differences between the two.

Trust is often the highest-scoring behaviour, underscoring its importance to all relationships.

In the telecoms category, agencies are given a higher score (75.6) for their communication skills than they give to their clients (71.7), but a wide gap also appears in clients' perceptions of their agencies' sense of challenge (69.8).

[2] Reports: Seven behaviours that set the best teams apart from the rest.

In summary

The marketing category in which a client operates significantly affects the client-agency team relationship. Understanding the unique characteristics, challenges and dynamics of each category is crucial for building strong and successful partnerships.

In the telecoms category, marketers and agencies score each other lower than the all-categories average. This may support our observation that scores tend to be harsher in more technical categories.

Agency and client scores of each other are virtually identical. Although this is unusual, an equitable view of each party's performance reflects alignment in many aspects of the relationship.

Media buying and planning present clear opportunities for weaker agencies to improve against their better-performing rivals, while marketers can improve their timing & process management.

When comparing team behaviours, agencies need to up their challenge behaviour and marketers appear to lag behind agencies in terms of communication.

"The team is very helpful and proactive. They always have additional creative media ideas and recommendations throughout the whole year, not only campaign periods."

Telecoms marketer

Building stronger teams

How agencies can do better

1. Become a subject-matter expert in the category. In a world of generalisation, specific industry knowledge is valued.

2. Know the criteria that won you the business. Measure and monitor them to ensure you keep up with the client's expectations.

3. Make sure the team is aware of the criteria for good performance and is challenged to deliver on them.

4. Be enthusiastic about the client's business. People who are interested and engaged in a brand or category are likely to deliver better work.

5. Acknowledge and respect client members at all levels. Problems at a junior level can become senior headaches.

6. Be courageous and transparent. If you disagree, say so. All good relationships are built on trust.

7. Tackle issues before they become problems. Regular and frequent client-agency evaluations provide an objective platform for open dialogue.

8. Never be complacent. Think of all the other agencies who would love your client.

9. Have a 'can do' attitude. But if you say 'yes' be sure to deliver. If you deliver on your promises, the client is more likely to accept those times when you have to say you 'cannot'.

10. Good work is the best insurance. Effective solutions seal partnerships and provide great momentum and stickiness in a relationship.

How marketers can do better

1. Set mutually agreed, realistic and quantifiable objectives.

2. Instigate a regular 360° review of progress against these objectives.

3. Push for directness, trust and chemistry between the agency and client teams.

4. Make sure there are equally talented people on both sides who are motivated by shared incentives and principles.

5. Demand ongoing, transparent feedback in both directions.

6. Always respond to work with the positive first. Get cycles of positivity going, then turn the conversation to more critical feedback.

7. Empathise with their pressures. Care about the issues and celebrate their achievements. Forgive them their foibles and try to see things from their point of view.

8. Give agencies the opportunity to get under the skin of your business. Allow them to immerse themselves in every aspect of your operation. Enable them to understand your culture and openly share information and intelligence with them.

9. Create an atmosphere of excellence. Demand excellence. Inspire excellence. Recognise excellence and reward it.

10. Encourage your agencies to work together. Relationships that are better orchestrated can deliver substantially better performance.

Other reports

This report is one of a series focusing on how team relationships are affected by marketing category.

The first report introduces the topic.

The other reports each focus on an individual category and cover the behaviours and disciplines that set the best teams apart from the rest in that category.

1. Automotive
2. Banking & insurance
3. Confectionery
4. Food
5. Healthcare
6. Drinks (non-alcoholic)
7. Personal care
8. Petcare
9. Retail
10. Telecoms
11. Wine, beer & spirits

Download the report for your category here.

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Understanding business relationships in the automotive category
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2023
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Understanding business relationships in the retail category
2023
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Understanding business relationships in the banking and insurance category
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Understanding business relationships in the (non-alcoholic) drinks category
2023
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Understanding business relationships in the telecoms category
2023
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Understanding business relationships in the confectionery category
2023
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Understanding business relationships in the personal care category
2023
aprais

Understanding business relationships in the wine, beer and spirits category
2023
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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 26,000 evaluations, with multiple clients in over 70 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 us

Request a free consultation for your organisation: aprais@aprais.com

Learn more: www.aprais.com

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