

Understanding business relationships in the food 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 food category improve?

“We could benefit from a greater shared sense of purpose between agency and client. There are some instances where clearer leadership would help on projects that get left to agencies to sort out.”

Food 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.

Food

The food category offers exciting opportunities for creativity and innovation.

Working on food brands allows marketers and their agencies to tap into consumers' emotions and desires, fostering a sense of passion and enthusiasm within the team.

Team members may be more likely to feel personally invested in the products they promote, leading to heightened motivation and dedication to delivering exceptional results. This emotional connection can foster a strong bond between the client and the agency, creating a collaborative atmosphere and a better understanding of the brand's vision.

However, the food category can also pose challenges that affect the relationship.

The industry is highly competitive and subject to ever-changing consumer preferences. Frequent shifts in trends and tastes demand nimble and adaptable strategies, which can strain the agency's resources and capacity to keep up with the client's demands.

Regulatory requirements and health considerations in the food sector vary by region and by country, adding to the complexity for global brands. This can lead to increased scrutiny and limitations on marketing strategies, potentially causing conflicts between the client's expectations and the agency's creative ideas.

Moreover, the emotional connection that initially strengthens the relationship can also become a double-edged sword. When personal feelings and passion are involved, disagreements over creative direction or strategic choices may become more contentious, leading to tensions between the client and the agency.

About this report

This report is based on our experience advising some of the world's leading marketers and agencies in the food 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 food category.

Food versus all categories

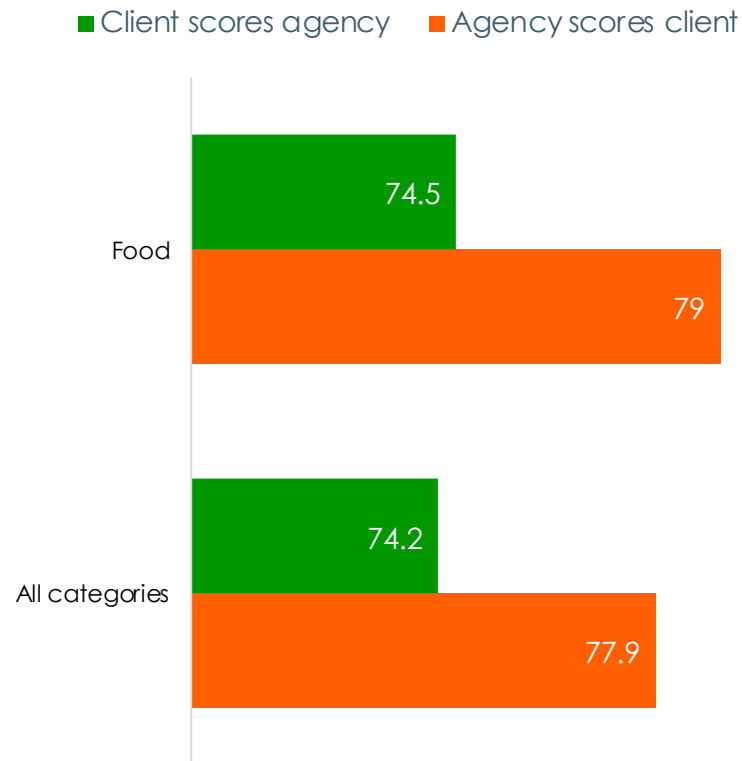
Across all categories and most regions of the world, our data shows that agencies score their marketer clients higher than clients score agencies when assessing their relationships.

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 food and finance.

As the chart indicates, food is an example of this hypothesis, with scores that closely mirror the all-categories averages.

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.



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.

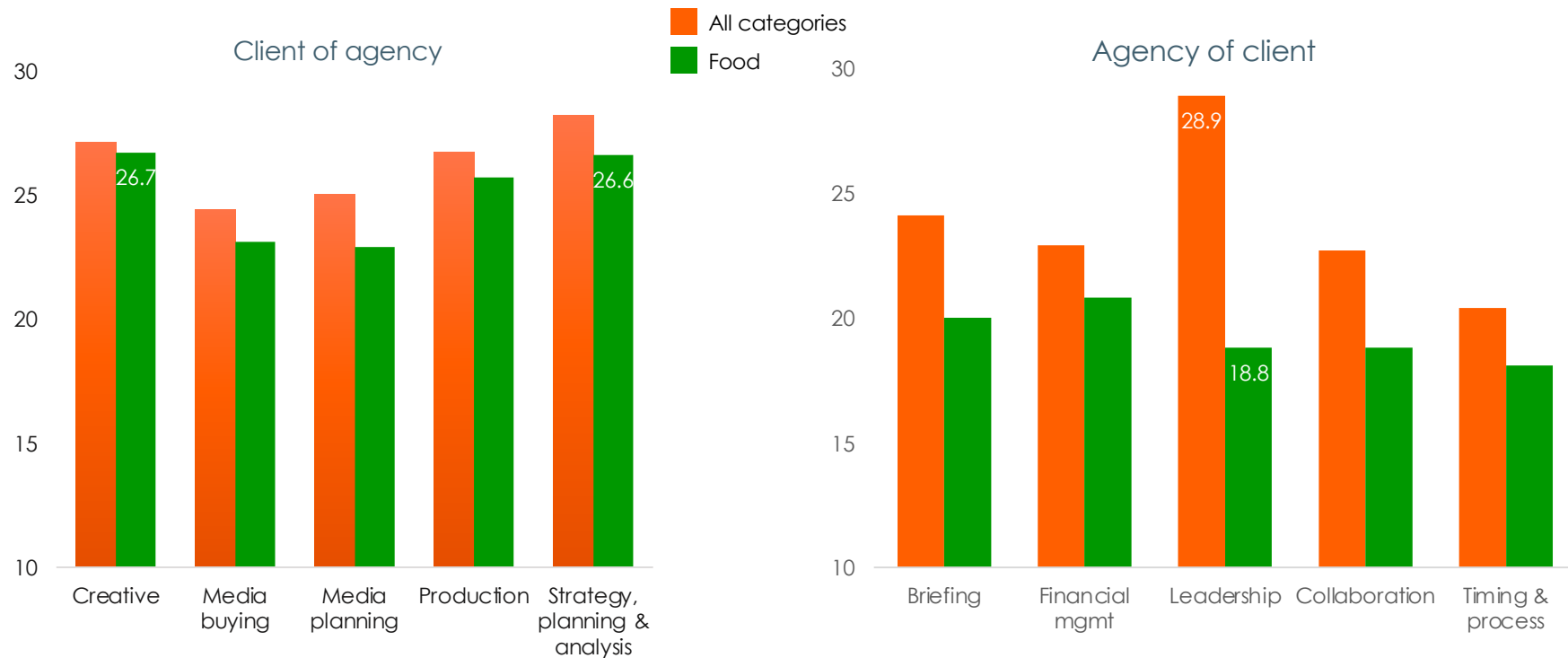
The charts below show the gap in scores between the top 10% and the bottom 10% for a selection of disciplines, and compare the gap in food with the all-categories average.

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.

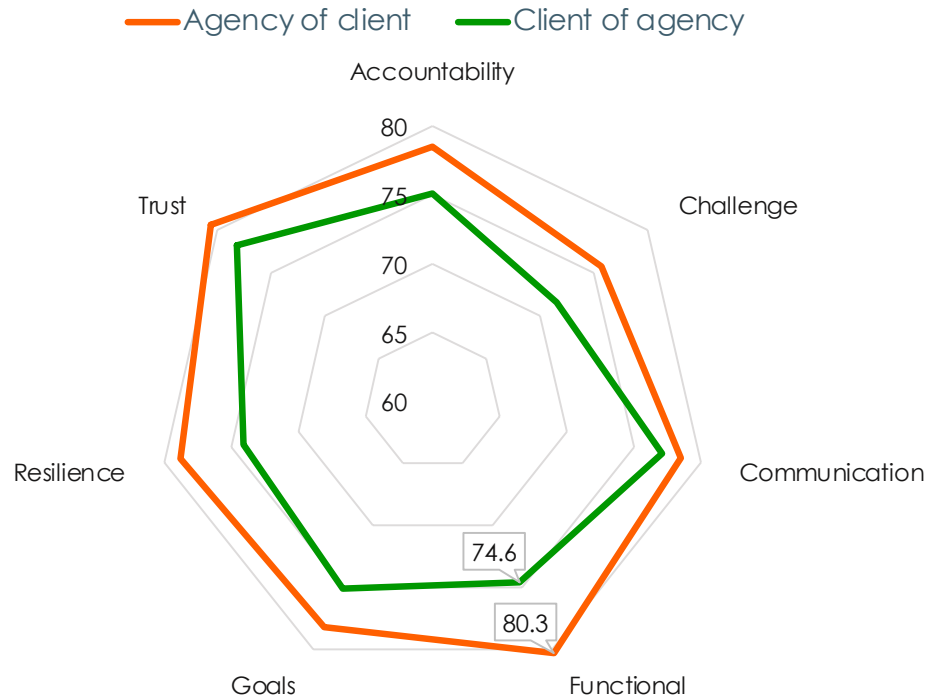
Strategy, planning & analysis (26.6) and creative (26.7) are clear differentiators for the best-performing agencies, both overall and in the food category.

The gaps between the top and bottom 10% are narrower in food than the all-categories averages. This is particularly pronounced for the leadership discipline for clients, which has almost a 10-point advantage (narrower gap) over the all-categories average.



Source: All-categories 26,000 Aprais evaluations.

Team characteristics – behaviours



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 performance¹.

This chart compares the behaviours of each team in the food 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, as is the case here in the food category.

Agencies evaluate their clients higher for all behaviours than clients rate their agencies. This is particularly apparent in the functional behaviours of clients (80.3), which score considerably more than their clients rate agencies (74.6). There is also a wide gap in perceptions of agencies' challenge and resilience.

¹ 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.

Client-agency evaluation scores in the food category reflect the average across all categories.

Strategy, planning & analysis and creative are clear differentiators for the best-performing agencies. While the gap between the best and the rest of marketers is narrower than for many other industries, as long as any gaps remain there is room for improvement.

The wide gap in scores for functional behaviours is cause for concern and something agencies should aim to close through improved on-the-job performance. Opportunities are also evident to improve agencies' challenge and resilience.

The food category's impact on client-agency relationships is a mixed bag of emotions and challenges. While it can generate enthusiasm and dedication, it also necessitates adaptability and open communication to navigate the complexities of the industry successfully.

Establishing clear expectations and maintaining a mutual understanding of the brand's objectives are crucial to fostering a positive and long-lasting partnership in the dynamic world of food marketing.

“Strategy and planning is definitely a strength of the agency. The team is highly proactive respecting strategy development and always offers well-supported and adequate feedback. The analysis is always well-supported.”

Food 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](#).



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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