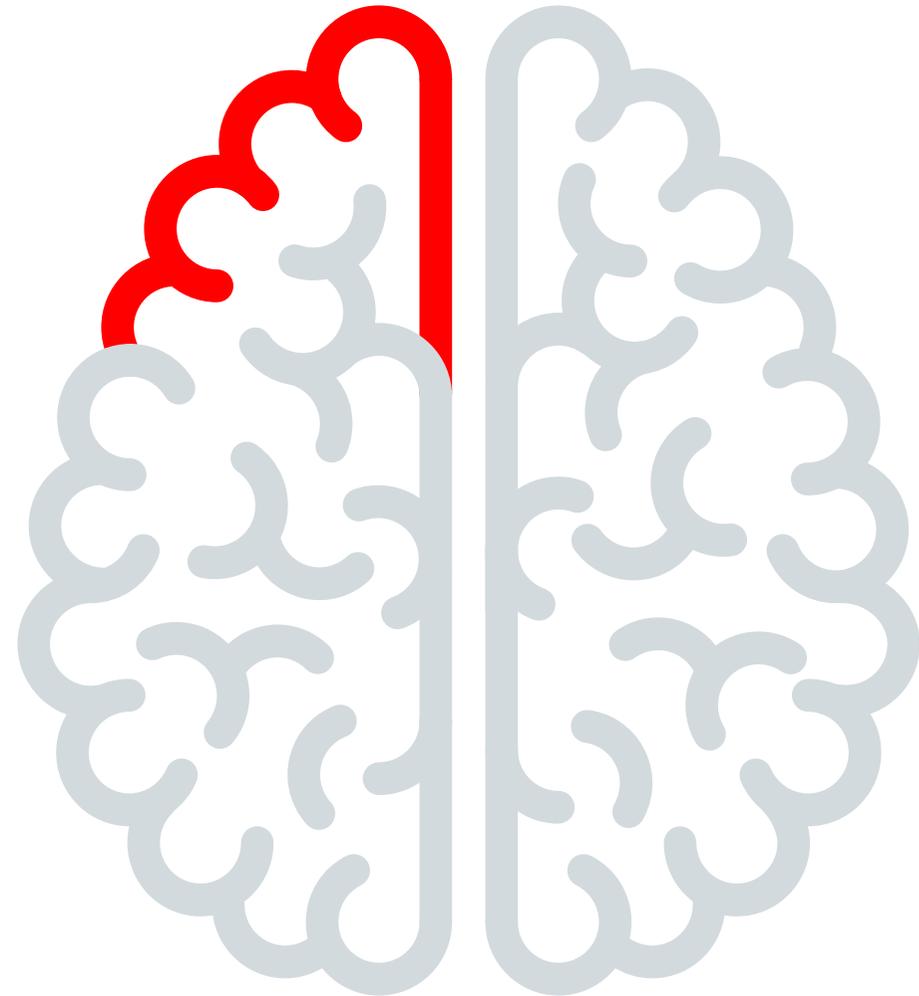# Accountability

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

aprais

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.

Accountability

Communication

Goals

Trust

Resilience

Functional

Challenge
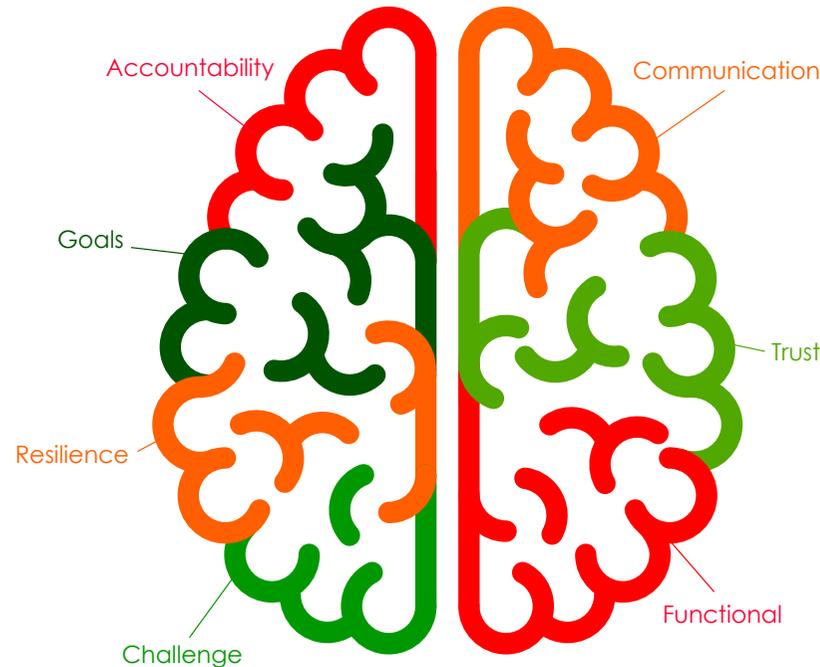
What's in this report

We will focus on accountability.

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 accountability on overall performance.

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

Accountability

*'Anyone holding themselves
accountable to nobody,
ought not to be trusted,
by anybody.'*

Thomas Paine
A founding father of the United States

Accountability is about setting shared expectations and holding people to them. In ideal cases, this is linked to the company's mission, values and goals.

As an article[1] in *Forbes* magazine explains, accountability makes us better – it makes us more confident. It is important as leaders that we do not only have accountability in the areas the board says we must. A truly authentic leader is accountable in all aspects. As a leader, accountability is important because it creates respect and trust.

When people face consequences for their actions or performance they are said to be held accountable.

When managed well, accountability can increase team members' skills and confidence.

Although this behaviour is critically important, it needs to be balanced with the need to give employees autonomy in their roles.

[1] *You May Not Be As Accountable As You Think*, 2018

How accountability has changed

When it comes to client-agency relationships, it is important to understand how accountability 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 accountability improved by 8% from 74 in 2011 to 80 in 2021.

This is in line with increases seen for most of the behaviours. The notable exception is challenge, which showed the highest increase at 11% over the decade.

Change in average behaviour scores 2011–2021
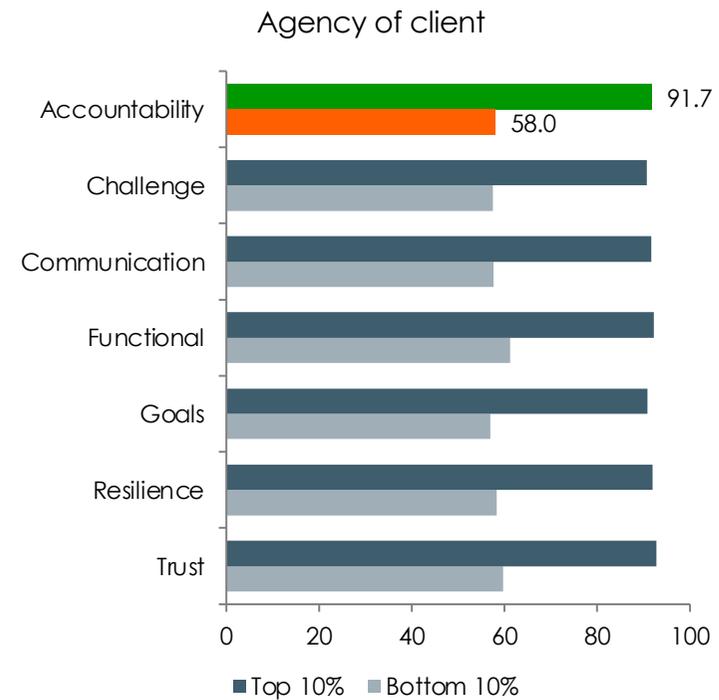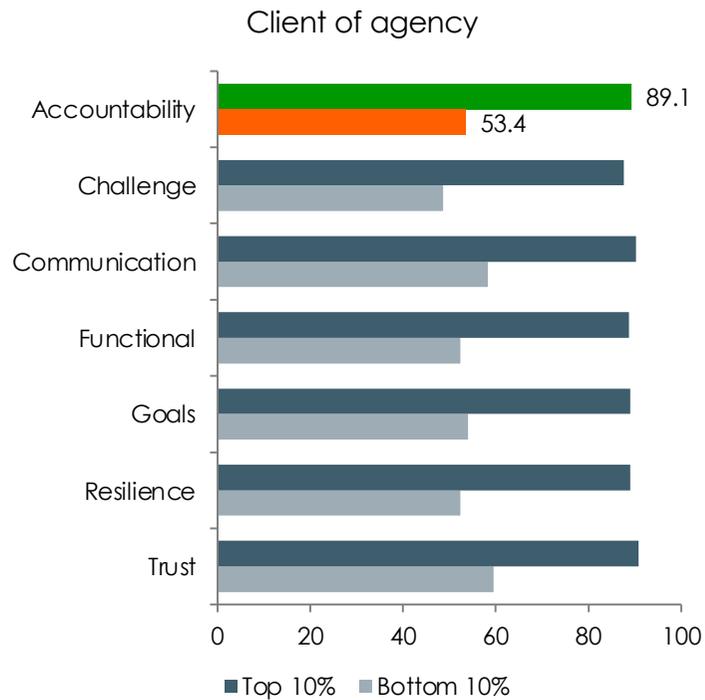

■ 2011 ■ 2021
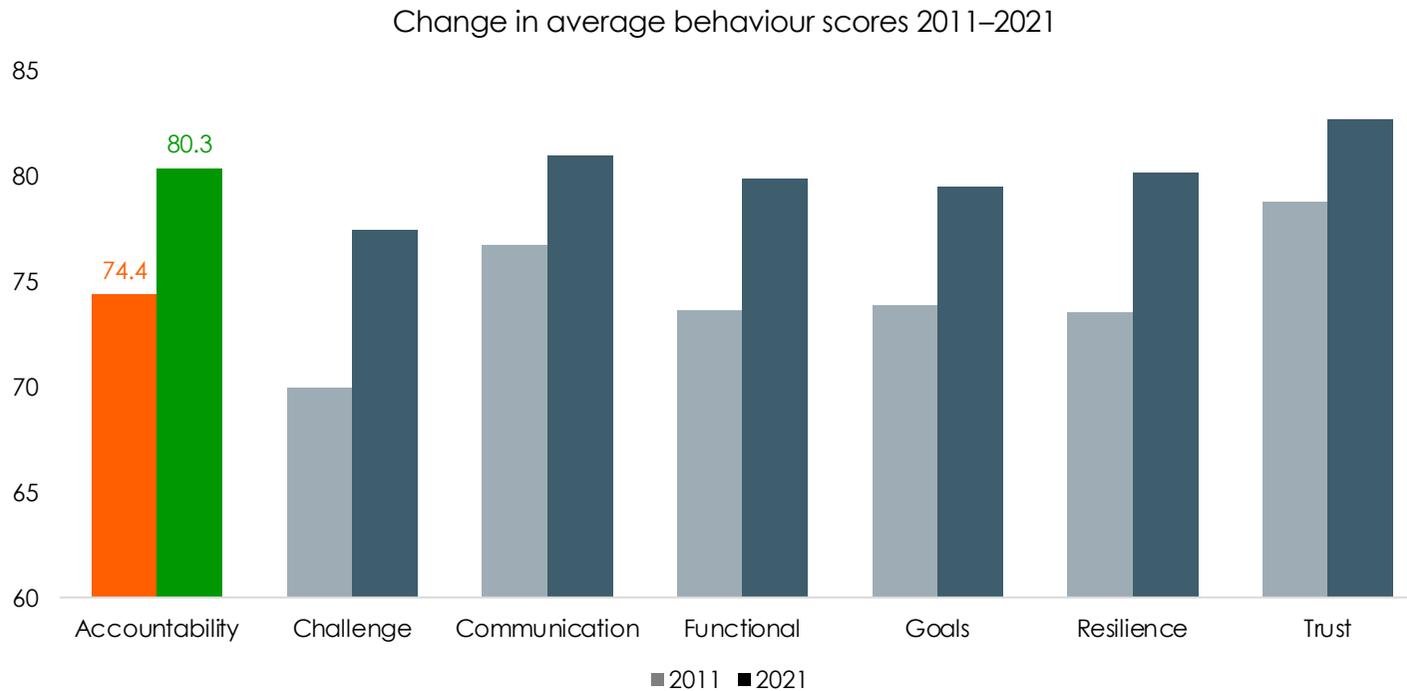
The best versus the rest

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 accountability.

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 accountability with their top-performing peers.

In the case of agencies there is a 36-point potential to improve, whereas for clients the gap is 33 points.

Client of agency

	Top 10%	Bottom 10%
Accountability	89.1	53.4
Challenge		
Communication		
Functional		
Goals		
Resilience		
Trust		

■ Top 10%   ■ Bottom 10%

Agency of client

	Top 10%	Bottom 10%
Accountability	91.7	58.0
Challenge		
Communication		
Functional		
Goals		
Resilience		
Trust		

■ Top 10%   ■ Bottom 10%

Source: 24,000 Aprais evaluations

Just how important is accountability?

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 accountability does not change whether the client is at the top or the bottom of performers.

For agencies, however, it seems that demonstrating more accountability may help poor performers close the gap on the top 10%.

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

Source: 24,000 Aprais evaluations

How to improve your accountability 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 accountability.

What agencies should do

1. Accept responsibility for mistakes. This is the essence of accountability.
2. Ensure a sufficient depth and quality of staff and strive for continuity of team members.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the role digital plays within the overall communication strategy, regardless of the agency type.
4. Ensure that recommendations reflect a thorough understanding of the brand and its consumers.
5. Reflect a positive service attitude among all team members. This includes evidence of commitment from the agency management.
6. Show initiative to collaborate with other agencies involved with the client's business. For example, powerful value can be achieved when the media agency is consulted and involved in creative decisions.

What marketers should do

1. Ensure thorough, clear briefs for every project. They should carry the commitment of the entire client team.
2. Allow reasonable response time commensurate with the scale of the task.
3. Make sure work reviews and approvals are comprehensive and reflect the views of all stakeholders.
4. Involve the agency where appropriate, in research and strategic issues. They should share the brand's strategic vision.
5. Manage the priority of projects. For larger tasks, establish RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted and informed) for each project and work to them.
6. Provide adequate levels of staffing and their calibre for the tasks. Try to minimise staff churn, which leads to disruption of work flows.
7. Be transparent and fair in dealing with multiple agencies to minimise unproductive competition and politics among them.
8. Encourage internal awareness of the roles and responsibilities of each agency involved in your business.

In conclusion

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

Accountability requires courage – for example, when taking responsibility for mistakes.

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 accountability.

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

Accountability

Client scores agency
Agency scores client

Source: 24,000 Aprais evaluations

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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