In a recent interview, Marc Pritchard, global marketing and brand-building officer at Procter & Gamble, made it clear he expected agencies to collaborate, and ensure client campaigns are well integrated with the process, seamlessly. He went further, saying: “[Agencies’] complexity should not be our problem.”

Understandable? Client prerogative? Absolutely. But it goes beyond that. It also makes business sense for both the client and the agency. Aprais’ data from more than 15,000 client-agency relationship evaluations, over 14-plus years, shows there is robust rationale for this, too.

In support of Mr Pritchard’s comments, the data shows that clients who actively assess the “collaboration” of their agency partners view those that they judge to be good collaborators 8% more favourably than those that are not.

However, more important than this, and more likely to be on any client’s radar, is the actual impact it has on the work itself. Clients who share P&G’s stated desire to achieve a well-integrated campaign find it far more with agencies who already adopt P&G’s mantra, judging their “integrated solutions” at 84.9 (out of 100). This is a staggering 69% higher than the work of those agencies that are not seen to collaborate well.

There is clearly a lot in it for clients, if agencies invest in a more collaborative approach. So far, so good. But is that all? Is it just a case of clients asking for more and, as a result of their status (and budget size), getting it? Here, the Aprais view (and data) is unequivocal—something more is also required of clients.

David Ogilvy’s insight from 50 years ago in his book *Confessions of an Advertising Man* was that “clients get the advertising they deserve.” Aprais data supports Ogilvy’s premise with a 99.99% statistical confidence. In other words, there is an extremely strong codependency between client and agency performance – or, in his words, better clients do get better work from their agencies.

How much better? Top-performing clients score the creative output of their agencies at 83.7, which is a remarkable 37% higher than the 60.9 for those clients who are not at the top of their game.

Key competencies that contribute to a client being “top-performing” include briefing, approval and timing. However, another element in the mix, as important as the others, is behaviour. In the same way that there is a plea for agencies to collaborate better, agencies need their clients to collaborate with them, too. It is no coincidence that those agencies viewed by clients as top-performing are those whose clients are seen as good at partnering and collaboration (79.6), while agencies seen as poor-performing work with clients who have scored 20% lower (63.8) on this criteria.

Now for a word of caution. In the marcomms industry, trust currently seems to be in short supply. Recent data shows some intriguing and, at the same time, worrying findings. Client trust in agencies is eroding. In 2011, agreement with the statement “agency account managers are reliable and trustworthy” scored an impressive 97.5 (out of 100). By 2014, this had fallen by 14.6 points to 82.9. And agencies are aware of this, clearly sensing deterioration in how much their clients trust them. When asked whether the client “demonstrates trust in the agency”, the figure in 2010 for those answering “yes” was 78.2 (out of 100); by 2014 this had fallen to 69.3.

Inevitably, this leads us to the challenge that I mentioned at the start of this article. While it is right that clients are clear on their need and demand for their agencies to collaborate better with each other, are they doing what is necessary to collaborate better with their agencies? Or as Snow White’s stepmother might say: “Mirror, mirror on the wall…”

**IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO**

Collaboration pays. The more collaborative the agency, the greater the benefits, but clients must remember that they, too, must be prepared to play their part in this