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Jodi Lisa Smith

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**NAVIGATING THROUGH THE PITCH LANDSCAPE:  
AN EXAMINATION OF CLIENTS, CONSULTANTS, AND  
ADVERTISING AGENCIES DURING THE PITCH PROCESS**

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AN EXAMINATION OF CLIENTS, CONSULTANTS, AND  
ADVERTISING AGENCIES DURING THE PITCH PROCESS**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May, 2009**

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the most important people in my life, for without them I certainly would not be where I am today.

I thank my wonderful parents John and Gloria who have been the greatest source of strength, love, and support not only during the completion of this degree but throughout my entire life. I thank my sister Jaymee and brother J.R. who have been two of the strongest influences in life in ways they may not realize. I thank my future husband Alan for his voice of encouragement, words of praise, and constant love throughout my whole doctoral program.

Lastly, I thank God for blessing me with the most amazing family and group of friends a person could ever wish to know. I am a better person for having each and every one of you in my life. I love you and thank you all for believing in me. It's been a long road but I couldn't have completed this journey without you all by my side.

## Acknowledgements

The University of Texas at Austin has been my academic home for almost seven years. When I came here to pursue my Masters degree, I had no idea I would stay to complete a doctoral program. Even though the journey was a long and difficult one, it was worth every moment. I would go through it all over again because I have learned more than I ever thought possible and have met some of the greatest people in my life.

First I would like to thank the members of my committee: *Jef Richards, Gary Wilcox, Norvell Northcutt, Janet Dukerich, and Meme Drumwright*. I thank you for standing by my side and believing in me when I did not believe in myself. I feel so fortunate to have had such a wonderful group of professionals on my committee. Each and every one of you poured so much of your time and energy into me and I am eternally grateful.

***Dr. Jef Richards*** stood by side during the completion of my Masters degree as well as throughout my entire doctoral program. Jef has been a wonderful advisor and friend. He has provided insightful academic guidance on countless projects and was always there with attentive ears to listen to me rant during many stressful moments (and

there were PLENTY of them!). Thank you, Jef, for never giving up on me and for having the confidence in me that I did not always possess.

***Dr. Gary Wilcox*** was the first person I met at UT while I was in the process of applying for the Masters program. He welcomed me to the university with open arms and has been a constant source of support. Throughout my many years at this fabulous university, he has definitely seen me at my best and my worst and still talks to me! Gary, I cannot thank you enough for all of your encouragement. It has meant more than you could ever know.

***Dr. Norvell Northcutt*** was one of the first individuals who made me believe I could actually love research. When I took his class, I was in awe of how he explained everything so clearly. Dr. Northcutt, I cannot thank you enough for your ability to always make sense out of my ramblings. You have been so encouraging in my qualitative research endeavors and I feel I have learned so much from you. Thank you for your eternal positive outlook and unwavering enthusiasm, it rubs off on me every time I see you.

***Dr. Janet Dukerich*** is a wealth of information and I have the greatest admiration and appreciation for the way in which she has provided me guidance through the years. Janet, I thank you for helping me stay focused and for being patient with me while I continually struggled through theoretical concepts and methodological issues. I feel so lucky that I was able to assist you with the signature course. It was a wonderful

experience and I sincerely appreciate you giving me the opportunity to be a part of the inaugural class.

*Dr. Meme Drumwright* is one of the kindest and smartest ladies I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. Meme has such an amazing way of offering valuable feedback in the most upbeat and cheerful manner imaginable. This was appreciated more than words can express especially on days when I walked into her office feeling worried and churned up about my dissertation. Meme, I thank you infinitely for your willingness to embrace my dissertation with open arms. You helped me more than you could possibly know; not only in the valuable suggestions you provided but always in the kind way you handled all of my concerns. I appreciate your enthusiasm towards my work and your commitment to helping me succeed.

*Dr. John Fortunato*, I thank you for providing me with four years of incredible advice. I thoroughly enjoyed working as your TA and really appreciate how you always provided me with an objective perspective. You were instrumental in keeping my spirits up in those times when I seriously doubted my ability to complete the Ph.D. program. Even after you moved, I appreciated the way you checked in on me periodically and followed my progress (although Kramer seriously missed flying into Jerry's office all the time!). You are definitely my favorite person from New Jersey and one of my favorite people all-round.

*Joanne Davis* is a consultant who I had the pleasure of meeting while working on my dissertation. Joanne, I thank you for so graciously introducing me to several key

people. I sincerely appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to go above and beyond to help me. You were such a pivotal part in getting the research going, I cannot thank you enough.

**Tom Finneran** is the executive vice president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA). Tom, thank you and the AAAA for your willingness to assist me with my dissertation by making many resources available for my use. I appreciate you continually touching base with me and expressing interest in my project. Your help was invaluable and appreciated more than I could ever express.

**Bill Duggan** is on the Board of Directors for the Association of National Advertisers (ANA). Bill, thank you and various ANA members for helping me gain insight into the client perspective. This work could not have been completed without your assistance.

**Joe Broschack** is a UT alum and an amazing scholar. Joe, thank you for taking such an interest in my research and giving me great advice on how to think about several areas of the dissertation. I hope one day we can actually meet in person!

I wish I could thank all of my *respondents* by name but I cannot do that based on our confidentiality agreement. I do want to thank you all for your willing participation. Obviously, this research would not have been possible without you. I appreciate your time and your candid responses. Because of your participation, I believe a great deal more is known about the pitch landscape.



*To my friends and colleagues who traveled this journey with me:* Kasey Windels, Laura Bright, Assaf Avni, Karen Lee, and Yeo Jung Kim, thank you all for being a true support structure. We all shared a great deal of stressful moments as we trudged through classes, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation but I know we also shared a great deal of happy social moments. I am reminded of many fun afternoons at Trudy's and an endless amount of humorous times at AAA conferences around the country. I am proud of each and every one of you for all you have achieved and I feel so fortunate that our paths crossed in the doctoral program. It is with pride and gratitude that I call you all my colleagues and friends.

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE PITCH LANDSCAPE:  
AN EXAMINATION OF CLIENTS, CONSULTANTS, AND  
ADVERTISING AGENCIES DURING THE PITCH PROCESS

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

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The pitch process is critical for both clients and agencies as it is the time period when clients are trying to identify the best agencies to hire and agencies are trying to win business. There are a multitude of variables that play a large role in the success of a client-agency relationship; however, the specific actions, events, and dynamics that occur during the pitch process can be especially important in setting the tone and influencing the outcome of the partnership. Many studies have examined various dynamics and phases of the client-agency relationship, but few have specifically focused on the earliest phase; the pitching process. This study fills this void by providing insights from clients, advertising agencies, and third-party consultants involved in all aspects of the pitching

process to better understand the dynamics of the beginning stages of the client-agency life cycle.

The literature review examines personal relationships, business relationships, and client-agency relationships and includes examples of relationship development models. Although these models provide a good backdrop for the way a client and an agency develop their relationship, they do not delve into specific aspects of the Pitch. Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) provide insights both into how the pitch process facilitates exchange between clients and agencies and the ways in which all parties involved in a pitch have certain expectations. The extent that expectations are either confirmed or disconfirmed can lead to increased or decreased satisfaction with the overall pitch process.

The four main research questions driving this study related to attraction, trust, and satisfaction. Respondents were asked how both attraction and trust were experienced and could be accelerated during the pitch process and were asked to identify the various components that were involved in the “most-satisfying” and “least-satisfying” pitches. The results indicated that both logistical and relational factors played a key role in the way in which a pitch process was experienced and although clients, agency professionals, and consultants shared many thoughts, each constituency offered a unique perspective. This research brings attention to the level of disconnect that occurs among the various constituencies and makes recommendations regarding ways to improve the pitching landscape.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 The Research Area**

As with most inter-organizational relationships, the client-advertising agency dynamic involves both parties entering into a relationship based on the principles of exchange and benefit. The client provides financial compensation to the advertising agency in exchange for a variety of creative services and media placement that ideally results in a benefit to both client and agency.

The development of the relationship between a client and its advertising agency has been commonly compared to that of personal relationships using the metaphors of dating, marriage, and unfortunately divorce. Just as personal relationships evolve, so do the relationships between clients and their agencies. From the courting and dating phases (pitch process), to the marriage (client awards business to a particular agency), to the separation (client puts account up for review), and finally to the divorce (relationship between client and agency is terminated); these business relationships evolve through the same stages of creation, development, maintenance, and termination as are experienced in personal relationships.

While all phases of any relationship are vital to its success, the main focus of this study is the pitch process; the earliest stage of the client-agency life cycle. Considering the amount of time and financial resources involved in a pitch process, it is surprising that so many previous studies have glazed over this stage of the client-agency relationship. The way in which the pitch process is experienced by clients, agencies, and consultants can provide the foundation for how the rest of the relationship will develop.

## 1.2 The Evolution of the Pitch

Pitching is not limited to the advertising industry. Elsbach and Kramer discuss a variety of situations where “judgments regarding others’ creative potential must be made before any actual products are produced or before reliable reputational information is available to decision makers” and that this “is done initially and primarily on the basis of subjective assessments made during face-to-face interviews, or ‘pitches’” (p. 283).

The concept of pitching a product or service is not new; in fact it could be assumed with the first salesperson came the necessity to pitch business. The scope of this paper does not allow for the inclusion of a full timeline of the evolution of the pitch over the past century; however, it is important to note that the pitch process has changed according to the demands of the industry. When Volney Palmer, considered by many to be the first advertising agent, opened his shop in Philadelphia in 1843, the concept of a pitch was vastly different than it is currently.

Advertising was considered an embarrassment — the retarded child, the wastrel relative, the unruly servant kept backstairs and never allowed into the front parlor. A firm risked its credit rating by advertising; banks might take it as a confession of financial weakness. Everyone deplored advertising. Nobody — advertiser, agent, or medium — took responsibility for it. The advertiser only prepared the ad, but did not place it; the agent only served as an errand boy, passing the advertiser’s message along to the publisher; the medium printed it, but surely would not question the right of free speech by making a judgment on the veracity of the advertiser (Fox, p. 15)

Even though the first advertising agents were not involved with pitching the extensive creative services offered by today’s advertising agencies, they still had to communicate the benefit of advertising and pitch the concept to each potential advertiser. For instance, before there was any government regulation, it was common for publishers

to lie about the circulation of their publications because the higher the circulation, the higher the rate. Agents had rate cards that would be given to prospective advertisers. These rate cards “meant only the start of negotiations” (Fox, 1997, p. 15).

In addition, even though the sophistication of the pitch process was extremely different than it is today, strong relationships between the various constituencies still remained an important aspect to the success of the pitch. The quality of the relationship between two parties could severely impact the final rate as illustrated by the following story:

One publisher of a prominent weekly would make the rounds of New York advertising agents offering a firm rate of twenty-five cents a line. ‘Everybody liked him,’ one of the agents later recalled, ‘but few had confidence in his circulation.’ When he made his rounds in the morning he stood out for his rates less twenty-five per cent. After a tolerably agreeable luncheon and strictly between friends he would occasionally agree to a thirty-three per cent commission. After dinner it was mutually agreed that a rate card didn’t amount to much between friends and fifty per cent to a good fellow was agreed upon (Fox, 1997, p. 15)

By the early 1900s, the advertising industry began to operate more closely to current day where there was “an emphasis on the ad itself instead of the selection of media or the size of the advertiser’s budget” (Fox, 1997, p. 40). As the industry continued to grow and more agencies opened, competition for clients increased. With increased competition, the pressure of the pitch increased.

Even though obtaining clients was always a necessity for agencies to be successful, it wasn’t until 1969 that “the floodgates opened, and pitching became the driving force for agencies – a trend accelerated by the emergence of media independents and the replacement of commission by fees as the ‘gold standard’ for agency payment

during the 1980s” (Wetthey, 2004, p.27). Since that time, pitching has continued to evolve and serve a large role in the establishment of relationships between client and advertising agencies. Wetthey (2004) states the “mating rituals of clients and agencies” have “become so elaborate” (p. 27) and discusses some key changes that have made an impact on the pitching landscape.

Firstly, advertising agencies have changed a great deal in the scope of services they are offering and the way in which they are structured. Clients and consultants have to consider these various qualifications and services when deciding what agencies will be invited to pitch a particular account.

Secondly, the tenure of key marketing leaders has been declining resulting in loss of prestige for these previously well-regarded positions. High CMO (chief-marketing officer) turnover can make a big difference in the pitch process because in many cases, when a new CMO is hired, a new advertising agency may also be required (Maddox, 2006).

Thirdly, the role of procurement departments in the pitch process is on the rise. According to the 2007 survey conducted by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) and Millward Brown, “Procurement plays an increasingly bigger role in the agency search process as budget size increases. It is primarily involved in negotiating the contracts and facilitating discussions about compensation” (p. 29).

For a company, involving its procurement department may be a way to ensure a level of legitimacy in the agency evaluation process; however, shopping for an advertising agency should not be viewed in the same context as shopping for office

supplies. This is primarily because of the difficulty in assessing value of an advertising agency; it extends far beyond comparing financial costs. Agencies used to sell and clients used to buy, “from now on, clients will source, and advertising agencies will tender” and “the fee system has given procurement the idea that agencies are like a Chinese menu on eBay, and if you can pick and choose entirely on the basis of inputs, why not ask 20+ restaurants (sorry, agencies) to send in menus (fee proposals)?” (Wethey, 2004, p. 27). This study explores the pitching landscape to better understand how the various constituencies are handling the evolution of the pitch process and the multitude of relationship dynamics that come into play.

### **1.3 Statement of Purpose**

Many articles have been written about the relationship between clients and their advertising agencies. A review of the literature will reveal studies that delve into — the overall development of the client-agency relationship (Wackman, Salmon, & Salmon, 1987), advertising agency selection (Cagley & Roberts, 1984; Cagley, 1986; Harvey & Rupert, 1988; Pendleton, 1988), winning new accounts (Wills, 1992), aspects of loyalty between clients and agencies (Mitchell & Sanders, 1995), reasons for longevity (Davies & Prince, 1999), key predictors of termination of the relationship and/or agency switch (Henke, 1995; Baker, Faulkner, & Fisher, 1998), and the list goes on. The majority of these studies focus on the period of time *after* the advertising agency has awarded. What was absent from the literature was a study that focused on the beginning of the client-agency life cycle – the pitch process.

The lack of research focusing on the pitch process has left a void that this study seeks to fill. Because so little is understood about how the pitch process unfolds, the purpose of this study is to discover how clients and agencies make their first contact, how this relationship grows, and what makes one pitch better than another.

#### **1.4 Assumptions**

There were several assumptions the researcher brought to this study based on personal experience, previous research, and observation. First, it was assumed that the way in which the pitch process is experienced sets the tone for the entire client-agency relationship. The pitch process can be extremely intense for all parties involved and so it was assumed that the earliest interactions between the various constituencies could have a lasting effect. Second, it was assumed that even though each pitch process would be unique, there would be some commonalities regarding what works and what does not work across the board. Third, based on the assumption that each process would be unique, it was also assumed that there would be distinct differences between each of the constituencies (clients, agencies, and consultants). Finally, it was assumed that

#### **1.5 Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for the current study originates from the researcher's desire to shed light on the pitching process which has been previously over-looked. Relationships between clients and their advertising agencies often do not make it past the first year (Henke, 1995; Davies & Prince, 1999). A recent study involving 140 key marketing decision makers with annual marketing budgets in excess of \$2M revealed that 46% of

clients reported their agency relationship lasting less than two years (Reardon Smith Whittaker, 2007).

Factors such as mergers, rebranding efforts, and a decrease in CMO tenure have all been cited as reasons clients terminate their relationship with their current agency and begin to search for a replacement (Maddox, 2006). These short-term relationships can be costly to all parties involved. Halinen (1997) states, “Long-term business relationships provide many potential benefits for professional service companies and their clients. It is generally less costly for a service firm to maintain and develop an existing client relationship than to attract a new one” (p. 3).

Regardless of the particular circumstances that result in the dissolution of a particular relationship between client and agency, it may be common for both parties to focus on the specific things that went wrong, identify what caused the relationship to end, and think about ways to prevent the same thing from happening in the future. As Baker, Faulkner, and Fisher (1998) state, “the birth and death of organizations receive far more attention than the formation and dissolution of the relationships between organizations” (p. 147).

This research proposes that actions and events occurring in the early phases of a relationship can set the tone for how the remainder of the relationship will evolve. Therefore, instead of focusing on the specific factors that may have resulted in the termination of a particular client-agency relationship, more insight could be gained by understanding how it first developed. By examining the first phase of the client-agency life-cycle closely and discovering what various parties identify as most and least-

satisfying, recommendations can be made regarding specific things to do as well as those to avoid when involved in a pitch process.

## **1.6 Defining Key Terms**

Before delving into the study, several key terms and concepts need further clarification. The term ***pitch*** can be used as both a verb and a noun. For instance, as a verb, an agency will ***pitch*** their ideas or may be said to be in the process of ***pitching*** new business. As a noun, a ***Pitch*** is usual the formal presentation given by an agency to a potential client with the main goal of winning the particular business account. For clarification purposes, when referring to the verb ***pitch*** will be used and when referring to the noun, ***Pitch*** will be used. Because of the vast amount of variation within client-agency relationships in general, the way in which a Pitch is handled depends greatly on both the agency and the client involved. For the purposes of this study, this complex process in its entirety is called the ***pitch process***.

## **1.7 The People, The Pitch, and The Process**

A Pitch cannot occur without people and it is the role that people play in the pitch process and the way in which relationships are developed that is at the heart of this study. In order for any pitch process to function, individuals working for client organizations, third-party consultants, and advertising agencies all have to develop relationships both within and across their organizations. Before discussing the evolution of the various relationships in a pitch process, it is important to provide an understanding of the role of people in constituency. Because each organization, consultancy, and agency are



different, the specific roles of individuals, involvement in the Pitch, and the relationship exchange may vary greatly.

Even though the term “client” is singular, in any pitch process, the client may be represented by a company owner, brand manager, or a team of people. This is greatly dependent on the size of the organization. In most cases, the larger the organization, the more likely the amount of people involved in a pitch process will increase. The more people that are involved, the more pressure there is to learn how to communicate internally so that there is a shared vision of what the organization stands for, the necessary requirements from a perspective advertising agency, and whether or not a consultant will be involved.

In pitch processes where consultants are involved, usually only one consultant works with each client however, the size of the consultant firms can vary. Some consultants are part of a larger group whereas others operate individually. Regardless of the size of the firm, the client and the individual consultant must form a relationship with one another. The client must feel as if the consultant understands the client’s organization. In order to do this, significant time must be spent with one another so that the consultant obtains a clear picture of what the client is looking for in an agency and so the client believes the consultant will add value to the pitch process.

For advertising agencies involved in a pitch process, the role of people becomes even more complex because in an agency individuals from a variety of departments all have to come together to work on the Pitch. For instance, on any one pitch there may be account executives, account planners, media planners, art directors, and copywriters all

working with one another closely throughout the entire pitch process. Many of these individuals, although working for the same agency, may not necessarily have experience working closely with one another and therefore relationships have to be created and cultivated. Because an agency's current work does not disappear, individuals working on a pitch process have to learn how to juggle existing projects with prospective projects. These high demands can add additional stress to an already tense situation.

Some individuals may only participate during particular stages of the pitch process whereas others may be involved from the beginning all the way to the presentation of the final Pitch. Regardless of the extent of involvement, all agency individuals need to understand that although it is important to develop positive relationships with prospective clients and their consultants, it is also important for attention to be paid to the way in which internal relationships are developed and nurtured.

There is no disputing the key role people play in the pitch process. As discussed, both within and between each of the three constituencies, people have to build and maintain relationships throughout the entire pitch process. The next section will delve into the literature that provides support for the way that the creation and development of relationships are critical to understand when exploring the pitch process.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

All relationships, both personal and professional, have the ability to create a great deal of happiness or misery depending on their status and health. Most individuals probably could not imagine what their lives would be like without daily interaction from family, spouses, friends, and co-workers. With the acknowledgement of the important role relationships play in the lives of many, it is no surprise that the literature on relationships is extensive. What is not so extensive is the body of research that specifically delves into how the dynamics that provide the very core of our personal relationships may actually transfer into our business relationships.

When thinking of relationships, it may be more common for individuals to think of romantic, friendly, and familial relationships with less consideration to work relationships; however, there may be more commonalities between business relationships and personal relationships than previously realized. For instance, the creation, development, and maintenance of the relationship between an advertising agency and its client actually share many similarities to that of personal relationships and may be why a romantic analogy is often used when discussing the relationship. Even though a relationship between a client and an advertising agency can be considered as an inter-organizational relationship, there are a multitude of individuals responsible for the actual interaction between the organizations; therefore, personal relationships cannot be overlooked.

The purpose of this study was to delve into the pitch process and to uncover various subtleties that occur during the earliest phases of the client-agency relationship.

This chapter reviews literature on six key areas: personal relationship development, business relationship development, client-agency relationships, attraction, trust, and satisfaction. By first focusing on the larger context of relationships and finally whittling down to three specific constructs, the literature review provides the necessary backdrop for which this study was conducted.

## **2.1 Personal Relationship Development**

The development of relationships is vital to this current study. The focus of this research was to understand the way various parties involved in the pitching process create and develop their relationship. The manner in which the relationship is first created may play a significant role in the overall success and longevity of the relationship. Before delving into the specifics of the client-agency relationship, it is helpful to obtain some background regarding the development of personal relationships for a few reasons. First, even though the relationship may exist between two or three organizations (client, advertising agency, and potentially consultancy firm), individuals are responsible for the actual interaction. Secondly, personal relationship metaphors are so commonly used when describing client-advertising agency dynamics, it is worth gaining additional insight to fully understand the comparison.

Clark and Mills (1993) simplify relationships by stating they should be classified as either communal or exchange. Communal relationships are those that come to mind when considering friendship, family, or significant others. These are relationships where there is a large concern regarding the needs of the other person and where favors are performed without “keeping track” or “keeping score.”

Exchange relationships are those reserved mostly for strangers, acquaintances, or business partners/associates. These relationships are based on the exchange of benefits and on the knowledge that a favor given has the expectation of a favor received. In exchange relationships, both parties are usually equally benefited or else the relationship will cease to exist. This is unlike communal relationships where in many cases and circumstances they may be one-sided (a mother and an infant is the best example). This distinction between communal and exchange is just one way to classify relationships and may be overly simplistic when considering the complexities of the workplace. This is just one distinction that has been made as an attempt to classify and organize relationships.

The study of relationships has developed quite rapidly over the past few decades. George Levinger (1994) traces these developments by viewing them both in the macro and micro perspective. Levinger reports that for many years, relationships were only thought to really matter at the individual level and few took into consideration the larger world that could actually play a part in their development. Forces of technology, economics, and social movements, as well as new barrier rules for the entrance and exit of relationships have all played a role in interpersonal dynamics. This is supported when thinking of how the Internet and cell phones have changed the way we communicate and maintain our relationships; how social movements involving racism and feminism have changed specific roles and expectations; and how social acceptance of pre-marital cohabitation and divorce rates have potentially changed how relationships begin and end.

On the micro level, Levinger (1994) discusses underlying forces and theories that are more familiar when thinking of relationships such as those involving cognition, attraction, attachment, comparison, balance, exchange, attachment, commitment, etc. Levinger's main point was that relationships can be viewed from four main levels and he used the example of a teleidoscope to illustrate. A teleidoscope works very much like a kaleidoscope but with one key difference. A kaleidoscope is a tube of mirrors that contains many small colored beads or pebbles that, when rotated, reflect many different images to the viewer. The kaleidoscope has a closed bottom so as to contain the various beads and pebbles. The teleidoscope works on the same sort of principle as a kaleidoscope, producing different images to the viewer; however, instead of having an end that is closed off, the teleidoscope's end is opened to the world. The different images that are created for the viewer are the result of using various different colored lenses and holding it up to the outside world.

Levinger (1994) points out how relationships can look very different depending on which particular lens or level is being used as the perspective. He discusses the individual, pair, social network, and socio-cultural levels and the way these levels cover the spectrum from the micro view all the way to the macro view of relationship development. These levels are particularly applicable to consider when studying the relationships between clients and agencies especially during the pitch process.

For instance, at the individual level, from CEO to account executive to consultant, individuals are responsible for the daily interactions and business dealings. At the pair

level, agencies usually have creative teams and planning teams that come together to present work to a client's marketing department.

At the social network level, think of companies such as Proctor & Gamble. Many separate brands (Tide, Mr. Clean, Iams, etc.) exist under the P&G umbrella. There would be a variety of relationships occurring on the brand level and then additional relationships on the company level. The larger the network, the more relationships would exist. The same can be said for the various relationships that exist within the various holding companies such as Omnicom, WPP, and Publicis, etc. Each holding company consists of additional global networks and other agencies. Membership in these particular holding companies may determine how various client relationships are approached.

Each year *Advertising Age* compiles a table of the top holding companies based on worldwide revenue. As the advertising industry grows and evolves so does the breakdown of the holding companies and their global networks. Table 1 on the following page reproduces a portion of the 2008 results. For a more detailed breakdown of each of the holding company's family trees, refer to Appendices A-D. These appendices include the specific agencies that comprise each of the global networks and help to illustrate the complexity of the relationships at the social network level.

**Table 1 – Advertising Agency Family Trees 2008**  
*Primary holdings of the world's top four agency companies by 2007 worldwide revenue*

<b>Holding Company</b>	<b>Omnicom Group</b>	<b>WPP Group</b>	<b>Interpublic Group of Cos.</b>	<b>Publicis Groupe</b>
<b>Rank</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Worldwide Revenue</b>	\$12.69B	\$12.38B	\$6.55B	\$6.38B
<b>U.S. Revenue</b>	\$6.70B	\$4.54B	\$3.65B	\$2.76B
<b>Worldwide Employees</b>	70,000	90,182	43,000	43,808
<b>Global Networks and Revenue by Network</b>	DDB Worldwide Communications (\$2.62B)	Young & Rubicam Brands (\$2.15B)	McCann Worldgroup (\$2.53B)	Publicis Worldwide (\$1.20B)
	BBDO Worldwide (\$2.39B)	Ogilvy Group (\$1.84B)	DaftFCB (\$1.24B)	Leo Burnett Worldwide (\$1.07B)
		JWT (\$1.49B)	Lowe (\$518M)	Saatchi & Saatchi (\$740M)
	TBWA Worldwide (\$1.78B)	Grey Group (\$1.18B)	Hill Holliday (\$154M)	Digitas (\$415M)
		United Group (\$115 M)		

*Results from Advertising Age DataCenter Analysis, May 5, 2008 (B = billion M = million)*

Finally, on the socio-cultural level, it is important to consider the state of the overall industry throughout the various stages in particular client-agency relationships. Usually when the economy is suffering, marketing and advertising expenses are among the first to get cut; therefore increasing turnover in these areas.

As indicated, personal relationships can be extremely complex. In an attempt to help understand their complexity, several models have been created. The following



section details some of the relationship models most applicable when exploring client-agency relationships.

## **2.2 Personal Relationship Models**

One way relationship development has been examined is in the form of a linear model that breaks down every stage. Many of the models regarding relationship stages and development were originally intended to describe personal or intimate relationships, but there are several components of these models that are extremely applicable to the business relationship between clients and advertising agencies. Three models worth examining look both at the way in which a relationship develops (Knapp, 1984; Ford, 1998) and the specific factors that determine whether a relationship will actually form in the first place (Dwyer, 2000). Each model takes a different angle to relationship development but both provide a good context for studying the client-agency relationship during the pitch process.

Knapp (1984) presents a relationship escalation model that has been popular in describing a variety of relationships from romantic couples to roommates to business partners. He breaks the development down into the following five steps: 1) *Initiation* – this period of time is extremely short and both parties are usually concerned with creating favorable impressions and adhering to standard etiquette; 2) *Experimenting* – during this period of time both parties are trying to ask important questions of one another to determine whether the relationship should progress; 3) *Intensifying* – this is the period of time where both parties let their guard down and self-disclosure increases. During this stage, it is common for individuals involved to discuss the level of commitment each one

has to the relationship; 4) *Integrating* – during this phase, the individuals become a pair or team, begin engaging in joint activities, and begin to form a shared relational identity; and 5) *Bonding* – it is during this last stage where some formal or legal announcement of the relationship is established. Depending on the type of relationship this could range from an actual marriage to a business contract.

Knapp's model is appropriate when thinking of the various steps involved in the pitching process. As indicated by the respondents in this study, the pitching process can go through many of the same sort of stages as indicated by Knapp. The *initiation* phase discussed by Knapp can be compared to the early pitch stage when clients and agencies have already gone through the preliminary pitch stage and have decided that there is an interest in working together and where the creation of favorable impressions is vital to moving forward in the pitch process. The *experimenting* stage can be compared to the mid-pitch stage where agencies and clients are learning more about one another and deciding whether the relationship would be a good match. The *intensifying* stage could be compared to the final pitch stage because at this point, all the agencies are letting their guard down and presenting all of their hard work. The *integrating* and *bonding* stages probably would not occur until after a client had made the final selection of the agency.

Dwyer (2000) takes a different approach with her model because instead of looking just at the way a relationship develops as in Knapp's model, she identifies factors she believes are necessary in order for relationships to form in the first place. They are the following: 1) *Proximity* – a relationship cannot form if individuals do not come in contact with one another; 2) *Similarity* – usually there has to be some level of similarity

regarding interests, values, common ground; 3) *Physical Attraction* – there has to be an element of chemistry, particular features about the other that are attractive; 4) *Reciprocal Liking* – individuals like those who like them back and for a true relationship to occur, it must be reciprocated; 5) *Complementarity* – individuals like to be with those that complement them and perhaps offset some of their weaknesses; and 6) *Competence* – physical attraction alone will only carry the relationship for a short time, there has to be both an element of trust and a particular level of depth or skill for which the relationship is built upon.

This model is especially applicable because the main purpose of the pitching process is to find the best match between a client and an agency. According to Dwyer's model, if certain factors are not met, a relationship may not even have the potential to begin. For instance, in the case of *proximity*, some clients may feel strongly about working with an agency in a particular geographical area and so some clients and agencies may never have the opportunity to form a relationship simply based on where their offices are located. In the case of *similarity*, it may be assumed that both agencies and clients would want to work with others who share some sort of common ground. A highly creative agency may not want to work with an overly conservative client and vice versa.

In regard to *physical attraction*, it may not work the same for clients and agencies as in a romantic relationship; however, there should be a level of attraction where both parties want to work with one another. Clients may view agencies who have won a great deal of creative awards as an attractive choice to pursue whereas agencies may perceive

clients who have a reputation for being open-minded as an attractive choice. In addition, clients may consider a particular consultant as an attractive choice if he or she has had success with previous pitch process. There may be a variety of factors each constituency finds attractive about the other parties when participating in a pitch process.

A relationship will cease to occur unless there is *reciprocal liking*; both parties have to be committed to pursue the relationship because one-sided relationships do not work. The romance element is especially applicable to the current study as it seems to best relate to the pitching process where agencies are trying to win the client's business by working diligently to provide favorable impressions and trying to outdo their competitors.

*Complementarity* must be considered during the pitching process because although clients and agencies may seek out a certain level of similarity, there should also be some unique attributes that are brought to the table. For instance, the very nature of a client requesting a service from an agency indicates a particular area where help is needed. The particular style and approach of the agency may be just what the client needs to complement their long-term marketing goals. Both agencies and clients have to figure out the best match.

*Competence* is vital to the success of a client-agency relationship. The client has to believe that the agency is competent and able to do the work and the agency has to feel that the client is stable and grounded. If either or both parties are dissatisfied with the level of competency from one another, expectations will not be met, and the relationship may undergo conflict that may ultimately result in the relationship being terminated.

These are just two of the many relationship models found in the literature. Again, even though these models were originally intended to describe traditional interpersonal relationships among friends or romantic partners, many of the various aspects, steps, and phases mentioned in the models can also play a role in the formation of a relationship between client and agency. Clearly relationships at any level are far from simple; however, the context of the business environment can bring additional challenges to the surface. The next section discusses the way in which business relationships have been explored.

### **2.3 Business Relationships**

The value of relationships in business cannot be underestimated. As Ford (2003) states, “Relationships are the primary assets of a company, without which it can neither sell nor buy nor develop” (p. 196). As in personal relationships, exchange has been a common theme in most business relationships. Scholars have identified two main categories: the market exchange relationship and the relational exchange relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Frazier, Spekman, & O’Neal, 1988).

Halinen (1997) states, “Market exchange relationships arise when the buyer purchases primarily on price, uses multiple sources of supply and tends to switch suppliers frequently” in contrast to relational exchange relationships that “emerge when the buyer and supplier develop a relationship with a more long-term orientation” (p. 4). The main difference between these two types of relationships can be summarized as “relational exchange is less price-driven and is based on greater recognition of mutual

commitment between trading partners than is found in market exchange relationships” (Halinen, 1997, p.4).

The concept of exchange is applicable to the pitch process between a client and an advertising agency. Neither party would undergo the expense of a pitch process if there wasn't an expectation of gaining some sort of benefit. The client is trying to obtain a glimpse of what the agency will be capable of creating should they be hired, whether or not that will be worth the expense, and deciding what agency is a good match for the organization. The agency is in search of a client that will be easy to work with, will add value to the agency's client roster, and one who will fairly compensate for the service provided. The way in which the exchange between both client and agency is managed during the pitch process can determine whether or not the relationship will develop further.

Ford (2003) describes business relationships a little differently. “Every relationship is unique in its content, its dynamics, in how it evolves, in how it affects the parties involved and in what it requires from them for success for each of them” (Ford, 2003, p. 38). Instead of simply differentiating between types of exchange; he discusses the three key components of actor bonds, activity links, and resource ties and explains how they all substantiate a business relationship.

Actor bonds refer to the actual contact between individuals from different companies. Ford (2003) explains that during the early stages of a business relationship, distance occurs and is measured on several different dimensions: social, cultural, technological, and time. He defines the distance dimensions below:

Social distance measures the extent to which the actors are unfamiliar with each other's ways of thinking and working and are at ease with them. Cultural distance measures the degree to which the norms and values of the two companies differ. Technological distance refers to the differences between the product and production technologies of the two companies and hence the degree of fit between them. Time distance refers to the fact that the actors may be discussing business that will actually occur at some considerable time in the future. This may give a lack of urgency or unreality to their interactions (Ford, 2003, p. 39)

Once the various distance dimensions are addressed, both parties begin to learn about one another through two-way communication and deciding whether or not the relationship should move forward to the point where business is being conducted between the two companies. Ford (2003) discusses interaction and how effective communication is important because it “results in the formation of actor bonds between the individuals involved, based on their mutual learning, trust and commitment” (p. 40).

Activity links form the next step in the substantiation of the relationship. Once the initial actor bonds have been established and both parties have agreed to move forward with one another, some set of “interlocking” behaviors begin to take place. Ford (2003) uses the example of an order being placed and fulfilled and how over a period of time each order acts as an activity link between the two companies. “These links may encompass many aspects of the operations of the two companies, such as their design, production or logistics. Activity links involve costs, if only because co-ordination between any customer and supplier limits their ability to co-ordinate with others” (Ford, 2003, p. 40).

Resource ties are the last step required to substantiate a business relationship. When both parties decide they want their relationship to continue, it oftentimes requires

additional work. “This development will require investment and this may include the time spent developing contacts with the counterpart, or developing the offering or introducing different equipment or working practices” (Ford, 2003, p. 40). If the work that is required to maintain a particular relationship involves a company putting forth extra effort that it does not have to do for its other relationships, it is referred to as an “adaptation” and Ford (2003) states that, “Adaptations are not always balanced between the two companies, but no relationship can evolve over time without at least some” (p. 40). When adaptations are made, mutual dependence and resource ties increase.

Actor bonds, activity links, and resource ties can all be directly related to the pitch process. Actor bonds exist between the client and the agency and it is through those particular bonds that the rest of the pitch is managed. As the pitch process evolves, activity links are made between a client and an agency. Even though the business has not technically been awarded, the fact that the client and agency are participating in the pitch indicates a certain level of mutual commitment to the process. Through the actor bonds the client and agency learn more about one another and whether or not the pitch process should continue.

With each assignment that is given and completed and with each meeting that takes place, there is an interlocking of the two organizations. Resource ties are applicable for the pitch scenario because at some point during the pitch process, the client narrows down the long list of potential to advertising agencies to a shorter list. Once the client has a list of finalists, there may be additional things required from both parties. Individuals on both the client and the agency side may have to devote more time to the



process for additional presentations and meetings. During this time, agencies may have to make certain adaptations in order to please the client and potentially win the business.

## **2.4 Business Relationship Models**

Just like personal relationships, business relationships come with their fair share of complexities. Halinen (1997) states, "... the development of business relationships can be viewed from at least three different perspectives: input-output, change, and processual" (p. 6). Each one of the perspectives focuses on a different component. Input-output models "focus on the factors that foster the initiation, maintenance, or dissolution of a relationship ..." (Halinen, 1997, p.6). Change models "look at the development process in terms of the changes in a number of specific variables over time" (p. 6). Change models indicate *whether* a change occurred but it is the processual perspective that addresses *how* the change happened. "Process models take up the process of development as such, i.e. the nature, sequence and order of events and activities that unfold over time and that describe how things change" (Halinen, 1997, p.6).

The two most common types of models that have been used when discussing buyer-seller relationships are the life-cycle and the evolutionary models. Both of these types of models share many similarities with the models developed for personal relationships. With life-cycle models, the development is viewed as a linear flow of events, where each phase is clearly defined, and one stage immediately follows another. Evolutionary models operate under the assumption that the relationship does not always develop in neat phases but rather as a result of ongoing events and interactions. For this

perspective, the development is seen more as a result of the context of the particular relationship as opposed to the “mere passage of time” (Halinen, 1997, p. 7).

Halinen (1997) reviewed thirteen different business development models. Of the thirteen models, five related to service environments and eight related to industrial environments. Much of the research in the service area has “treated buyers and sellers as separate actors, and the focus has been on individual service transactions rather than business relationships and their development” (p. 10). This is in contrast to the models that emerged out of the industrial sector where business relationships between buyers and sellers were compared to “a love affair between people” (p.10). When examining all the models reviewed in the service and industrial contexts, several models could be applicable to clients and advertising agencies; however, when carefully examining the various stages each model contained, Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh’s five-phase relationship development process model stood out as most relevant to the topic at hand.

Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) discuss how “[d]espite the importance generally ascribed to the idea of exchange, marketing research has largely neglected the relationship aspect of buyer-seller behavior while tending to study transactions as discrete events” (p. 11). They make a distinction between discrete transactions and relational exchange that is vital to consider when examining the client-agency relationship during the pitch process. With a discrete transaction, relationships between the two parties are not a factor and are “characterized by very limited communications and narrow content” (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 12). This is in contrast to a relational exchange where

“each transaction must be viewed in terms of its history and its anticipated future” (p. 12).

The notion of a potential future provides additional justification for the marriage analogy. McCall (1966) states, “Marriage [is a] restrictive trade agreement. The two individuals agree to exchange only with one another, at least until such time as the balance of trade becomes unfavorable in terms of broader market considerations” (p. 197-198). Levitt (1983) also uses the marriage analogy when discussing buyer-seller relationships when he states, “. . . the sale merely consummates the courtship. Then the marriage begins. How good the marriage is depends on how well the relationship is managed by the seller” (p. 111).

Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh’s (1987) relationship development process consists of five phases: 1) *awareness*, 2) *exploration*, 3) *expansion*, 4) *commitment*, and 5) *dissolution*. The *awareness* phase is when two parties are first learning about one another and considering the potential for exchange. In the case of a client looking for an agency, the awareness may come in the form of discovering work done by a particular agency. In addition, if a consultant is involved, he or she may make the client aware of a several agencies the client had not previously known. Depending on how big the particular client is, the agency may be aware of the client by previous advertising or word of mouth.

The *exploration* phase “may be very brief, or it may include an extended period of testing and evaluation” (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 16). It is broken up into the following five sub processes: 1) *attraction* 2) *communication and bargaining* 3) *development and exercise of power*, 4) *norm development* and 5) *expectation*

*development*. The manner in which two companies are attracted to one another, learn how to communicate, establish roles, and define norms and expectations all play a large role in determining whether or not the two companies can move forward with a relationship. The pitch process can almost be entirely characterized as an exploration phase because it is the period of time when a client evaluates several agencies to decide which one will be the best fit. In addition, the agencies also need to explore each potential client and decide whether or not it is beneficial to move forward. Making sure expectations from both client and agency are addressed at this point can prevent problems further down the road.

The *expansion* phase is characterized by “continual increase in benefits obtained by exchange partners and to their increasing interdependence” (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 18). The five sub-processes present during the exploration phase can continue throughout the expansion phase just with a higher level of involvement. During the pitch process, if a client is satisfied with what a particular agency demonstrates during the exploration phase, the client will be more interested in expanding the relationship. The expansion phase for a pitch process may be where clients begin to narrow down the initial long list of potential agencies to a shorter list. Clients and agencies continue to invest time in the pitch process as long as the potential for a successful relationship is present.

The fourth phase of Dwyer, Shurr, and Oh’s (1987) relationship development process is *commitment*. This phase “refers to an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners” (p. 19). It is the point where “the exchange

partners have achieved a level of satisfaction from the exchange process that virtually precludes other primary exchange partners who could provide similar benefits” (p. 19). In reference to the pitch process, this is the point where the client has reviewed all agencies and has selected the one that is believed to be the best choice. In addition, the advertising agency has participated in the full pitch process and has agreed to work with the client. The commitment phase is characterized by inputs, durability, and consistency. In order for commitment to occur both parties should: continually input value to the relationship, be prepared to work on making the relationship last, and be consistent in meeting and exceeding expectations (Dwyer, Shurr, & Oh, 1987).

*Dissolution* is the final phase in the relational development process and is when a particular relationship ceases to exist. Even though only one phase is dedicated to the relationship being terminated; one or both parties can make the decision to disengage from the relationship at any point during the relational development process if it is perceived to not be mutually beneficial. The pitch process illustrates this perfectly because at any point, the client or the agency could decide to not proceed with the Pitch for a variety of reasons. Obviously, the further the relationship has developed, the harder the dissolution. Dwyer, Shurr, and Oh (1987) state that although “termination of personal relationships is a significant source of psychological, emotional, and physical stress ... the dissolution of commercial relationships extracts parallel tolls” (p. 19-20).

The various business relationship development models offer some insight into the way the client-agency relationship may develop. The pitch process appears to be more of a relational exchange than a discrete transaction because in most cases, a client is looking

for an agency to work with for an extended period of time. This is not to say that a client may not hire an agency just for one project; however, the purchase of creative services usually requires a time commitment that extends beyond the actual financial transaction. The following section explores more about the specific characteristics of a client-agency relationship.

## **2.5 The Client-Agency Relationship**

As discussed earlier, relationships, both personal and professional, evolve in various stages. While there are some commonalities among all relationships, each type of relationship offers unique characteristics. There have been many studies conducted that specifically look at the client-agency relationship dynamic. These previous studies provide a more specific level of understanding of this particular relationship and help provide additional clarity to the current study.

Cagley and Roberts (1984) sought to determine quantitative factors that companies use to evaluate current and prospective advertising agencies to see which ones may be perceived as beneficial. They mailed questionnaires to a random sample of 125 firms listed in the Fortune 500 Directory and received sixty-nine (55 percent response rate) completed questionnaires. The results indicated that the seven most important criteria that companies use when evaluating agencies all dealt with some sort of personal relationship. The top three criteria were “quality of people assigned to the account”, “complete agreement between the agency and client on goals and objectives”, and “need for agency personnel to thoroughly learn the characteristics of the advertiser’s business” (p. 27).

In addition, Cagley and Roberts (1984) found that the size of a particular client affected the attributes deemed most important. For instance, larger companies placed greater importance on attributes such as agency stability, cost, marketing philosophy and analysis, and range of services. They concluded that “larger firms prefer associations with agencies similar in size and capability to themselves” (p. 31).

There have been other studies that have tried to get to the bottom of what works and what does not in regard to client-agency relationships (Buchanan & Mitchell, 1991; Henke, 1995). Doyle, Corstjens, and Mitchell (1980) studied eighty-four clients and their terminated agencies in the United Kingdom and discovered clients and agencies indicated very different reasons for this termination.

Among the top five reasons reported by clients for the relationship ending, three were concerned with the level of dissatisfaction with the work produced by the agency. From the agency’s standpoint, none of the top five reasons mentioned involved client satisfaction with their work. The agencies believed the termination was a result of external factors in which they had no control. The simple fact that there is such discrepancy between the client and the agency viewpoint supports the need for greater communication within this relationship.

Mitchell (1986) used the same methodology as Doyle, Corstjens, and Mitchell (1980) but focused on agencies and clients from the United States. His results found that clients in both the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) ranked the top five reasons for switching advertising agencies the same; both groups indicated that the number one reason was because of dissatisfaction with agency performance.

Based on the results, Mitchell (1986) believes that agencies need to develop a greater sensitivity for recognizing signs of dissatisfaction and presents a framework for an audit that agencies should use. The audit is broken down into the five classes of variables believed to influence and affect the client-agency relationship: environmental, inter-organizational, interpersonal, inter/intra-functional, and individual. Mitchell (1986) believes that “advertising agencies invest a significant proportion of their resources developing speculative presentations for new accounts but only a fraction of resources for speculating the strength of existing relationships” (p. 33).

Davis and Prince (1999) examined the longevity of new agency accounts in both the United States and the United Kingdom during a ten-year period. Their results indicated that about one third of accounts changed agency at the end of the first year. By the second year, the probability of an agency switch increased to more than one half. By the end of five years, only about one-fifth of the original accounts were still at the same agency. By the end of ten years, only 5 percent of US accounts and 2 percent of UK accounts remained at the same agency.

Henke (1995) conducted a longitudinal study of advertising decision-makers through a two-wave telephone survey to identify the “critical core variables which serve to discriminate between the decision to keep an agency and the decision to change agencies” (p. 25). During the first wave, respondents were asked to share their perceptions of ad agencies in general as well as their perceptions about their current agency of record. The second wave took place one year later to find out which clients had switched agencies since the first round of interviews. Results indicated “the decision



to change ad agencies is related to the primary decision-maker's unaided awareness of ad agencies; satisfaction with creative skills and dissatisfaction with account size and media skills; and perceived lesser importance of both creative skills and the winning of awards" (p. 28).

All of these studies on the client-agency relationship suggest the fragility of this type of business relationship. From the studies discussed, it appears as if many companies and agencies may not be spending an adequate time during the pitch process to successfully evaluate whether or not a particular partnership has long-term potential. As Mitchell (1986) suggested, companies are spending a significant amount of money just trying to win the business; however, the same amount of energy and expense is not always put into keeping existing clients happy. This supports the idea that if companies and agencies spent more time during the pitch process evaluating one another and assessing expectations, perhaps client-agency relationships may have an increased level of longevity.

## **2.6 Client-Agency Relationship Models**

There is not a vast amount of relationship models that exist that specifically focus on the client-agency relationship; however, there are three models that are worth discussing that do add value to the current study. The first two are more simplistic in the way the relationship is defined in contrast to the last model which is highly detailed. Each model contributes greater understanding to the way in which the relationship between a client and an advertising agency develops and are vital to review before delving into the current study.

Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) examine the client-agency and break the life cycle down into the four main areas of *pre-relationship*, *development*, *maintenance*, and *termination*. The focus of this study will be on the dynamics that exist within the pre-relationship phase; however, each phase will be briefly described in order to provide a general overview of the development of the relationship between a client and their agency. Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) define the *pre-relationship* phase as the one that occurs “during the agency-selection process before a formal contract or agreement is established” (p. 22) and discuss that it is during this phase when “both parties are learning about each other, and the agency is trying to sell its competency to the client” (p. 22).

Once an account has been awarded, the *development* phase begins. This has been likened to the “honeymoon phase” (p. 22) since both parties are usually full of energy and excitement over the newness of the relationship. This is the time period where initial work is being created. The *maintenance* phase is the period of time that typically lasts the longest. This marks the point where relationship bonds are at their strongest and where productivity and profitability are at their highest. The *termination* phase, as the name implies, is when the relationship either voluntarily or involuntarily comes to an end.

The activities that occur in the *pre-relationship* stage may be vastly different than those in the *maintenance* stage. For instance, companies approach the promotion of their product differently when it is first introduced as compared to once it has hit a mature state in the market. At any rate, these different stages of the client-agency are important in

understanding both what is expected and what is delivered to make the relationship feel successful. In recent years, client-agency relationships have definitely undergone many challenges as discussed below.

Waller (2004) states, “A good agency-client relationship is important to have, for a client to successfully promote its product/service/idea, and for an advertising agency to keep its paying clients” (p. 95). He examines the client-agency relationship by focusing on the account-management lifecycle and breaks it down into three main stages: 1) *agency evaluation/selection*, 2) *relationship development and maintenance*, and 3) *agency review/termination*. According to Waller (2004), the first stage marks the beginning of the lifecycle. The client spends time evaluating agencies and selecting the one that will be awarded the work. “Generally at this stage there are certain ‘attributes’, capabilities, or factors, which are valued by clients and must be satisfied before the final decision is made” (p. 99).

The second stage is *relationship development and maintenance* and this occurs as soon as a client selects a particular agency. Waller (2004) states that this phase can be characterized by two main areas: “the factors that may cause satisfaction/dissatisfaction by the client with how the agency is taking care of its business, and whether advertising agency executives and client representatives share the same attitudes towards particular topics” (p.102).

The final stage is *agency review/termination*. “The termination of advertising agencies is when agency dissatisfaction leads to the end of the relationship. This may result in the direct switching of agencies or placing their account under review...”

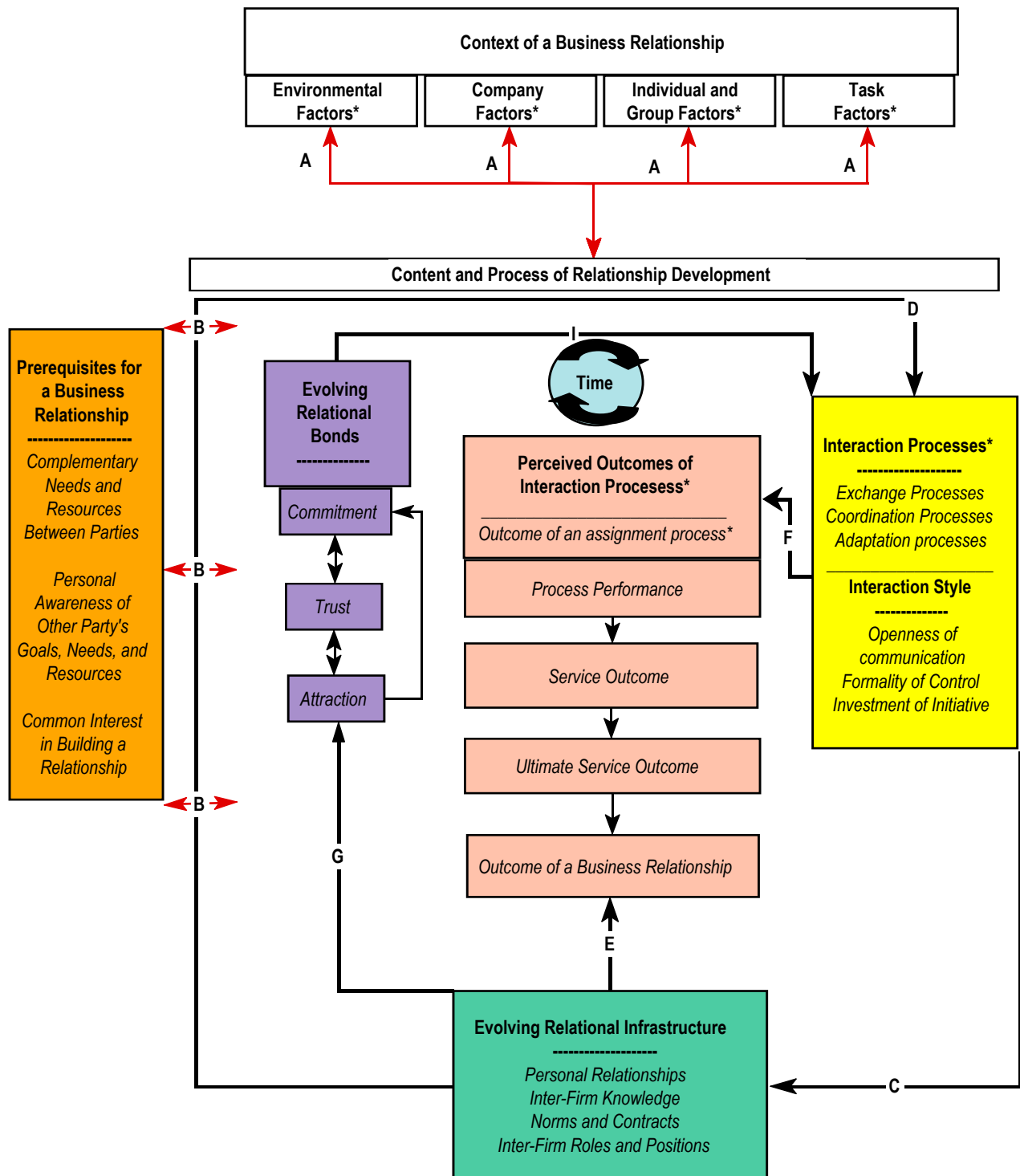
(p.105). There have been many studies conducted that delve into the specific reasons a relationship may be terminated and the results indicate these reasons may include anything from creative conflicts to personnel issues to budget concerns.

Like the model devised by Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987), Waller's model offers a good overview of the client-agency relationship and breaks the development down into basic phases. The first stage of Waller's model, *agency evaluation/selection*, is most applicable to the current research as it focuses on the way clients evaluate and select agencies based on certain attributes; however, it does not really address the extensiveness of the pitch process. What is missing from both of these models is the specific relational dynamics that occur at each stage of the relationship. For this reason, a model devised by Halinen (1997) offers some additional clarity.

Halinen (1997) provides an extensive and complex client-agency relationship development model. Even though this model was based on data from one case study, it should be reviewed as it does provide additional insights and greater detail about the way in which a relationship between a client and advertising agency develops. Out of all the models reviewed, it seems to be the one that has the greatest applicability despite the omission of a critical component of the current study; Halinen did not detail the pitch process in her study. Consequently, the omission of this process provides increased justifiability for the current study.

The model is shown in Figure 1 on the following page. Based on the complexity of the model, a brief explanation of each of the areas is provided immediately following the model.

Figure 1- Process Model of the Development of Advertising Agency-Client Relationships  
(Halinen, 1997, p. 290)



The arrows marked with letters A-I represent temporal order and influence while the arrows with no letter just indicate influence. The circle marked “time” in the center of the diagram indicates that relational development evolves over the context of time and is an ongoing process. Each component has some influence over another and as time evolves, so does the level of the influence. The asterisks indicate “potentially critical events in a relationship” (Halinen, 1997, p. 180) and “... functioned as turning points in relationship development and as potential boundaries between different development phases” (Halinen, 1997, p. 289).

The model consists of three main conceptual areas: *context of a business relationship*, *prerequisites for a business relationship*, and *content and process of relationship development*. The content and process of relationship development are comprised of *interaction processes*, *interaction styles*, *evolving relational infrastructure*, *perceived outcomes of interaction processes*, and *evolving relational bonds*.

The context of a business relationship includes: *environmental factors*, *company factors*, *individual and group factors*, and *task factors*. These factors all provide a foundation for which the specific relationship is built and influence the *content and process of relationship development*. In regard to the pitch process, each one of these factors can seriously impact the way a particular pitch process is handled.

The prerequisites for a business relationship include: *complementary needs and resources between parties*, *personal awareness of the other party’s goals, needs and resources*, and *interest in building a business relationship*. All of these have to be met in order for a relationship to begin, are continually assessed by both parties through

*interaction processes*, and impact the *evolving relational bonds*. All of these prerequisites are important for clients and agencies to consider when going through a pitch process (Halinen, 1997).

Within the content and process of relationship development, the *interaction processes* refer to the way the two parties communicate with another through: *exchange processes*, *coordination processes*, and *adaptation processes*. As discussed earlier, the concept of exchange and adaptation is common in business relationships. Services are exchanged for money and oftentimes one or both parties adapt to appease the other party. In addition, in order for the relationship to move forward, a great amount of coordination must take place. For clients, agencies, and consultants, interaction processes occur throughout the entire pitch process and aid in assisting both client and agency in their decision to move forward with the relationship.

The interaction style includes: *openness of communication*, *formality of control*, and *investment initiative*. “Openness of communication refers to how widely the parties exchange information and meaning with each other” (Halinen, 1997, p. 292). Formality of control refers to the way both parties manage the process and relationship through strict policies and procedures. Lastly, investment initiative refers to the way the parties “make an effort to develop the relationship in the form of ideas, actions, time or money” (Halinen, 1997, p. 292). Throughout the pitch process, clients, agencies, and consultants may have to deal with a variety of interaction style and these styles can be key determinants in how well a client and agency are suited for one another.

Through interaction, a relational infrastructure is developed and consists of *personal relationships, inter-firm knowledge, norms, and contracts, and inter-firm roles and positions*. Personal relationships are the way in which two parties learn about one another and as they develop, so does the inter-firm knowledge. As the relationship progresses, norms, roles, and positions of both parties are further defined and contracts are established. With clients and advertising agencies, the personal relationships between representatives from both companies play a huge role in how the pitch process moves forward. As clients and agencies learn more about one another, norms, roles, and positions of everyone involved can be established. Contracts may exist between clients and consultants and between clients and agencies regarding the rules of engagement that must be followed throughout the Pitch. The way in which both parties view the relational infrastructure can have “an important influence on the perceived outcomes of assignment processes and on the outcome of business relationship” (Halinen, 1997, p. 293).

The *perceived outcomes of interaction processes* is ongoing and in conjunction with each interaction. This is the phase characterized by ongoing assessment by both parties. As the relationship evolves, different interactions may result in one or both parties assessing the relationship differently. Halinen (1997) states, “The perceived satisfaction with an entire business relationship is the result of all interaction episodes between the parties” (p. 293). In the context of the pitch process, some agencies will have more interaction opportunities with clients than others because clients usually start



with a long list of potential agencies and gradually reduce the list as the process continues.

The last component of Halinen's model includes the evolving relational bonds of *attraction*, *trust*, and *commitment*. The development of these bonds makes the relationship strong and potentially long-lasting. As the name implies, each of these bonds continually evolve throughout the client-agency relationship.

Attraction is defined as "a company's interest in exchange with one another, based on the economic and social reward-cost outcomes expected from a relationship over time" (Halinen, 1997, p. 294) and as each party learns more about one another, attraction can either increase or decrease. As a pitch process evolves, clients and agencies have to consistently evaluate the level of attractiveness experienced and decide whether pursuing the relationship further is beneficial. Halinen (1997) defines trust as "one party's belief that its needs will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other" (p. 295). If there is not a mutual level of trust between a client and agency during the pitch process, it is highly unlikely the relationship will progress.

Finally, commitment is defined as "an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between the parties to the relationship ... and represents the most advanced state in a business relationship" (Halinen, 1997, p. 295). In the pitching process, a certain level of commitment is required from both parties to participate in the process and the task at hand; however, it may not be experienced at its fullest until the client awards the business to a particular agency.

This model provides an exceptional level of detail regarding the various stages of the development of a relationship between a client and its advertising agency; however, because the case study did not provide details on the actual pitch process, there still remains a void in understanding how clients and agencies experience the first phase of the relationship. Because the client-agency dynamic has undergone many changes in recent years, a review of the current status of client-agency relationships is provided below to add further clarity to the challenges faced by all parties involved in a pitch process.

## **2.7 The Status of Client-Agency Relationships**

The increased rate of Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) turnovers in recent years combined with the vast number of clients who are either changing their advertising agencies or who are at least putting their accounts up for review (the process where a client invites other agencies to bid for its business), draw attention to the precarious nature of client-agency relationships (Maddox, 2006). Even though the most recent reports show the average tenure of a CMO at one of the 100 leading consumer branded companies has experienced a five-month increase over the average tenure in 2006, it is still a speedy 28.4 months (Maddox, 2009).

These events and statistics indicate that some *thing* or some list of *things* within these different relationships is unsatisfactory. Personnel changes can play a large role in the creation, maintenance, and termination of the relationship between a client and advertising agencies since the CMO is usually heavily involved in this process. Broschak (2004) conducted a study that actually studied market ties between agencies and clients

and the manner in which these ties can dissolve when key individuals leave either firm. Obviously, not every terminated or unstable relationship between a client and their advertising agency is the result of a change in CMOs or turnover in other personnel, but these activities indicate that both intra-organizational relationships and inter-organizational relationships can be fragile and tumultuous.

Advertising agencies have to constantly be on their toes and consistently work to not only attract clients but also make sure that once an account has been won, the attention and effort paid towards the account does not lose momentum. Agencies use a great deal of financial and creative resources when pitching a new account, but they may fail to keep up the intensity after the account has been awarded. This further emphasizes how the activities leading up to the selection of an agency and the decisions involved with the maintenance and/or terminations of these relationships are of extreme importance on many levels.

The establishment and maintenance of a successful relationship between a client and an advertising agency is important to all parties involved for a variety of reasons. For the agency, the focus is on attracting and keeping good clients. They are the lifeblood of their business and so it makes sense that the goal should be to keep their clients happy. For the client, the goal is to have an agency that will provide the best results based on the specific criteria the client deems most important and who will be easy to work with and respectful of the client's company.

Over the past twenty years, third-party search consultants have been added to the client-agency relationship dynamic. These individuals are hired to assist a client in the

selection of an agency and so are especially critical during the early stages of a client-agency relationship. Consultants help their clients identify the advertising agency that is the best fit for the client. One of the consultant's main goals is to keep the communication lines open so that both parties achieve the desired results.

By looking at the rate and frequency of account switches as well as the various factors that both parties indicate as determinants of a successful relationship, it further presents the need to understand the extent of communication that occurs during the pitch process. As indicated by previous studies, attraction, trust, and satisfaction are all key factors in the relationship between clients and agencies. In the next section, these three key factors will be discussed more thoroughly.

## **2.8 Attraction, Trust, and Satisfaction**

Attraction and trust were assumed to play a role in the early stages of a relationship because the client and agency were believed to need a certain level of attraction to one another to even consider working together and would require a level of trust to actually agree to move forward with the relationship. In addition, the manner in which the pitch was evaluated would drive the level of satisfaction experienced. In order to understand the role attraction, trust, and satisfaction would play in the pitch process, several studies were explored.

Halinen (1997) developed a process model of the development of the client-agency relationship based on an in-depth longitudinal case study. The case study involved Fiskars Oy Ab (a multinational corporation based in Finland specializing in

metal and consumer brands and best known for their scissors and axes) and Markkinoinit Topitörmä Oy (a full-service advertising agency operating in Helsinki).

Halinen (1997) discussed both a “pre-relationship” phase and an “initial” phase in her model, but these descriptions were based on the development phases of the relationship *after* Fiskars had decided to move forward with Markkinoinit Topitörmä Oy and did not include the actual pitch process. She identified three evolving relational bonds: attraction, trust, and commitment. Attraction and trust are especially vital when considering the early phases of the client-agency relationship and so were the two relational bonds focused on for this study. Even though there is a level of commitment both desired and required for both parties to participate in the pitch process, the way in which the bond of commitment was discussed by Halinen, indicated a more advanced state in the particular relationship and so the author decided not to examine that relational bond in this study.

## **2.9 Attraction**

Attraction has been explored in both the interpersonal and marketing literature and has been considered “a precondition for the commencement of interaction” (Halinen, 1997, p. 59). For the purpose of this study, the relationship between a client and an advertising agency is considered a business relationship. When studying this type of relationship, attractiveness is considered to be “based on the perceived compatibility of organizational needs and resources” and “intangible and personal factors – especially interpersonal chemistry – will probably play an important role in determining inter-firm attractiveness...” (Halinen, 1997, p. 59).

The concept of attraction is especially appropriate when clients begin to search for an advertising agency. Cagley (1986) compared the perceptions of advertisers and agencies in regard to the factors that are responsible for advertising agency selection. The advertiser population consisted of a random sample of 125 firms listed in the *Fortune 500 Director*. Questionnaires were mailed to advertising directors and managers. Sixty-nine completed questionnaires were received (55 percent response rate). For the agency population, the listing by *Advertising Age's* annual *Agency Income Profile* issue was used and every fifth agency with an income of at least \$5 million was selected. A total of 192 questionnaires were mailed and seventy-six completed questionnaires were received (40 percent response rate).

Cagley's results indicated that both agencies and advertisers agree on the majority of the twenty-five attributes they feel are most important in agency selection. The attribute that received the highest ratings from both agencies and advertisers was "quality of people assigned to the account" (Cagley, 1986, p. 43). This finding further supports the need to examine how the relationships between these two parties are created and nurtured because there is agreement that the people you work with can definitely make a difference in the how the relationship is perceived.

Wills (1995) discussed winning new business and the various attributes and characteristics that agencies should be aware of when trying to attract new clients. Wills surveyed both agencies and clients to identify the effectiveness of the following techniques for winning new business: personal contact with top management, positive recommendation of satisfied clients, publicity on recent successful campaigns,

responsiveness to requests for new business presentations, trade advertising, direct mail, unsolicited speculative proposals, and sales calls by an agency's new business staff.

The final count of participants included 909 agencies (35 percent response rate) and 639 clients (24 percent response rate). The results identified three techniques that both clients and agencies identified as being most influential in winning new business. They were: "having strong advocate clients who willingly recommend the agency to potential new clients"; "having superior presentation skills for pitching new business, when requested by the client"; and "cultivating a network of personal relationships" (Wills, 1995, p. 13).

Because both clients and agencies considered new business presentations as highly effective in regard to winning new business, "it is no wonder that the advertising industry puts such intensive efforts into pitching new-business proposals" (Wills, 1995, p. 12). The results from the study indicating the importance of both the pitch presentation and the network of relationships further fueled the curiosity and motivation to focus on relationship development during the pitch process.

## **2.10 Trust**

When discussing trust, Golembiewski and McConkie (1975) state, "perhaps there is no other single variable which so thoroughly influences interpersonal and intergroup behavior" (p. 131). The definition, establishment, and maintenance of trust can be a complex process. As Hosmer (1995) states, "There appears to be widespread agreement on the importance of trust in human conduct, but unfortunately there also appears to be equally widespread lack of agreement on a suitable definition of the concept" (p. 380).

The literature acknowledges its value and necessity in any successful relationship both personally and professionally. When thinking about the client-agency relationship, trust can exist both at the individual and organizational levels. Even though the relationships are between two organizations collectively, the actual activities involved with creating, building, and maintaining the trust falls within the hands of the specific individuals who serve as the contact persons and liaisons between the organizations. Because of this dynamic, special care needs to be taken when considering a definition of trust for this study.

Blois (1999) provides a review of the way trust has been defined in regard to relationships between organizations and their customers. In reviewing the various definitions, the following seem most applicable in the context of clients and their advertising agencies. Trust is defined as: “an attitude displayed in situations where ... a person is relying on another person, a person is risking something of value, and/or a person is attempting to achieve a desired goal (Bialaszewski & Giallourakis, 1985, p. 207); “... the belief that a party’s work or promise is reliable and that a party will fulfill his/her obligations in an exchange relationship” (Schurr & Ozanne, 1985, p. 940); and “...the firm’s belief that another company will perform actions that result in positive outcomes for the firm, as well as not take unexpected actions that would result in negative outcomes for the firm (Anderson & Narus, 1990, p. 45).

These examples support why trust has many definitions and why it is considered a multidimensional construct. There are several differences between the various types of trust and the way it contributes to the overall status and quality of a relationship. After



reviewing a series of definitions and applications of trust in the contexts of individual expectations, interpersonal relations, economic transactions, and social structures, Hosmer (1995) arrives at the following definition and the one that is used for the current study:

Trust is the reliance by one person, group, or firm upon a voluntarily accepted duty on the part of another person, group or firm to recognize and protect the rights and interests of all others engaged in a joint endeavor or economic exchange (p. 393)

### ***2.10a Evolution of Trust***

Holmes and Kempel (1989) discuss the various stages of trust as a relationship evolves. As the investment into the relationship grows, both parties put in more of themselves which indirectly increases their vulnerability to get hurt should the relationship dissolve or fall apart. In the case of personal relationships the hurt would come in the form of a broken heart, in the case of a business relationship it could come in the form of a broken bank account or reputation.

Typically ... social exchange relations evolve in a slow process, starting with minor transactions in which little trust is required because little risk is involved and in which partners can prove their trustworthiness, enabling them to expand their relation and engage in major transactions (Shapiro, 1987, p.625)

Jones and George (1998) further explain the evolution of trust from a symbolic interactionist perspective. This states that people behave in situations based on meanings associated from past learning experiences. These meanings are a direct result of interaction with others, and ultimately create a definition of a social situation. This relates to the evolution of trust in relationships because two or more parties are actually responsible for the way in which the social situation is defined and “to the extent that

they use or develop similar interpretive schemes to define the social situation, the parties will tend to agree on their perceptions of the level of trust present in the social situation ...” (Jones & George, 1998, p. 535). Jones and George (1998) propose that trust is “a changing or evolving experience, in which values, attitudes, and moods and emotions operate simultaneously to produce an overall state of trust or distrust” (p. 537).

In regard to how trust evolves in the specific client-advertising agency relationship, Davies and Prince (2005) discuss *general trust* (based on indirect communications and client reputation) and *specific trust* (based on focal relationship experiences) as well as the various stages of the client-agency relationship. They discuss *pre-experiential trust* as a result of *institution-based trust*, *cognition-based trust*, and *value-based trust*.

*Pre-experiential trust* occurs before an agency and client even begin working together and is basically the result of perception of one another’s reputation and previous work created or produced. It is not based on any direct contact. This is the form of trust most applicable to the beginning stages of a relationship – the type of trust that may actually be used when deciding to begin a relationship in the first place. Relatively little research has explored this form of trust, and yet its mere presence or absence can make or break the actual establishment of the relationship between a client and advertising agency.

Clients will use norms about institutional practice to develop *institution-based trust*; categorical norms (i.e. qualities expected from association with particular agency

features) to develop *cognition-based trust*; and norms based on identifying and sharing similar values to develop *value-based trust*.

The *initial experiential stage* of the relationship between a client and agency is therefore a period where pre-experiential trust is tested to see if the expectations are being met. Once clients and agencies enter the *established experiential stage*, prior expectations are adjusted based on the actual service experience. It is at this point where “agency reputation and style become less relevant whereas creativity, productivity, and information sharing become more prominent as evaluative criteria” (Davies & Prince, 2005, p. 7).

There is no disputing the importance of trust in any relationship from the very beginning throughout the duration. Its presence or absence in any relationship seems to be a direct predictor of the success and longevity of the relationship. Mitchell and Sanders (1995) acknowledge that “trust appears to be particularly important in longer-term relations, and lack of trust has been correlated with disharmony in inter-organizational relations” (p. 11).

## **2.11 Satisfaction**

As discussed, attraction and trust are two vital components to consider when understanding the way clients and agencies begin to develop a relationship during the pitch process. The last element that must be reviewed is satisfaction. In order for both an agency and a client to perceive the particular relationship successful, both parties should feel satisfied. As Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) state, “The complexity of the products and services and the long-term nature of business relationships in the advertising

industry mean that effective and satisfactory business relationships are of the greatest importance in the marketing of advertising services” (p. 843).

Several studies have examined the way in which satisfaction is experienced in the client-agency relationship. Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) sought to discover key factors contributing to a successful relationship between a client and an advertising agency. Because the idea of what is deemed to be successful can be highly subjective, the authors defined a successful client-agency relationship as “one in which the client is satisfied with the agency’s overall performance and in particular with the agency’s creative work” (p. 24).

They divided the elements of client-agency relationships into four main groups: *work product*, *work pattern*, *organizational factors*, and *relationship factors*. Work product factors included: *creative strategy*, *creative execution*, *media buying*, *media planning*, *research*, and *marketing strategy* (sometimes). Work pattern factors included: *authority structure*, *approval process*, *deadlines and timing*, *productivity of meetings*, and *quality of communication*. Organizational factors included: *corporate policy*, *organization structure*, *organizational politics*, *marketing strategy*, and *personnel factors* (competence and experience). Lastly, relationship factors included: *rapport/comfort*, *energy level*, *trust/respect*, *control patterns*, and *personnel turnover*.

Work product, work pattern, and organizational factors actually contribute to the overall relationship factors. Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) acknowledge the idea that “the chemistry between people has a major influence on the quality of the work

product that is developed, on the kind and success of the work patterns that are established, and on the organizational factors involved in the relationship” (p.24).

Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) sent out surveys to 300 advertisers in the mid-western United States and received 182 completed questionnaires (61 percent response rate). Their results indicated that “a relationship factor was found to be the most highly significant predictor of a client’s satisfaction with its agency” (p. 26) as 28 percent of the variance in satisfaction level was attributed to whether the client and the account service people had a good personal relationship. The second item that was a significant predictor of satisfaction was related to whether the client believed the agency charged fairly for the work. This may also speak to the presence or absence of trust in the way that the client feels the agency is knowledgeable and honest in regard to how they handle their business.

The results of this study suggest agencies and clients should focus more on relationship factors during the pitching process because although relationship factors were secondary to work product factors in the pre-relationship phase of the client-agency relationship, relationship factors proved to be the largest predictor of client satisfaction with their particular advertising agency. The results of these various studies support not only how attraction, trust, and satisfaction all serve as key components of the client-agency relationship as a whole but also why they should be focused on during the pitch process. Based on the literature review, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How is attraction developed and experienced during all phases of the pitch process?

RQ2: How is trust developed and experienced during all phases of the pitch process?

RQ3: What are the various elements that characterize the “most satisfying” pitch processes?

RQ4: What are the various elements that characterize the “least satisfying” pitch processes?

This study addresses each of these research questions by exploring the various ways all parties interact with one another during the beginning stages of the client-agency life cycle – from the early-pitch phase to the final pitch phase. This study provides an understanding of the components involved in the “most satisfying” and “least satisfying” pitches (regardless of whether the account was won or not) as defined by the participants and explains how the relational bonds of attraction and trust were both experienced and accelerated during the early stages of the relationship. Before discussing the methodology used to answer the research questions, the following section addresses the epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and theories guiding this research.

## **Chapter Three: Epistemology, Theoretical Perspective, and Guiding Theories**

### **3.1 Epistemology**

The social constructionist perspective operates under the basic assumption that meaning is constructed based on an interaction between subject and object; that meaning does not exist without consciousness and that consciousness is a result of the mind formulating a meaning (Merriam, 2002). This is the most appropriate epistemology to call upon for this research because the way in which the pitching process is experienced and viewed is largely based on the interactions the various clients, consultants, and agency professionals experience as individuals and with one another.

### **3.2 Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective of Interpretivism posits that truth and meaning are constructed based on the interaction between subjects and their objects. These “interpretations” can vary considerably based on the individual and his/her social reality. Social Constructionism views the process of constructing meaning as a result of being a part of a larger social entity. It is the idea that the meanings individuals attach to things and the way in which their world is interpreted, is largely a result of the particular social group for which they are a member (Merriam, 2002). The viewpoints of the various pitch processes, the way in which the most-satisfying and least-satisfying pitches were assessed, and the way in which attraction and trust were experienced during the phases of the pitch process was greatly determined both by the individuals’ interaction with their social world in general and their corresponding organizations specifically.

### **3.3 Guiding Theories**

This study uses Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; 1961) and Expectation Confirmation Theory, ECT, (Oliver, 1980; Churchill & Suprenant, 1982; Spreng et al. 1996) to further understand not only how the relationship between a client and advertising may function but also to understand how attraction, trust, and satisfaction can play key roles during the pitch process.

#### ***3.3a Social Exchange Theory (SET)***

In Social Exchange Theory (SET), the relationship between two parties is viewed in economic terms: profits, benefits, rewards, costs, and alternatives. SET is based on the idea that “Social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige” (Homans, 1958, p. 606). In order for a particular relationship to be perceived as successful, both parties will receive benefits and rewards from the relationship. Profits and rewards are weighed up against costs and alternatives.

SET provides an explanation as to how clients and agencies initially build and maintain their attraction and trust toward one another. During the pitch process, both parties will consider the benefits of beginning a relationship. Clients and agencies are trying to obtain enough background information to weigh the benefits and costs of pursuing the relationship.

If an agency determines the cost for pursuing the business is greater than the potential benefit, the attraction will be low, and the agency will not aggressively seek out the work. Clients are doing the same as they begin narrowing down the list of potential



agencies and deciding whether or not a consultant will be used. They are trying to decide which agency will bring the most benefit to the company and whether or not the benefits of involving a consultant outweigh the costs. The early pitch phase is characterized by minimal personal interaction and unless the various people involved have worked with one another before, reputations are used to assist in making the decision to move forward with the relationship. These various reputations assist in the level of pre-experiential trust experienced by all parties involved and also play a role both in the level of perceived attractiveness and the consideration of potential benefits realized.

Clients may be attracted to particular agencies based on the agency's track record and portfolio because it gives the client a glimpse into the potential rewards they may experience from working with the agency. Pre-experiential trust may be increased once the agency's previous campaigns have been evaluated because the client is able to see the level and quality of work that is possible. In addition, agencies can also establish a level of pre-experiential trust when evaluating whether or not a potential client would be beneficial for the agency to pursue.

If the client has a reputation of switching agencies frequently, an agency may not view the client as an attractive choice and not feel as if the relationship would offer a great deal of benefit or reward. If a client chooses to work with a consultant, attractiveness may be assessed based on the consultant's involvement in other successful pitches or their work with clients similar to themselves. Consultants may also have some pre-conceived thoughts about particular clients and agencies based on industry knowledge or from other consultants. The information that circulates within the industry

can contribute to the various perceptions agencies, clients, and consultants all have for one another. Obviously, as the pitch process continues and more interaction ensues, both parties may discover more about one other that either makes the other party more or less attractive.

As discussed, the levels of attraction and pre-experiential trust are considered when clients and agencies select one another. Cagley (1986) compared the perceptions of advertisers and agencies in regard to the factors responsible for advertising agency selection. The attribute receiving the highest ratings from both agencies and advertisers was “quality of people assigned to the account” (p. 43). This finding lends credence to the importance of the personal element during the pitch process and how the extent of interaction and exchange between the various people involved may ultimately play a key role. Because the quantity of interaction is so limited in the pitch process, it makes the quality of that interaction even more important.

Wills (1995) discussed winning new business and the various attributes and characteristics agencies should be aware of when trying to attract new clients. The results reported three techniques both clients and agencies identified as being most influential in winning new business: “having strong advocate clients who willingly recommend the agency to potential new clients”; “having superior presentation skills for pitching new business, when requested by the client”; and “cultivating a network of personal relationships” (Wills, 1995, p. 13).

Because both clients and agencies considered new business presentations as highly effective in regard to winning new business, “it is no wonder that the advertising

industry puts such intensive efforts into pitching new-business proposals” (Wills, 1995, p. 12). The importance of both the formal pitch presentation and the network of relationships indicate their contribution to the level of attraction and areas advertising agencies should focus on during the pitch process,

### ***3.3b Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT)***

Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) has been typically used when discussing customer satisfaction with a purchase of a particular product or service (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Churchill & Suprenant, 1982). ECT states that an individual’s satisfaction with a particular purchase is dependent upon the extent that previous expectations were either confirmed or disconfirmed.

Oliver (1980) addresses that although several earlier studies have been in agreement regarding the connection between expectations and satisfaction, there are varying viewpoints regarding expectancy disconfirmation. He states, “Almost without exception, reviewers and early researchers in the areas of job, life, self, and patient satisfaction agree that satisfaction is a function of an initial standard and some perceived discrepancy from the initial reference point” (Oliver, 1980, p. 460).

Churchill and Suprenant (1982) investigated the determinants of customer satisfaction and discussed how the majority of previous studies have used some variation of the disconfirmation paradigm or ECT when discussing customer satisfaction. The disconfirmation paradigm consists of four main constructs: expectations, performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction. The relationship between these four constructs can be summarized as:

An individual's expectations are: (1) confirmed when a product performs as expected, (2) negatively disconfirmed when the product performs more poorly than expected, and (3) positively disconfirmed when the product performs better than expected. Dissatisfaction results when a subject's expectations are negatively disconfirmed (Churchill and Suprenant, 1982, p. 492)

According to Churchill and Suprenant (1982), satisfaction can be defined conceptually as “an outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer's comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase in relation to the anticipated consequences” (p.493). They further explain the operational definition of satisfaction as “similar to attitude in that it can be assessed as the sum of the satisfactions with the various attributes of the product or service” (p. 493).

One of the main questions driving this study focused on the extent of satisfaction experienced by agencies, clients, and consultants during a pitch process. Respondents were asked to discuss both the “most satisfying” and “least satisfying” pitch processes in which they had been involved. Satisfaction, in the context of client-agency relationships, can be assessed differently because clients, agencies, and consultants have different perspectives that may result in different ideas of what makes a particular relationship or pitch process satisfying. The results of both Cagley and Roberts (1984) and Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon (1987) supported the fact that the attributes clients viewed as least important in the initial evaluation process ended up becoming the most important determinants of client satisfaction; however, these studies fail to take into consideration the viewpoints of the advertising agencies or third-party consultants.

Both of these definitions are helpful in understanding satisfaction; however, the relationship between a client and an agency can be extremely complex because

satisfaction can be assessed on two dimensions: the “people” and the “product”. The people dimension involves the way the clients, agencies, and consultants communicate with one another and how satisfied each party is with the interaction. The product dimension involves the actual quality of the product/service provided and how satisfied each party is with the final outcome. If the relationship is viewed simplistically, the clients can be considered consumers and the advertising agencies and the services they provide, become the products.

ECT “does not make a distinction between expectations towards the core product (or service) and expectations towards the supplier providing the core product” (Selnes, 1998, p. 309). In addition to these two types of expectations, “buyers are likely to have expectations towards the supplier regarding their competence, communication, commitment, and conflict handling” (Selnes, 1998, p. 309). These four attributes can be applicable in the pitch process. Clients, agencies, and consultants would all want to work with competent individuals who can communicate well, are committed to the work, and are able to resolve conflicts. In this study, clients, agencies, and consultants all had pre-conceived expectations relating not only to how a pitch should be conducted but also in regard to the final outcome; therefore, although ECT may have been originally developed to explain satisfaction with traditional purchasing decisions, it seems to provide some clarity to the way in which satisfaction is experienced during the pitch process. The methodology that was used to discover the way in which attraction, trust, and satisfaction were experienced during the pitch process will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Research Agenda**

### **4.1 Methodology**

Qualitative research is the most appropriate methodology when the main purpose is to “understand the meanings that individuals give to their actions rather than to predict their behavior” (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004, p. 8). Qualitative research is centered on the belief that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” and “the world, or reality is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon ...” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). A qualitative study is best used when “you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved or a combination of these” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Because of the nature of the research questions that drove this study, it was determined a qualitative approach was most appropriate.

Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with clients, advertising agencies, and third-party consultants, this study uncovered how the various stages of the pitch process are experienced and how individuals from all three constituencies interact with one another during the beginning stages of the client-agency life cycle. Interviews were the primary source of data collection but the data was supplemented with additional documents and conference presentations.

The study identified the components involved in the “most satisfying” and “least satisfying” pitches (regardless of whether the account was won or not) as defined by the participants and discovered how the relational bonds of attraction and trust were both experienced and could be accelerated during the early stages of the relationship.

## **4.2 Method**

When interviewing, a researcher can elect to take either a structured or semi-structured approach. Aberbach and Rockman (2002) discuss how structured interviewing makes sense in studies where a great deal of information is already known and where the researcher is asking questions to simply fill in the gaps or affirm what is already suspected, but “if one needs to probe for information and to give respondents maximum flexibility in structuring their response, then open-ended questions are the way to go” (p. 673). For this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to answer the research questions.

## **4.3 Participants**

All individuals were informed their participation was entirely voluntary and all information regarding their identity would adhere to the standards for anonymity and confidentiality both inside and outside their organizations. Participants included thirty-four professionals from client companies, advertising agencies, and third-party consultancy firms who participated in the pitch process.

Individuals from client companies mostly worked within the marketing, procurement, or purchasing departments and held various titles depending on the structure and size of the companies. Individuals from advertising agencies worked as new business directors, account managers, account planners, or held various creative positions; the only pre-requisite was that they had to have a key role in the pitch process. Finally, third-party consultants offered a different perspective to the pitch process because they were usually hired to assist clients in the selection of an agency and

therefore were able to identify some different aspects than both the clients and the agencies. All of the consultants interviewed had previous careers on either the client or agency side of the business and so in addition to offering the consultant perspective, they were also able to offer additional insight based on their previous experiences.

The approximate age range represented in this sample was 25-70 and pitching ranged from 1-40 years of experience in advertising, marketing, and/or pitching. Participation was entirely voluntary and none of the professionals were thought to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence. Because the interviews took place within the United States, the interviews were conducted in English only. English is the language of business within the United States, and all participants were professionals within the United States.

#### **4.4 Sample Selection**

Participants represented a purposive sample and were chosen to reflect the depth and breadth of the phenomenon. In addition, the snowballing technique was used where respondents were asked to refer or identify additional participants who would be willing to participate. Even though geographical location of the client, consultant, or agency was not assumed to be a huge factor affecting the specific relationship dynamics of the pitch process, participants were selected from various cities and markets. Please refer to Table 2 on pg. 69 for a breakdown of the locations. Data saturation began to show up after conducting twenty-four interviews; however, the researcher continued to obtain a total of thirty-four interviews. In addition, while in attendance at a new business conference in New York, the researcher was able to have several informal discussions with various



individuals representing either consultancy firms, advertising agencies, or client organizations. These additional conversations added value and clarification to the previously collected data.

#### ***4.4a Agency and Client Size***

Preliminary interviews revealed insight into how agency size may play a contributing factor in regard to how the pitch process is handled. Buchanan and Mitchell (1991) found that factors such as account size, agency size, and client size did not affect the actual likelihood of account dissolution, but these factors did decrease the risk of dissolution. Their argument was that “size stabilized client-agency relationships” (Broschak, 2004, p. 45) and even though this study focused on the establishment as opposed to the dissolution of a client-agency relationship, evidence from both previous studies and preliminary interviews supported the assumption that size may change the Pitch dynamic.

Another finding of the preliminary interviews revealed that the client size and account size were closely related to the agency size; therefore, it was determined to only use agency size for classification purposes. This was based on the assumption that clients would most likely only consider agencies that were able to meet their needs in regard to the amount of resources the agency could dedicate to their account as well as the ability to work within a specified budget. There are always exceptions, but this assumption was made and was supported in this study.

The classification of an agency was done using a combination of billings and number of employees as listed in the online version (Redbooks.com) of The Advertising

Redbooks™. This extensive directory has been used for over 100 years and provides detailed information on over 21,000 advertisers and 14,000 agencies. The classification was devised by the researcher to include both billings and employees as both were discovered to affect the way pitches are handled. In most cases, billings and employees were highly correlated; the higher the billings, the greater the number of employees, but there were a few exceptions and so the researcher devised the following categorization: an agency with annual billings under \$60M and under 50 employees was classified as *small*, an agency with annual billings between \$60M and \$150M with between 50 and 200 employees was classified as *medium*, and an agency with annual billings exceeding \$150M with over 200 employees was classified as *large*.

In regard to client organizations, preliminary interviews supported that the pitch process, as outlined in this study, was best captured when dealing with larger clients who participate in national and regional advertising campaigns as opposed to only local campaigns. This was directly related to both the amount of money the organization could devote to advertising as well as the amount of manpower that could focus on a full-scale pitch process. For this reason, this study only included client organizations who advertised on a national and regional scale. This was not done to undermine the process that local businesses go through when selecting their advertising services. Based on informal preliminary interviews, local businesses handle advertising very differently from national and regional advertisers, and the pitch process at the local level does not usually involve the extent of issues and dynamics this study sought to explore.

Consultants are extremely difficult to categorize based on size. Among the consultants in this sample, several own their own firms and many work independently and so size categorization can be complicated. There are some consultancy firms that are well-known for the volume of agency searches they conduct and it was assumed that larger consultancy groups may have more formalized processes in place. However, because there was not any previous evidence that suggested that the size of the consultant firm would specifically impact the relationship dynamics of the Pitch, it did not factor into the way in which the consultants were selected.

#### ***4.4b Individual Respondents***

The number of respondents dispersed among the agency, client, and consultant levels varied. For example, for any given pitch process there may be a team of individuals working at the agency level, a few individuals involved on the client level, and only one consultant. Although this sort of dynamic affected the number of “voices” heard from each constituency, it simulates the actual way in which a pitch process is played out in the industry. In support of this, the amount of respondents from the agency constituency was considerably larger than from the client and consultancy constituencies. Table 2 on the following page shows how the respondents were dispersed.

**Table 2 – Respondents**

	<b>Clients n = 10</b>	<b>Agencies n = 17</b>	<b>Consultants n = 7</b>
<b>Size</b>	N/A	Small: (3) Medium: (4) Large: (10)	N/A
<b>Cities Represented</b>	Bentonville East Hanover Miami Newport Beach New York City White Plains	Austin Boston Chicago Dallas New York City San Francisco Seattle	Boston Cleveland Los Angeles Mercer Island New York City

#### **4.5 Research Design**

As is often the case in qualitative research, the design devised before conducting the fieldwork often has to change based on unforeseen challenges that arise once the study begins. That was the case with this study. The researcher had anticipated some potential problems and unfortunately, several of those preliminary concerns were well-founded.

The original design involved conducting interviews with personnel from a total of six agencies: two small, two medium, and two large. At each of these agencies, the goal

was to interview the person in charge of new business to find out what he or she considered to be the “most satisfying” and “least satisfying” pitch in which the agency had been involved. Once this information had been shared, additional individuals were to be sought out at the agency, client, and consultant level (if a consultant was used) who worked on the pitches identified by the new business director.

This design created a level of subjectivity involved with using the opinion of the new business director in determining which pitches would get the focus. To remedy this, other individuals interviewed were asked to give their opinion regarding the most satisfying and least satisfying pitches in which they worked. It was acknowledged that this may or may not be the same. The extent of agreement could indicate the degree individuals with different job roles experienced the pitch process differently regardless of the fact they are in the same organization.

The main goal was to keep a level of continuity by hearing viewpoints from individuals involved in the same pitch process. The ideal scenario involved interviewing individuals across all three constituencies who had worked on the same pitch. Although the researcher was able to speak with all parties involved on a few of the pitches mentioned as “most” or “least” satisfying, the majority of the interviews discussed unique pitches.

Based on preliminary interviews, despite the promise of anonymity, some unwillingness existed from agency professionals to disclose the actual client names regardless of whether it was in a positive or negative context. This concern seemed to echo with many respondents once the study began. Although several agencies were

cooperative and willing to disclose a great deal of information, many did not want to mention the specific client names for fear of damaging any existing or potential future relationships. In addition, of the specific clients mentioned by name, very few were receptive to being interviewed either because of time constraints or concern over information disclosure. Another unforeseen problem arose because of personnel turnover. On several occasions, a person interviewed at the agency level would tell the researcher about the “most satisfying” pitch with a client but when the researcher attempted to follow up with that client, she discovered the key individuals who had worked on the particular pitch, were no longer at that organization.

Although these challenges affected the extent of continuity that could be examined on a per pitch basis, it provided an opportunity to examine a greater variety and number of pitches that ultimately uncovered additional insights that would not have been gained with the original design. In addition, because of the quality of the interviews and the caliber of the various respondents, the similarities and differences shared by the different constituencies could still be explored even when discussing different pitches. It was determined that the ability to discuss more pitch processes in general actually provided a greater level of understanding about the relationship dynamics involved because more unique pitches were discussed than was proposed in the original study design.

## **4.6 Research Protocol**

The following is a detailed description of the research protocol. The appendices E-L include additional materials such as the recruitment letter, consent form, and interview protocol. Participants were all professionals from advertising agencies, client companies, and consulting firms who had an involvement in the pitch process. Some of the questions asked were the same for each constituency; however, as indicated in the appendix, some questions did vary.

The study employed an emergent research design where “important leads are identified in the early phases of data analysis and pursued by asking new questions, observing new situations or previous situations with a slightly different lens, or examining previously unimportant documents” (Maykut and Moorehouse, 1994, p.44). Part of this design involved the researcher keeping an ongoing research journal that kept track of recurring comments and themes. The journal also provided a place where the researcher could keep track of personal notes and observations throughout the entire process. Many of these notes involved the various challenges that were encountered.

### ***4.6a Interview Protocol***

Two experienced qualitative researchers provided additional input on the interview protocol. Three additional professors from the advertising and management departments as well as four industry practitioners were also consulted to help alleviate as many concerns as possible before the study was conducted and to ensure the questions were appropriate.

A total of five preliminary interviews were conducted using this protocol (see Appendices E-G for the specific interview protocol used). These preliminary interviews were conducted to provide both general information about the pitch process as well as to fine tune some of the interview questions for the main study. Results from the pre-test shed a great deal of light into the whole process and the interview protocol was revised (see Appendices H-J).

#### ***4.6b Procedure for participant recruitment***

The American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) and the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) were instrumental in helping identify potential participants from all three constituencies. Once a potential participant was identified, an introductory email was sent or a phone call was made by the researcher to tell a little about the study and to see if the individual would be willing to participate. In the event the researcher was unable to speak to the individual directly, a message was left and a follow-up email was sent. The email included a short description of the study and requested the individual's participation in this study (Appendix K). Only potential subjects who agreed to take part in the study after reading the description and consent form (Appendix L) were contacted by the researcher via e-mail or phone with further instructions.

Along with the recruitment letter, a consent form was also sent so the potential participant was fully aware of the various goals and potential risks associated with participation in the study. If the individual agreed to participate, an appointment was arranged for a 45 minute-1 hour interview either by phone or in-person depending on



location of the participant). The interview began with a brief statement regarding the purpose of the study along with questions about the informant's position within the agency and number of years of experience. The questions were broad and open ended to allow the informants, rather than the researcher, to define the situation,. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, so the findings could be more systematically analyzed. Permission to record the interview was obtained from all participants before the start of each interview.

#### ***4.6c Procedure for obtaining informed consent***

Because of geographic limitations, the majority of the interviews occurred over the phone. Participants received an e-mail containing a short description of the study along with a request for an interview. The short consent form (see Appendix L) was attached and sent with the recruitment e-mail. Informants were asked to respond to the e-mail with a statement indicating their agreement to participate in the study. In addition, at the start of the interview, participants were asked to provide oral consent of participation and were given the opportunity to ask any additional questions they may have needed to clarify before proceeding.

#### ***4.6d Privacy and confidentiality of participants***

All interviews were conducted either via telephone or at a public place such as the participant's place of business or local coffee shop. When the interview was coordinated, participants were reminded of the purpose of the research and requested they set a time and place where they would feel comfortable sharing information on the topic.

Participants were asked to set aside approximately 45 minutes-1 hour for the interview. Care was taken to ensure all participants felt comfortable with the time and location of the interview. At the beginning of the interview as well as the time of the initial consent, participants were assured of confidentiality. While recording, participants were not asked to indicate their name, company or any other information that would connect them to their interview. Their personal information was not connected to the study materials or to the final presentation of this study.

Participants were informed the data obtained from their completed study materials would be used for a doctoral dissertation and would be completely anonymous. The consent form addressed confidentiality of information, while the debriefing statement assured participants their identity would not be disclosed in any part of the dissertation.

The confidentiality of the research data was ensured through several mechanisms. First, the participants did not say their names while recording and their names were in no way associated with their digital recordings. The digital recordings were secured in the researcher's home office once they were transcribed. The author of this research was the only individual with access to the digital recordings and the transcripts of the recordings. The digital recordings will be kept for one year, the extent of the Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, and will then be destroyed by the researcher.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

The techniques used for inductive analysis and interpretation of the data adhered to the rigorous procedures for qualitative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss, 1990; Maykut & Moorehouse (1994;

Spiggle, 1994; Denzen & Lincoln, 1998a and 1998b; and Auberbach & Silverstein, 2003). In order to prepare and analyze the data, several previous methods served as a guide.

Maykut and Moorehouse (1994) discuss the importance of coding each page of the transcript before unitizing and further analysis takes place. The purpose of this phase was to devise a coding scheme so that the information such as source, company, page in original transcript etc. could be easily identified for each response. Each direct quote was assigned a code indicating constituency level (A= agency, C = Consultant, and CL = client), data source (I = interview, D = document, and P = presentation), and participant number (1-34). This coding scheme allowed for confidentiality but also enabled the researcher to know the source for the purpose of analysis. In addition to page numbers, all transcripts included line numbers and were included when a direct quote was used. For example, lines 125-132 from page three of an interview transcript with agency respondent 4 would create the code AI4, p3, 125-132.

Because the latter processes of unitization and data analysis involved the data being categorized into various themes and units of meaning, it was important to ensure that each nugget of information could be tied directly back to the original source. This gave the researcher the ability to go back at any time to the specific transcript and read the information in its original context (Maykut and Moorehouse, 1994).

Miles and Huberman (1984) state that “analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 21). This process aligns similarly with Auberbach and Silverstein (2003) who highlight three

general areas the researcher must cover when conducting qualitative analysis: Efficiently managing the text, making sure what the respondents said is accurately depicted, and using what is learned from the respondents to assist in the development of theory (p. 43).

By following this process, the researcher will be able to identify repeating ideas, themes, and categories; together, these will build a theoretical narrative. Each one builds towards the other; repeating ideas are thoughts or general feelings mentioned by many of the participants; themes group all of the repeating ideas together under one general description; and categories represent a cluster of themes. These three components form the basis of a theoretical narrative. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), “A theoretical narrative describes the process that the research participants reported in terms of your categories to organize people’s subjective experience into a coherent story – it employs people’s own language to make their story vivid and real” (p. 73).

Throughout the entire data analysis process, the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to combine “inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained” (Maykut & Moorehouse, 1994, p. 134). The first step addressed data reduction and text management. This involved reading through the journal and all of the transcripts and only selecting the text that was relevant to the research questions.

Once all of the transcripts and data were coded with the source and the relevant text was selected, the unitizing phase began. This involved reading through all of the data and identifying units of meaning. “In order to be useful for analysis, each unit of meaning identified in the data must stand by itself, i.e., it must be understandable without

additional information, except for knowledge of the researcher's focus of inquiry" (Maykut and Moorehouse, 1994, p.128).

All of the transcripts were read several times and whatever appeared as prominent concepts became *provisional categories* (it was considered provisional because it changed as the analysis continued). Eventually, these provisional categories would evolve to form themes. After identifying provisional categories, the transcripts were re-read several times to identify the specific chunks of data (repeating ideas) that supported each of the provisional categories. For each repeating idea, a code was created and notated next to the response so that each chunk of data could be correctly associated with the corresponding provisional category.

Miles and Huberman (1984) define a code as "an abbreviation or symbol applied to a segment of words – most often a sentence or paragraph of transcribed field notes" (p. 56) and discuss the variety of coding schemes that can be used. An inductive approach to code creation was employed which involved waiting until all data was collected to create the codes as opposed to generating a list beforehand. Miles and Huberman (1984) comment that with this method, "[d]ata get well molded to the codes that represent them, and we get more of a code-in-use flavor than the generic-code-for-many-uses generated by a prefabricated start list" and "the analyst is more open-minded and more context-sensitive" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.57).

In addition, because codes are oftentimes just a single word, researchers should provide clear definitions so that other researchers may follow the analysis. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that you "give a name to a code that is closest to the concept it

is describing” and “don’t use numbers” (p. 60). For a full listing of codes and definitions, please see Appendix M

Although Maykut and Moorehouse (1994) suggested cutting apart the various units of meaning from the photocopied transcripts and taping to index cards to allow for greater ease in grouping categories, the data was managed electronically. Instead of having physical data cards, data units were highlighted within the original transcripts. A two-column table was created where the left-hand column listed the various provisional categories and the right-hand column contained the supporting data units from the original transcripts.

As codes were generated, the data was continually reviewed. If a data unit fit within a code category, it was placed in the right-hand column next to the code title. Lincoln and Guba (1985) devised the idea that in order for a unit of data to “fit” into a category, it must either “look like” or “feel like” the other data nuggets already in the category. If it did not fit, a new category and code was defined. This process continued where provisional categories were continually established until all of the data units were categorized.

It was common for several data units to fit into more than one category. When a particular provisional category accumulated between 6-8 data units, the category was further segmented so that the category name was as descriptive and precise as possible. This involved writing a *rule of inclusion*; a rule that provided the guidelines for what data units would be included or excluded in each category. After the rule of inclusion was created for each category, each data unit within the category was re-read to make sure it

still fit based on the new rule. Once all of the provisional categories were established, rules of inclusion created, and all data units assigned to a category, the provisional category name was refined and became an actual theme.

The transcripts were reviewed several times to refine the names of each of the themes. The themes and repeating ideas were reviewed and were used to formulate categories. The refinement of categories included both renaming and reorganizing and continued until the most prevalent repeating ideas, themes, and categories were identified

#### ***4.7a Quality Control***

When conducting qualitative research, “the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2002, p. 25). It is the responsibility of the researcher to employ as many strategies as possible to ensure the study is conducted in the most systematic and ethical manner possible.

While all research has an ethical responsibility both in the way it is conducted and reported, collecting qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews requires special consideration. In this case, the information sought involved the participants sharing highly sensitive material and although the researcher wanted to gain as much detailed information as possible, the participants were always given the option to not answer a question. The respect and anonymity of the participants were at the forefront of this study and maintained at all times. This research method comes with some common concerns regarding reliability, validity, and overall rigor of the analysis. Every attempt was made by the researcher to address each one of these issues as detailed below.

#### ***4.7b Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability***

Qualitative researchers approach reliability a little differently. “Rather than insisting that others get the same results as the original researcher, reliability lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27).

For this study, the issue of internal validity was addressed by interviewing many participants involved in each pitch process from the three separate constituencies (agency, client, and consultant). These three different viewpoints were used to develop themes and categories. The principles of *triangulation* advocate “using either multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31).

When available, additional documents, internal communications, presentations and industry publications were used to support established themes and categories. For instance, the researcher had access to the full results of a 2007 survey, *Agency Search – What Matters? Winning Strategies for Ad Agencies*, conducted by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) in conjunction with Millward Brown. The survey included 317 national marketers and specifically looked at the agency search and selection process. Many questions in the survey were closely related to the proposed study and provided a great resource to compare and support findings. In addition, several of the respondents shared internal memos and documents that were used as additional data sources.



External validity, based on the traditional positivist view, is the extent that results can be statistically generalized from the random sample in the study to the general population. Because qualitative research involves gathering a non-random sample for the purposes of obtaining the richest data possible, statistical generalizability is not possible; however, “if one thinks of what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation or incident and how that knowledge can be transferred to another situation, generalizability in qualitative research becomes possible” (Merriam, 2002, p. 28).

Auberbach and Silverstein (2003) discuss that in the place of reliability and validity, “justifiability of interpretations” (p. 78) can be used. In order for an analysis to be justifiable it must be transparent, communicable, and coherent. Transparency refers to the extent that the process followed by the researcher is documented in details so that others may understand how the researcher arrived at his/her particular conclusions. Communicability refers to the ability to explain the various categories and themes in a manner that makes sense to others. Finally, coherence refers to the ability for the categories to logically fit together to produce an intelligible story.

In addition, Auberbach and Silverstein (2003) explain how transferability can serve as an alternative to generalizability. Themes and repeating ideas may be unique to the particular sample; however, transferability refers to the way in which the categories may extend beyond the sample used in the particular study. They state, “The abstract patterns described by your categories will be applicable to other research samples even though their specific content will not be” (Auberbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 91).

In order to address justifiability and transferability, an *audit trail* was established in the form of typed interview transcripts, research journal, and documentation for all phases of the coding process. The audit trail provides support for the way categories were defined and particular decisions were made throughout the analysis process. In addition, the researcher attempted to facilitate the ease of the reader in the assessment of how well the results could be applied to other situations by presenting the data and findings using as much description and richness as possible. By trying to maximize the degree of variation in the selection of participants based on both organization size, job title, and geographical location, the researcher created a wider range of diversity and increased the possible situations for which the findings may be applied and relevant.

#### **4.8 Limitations**

As is the case with many research endeavors, the current study encountered many challenges. Although a systematic process of data collection, coding, and analysis was followed, the interpretation of the data was prepared by the sole researcher and therefore is limited to the judgments and assumptions made by the researcher.

Several of the limitations were the result of early decisions made by the researcher regarding the way in which some of the interview questions were structured. Instead of asking respondents to discuss pitch experiences in general and then using their free responses to draw conclusions about the characteristics of positive and negative pitch experiences, the researcher explicitly asked the respondents to discuss specific examples of their most and least satisfying experiences. This could be perceived as a limitation as it forces the respondents to provide answers that support a true dichotomy of either

positive or negative pitch experiences. This limitation is respectfully acknowledged and even though the questions were structured to discover examples of pitch processes on both extreme ends of the spectrum so that the particular characteristics of most-satisfying and least-satisfying pitches would be articulated directly by the respondents, the realization that many pitches fall somewhere in the middle was not overlooked.

Another limitation involving the way the questions were structured relates to the supposition that the pitch process is indeed a linear process. For example, the question “Have the factors that attracted you in the *first* place been sustained over the course of the relationship?” could potentially lead the respondents because questions that assume the pitch process is a linear process will lead to answers that suggest and support that assumption. In actuality, the data later revealed that many aspects of the pitch process do not follow a linear flow and in many cases, the process is much more complicated. Every attempt was made to not bias or lead the respondents in any way but the researcher acknowledges that some of the questions could have been worded a little more carefully where the use of sequential words (first, last, next, etc.) were eliminated.

One of the biggest challenges the researcher faced was the availability of respondents and the willingness of participation. This resulted in a sample that may not be completely representative of the total population. As discussed earlier, the original study proposed a design where a series of most-satisfying pitch processes and least-satisfying pitch processes would be identified by new business directors at various agencies. These would then be examined across the various constituencies that worked on the particular pitches identified by the new business directors. The original goal was

to use each pitch process as the unit of analysis and to discover how different constituencies experience the same pitch process. There were instances where it was possible to interview the agency, the consultant, and the client who all worked on the same pitch; however, the majority of the respondents discussed different pitch processes. Although this was a limitation in the ability to compare different perspectives on the same pitch, as the study progressed, it was determined that the lack of continuity across pitch processes did not devalue the data collected. Instead, it allowed the researcher to learn about a greater number of pitch processes than the original design would have allowed.

Considerable measures were taken to reduce the effect of these limitations. Several colleagues reviewed partial transcripts and coding schema in an attempt to provide additional support for the categories, themes, and repeating ideas used. In addition, the researcher made every effort to provide a great deal of transparency by explaining the method in great detail. This included the way the data was collected, coded, and the way the various themes and categories were developed. The extensive use of quotations provided a way for the content be expressed in the words of the respondents as opposed to the researcher. In addition, wherever possible, various documents and presentations were used to add additional support and clarification to the findings. These findings are reported in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Results and Discussion**

### **5.1 A Tale of Three Pitches**

One Friday afternoon, over a period of three hours, three phones ring in the offices of three different advertising agencies located in three separate cities. A client's voice on the other end of the phone delivers three extremely different types of news. For one agency, it is the knowledge that despite playing by the rules during the entire eight week pitch process, another agency was a better fit for the client and was awarded the business. For a second agency, it is the reality that despite its best effort to retain the business, the effort was unsuccessful and the relationship is officially terminated. For a third agency, it is confirmation that eight tireless weeks of involvement in a pitch process has resulted in winning the business.

In yet another office in another city the client stretches back in her chair after making the last of three important phone calls. Each time she hung up the phone, she was reminded of how difficult the entire process had been. It had all begun when she hired a new CMO who, after reviewing the current marketing plan, decided the company should undergo a pitch process. Even though the client had not hired a consultant in the past, she felt the company would benefit from an objective perspective. The client's organization had not participated in a pitch process in several years and so the idea of having a consultant to assist not only in identifying potential agency partners but also to help facilitate the process seemed like a smart choice for the client.

Throughout the course of the process, after reviewing what seemed like a million requests for proposals (RFPs) and sitting in on countless meetings and presentations, the client managed to narrow down the list of potential agencies to only three; one of which was the incumbent agency. The client struggled with the inclusion of the incumbent. On the one hand, as the new CMO had pointed out, the work that had been created over the past few months had not been producing the desired results; however, because the client had worked with the incumbent for almost five years, it was difficult to consider terminating the relationship.

The client was looking for an agency that was not only talented and could take her company to where it needed to go but one that would mesh well with her organization. There were a ton of factors that had to be considered. The client wanted to know about past creative awards, see work the agencies had created for other companies, and assess whether the personalities of the agency professionals would work well with her marketing team. This meant that she wanted the agency to send the individuals who would actually be working on her business to all the meetings and presentations that occurred throughout the entire pitch process.

There was so much to consider throughout those eight weeks and although the process was intense and the decision was difficult, she had selected an agency that was capable, trustworthy, and likeable. She finally arrived at a place where she was confident that she had made the right choice.

### ***5.1a The Incumbent Agency***

For all the team members at the incumbent agency, this pitch process was viewed as bittersweet. On the one hand they were really upset the client wanted to review the business. They had what appeared to be a successful relationship for the past five years and all of a sudden, out of the blue, the client informs them the account is going up for review. Sure, the last few months had been a little rough but what relationship does not have its rough patches? The incumbents were aware of the client's new CMO and wondered what role he may have played in the decision to conduct a pitch process.

As upset as they were about the Pitch, the incumbents were also somewhat encouraged they were still being included. They knew the role of the incumbent is never desirable in a pitch process because in most cases, the business is being reviewed because the client is no longer satisfied and no longer trusts the current agency to deliver what is required. The incumbent debated on whether or not to participate in the Pitch; after all it would be a huge expense for the agency and they wondered whether it was too late to prove the client should retain their relationship. After much deliberating, the incumbent agency team had decided the account was worth the time and the expense.

When the incumbent's team learned a consultant was involved, they had mixed feelings since when they had won the business five years earlier, there was no consultant involved. They were not sure if the presence of a consultant would be beneficial or detrimental. One of the consultant's main jobs is to help level the playing field, they weren't sure if that would work in their favor by allowing them to "start fresh" or if it

would work against them because they would not be able to capitalize on the benefits of an existing relationship.

Over the course of the eight weeks, the individuals from the incumbent agency worked diligently to try to convince the client that their agency knew the client's business better than any of the competitors; after all, they had the advantage of spending the last five years learning as much as possible. They knew that the odds were against them. One of the incumbent's account planners had shared the latest statistic showing that incumbents only retain the business between three and ten percent of the time. Needless to say, after each elimination phase, the incumbents were relieved to know they had made the cut. When it came down to the last three agencies, the incumbents began to feel they may just have actually won the agency back. Unfortunately, when the phone rang on that Friday afternoon, they were informed this was not the case.

### ***5.1b The Losing Agency***

For the losing agency, the phone call notification was a mixed blessing. As much as the agency team was disappointed to learn it would not have the opportunity to work on the client's desirable brand, the pitch process had been far from hassle-free.

It seemed like from the start, nothing had gone smoothly. The agency was extremely frustrated to learn that the client had hired a consultant to handle the Pitch. The agency had worked with this particular consultant before and knew that the process she used was extremely structured and would give them little interaction with the client. The RFP alone consisted of more than forty questions and it seemed like there were so many rules of what the agency could and could not do, it was hard to keep them all



straight. The client had specified that the people who would eventually work on the business attend all of the meetings. The agency understood this request but was worried about not using its star presenters during the Pitch.

After successfully making it through the RFP stage, a chemistry meeting had been scheduled. The agency had a difficult time reading the actions of the client's recently-hired CMO. He seemed nice enough but said very little at the meeting. When individuals from the agency asked questions, the answers given were so vague that the agency team did not really feel as if the meeting had been especially beneficial.

Working with the consultant had proven to be as challenging as the agency had remembered. She was extremely adamant that all contact go directly through her and so the individuals on the agency team never felt like they could actually connect with the client. After the initial chemistry check, another few meetings were scheduled. During these additional meetings, the client did give a little more feedback; however, the agency team still had a difficult time understanding whether or not the client was on board with the ideas they were generating and determining whether it would be a good fit for the client. This was stressful for the agency team and it resulted in more fighting than working.

When the agency learned it had made it to the final pitch round along with two other agencies, the team was both excited and nervous. It was exciting to have made it so far along the process and to actually have the opportunity to work on one of the hottest brands in the marketplace. It was nerve-racking because throughout the entire pitch process, the amount of contact had been so limited the agency never really felt as if they

knew exactly what the client wanted. Therefore going into the final pitch presentation, the agency team was not sure what to expect.

Unfortunately, during the presentation, the agency team had made a series of what turned out to be fatal mistakes. The first and probably most inexcusable was the fact that the agency person presenting the creative called the client by the wrong name ... not just once, but in excess of five times. This mistake caused the client to disengage throughout the remainder of the presentation. One agency person even remembered seeing the CMO checking his Blackberry multiple times. In addition, the PowerPoint presentation contained a multitude of typing errors. It was not until after the presentation had started that the agency's account planner realized the old unedited version of the presentation was being used. Lastly, the agency allowed the client to see the internal conflict that was present within the team members when one of them rudely corrected another mid-sentence. As the individuals from the losing agency reflected on the entire pitch process, it became clear that the decision the client had made in not selecting them was completely justified.

### ***5.1c The Winning Agency***

For the winning agency, this pitch process was considered to be one of the most-satisfying the agency had ever experienced. It seemed like right from the beginning everything just fell into place. It all began when a CMO of one of the agency's existing clients left and went to work at another company. At first the agency was scared because it was not sure what would happen with the account but not only did the agency retain its

business with the existing client, it wound up being invited to participate in pitching business for the CMO's new employer.

When the RFP arrived and the agency learned the Pitch was being handled by a particular consultant, it was thrilled. Having worked with her on several pitches before, they knew her process was systematic and thorough. As a smaller shop with fewer years of experience than many of its competitors, it appreciated the opportunity to compete with other agencies on a level playing field.

The agency diligently completed the detailed RFP and awaited notification of the next step. Once the consultant informed the agency it would be moving on to the round of chemistry meetings, a team was assembled that would not only work on the Pitch but would also work on the account should the business be awarded. The first chemistry meeting could not have gone more perfectly. From the moment the meeting started, the individuals from the agency felt extremely comfortable. Sure it helped knowing the CMO but even the other individuals working for the client were extremely welcoming. The agency asked several questions and the CMO delivered thoughtful responses. At the conclusion of the meeting, the agency walked away not only with a clear sense of what the client was looking for but also with a feeling of excitement that the client seemed extremely receptive to accepting new ideas and direction.

The agency team began work immediately. Even though the hours were long and the work was challenging, all of the team members were excited and passionate about the client's brand and genuinely enjoyed working with one another. With each meeting the agency had with the client, the chemistry continued to radiate. Even though the

consultant's process did limit the amount of contact the agency had with the client, the agency felt as if it had an extremely clear direction of what the client wanted and was confident in the ideas the team was generating.

When the consultant called and informed the agency it would be competing with two other agencies in the final pitch presentation, the agency was filled with excitement. The agency team practiced the presentation more times than could be counted as they felt there was no such thing as being too prepared. The agency's preparation paid off. The final presentation went smoothly and the individuals on the pitch team remarked how wonderful it was to see the client fully-engaged. When the individuals from the agency completed their presentation they knew that regardless of the client's decision, they were extremely proud of the way in which the Pitch had been conducted from start to finish and would not have changed a thing. When the client called that Friday afternoon, it confirmed that all of the agency's hard work had indeed paid off and that the agency did not need to change a thing.

### ***5.1d The Current Study***

The above story supports how the pitch process cannot be characterized as one size fits all; each pitch process can be as unique as the people involved. In addition, the pitching landscape today is quite different than years prior. The speed of business and the advancements of technology have paved the way for an increased involvement of search consultants to help clients navigate their way through the complex pitching process.

The interviews with agencies, clients, and consultants combined with a review of several internal documents, association surveys, and presentations provided a great deal of perspective on the pitch process. Even though the research questions probed respondents to focus on the relational constructs of attraction and trust as well as the factors involved in the most and least-satisfying pitch processes, many logistical factors were revealed that may contribute to the relationship dynamic during a pitch process. Although many unique themes and categories emerged within each of the three groups, an abundance of general themes and categories were also detected. In addition, the findings show that although there is a great amount of shared views and comments between the three constituencies, there are also a few areas where there appears to be a high level of disconnect.

The results and discussion will be presented in three sections. The first section will define the various stages of the pitch process and present some over-arching general findings that emerged from all respondents. Many of these general findings were not directly related to the research questions; however, because they were mentioned frequently by the respondents and because they appeared to have a considerable impact on the way in which the pitch process was experienced, it was determined they should be documented. Each of these general findings will be supported by examples from each of the three constituencies: clients, consultants, and agencies.

The second section will specifically address the answers to the four research questions driving this study: 1) the way attraction is developed and experienced during all phases of the pitch process 2) the way trust is developed and experienced during all

phases of the pitch process 3) the various elements that characterize the “most satisfying” pitch processes and 4) the various elements that characterize the “least satisfying” pitch processes. Each of these questions will be addressed with support from each of the constituency groups.

The third section will reveal some additional insights. These findings, although not directly tied to the research questions, provided some additional knowledge regarding how the pitch process was experienced and touched on some important aspects that could be explored in future studies.

## **5.2 Pitch Process Phases**

During the course of the interviews, it was discovered that although the pitch process can be viewed in its entirety as one long process, several different phases exist within each pitch process. These classifications are general in nature and are provided by the researcher in an attempt to help organize the various steps of the pitch process. Because each client and agency relationship is unique, the way in which the process is experienced and broken down oftentimes blurs across these category lines.

The *preliminary-pitch phase* begins as soon as an agency learns about a potential client and makes the decision to begin pursuing the business. Depending on the client and the agency, this news may be communicated either by informal (through friends and other industry contacts) or formal (request for proposal by the client or consultant) means. During the preliminary-pitch phase, the agency focuses on gathering as much information as possible to help decide whether the account should be pursued. Usually

personal contact between agency and client is minimal during the preliminary-pitch phase.

The *early-pitch phase* begins once an agency begins moving forward with actively pursuing an account. This may occur either by completing a request for proposal (RFP) or completing an information sheet sent by a third-party consultant. This is the period of time when an agency may appear on the long list of potential candidates a particular client is evaluating. Once an agency has entered the early-pitch phase, more extensive information about the client is gathered and specific individuals may get assigned to the project. This phase serves as an initial weeding out period for both the agency and the client. The agency determines whether it still wants to pursue the business and the client organization decides which agencies will move forward in the pitch process. Depending on the size of the client and the number of agencies being considered, face-to-face meetings may or may not be scheduled during this phase.

The *mid-pitch phase* occurs once the initial list of potential candidates has been narrowed down and all parties are on board with moving forward. The agency and client will have more contact than in the earlier phases of the pitch process. During mid-pitch, the agency is working aggressively to prepare work that will stand out against the competition. The agency has assembled its team of individuals who are devoted to the particular pitch. The mid-pitch phase is where most of the tangible and laborious work takes place because all parties have made the decision to move forward. During mid-pitch more communication will take place between agency and client. The mid-pitch

phase is focused on creating the best solution for the client's needs with the ultimate goal of winning the client's business.

The *final-pitch phase* as the name implies, is the finale to the pitch process. The final-pitch phase consists of the time period where an agency shares all of the hard work that was done during the mid-pitch phase with the client. This is usually done in some sort of formal presentation by each of the agency finalists. During this phase, the client compares all of the agencies and weighs up which agency is the best choice. During the final-pitch phase, the client selects the agency that will be asked to enter into a formal commitment with the organization.

As indicated, every pitch process is unique and the way in which these phases exist and function within every single pitch process may vary; therefore, this classification is not designed to serve as absolute in nature but rather as a guide to help break down the various phases that can be experienced throughout an extremely complex process.

### **5.3 General Findings**

As one agency respondent commented, "Pitching is a special beast. It is way more exciting than the day to day, it's also way much more frustrating, and definitely much more time-consuming" (AI1, p.1, 2-3). Through the interviews, it became clear that pitching is indeed one of the most dynamic stages of the client-agency relationship. There is no doubt that the pitch process is one full of many facets. Participants were asked to share some general thoughts regarding their experience in pitching.



Pitching is fun because it is invigorating and it is super creative. Everybody has this team/family spirit that comes from spending ridiculous amount of hours at the office. It is absolutely exhausting because your day to day responsibilities don't get away; you just add an additional piece (AI1, p. 4, 164-167)

When people ask me to be on pitches, the first thing I think about is marathon running because that's really what it is. I mean I'll be honest, it's my least favorite process of the agency because it's a nightmare quite honestly because there are so many things at stake. You can either be potentially losing a piece of business or the other side is not winning it and there's a fine line there. One doesn't cost jobs maybe, the other one is just your ego maybe. You also have, depending on the size of the Pitch, either a small team or a large team and the larger the team becomes, the more chaotic it becomes and the more I think, counterproductive it becomes. But on the same side, I think also the pitch process is kind of the, I guess the best example of advertising in the process, the experience of advertising (AI6, p1, 4-12)

It's an interesting business and the pitch process, oh my gosh, talk about probably the most complex part at working at an agency. The energy is intense. It's strategic from start to finish. It can be hugely rewarding and hugely disappointing but it is one of those things that really in many ways becomes the focal point of the agency (AI3, p11, 412-415)

Before delving into some of the more specific themes and categories associated with the research questions and unique to each constituency, there were three general categories that evolved from the themes touched on by all of the respondents that really set the tone for the entire pitch process.

For clarification of the findings, from this point forward, categories will be written in ALL CAPS, themes will be written in *italics*, and repeating ideas will be written either in quotation marks or block quotes. In addition, each direct quote will contain a code indicating constituency level (A= agency, C = Consultant, and CL =

client), data source (I = interview, D = document, and P = presentation), and participant number. In the case of interviews, transcript line numbers will also be included.

The three general categories that evolved were: ENVIRONMENTAL CLIMATE, LEVEL OF FORMALITY, and PRESENCE OF A CONSULTANT. Each theoretical construct consisted of several themes. ENVIRONMENTAL CLIMATE consisted of *Time Sensitivity*, *Technical Capability*, and *Level of Formality*. LEVEL OF FORMALITY consisted of *Process-Driven*, *Playing by the Rules*, and *Going with the Flow*. PRESENCE OF A CONSULTANT consisted of *Involvement Style* and *Level Playing Field*. Each one of the general findings is explained below and Table 3 on page 117 organizes the various repeating ideas, themes, and categories that emerged in a summary format.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CLIMATE**

All of the interviews began with a general conversation with each participant about his or her experience in pitching. The respondents ranged in years of experience from 1-40 and most commented on how the advertising industry in general and pitching in particular has evolved through the years. Respondents discussed their various pitching experiences and highlighted several key areas related to the overall environmental climate that have made an impact on how the Pitch was conducted. Although there were many things mentioned, the data gravitated towards two main themes: *Time Sensitivity* and *Technical Capability*.

### *Time Sensitivity*

Many respondents discussed how business moves so much more quickly today than it did in previous years. The idea that everyone wants results yesterday seems to echo in the ears of many of the participants regardless of whether they were a client, search consultant, or agency employee.

The primary thing right now is the speed of business and the fact that in the old days you could take 90 days which was typically the time from notification of a termination to you know when the new agency would need to be on boarded and you could use that time to select a new resource. The reality is most clients come to us and they're already way behind the 8 ball. In many instances today, they don't have work for something that has to go on air or be in market you know in a relatively short time frame from when they contact us (CI1, p2, 62-67)

You know a lot of times like today for example, I am literally sending out a RFP that I'll ask for back in a week and if I talk to any of these guys, I'll be shocked. I mean I might have 10 minute conversations like, hey it's coming today, have you got it? But in reality, it's so fast, the process is really not as enjoyable for me, quite honestly or for the agency (CLI4, p5, 195-198)

Creatively, a lot of times for pitches it ends up being all hands on deck. Whoever can write the best script and you get lots of art directors and designers ... You need to get stuff out of the door. Kind of what you would do in a normal year's worth of work for a regular piece of business you do in 6 weeks to 2 months for a pitch. It is accelerated and so it ends up taking up a lot of resources from studio to design department and stuff like that and so you have to stagger your pitch schedule a little bit so you don't have too many going on at a time (AI1, p4, 156-161)

... it's expensive on our end too in the fact that it's a distraction from the business and it takes people out of their day jobs and it's a pretty big investment on both sides and should not be entered into lightly (CLI3, p9, 337-338)

Respondents share concerns with how the speed of the pitching business could ultimately create a negative impact on the overall outcome of the client-agency

relationship. The time pressures placed on the various individuals involved can result in individuals rushing through the process just to meet a deadline.

Ultimately, it would be great to get some better sense of the working relationship so I think that would come with more time and maybe breaking it down. If it's a huge assignment, I think most clients and agencies want this to be a long-term relationship and really the only way to do it is to spend more time. I think that so frequently, I would imagine everyone's got a campaign schedule, they've made a decision and then time sometimes becomes a little bit of a driving motivator to make a decision and hopefully that's not the case for many because I think that could be a huge mistake if you rush because you have to get your commercials on the air and therefore you have to hire somebody. You're each making an investment ... (CLI5, p14, 499-506)

It's not totally like a marriage because you can get divorced at the end of the year but it's very expensive and time consuming process on the client side and on the agency side. Agencies spend an enormous amount of money on new business pitches and so you want to keep a piece of business for a while and the client too, would like to keep that agency for as long as possible because they don't want to admit they made a mistake. When you part company after a year, clearly somebody has made a mistake (AI2, p1-2, 40-45)

The respondents' mention of the pressures related to time issues came as no surprise to the researcher. The speed of business and the pressure to deliver quality products in an efficient manner is not necessarily a new concept; however, in the pitch process, it can be detrimental to the development of a successful relationship. In the short-term, rushing through a pitch process may seem the most cost-effective for everyone involved because less time will be spent deciding and more time can be devoted to actually producing work. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. As several of the respondents indicated, if more time was spent during the pitch process to really arrive at the best agency-client fit, perhaps less relationships would end up being terminated.

### ***Technical Capability***

Respondents indicated that over the years there have been a variety of specific capabilities that have been required from professionals working in advertising and marketing services. The theme *technical capability* encompasses two main ideas. The first is that through technology such as the Internet, obtaining information is so much easier than it used to be in years prior. If a particular client wants to learn about an agency or an agency wants to research a client, a trip online will elicit a great deal of information in a short amount of time.

... actually when consultants first started, there was no Internet and so one of the things that's really different now, even since we've been in business and formed our company and what our business model was is that there is so much access to agency information that in the old days was really not available (CI1, p1, 32-35)

The agency world is changing extremely fast and extremely slow at the same time. It is largely driven by the Internet. There are a whole slew of people who know more about internet marketing and how to create experiential marketing because they grew up on the Internet ... it is the whole upbringing of young people especially (AI15, p6, 232-235)

The second idea is the demand that today's professionals are up to speed with the trends and tools of the current marketplace; therefore, technical capability encompasses both the impact of technology and the way professionals are embracing their changing environment. The way in which these various challenges are being handled by agencies, clients, and consultants can impact the pitch process. "Most agencies will tell you they're full service and they are but the industry is in a place still that people have certain expertise ..." (CLI1, p3, 98-99). Additional respondents below share their views:

I think it is also true that virtually all clients are trying to wrap their heads around this new interactive digital world and confusing world to them, they are trying to figure out how they fit into it and how they can and should employ these times. I think oftentimes they are out searching for marketing partners who can take them by the hand and lead them into this brave new world. So I think, all of this that I am talking about is behind a lot of the search activity that is going on these days (CI4, p1, 13-18)

I kinda feel that we as an industry are at a bit of a crossroads in how we navigate through it, well in part depend on the next period of time in our kind of lives because we have to challenge ourselves about how we are doing what we are doing, I think more aligned with what clients need today and sometimes that's hard to change ya know? ... it's really because of technology, if there is one single thing you could point your finger to, it's really that because it's changed everything (CI1, p3, 102-106)

... trust me everybody knows the marketplace is changing but nobody is clearly going to believe you. Everybody is redefining the marketplace but more importantly, the consumer is redefining the marketplace so if you can say "I understand how the consumer redefines the marketplace" then that will probably resonate more (A17, p10-11, 405-408)

Technical capabilities referred to not only the way in which the various respondents are able to keep up with the changing technological environment, but it also referred to the specific capabilities that these individuals brought to the pitch process. Several respondents comment on the way in which the industry's evolution has created a shift in the way specific capabilities are offered.

Companies might want a greater level of expertise based on the kind of activity like the Internet or whatever and so they've moved away from their full-service agency and contracted with a specialist. The reality is there aren't full-service agencies anymore (CLI3, p1, 29-32)

There are two things happening at the same time. Number one the agency model, the full-service agency model started to disaggregate OKAY? So if I wanted those separate things, I had to go some place to get great competence and at the same time, the need to communicate with consumers in ways beyond just television, that's increased as well. So the need to do internet marketing or multi-cultural marketing or to have more sophisticated promotion techniques. That's has all emerged and has

driven the agencies' business model in terms of creating these as we call it centers of excellence under these holding companies (CLI3, p2-3, 70-76)

Respondents shared how through the years, the evolution of both the consumer market in general and pitching in particular, has created a great deal of pressure to keep up with the latest trends and technologies. Consumers today have become so immune to the sheer quantity of advertising that it becomes increasingly challenging for clients to continue to reach their target market. These challenges faced by the clients are then transferred to advertising agencies.

Greater demands are placed on agencies to continue to generate creative ideas that will reach an ad-resistant consumer. Clients are realizing that in order to reach their audiences, they need to not only embrace new media opportunities but they also need to approach different messaging strategies. They need agencies that will be able to help carry their brands through the changing times. In order for an agency to be competitive in the pitch process, the agency must make sure its resources and capabilities are in sync with those of potential clients.

## **LEVEL OF FORMALITY**

The second theoretical construct that emerged from the data related to the level of formality that the pitch processes followed. Pitches can fall anywhere along the spectrum from formal to informal; from traditional to alternative. A formal pitch is characterized by a process where there is a great deal of structure; where there are specific steps that must be taken, guidelines that must be followed, and a strict timeline that must be executed. In many formal pitch processes, consultants are involved. This is not always

the case, but based on the participants for this study, most formal pitches were executed by a consultant.

For the majority of agency respondents, formal pitches were not viewed positively. There seemed to be an overall level of frustration with the way in which a pitch succumbed to strict rules and guidelines and the jumping through a lot of unnecessary hoops. However, for some clients and consultants, the formal pitch was viewed as a necessity because it provided a systematic way to maneuver through a highly complex and confusing process.

In contrast, informal pitch processes usually involve little structure and may avoid a great deal of systemic steps. For instance, one respondent discussed how their lead agency was selected without a formal RFP process. It was a situation where the company was not happy with their current agency, they researched work in the industry they liked, and basically the CMO of the client organization called up a few agencies and through a lot of discussion, a choice was made. As the client comments, “I would say that is not what your typically going to find with any pitch process with any agency or client. It really was basically top to top. They were hand-selected and in the door” (CLI10, p3, 116-117). The two themes that were generated from the data were *Process-Driven* and *Going with the Flow*.

### ***Process-Driven***

This theme was characterized by instances where a great deal of organization and structure was followed throughout the entire pitch process and where everything evolved



in a systematic way. The *Process-Driven* theme focused on the specific phases of the pitch process and what was required in each phase.

Two of the biggest phases discussed were the RFI (Request for Information) and the RFP (Request for Proposal). These two processes often mark the beginning of the pitch process and as one consultant commented, “It’s the first chance you have to create the impression you need and you have to put yourself in the mindset of the people reading it” (CI2, p4, 135-137). Various respondents discuss how this phase is handled in a process-driven manner, “You have to have a process, there has to be a mechanism to do this and do it well” (CI1, p2, 39-40).

When we go through the RFI process, we usually call down anywhere between five and seven agencies and we go from there into the traditional RFP which essentially would be, here’s your assignment, come back with a proposal and how you’d go about it and we have agency presentations and then from there we have all our tools that we use, scorecards, etc. to make final decisions. We usually get them down to two so we go from five to two and I tend to negotiate with both of them to see. We usually have a favorite, but I always have a backup just in case (CLI4, p2, 85-90)

You started with an RFI piece and then from there, with the RFI came in from the creative side, all the reels and then we reviewed all the reels, and went to an evaluation process and then went down to our final invitations for the RFP; it was a very formalized RFP that went out. It went out with a very specific time frame to it so every agency had exactly 14 days. So we went and figured out when they were going to come and present backwards, they got their RFP at different points in time (CLI7, p1, 22-26)

There were two pieces to it, there was the RFP piece to really fill out their account service philosophy, their creative philosophy, their technology capabilities on all of that but the other big piece that went out with that was a case study. They all got the exact same case. We were very structured about who they could talk to and who they couldn’t talk to. I mean it was super super super super super structured ... today we are not doing what I would call, a heavy duty super formalized RFI/RFP process anymore because we’re doing blended pieces (CLI7, p1, 26-30, 38-39)

This theme was characterized by particular mention of the linear steps or phases a pitch followed. Generally speaking, a formal pitch would begin where a client (or a consultant) sends out a Request for Information (RFI). Once all of the agencies have submitted the RFIs, the clients or the consultant will review to see which agencies they believe would be most suitable. They use whatever criteria they feel is most appropriate for their business and narrow the potential agency field down. Once the initial pool of agencies has been reduced, a Request for Proposal (RFP) is sent out. The RFP asks for more detailed information from the agencies that was not addressed in the RFI.

After all of the RFPs are received and reviewed, the client decides what agencies will move forward to the next phase for chemistry meetings. Chemistry meetings are meetings where the client will meet with an agency face-to-face to assess what the working relationship may be like should the work be awarded. Respondents discussed how oftentimes chemistry meetings involve the agency working on some sort of hypothetical problem so that the client may see how the agency works through an assignment. Usually, the potential agencies will be reviewed again after the chemistry meetings and the client will decide what agency will move on to the final Pitch. In most cases, the final Pitch is a formal presentation by the agency to the client. After the final Pitch, the winning agency is awarded.

The respondents who discussed process-driven processes, all mentioned slight variations to the above scenario. For instance, some clients will have a longer list of potential agencies or require more meetings or perhaps require a different assignment/activity in the chemistry meeting. The main point to this theme is the

formality of the Pitch is driven by the specific phases. The client and consultant are the ones who determine the phases that must be completed and may be why several clients and many consultants viewed the various formal phases and processes more beneficial than the agencies.

### ***Going With the Flow***

In contrast to the *Process-Driven* theme, *Going with the Flow* was the theme encompassing the extent of informal interaction between the various constituencies during a pitch. During the preliminary interviews, the researcher spoke with several individuals from small agencies and realized that more often than not, the pitch process in small agencies was handled more informally than formally. One client described a particular meeting she had with an agency, “It was really a meet and greet. It was very informal, it didn’t have a set agenda, so I think you stay interested” (CLI5, p8, 276-277).

Additional respondents discuss instances where the pitch process was handled informally.

We are a smaller agency and so we don’t really like to participate in the big gigantic pitches that go on for months and months and months ... for multiple reasons, for monetary things and just because some of the things they ask you to do are just absolutely asinine (AI15, p1, 3-6)

... the other way that you can end up in a pitch situation is that somebody knows somebody and they went to another agency and then they met a client and they are leaving and they are coming to your agency and they want to bring that piece of business with them or people know each other from years ago and they are looking to move and they will call the president of our agency and will say, “hey, we are looking to move and I worked with you years ago, would you guys be interested?” so it can run the gamut of being completely informal where we throughout the pitch process have a direct contact and a direct line to the client that we would potentially be working with on a day-to-day basis or it can be as far the other direction where we only get to talk to the consultant and so obviously anywhere in that spectrum provides various different opportunities and challenges (AI1, p2, 68-76)

It's in those settings in a more relaxed setting that's not formally a meeting where you can start to get to know really how these people really think and feel and act (CLI6, p4, 149-150)

...we have what we call a strategic workshop where the client goes to each of the agencies' offices and has a very informal but productive meeting where the client can begin, or the agency can begin to set hypotheses around the room about here's what we are thinking about strategically, Again, not a presentation, much more informal ... (CI7, p1, 32-36)

The theme *Going with the Flow* also refers to the way in which an agency may have to adapt based on the particular situation and the various people involved; where there may not be any strict guidelines to follow or specific actions to take and where it is up to the agency to figure out. As the respondent indicates below, going with the flow requires a certain level of flexibility and adaptability.

I don't want to say we're a chameleon and we'll just do what the client is, we want to be ourselves, but at the same time, if you have procurement people coming in to the client or financial people, they want to be more buttoned-up because they deal with Excel spreadsheets most of the time. You have the first date, if the person is going to take you out to a Four Seasons restaurant, if you will, you're gonna dress a certain way versus pizza and miniature golf ... The process will partially dictate it (AI5, p3, 107-112)

For the most part, informal communication and contact was perceived favorably by most participants. There was a perception that too much formality can create an environment where it is extremely difficult to get to know one another and to assess whether or not a relationship will work in the long-term. Generally speaking, the perceptions of formality were definitely varied across the constituencies.

There's more pitching going on and there's more switching going on ... the nature of pitches is becoming more formalized ... it's not right to make them so formal. Like you can't talk to us, you go into one end of the

cave and come out with creative ideas and based on that we're supposed to pick you (CI5, p1, 19-22)

It appeared as if the extent of the preference towards participating in a more formal and structured process versus a more laid-back approach was largely dependent upon both the personalities of the individuals involved and the organizational culture. Some individuals saw the benefit of a systematic approach because the ability to impose a certain set of rules and guidelines on an otherwise subjective process produced the clarity they wanted. In contrast, other individuals felt because the pitch process does have such a high level of subjectivity involved, formal processes add a level of sterility that is both unnecessary and unbeneficial.

## **PRESENCE OF A CONSULTANT**

According to the respondents, the involvement and presence of a consultant can significantly impact the pitch process. One agency respondent remarked, "We had a consultant which definitely changes the chemistry dynamic" (AI1, p9, 354-355). The data was divided regarding whether or not the involvement of consultants in a pitch process was beneficial as indicated by the responses below:

The reason why most clients hire a search consultant is they just sometimes, frankly, well sometimes it is out of ignorance because they don't know the agency landscape very well and they certainly don't have the time and the internal resources required to devote to a full-blown search because it is very time consuming. I can educate clients on how agencies work and what the business model is and so forth (CI4, p2, 47-51)

I guess in general, my experience with consultants wasn't great but it probably wasn't with the right consultant who was going to make a difference in my life (CLI6, p1, 35-36)

...there are consultants that are really great that make the process easier and pleasant for everybody and then there are some consultants who are so prejudiced against one agency that they really don't allow a level playing field and they can be very very brutal. That doesn't solve the client's needs either because that consultant is damaging the competition. When they don't use a consultant ... it depends ... if the company has been sly about new business and they've done it before and they have somebody in charge who has experience, then it's OKAY, but if it is somebody who is in charge that has never done it before, you spin a lot of wheels. That's the one good thing about a consultant is there is a minimum amount of wheel spinning. If the client wants something stupid done, the consultant can usually talk 'em out of it. If there's no consultant there, then no agency is going to object because you don't want to be the only agency to object (AI2, p6, 231-240)

Some clients use search consultants when they want to select a new agency. In most cases, the clients who choose to use a consultant are usually larger organizations; however, there are several large organizations that opt to not use consultants. Large organizations seem to have one of two views when it comes to using a consultant. On the one hand, client organizations hire consultants to assist with managing the logistics of the pitch process as it can be extremely time consuming, but on the other hand, many clients feel as if an outsider could not possibly understand their business more than internal staff and therefore feel the expense of a consultant is unnecessary.

No, we don't work with consultants. I think as a company, the last time we worked with a consultant was probably fifteen years ago. One of the things for us was we know our business, you don't have the time to teach someone else about our business in order for them to go out and in a way the consultant semi-pitches our business so what ended up happening is, my group, my team took on and added the responsibility from an RFP point of view because we had done some with vendors and said you know what, we can move this to the agency and now we've done that we really don't look to go out (CLI7, p1, 32-37)

Based on this study, the dynamics of the pitch process were drastically different depending on whether or not a consultant was present. It stands to reason that in most

cases, when a consultant is involved in the pitch process, the amount of contact between the client and the agency is decreased. When a consultant is present, it affects not only the amount of information that is exchanged, but also the client-agency dynamic. In addition to the general thoughts regarding the presence of a consultant in the pitch process, there data revealed two dominant themes: *Involvement Style* and *Level Playing Field*.

### ***Involvement Style***

Involvement style addressed the way in which consultants take part in the pitch process and the particular role they play. As one agency respondent commented, “Every consultant that we worked with has a different process and allows different contact points” (AI13, p2, 53-54).

Sometimes consultants are hired to be mechanics, they just contact the agencies, set it all up, keep everything on an even keel and so on. Sometimes they’re hired truly for their opinions as to what agencies they should consider although most clients have a point of view as to which agencies they want to consider, at least to some extent. Very few clients say “you tell me what to do and I’ll do it” (CI5, p1, 33-36)

I wanted the search consultant to help me narrow down who I should talk to. I needed them to help me with the process, help me get all the right documents, the timeline, how long do I need to do all these things, how long do I need to give them? You know contact the right people, set up the meetings. I used them more as consultants and advisors to make it happen and then to make the initial introductions and then also to even just provide some point of view...but when it comes to my own personal interactions with them, I like that to be me, not as seen through their lens. Because at the end of the day, the consultant is done when we choose and so I like to get going right away with talking to these people. These are my conversations and I use her as piece of information that I use to help me form my own decisions but not as a substitute for my own personal interaction (CLI6, p6-7, 242-252)

It's a bit of an art, because the reality is, we don't tell them what they should do, we facilitate. I mean different search consultants have different philosophies on this but we disappear and we really feel that the client and the agency need to own their relationship plus the other thing is the intangible human element and people hire people (CI1, p3, 89-92)

In addition, for agencies, it is in their best interest to try to maintain close relationships with the consultants. "Yeh, I think the agencies work hard to keep a dialogue with the search consultants, of course they should, it makes perfect sense" (CI4, p1, 61-62).

As an agency, you're then pitching yourself to the consultant. You need to make sure they know what you're up to, the current work that you're doing, that you're an agency is evolving in this fast-paced, changing media world, and that you're creatively evolving and all that stuff and so they become your clients basically (AI5, p4, 146-149)

I know that if we get dropped out of something at the RFP stage, we would want to know why. We usually find out why. Sometimes its because we're too big or they're not looking for a big agency or I don't know, there is always some reason or something that we can't do anything about. If your working with a good consultant and the consultant doesn't have it in for you, like some consultants have a prejudice against certain agencies. If you are working with a consultant and that consultant is not against you, you can get some pretty good feedback. In fact, the new business people at the agency really try to maintain a good relationship with the consultant so they can get honest feedback on what they did right and more importantly, what they did wrong. You're always learning and hopefully you don't make the same mistakes twice (AI2, p4, 139-147)

Agencies that have good relationships with consultants stand a greater chance of being included in a particular pitch than those agencies with which the consultant has had a negative experience. Agency respondents express their thoughts regarding how the involvement style of consultants can affect the amount of information that is available to the agency.



He was like, “ask me anything you want and I will tell you if I can. If not, I will just let you know that’s not something the client is comfortable with me talking about.” He gave what was probably as effective search consultant as I’ve ever seen only because he kept people from worrying about the details. He was like, because the client wants a big picture thought I’m going to be quite clear with you. There are going to be 5 agencies attending, 3 will make the Finals and 1 will work out on top and it will be because they didn’t explain the how to place the media, they explained what will be placed in the media and why it will work. And that’s one of the best RFPs I’ve ever seen because it’s like precision ... (AI7, p9-10, 363-370)

A really good consultant does a great job of fairly and equitably but in a pretty significant manner, giving all of the agencies a lot of access to the whole sort of breadth and depth of people across the client and usually it’s the client is saying that. The client says to the pitch consultant, “I want to work with you and I don’t want to have anyone bothering me or spending much time talking to any of these agencies about anything.” If they say that, then that’s how it will go. If the client says, “Yeh, I want this to be collaborative and I’ve got a lot of time to invest in it because I think it’s a really important decision,” and you know, that’s the nature of engagement (AI8, p2, 48-54)

Consultants offer a way for an organization to participate in a pitch process without having to carry the whole burden. Consultants vary in style from those heavily involved in every meeting to those who prefer to stay in the background. Small companies seldom use consultants because of the expense. There are several search consultants available to clients and the irony is that even though search consultants are hired to assist clients in finding the right agency, clients also need to make careful selections when it involves selecting a consultant. Some consultants are more involved than others and so these types of expectations should be clearly defined before an agency selects the consultant who will lead the Pitch.

### ***Level Playing Field***

Despite the different involvement styles, most respondents agreed that providing a “level playing field” is one of the main purposes of a consultant. This refers to consultant’s role in making sure all agencies are competing on an equal level. “One of the goals is to maintain the level playing field. There’s this fine line though between rewarding initiative that’s going to be differentiated as part of their process and making it even. So, it’s not about making it even as much as it is making it fair” (CI1, p8, 323-325).

In most cases to ensure a level playing field, consultants set forth rules of engagements that must be followed by all agencies participating in a particular pitch process. “That’s one of the main objectives. It is so disrespectful and so unfair for one agency to be given preferential treatment. If you have a meal with one agency, you should have a meal with all agencies” (CI3, p3, 85-86). “Agencies try to color inside the lines during the pitch process. If you think you are on a level playing field with your competition, then breaking the rules is a risk” (CI5, p10-11, 383-398).

You have to play by the rules if the client has gotten a consultant into the process. You have to play by the rules the consultant has worked out with the client. It doesn’t pay to break those rules. You end up showing arrogance when you do (AI3, p3, 107-109)

They usually spell it out for you. Like a serious purchasing or procurement manager will be very prepared with original documentation that says: this is considered a violation of terms, do not talk to the press, do not try to contact an executive without us, do not come onto our premises, you will be subject to disqualification (AI7, p9, 357-360)

This proved to be both a blessing and a curse to respondents. For clients and consultants, providing a level playing field makes the most sense because it allows for all

agencies to be evaluated as equally as possible. Providing strict rules of engagement and insisting the same process be followed by all potential agencies helps to eliminate the possibility of bias. “You’re always given rules of engagement by a consultant or even by a client because they have to sleep at night knowing that they have a level playing field. They can’t knowingly unlevel the playing field and play favorites to one over another with content or time” (AI13, p3, 85-87).

They [advertising agencies] are not to be calling, even if they know people on the brand who was in the company, they are not to be calling them and we have all of them sign obviously, confidentiality agreements, so not only are they to keep any information we give them about our brands confidential, but the Pitch itself is confidential. They should not be talking to colleagues within their own industry that they’re pitching [client name] business so all of that is confidential and for us, it’s a highly conservative company, there are no press releases (CLI2, p3, 78-83)

I have considerable amount of big company experience and the one thing that is consistent is that when it comes to the pitch process, we don’t want the agencies talking to the client unless we have sort of an open forum or basically that we facilitate that process with some sort of sourcing professional (CLI4, p3-4, 121-124)

They did have rules, not just how often they could contact but there was only a specific person they could contact and we gave them, for the case-study, lots and lots and lots of information that should have been enough for them to work from them. In this whole one, we did end up with a creative brief part of it so they had these 14 days to work on it and I think there was a check point maybe 6 or 7 days in on the creative brief and they had that checkpoint with the then director of advertising and then they went on from there, so it was really super structured. (CLI7, p7, 234-239)

However, for some agencies, they felt that they played by the rules as they were instructed but their competition did not and so even though it was supposed to be a level playing field, in actual fact, it was not level at all. “We had a really bad experience last year with consultants on some of the work we did and that’s where we felt the playing

field wasn't as level as it could be" (AI12, p3, 99-100). As one consultant remarked, "I have a strong philosophy and it was true when I was on the agency side and it is still true as I am on the consultant side in that, follow the rules but cheat in every way possible" (CI6, p4, 157-158)

Pitches are beauty contests so I don't think that, even though they are saying it's level, it's not level. I mean conversations happen on the down low and consultants depending on, because it's a very small number of consultants in the US and depending on their relationship, how many times you've pitched with them before because quite honestly, it's in their better interest to always bring the agencies in that impress clients to the table and if you are one of those agencies who constantly win and constantly impress then of course it's natural for that relationship to be a little more bias than it would be with a new agency (AI6, p2, 61-67)

You know the consultants would tell us, "Do not bring creative into the room. The client doesn't want to see it. Don't do spec creative" period, end of subject. Well, then we find out after the Pitch that the agency, for example, that won, went in with creative. So you're sitting there and you're going, "wait a minute. We're the nice guys following the rules, maybe we shouldn't be (AI3, p11, 396-400)

The notion of a level playing field seems to make sense to many clients, consultants, and agencies because it helps to add a level of objectivity to an otherwise subjective process. However, several respondents feel that no matter how much the creation of a level playing field is attempted, it is almost impossible to truly execute. In addition, some agencies commented how a level playing field is not always advantageous because it leaves less room for gaining a competitive advantage.

I think the way the consultants will lead a pitch process here is through a mechanism of trying to create the flattest playing field possible. The only way they can do that is by creating quite a strong framework for how you operate your pitch like how much time you have per meeting, what you can ask, what you can't ask, what you need to talk about, what the brief is in really high detail. It creates a flat playing field for agencies against one another, but the truth is we don't want a flat playing field. We want to

create unfair advantage because it is a competition and that is what you want to win it (AI14, p1, 18-25)

As supported by the various respondents, general findings regarding the pitch process could be broken down into ENVIRONMENTAL CLIMATE, LEVEL OF FORMALITY, and PRESENCE OF A CONSULTANT and included the themes: *time sensitivity, technical capability, process driven, going with the flow, involvement style, and level playing field*. The table on the following page provides a summary of these categories, themes, and repeating ideas.

**Table 3 – General Findings**

<b>I. ENVIRONMENTAL CLIMATE</b>	
<b>A. Time Sensitivity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “The primary thing right now is the speed of business” (CI1, p2, 62).</li> <li>2. “it’s so fast, the process is really not as enjoyable for me, quite honestly or for the agency” (CI4, p5, 198).</li> <li>3. “Kind of what you would do in a normal year’s worth of work for a regular piece of business you do in 6 weeks to 2 months for a pitch” (AI1, p4, 158-159).</li> </ol>
<b>B. Technical Capability</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “...I think oftentimes they are out searching for marketing partners who can take them by the hand and lead them into this brave new world” (CI4, p1, 15-18).</li> <li>2. “... it’s really because of technology, if there is one single thing you could point your finger to, it’s really that because it’s changed everything. (CI1, p3, 105-106).</li> <li>3. “There is so much access to agency information that in the old days was really not available” (CI1, p1, 35).</li> </ol>
<b>II. LEVEL OF FORMALITY</b>	
<b>A. Process-Driven</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “We were very structured about who they could talk to and who they couldn’t talk to. I mean it was super super super super super structured” (CI7, p1, 29-30).</li> <li>2. “It went out with a very specific time frame to it so every agency had exactly 14 days” (CI7, p1, 23-25).</li> <li>3. “You have to have a process, there has to be a mechanism to do this and do it well” (CI1, p2, 39-40).</li> </ol>
<b>B. Going with the Flow</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “It was very informal, it didn’t have a set agenda ...” (CI5, p8, 277).</li> <li>2. “I don’t want to say we’re a chameleon and we’ll just do what the client is, we want to be ourselves” (AI3, p3, 108-109).</li> <li>3. “...the nature of pitches is becoming more formalized ... it’s not right to make them so formal” (CI5, p1, 19-20)</li> </ol>
<b>III. PRESENCE OF CONSULTANT</b>	
<b>A. Involvement Style</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “... consultants are hired to be mechanics, they just contact the agencies, set it all up, keep everything on an even keel and so on” (CI5, p33-34).</li> <li>2. “It’s a bit of an art, because the reality is, we don’t tell them what they should do, we facilitate.” (CI1, p3, 89-92).</li> <li>3. “They are getting a window into both the agency businesses and the client businesses in a way that nobody else does” (AI1, p2, 52).</li> </ol>
<b>B. Level Playing Field</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “...we don’t want the agencies talking to the client unless we have sort of an open forum or basically that we facilitate that process” (CI4, p3-4, 123-124).</li> <li>2. “follow the rules but cheat in every way possible” (CI6, p4, 158).</li> <li>3. “We’re the nice guys following the rules, maybe we shouldn’t be” (AI3, p11, 399-400).</li> </ol>

## 5.4 Answering Research Questions

As was evident from the previous section, even though clients, agencies, and consultants all have different roles in the pitch process and may have different experiences, the interviews revealed enough commonalities to identify categories, key themes, and repeating ideas. The following section reports and discusses the findings as they related to the research questions.

### *5.4a The Development and Experience of Attraction*

The first question dealt with the way in which attraction was developed and experienced during all phases of the pitch process. The respondents agreed that attraction was a vital component in the pitch process. As one consultant stated, “It is ... it’s all about attraction. Just like dating with men and women and you have all of those dynamics” (CI5, p4, 117-118). Many respondents continued to comment on the dating analogy and its applicability when thinking of the pitch process. “To keep going with the dating analogy; I really don’t think clients care about us; they just care about what we can do for them specifically” (AI3, p3, 118-119).

As with personal relationships, the level of attraction can change over the course of the relationship. During the interviews, the researcher identified three main levels of attraction: initial, continued, and confirmed. *Initial attraction* can be defined as the various characteristics and components that assist agencies, consultants, and clients when first identifying and selecting potential matches. *Continued attraction* is the way in which initial attraction is maintained through the various interactions and connection points between clients and agencies. Initial attraction may or may not be supported as

both parties discover more about one another. **Confirmed attraction** is the way in which both parties have gone through the entire pitch process and still believe the relationship is a good fit.

The two categories relating to attraction that emerged were RATIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION and EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION. As one agency respondent stated, “You gotta break it down because there’s rational reasons and emotional reasons and rational reasons tend to be you know, they have experience, they’ve done this before, I trust them” (AI13, p9, 333-334).

There’s some rational and there’s say, I’ll say emotional things. On the rational side, there are such things in our space such as conflicts so for example, if we work with [brand name omitted], we couldn’t work with a [competing brand name omitted] so there’s some of that. Economics, I don’t say we have to do it for a minimum of 5 million dollars or anything it’s based on can it be a strong reputable account, and can it be profitable? If we take on something that might pay us only a million dollars a year which is cheap by this agency, and it could be brand strategy so that could be great but for a million dollars a year the client wants everything advertising, media, public relations, that’s something we just wouldn’t be able to do well. So there’s the economics. Three is also sector. Some sectors I think we aspire to be in more than others. We won’t pitch tobacco and we won’t pitch government accounts, for reasons (AI3, p1, 16-24)

## **RATIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION**

Rationally-driven attraction is based on factors that make sense and can be logically supported. As the respondent indicated above, logistical factors such as competing clients, economics, and sector are all aspects that can play a role in rational attraction. The rationally driven themes identified were: *Capabilities and Compensation* and *Size and Scope*.



### ***Capabilities and Compensation***

Capabilities and compensation are two factors that need to be rationally assessed by both clients and agencies. “We already have a good idea as a company what our scope is and what our desired deliverables are so we’re focusing on if that agency and their capabilities are up to par with us” (CLI7, p2, 51-53). Many respondents commented how the key factors determining whether or not a particular company would be perceived as an attractive choice had everything to do with talents and competencies and very little to do with personality. “I don’t want anyone who I don’t know trying to be my friend. I think it’s important that there is a respectful distance. Don’t call me for things I don’t need to know, you know just to make small talk” (CLI2, p2, 67-69). One of the best articulations of this theme came from the client below.

When you hire a plumber, do you hire him for his personality or his plumbing skills? I mean, certainly you hope to not see your plumber very often. So let’s now talk about a home decorator, you probably are looking not only for competency but you’re looking for somebody you feel gets you, understands you, they can help you to figure out how to express yourself so it’s not like shopping for a plumber necessarily ... but you’re first looking for competency (CLI3, p8, 268,270-273)

you don’t shop for personality because when you go through the RFP process, the people they will send to you to make the presentations and just sort of discuss with are their business development people and unless you demand that the people who are going to work on your business show up, you won’t get them. So you could pick this agency with these people that you really love and then never see those people again (CLI3, p8, 277-281)

This viewpoint supports why respondents may simply focus more on capabilities in the early stages of the pitch process and remove the people factor from the equation. For instance, when a client is looking for an agency, there are some basic capabilities it would want and expect from an advertising agency. Because each client is different, an agency should make every effort to find out what is perceived as an attractive capability

by a particular client. Usually the RFP will contain specific questions relating to key capabilities that are important to the client and are used as a way to narrow down the list of potential agencies.

A lot of consultants believe in doing what's dubbed as an RFP process, it's more of an RFI, request for information how big are you? What's your client list? What's your experience? What are your capabilities? It's kind of getting an assessment (AI3, p2, 55-59)

We do use RFPs, we use RFIs, where we send things out to get information to see whether or not they appear to have the right competencies and to understand who their clients are both in an effort to see whether or not they've done the kinds of things that we'd like to have done as well as, you wanna see whether they have any of your competitors (CLI3, p6, 210-213)

In addition, just as the client uses the RFPs to help decide what agencies should move forward to the next round, the agencies need to also review the RFPs to see assess which ones make sense for the agency to submit and which ones are better left alone.

Over time, we did get better about screening through the RFPs and just saying, the ones we were wondering "OK, where's the connection, why us?" I'd get on the phone and have a conversation. Sometimes it was like, "OK, this makes sense" other times I was like, "You know what? I don't think this is probably going to work for us" (AI5, p9, 337-340)

Clients differ in the particular capabilities that are deemed important. For instance, some clients place great importance on an agency's client roster and past experience because they may feel as if previous success may indicate future success. In addition, understanding the type of work in which an agency has been previously involved can assist the client in determining the feasibility of a relationship.

So the client list for me, is all-telling and then I like to meet the people and I like to spend some time talking to them a) about their processes and their approaches, b) about their work, you know what have you done? What did you do? How did you think about it? and c) just spending time with

them talking about issues, industry issues or their perspectives on how certain things are evolving and just spending time talking with people and hearing how they think so I can get a sense of what they've done because that is predictive of what they'll do and I can get some perspective about how deep their capabilities are (CLI3, p8-9, 299-305)

I look at are they stable? Who are their clients? Do I like what I see that they're doing for those clients? Do I witness that they have experience in the type of marketing that I'm going to do that enables me to know that they're not just trying to branch out? (CLI3, p8, 293-296)

Clients are not the only ones who are interested in finding out about previous experience. Agencies also like to look at a client's past experience with other agencies so they can assess the kind of work the client has produced previously. Understanding the style preferences of the prospective client can also help the agency decide whether or not working with the client would be a good fit for the agency.

We also look at the track record of the client, have they gone through a lot of agencies? Have they produced work that we have a lot of respect for? Do they invest enough on marketing to succeed? If we see that a client spends only 2% of their revenue on marketing it's like they don't believe in marketing, a lot of people, you look at the industry like the high-tech industry, technology industry, software, they don't tend to overly believe in marketing, very engineering-based cultures. Going back can it make the agency better? Will they allow us to do good work? Is it profitable? (AI3, p1, 31-37)

Sometimes, clients may not be exactly sure what they need which can be extremely challenging for both a consultant and an agency. For the consultant it can make the search process even more difficult because the client's parameters may not be clear. For the agency, it can be difficult to create good work for a client who is unsure about the actual needs of its organization.

The clients don't really know what they need. I would say like 80% of our business comes from clients coming to us saying "My webpage sucks. I

want a new webpage” and we go “OK”, take a look at their webpage, “Yeh, actually it’s not your webpage that sucks, it is your whole brand. You obviously don’t really know who you are talking to, your brand doesn’t really exist, and you are mixing up your mission statement with your positioning and your product proposition with your brand proposition. None of this stuff is speaking to each other and it is completely missing and so it is going to be impossible for your webpage to do any good whatsoever because none of this stuff is actually working together (AI15, p7, 260-267)

Despite the fact that many clients may not know exactly what they need as a company; several clients are good at identifying areas where they do and do not place value. For instance, some clients discussed the value placed on creative awards. One client remarked, “We’ll tell agencies, it’s a turnoff for us if you come in and tell us about your awards ... we don’t care” (CLI7, p6, 210-211). Whereas other clients shared how they value awards, “We do look at awards. Who has won awards?” (CLI2, p4, 128)

I watch to see who’s winning what award shows because I was a big person that said “You know what, I don’t care about awards from the agency, I just care about the results” and I still care about a result much more than I care about an award, but what I have learned is there is a correlation between awards and results. And there is a study that was done on this, if you look at the agencies that have won awards for something for whatever brand or client, if you track the same year that work came out for which they won the award and the results of the brand or the service or whatever they were marketing, there is a correlation about the success of the brand and so awards actually are more than just a nice feather in the hat. They actually do correlate to a real business result (CLI6, p9, 340-349)

The relationship between capabilities and compensation is a rational consideration. For instance, as the respondents indicated, some clients value creative awards and view them as a particular capability of the agency and some clients do not value them at all. Because there are different perceptions of value, compensation can be

an extremely difficult topic. Every client has a particular budget and a certain amount of money it is willing to pay to receive services from an agency.

We don't want an agency that's gonna come in and is all about nickel and dime and creating work that is creative to win awards ... it's great if it does, but the objective should be grounded in business needs (CLI8, p.6, 205-209)

Now, we oftentimes say, "we want your best people on our business" and you know, OK, yeh, we want the best people on our business but we want the right people on our business is the truth of the matter, we're not always willing to pay for their best (CLI3. P6, 195-198)

On the other side, every agency has a fee for the services provided and in many cases has to decide whether or not participating in the Pitch is worth the financial investment. The extent that the compensation is viewed as fair is directly associated with the value placed on the capabilities offered.

I've walked away from pitches because I didn't think we'd win and I didn't think it was worth the investment. Every pitch costs money. I have, on one occasion, did a pitch where I knew we weren't going to win and I knew the consultant needed me to be in the Pitch and the consultant knew I was doing it as a favor (CI2, p12, 453-456)

The agency financial compensation model is as ridiculous a compensation model as you're gonna find. It was ridiculous when it was commission but it was ridiculous and hugely profitable for the agencies now that it's moved much more to a labor-based fee, it's ridiculous the other way round because all the client pays you for is what you think in advance you're gonna do and then they get upset because you're not doing anything proactive for which they're not paying you (CI2, p11, 415-420)

A client would invite an agency to compete for an account and they'd say, "Our budget is fifty-million dollars," okay, and you would get to the end and they'd say, "Congratulations, you've won", and they would never utter a word about what your compensation was going to be. So we'd have in mind, we should be getting 5X and they'd have in mind X and so that was a really very disrespectful and wrong practice. So when we started our firm, we insist with our clients that we have to be respectful to

the agencies and give them a sense of what the economic reward will be and not just like, “You’ve won this cool account” (CI3, p1, 8-14)

For example, one agency may be a great deal more expensive than another agency; however, if the client perceives the more expensive agency as having more capabilities, the client may be willing to spend the extra money. In addition, a particular client may have a small advertising budget but if the agency views the brand as an attractive choice and one that would add value to the client roster, it may be more willing to make less money just to have the opportunity to be aligned with a particular brand.

We have the agency send us back a staffing and fee proposal based on the scope of work and we have them agree or redline the contract so that any provisions that would be problematic we have a month to sort out so and we also get the fee proposals in so that if two of them come in at \$100 dollars and one comes in at \$300, we’re like, “What are you assuming?” so we have a chance to pre-negotiate so that the client doesn’t feel they have to make a selection on the finalist agency based on the cheapest one (CI3, p2, 59-64)

We have a really desirable brand. Agencies want us on their roster. It’s really interesting because it’s almost like we don’t have to have the largest budget in the agency but there’s always the opportunity from the agency point of view to grow the business because you start with a brand but we have a whole company of brands so they will pretty much work with us to accommodate what is required and desired (CLI2, p4, 138-143)

Capabilities and compensation both play a large role in rational attraction for clients, agencies, and consultants because in most cases, if the capabilities provided do not match up with the capabilities desired, it is highly unlikely the relationship will have the chance to develop past the RFI/RFP stages. Clients and agencies need to be clear regarding both the capabilities they require from one another and the way in which those capabilities will be compensated. In addition, if a consultant is involved in a particular pitch process, he or she needs to also know both the client’s and the agency’s capability

requirements as well as how they feel regarding compensation so that he or she can identify the best possible matches.

### *Size and Scope*

Two inter-related logistical factors that must be considered when participating in a pitch process are size and scope. These two factors can impact how attractive a client is to an agency and how attractive an agency is to a client. For instance, if a particular client has an account up for review that requires a great deal of work; perhaps a fully integrated campaign, it needs an agency with enough staff that it can handle business. “We tend to hire agencies where we are going to be important to them as a client but not so much they don’t have diversity that if we pulled our stuff, they’d go under” (CLI1, p8, 293-294). Likewise, if a client has a smaller budget and perhaps only wants to complete a small project, it may not make sense to consider a larger agency to complete the work.

The scope refers to both the geographic and project boundaries. For example, if a particular client has a global brand and is working on an international rebranding effort, it would make more sense to hire an agency that has experience in the global marketplace as opposed to a small locally-owned advertising agency. On the other side, an agency may look at the scope of services the client is seeking and determine whether it is feasible for the agency to pursue or not.

If I’m a marketer that’s got a 20 million dollar budget and I see an agency, a slew of agencies and one might have let’s see 100 million plus, I might be lost in that or I might see another agency that their biggest account is 20 million and everything else is under 10 million do they have the scale to really focus on me? (AI3, p2, 59-62)

The geography and size thing are the two biggest issues. Small agencies are always complaining how nobody gives them a shot, but you know

what, if you're a client and you're looking at a company with only five people in it, there is a legitimate concern that they may not be here six months from now ... for a million different reasons and so as a client, you don't want to have hired an agency that disappears on you. You want some volume there and so 50 or a 100 people at an agency, once you get to that size, the size issue really goes away unless you are a big global agency and then 100 people really isn't sufficient. And then geographic, it depends on where you're at and how much you want to travel and what that's like (CI6, p2, 72-79)

Results from the interviews indicated that the pitch process was much more formalized and complex when dealing with large agencies and large accounts in comparison to pitch processes involving smaller agencies and smaller accounts. Part of the reason for this is that larger companies tend to have a bigger budget dedicated to marketing and therefore are financially able to commit more resources than a smaller company.

I think in a lot of ways, a lot of clients have been burned by the giant agencies who if they don't have the \$200 million/year budget, they are put on the back burner because they are not the big paycheck ... There are definitely advantages from a client perspective of going with a smaller shop that can give you unique attention. Our agency talks about the partners, who own the agency, who have the experience, they touch every piece of business. At bigger places, just because the size of the accounts, that can't happen (AI1, p8, 304-306, 309-312)

We are a global company so we look for global capabilities because we have a global strategy with our agencies and we're consolidated across the globe so each of our affiliates doesn't have an agency of their own because we work on a global basis. We look for experience in dealing with alliances because our company is a fully-integrated network and so we do a lot of work with alliances (CLI1, p3, 76-80)

Individuals working in a small agency paint a very different picture of the way in which accounts are won. In many cases, smaller agencies were less likely to work with a



consultant and did not participate in the multi-phase formal pitch process that most large agencies go through. Again, part of that is because smaller agencies may or may not be able to handle the large requirements of bigger companies and therefore may not be included in as many large-scale pitch processes.

Any of the bigger accounts, always went to a consultant. The smaller ones, and this is again generally speaking, the smaller ones would not bother with a consultant. They would have in mind three agencies they want to talk to, pick up the phone and say, “hey are you guys interested?”(AI5, p4, 140-142)

Depending on the size, a lot of the agencies have teams that are entirely dedicated to new business. Our agency isn’t big enough to support a team like that so we end up having to pull people from day to day accounts and then pitching then becomes like your second job (AI1, p4, 161-164)

Another factor that was related to both size and scope and mentioned by several of the respondents dealt with the way in which the client organizations and the advertising agencies were structured. For instance, many agencies operate under a holding company. As discussed earlier, a holding company acts as an umbrella of various agencies and so a particular agency’s perceived size and scope may be dependent on its involvement in a holding company. Refer to appendices A-D for more detailed information regarding the breakdown of the top four holding companies.

There are usually specific expectations required of an agency that is part of a holding company and that can play a role in the way pitching is approached. “Agencies, especially if they’re owned by holding companies, have to constantly increase the revenue stream” (CI2, p11, 427-428). A consultant, who had previously worked on the agency side, shares the pressures of being a part of a holding company.

When you're running an agency, you're responsible for the jobs of everybody who works there and it's a very thin margin business, it's a very volatile business. You have an annual contract with a clients is a laughable a concept; the only thing more laughable is the guarantee contracts of NFL football players, the team can cancel at any point in time so it's a real challenge for agencies. There are a few that have strong integrity in that regard, usually run by the founders who are not chasing the money because they're not part of a holding company. Boy I gotta tell you, if you're part of WPP and you have a chance to pitch a piece of business that you have a problem with, you go tell Martin Sorrell that you're going to walk away from the potential to make money, what you're telling him is you don't want to make money yourself, personally (CI2, p11-12, 432-444)

A client also shares views regarding how an agency's connection to a holding company can affect how a pitch is approached and viewed. "Do a little bit research on what is the value added by a holding company and you will discover, there is none" (CLI3, p3, 77-78).

I don't know people at the holding company in fact, I couldn't sit here in confidence and pick off all my agencies and tell you who their holding companies are ... that's just not a, they don't provide value and they're not involved in any of your business transactions, but I do know that if I go to agency A and I say, "hey we're looking for capability in this area" they will find someone under the holding company because they know that financially benefits them. It means that I need to be aware that any agency I work with is motivated to have me give business to other members of their holding company so when an agency says, "well, here let me help you, we know people, we'll manage that" they're looking for a way to keep it in the holding company and there's obviously a financial inducement for them to do that, that just needs to be understood (CLI3, p3, 81-89)

As stated previously, compensation is often assessed by the value that is placed on particular capabilities. The same can be said for size and scope, the extent that one or both of these factors is viewed as valuable plays a role in rationally-driven attraction. If a client determines it only wants to work with an agency located in a particular location

then all agencies not in that desired location will not be viewed as an attractive option. Likewise, if an agency knows it does not have the resources to handle a full-scale international account, a client requesting that level of service will also not be viewed as an attractive partner. In order for consultants to conduct an effective search process, it is important for them to know the extent that the clients and agencies they work with place value and importance on these factors. Unlike the emotionally-driven factors that will be discussed below, rationally-driven factors can be assessed earlier on in the pitch process.

### **EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION**

Emotionally-driven attraction may or may not take into account rational factors. For instance, rational factors may also be considered but unlike rationally-driven attraction, emotionally-driven attraction is not supported with simple facts and figures. Emotionally-driven attraction may start with something as simple as an agency wanting to represent a client just because they have a “cool factor” and happen to be extremely popular in the marketplace; not taking into consideration whether the particular product would be a logical fit for the agency or if the agency would even be able to support the scope of work.

Emotionally-driven attraction usually involves at least some sort of contact, phone call or meeting, to develop and so is not as quickly assessed as rationally-driven attraction. In addition, unlike rationally-driven attraction, this type of attraction is largely focused on the human factor and the quality of the interaction between the various people involved. The data revealed two themes: *People Matter* and *Connection Points*.

## *People Matter*

This theme embraces the human element of the pitch process. “It acknowledges that the success of a pitch process is largely determined by the people involved. “The game is not played on paper, it comes down to people” (AI3, p10, 389). “It’s a little like the theater, we remember the actors, not their lines. You remember the people, that’s what you remember” (CI5, p6, 227-229).

All that a client really wants in a new business pitch is to fall in love with somebody. They want to feel that they have an emotional connection with this new partner. They don’t know these people, they know you only by reputation and your reputation varies from client to client (AI2, p1, 34-35)

We try to be as unpolished and human as possible. The initial meeting is more like having dinner at the dining room not the living room, think of it that way. So you try to humanize it as much as possible. You want to come across as polished consultants that know their stuff pretty well. I also have to say that because so much depends on the personality of the agency and of the client (AI5, p3, 101-104)

Unfortunately, when agencies get assignments, they tend to go down into the cave and they don’t come out until the day of the Pitch and they don’t realize that human contact is 10 times more important than the content they’re going to present (CI5, p6, 222-225)

The *People Matter* theme takes the stance that no matter how good the creative may be or how successful the client is, the people behind the work and behind the brand have to be considered. This theme gets to the heart of what relationships are all about and why the connection between individuals across constituencies adds value to the pitch process.

How you say things is more important than what you’re saying first hour and that’s the difference between new business and working with an existing client, and it’s different and you gotta respect that it’s different. And creative directors have a real hard time with that. They believe that it’s all about the idea, if I have the right idea, we’ll win and of course if you don’t win, it’s because the client was an asshole and didn’t know a good idea if they saw one, but it’s not about the idea. I could take a

mediocre idea, a sub-mediocre idea into a room with the right set, the right cast of people, well-prepared and I'd win 60 percent plus of the time. I could take the best campaign idea you've ever saw in your life, Apple's Think Different campaign, into the room with the wrong set of people, poorly prepared and not only wouldn't win, I couldn't even get arrested because, it's all about the people (CI5, p10, 356-365)

At the end of the day, they're hiring people not an agency. If they don't like the people, even if you had the best idea, you're not going to win because agencies may not have had the best content but the client was in sync with them (AI13, p2, 68-70)

As indicated by the responses below, a particular client may think an agency has all of the right capabilities on paper but if the people do not mesh well, the overall success of the pitch process may be threatened. This theme supports the notion that the way in which people from various constituencies "click" has the potential to make or break the advancement of the pitch process.

The agency turned out to be a very good fit and when we met the account rep, the first one, we didn't like him at all. We were clear with them we didn't like him ... He was all about schmoozing and keeping the client happy and we didn't feel like he was doing any work and digging his heels into it. He was all about kind of hand-holding and making sure we were happy and we didn't feel that was a good use of agency resources and so when they brought in another person, she was right on the spot (CLI5, p9, 310-313)

We basically, at that meeting, the real objective, I mean we can say what it is, we try to say it's more about the business but it really is about that meeting people face-to-face and getting to see who our account team will be. We usually specify how many account people we want. We want them, whoever will be assigned will be at that meeting sort of thing. And really it's to get a feel for the culture and who they are and can we work with these people. So we might give them an assignment and of course the creative is important but if the creative was awesome and their presentation was awful or their people didn't click with our people, they're not going to win the business (CLI4, p4, 154-161)

The people who are involved in the pitch process are extremely important as they are responsible for the way in which the two organizations connect. For instance, in the example above, the same client that didn't like the first account representative from the agency ended up loving the representative's replacement. "She just had a way of being able to keep it all together and when she left, we weren't sure if we were going to keep the business, that's how strong we felt about it" (CLI5, p9, 329-330).

[The] boss sent a letter to the [agency] partners saying, this is how we feel about this and he actually accused them of not trying to keep her and said, "I wish you would have told us so we could have worked on this together so we could work to keep her." I think everyone was surprised to hear how strongly we felt about this and yet I think if you had asked us if an account person did really matter, we would have said no (CLI5, p9, 343-347)

As the example above illustrates, the value of the people involved in the pitch process does not end when the Pitch is over. It is for this reason that most clients feel strongly that the team they meet during the pitch process is going to be the actual team that will work on the business should it be awarded.

When I go into the negotiations it's like, look, okay you know you've got these people, I'm contracting for these people, so that's nice that you came to the pitch process and you brought your best players but these are the people we're now relying on (CLI1, p5, 175-177)

We want to meet the people, we want to talk to them further about their experience, we want to see examples of historical work by that account team because the agency is only as good as the account team that you hire and so that's an important thing because lots of agencies will bring in their work that's done by people who aren't available to you (CLI1, p4, 126-129)

They were putting people in the room who were great but I didn't get the sense necessarily that they were the ones who were going to do the work and so it's great for the pitch process but you end up wondering like how much time are you or effort are you going to be devoting to our business

really on a day-to-day basis? If you're going to push it down to somebody else, bring those people in the room because those are the people I need to be talking to now not you (CLI6, p4, 128-133)

Agencies were a little divided when it came to making the decision of who to put in the room during a pitch. Many agencies acknowledged that clients wanted to see and meet the people who were actually going to be working on the business.

When we orchestrated the team to do the Pitch that was the team that if we won would work on it. We were adamant about it because that was one thing that clients hated and that was one thing that we started seeing on every RFP that came in and that was, and they would literally say on the RFP, "Do not put in front of us your leadership team, put in front of us the people who are going to work on the business." And some consultants would say to us, "Do yourself a favor don't put your President in the room" some would be that literal, not all, and so we'd always put together the team that would actually work on the business and if we won, obviously we knew that team had the bandwidth. It was sometimes tough putting the teams together (AI5, p5, 181-188)

The planner who talks to them, is part of the pitch presentation is gonna be the person who's gonna be there, not just in a month but in a year and in two years. That's what we try to do, that's why we don't have one set of people that would do any piece of new business (AI8, p4, 131-134)

Other agencies felt torn between sending in the team that would actually work on the business should the account be awarded and a team that would deliver the best overall presentation. Agencies are aware of the importance of the Pitch and therefore on the one hand, they want to put their best foot forward; on the other hand, they want to accurately represent what they will actually be able to provide.

You know ideally, there are five people here, I'd send in every time. They're not going to be the people working on your business so I can't do that and some people do, some agencies do, some don't and sometimes it bites you in the butt, sometimes it doesn't (AI12, p7, 262-265)

The variable in a pitch is the client. You build a machine for repeatable success and the variable is always the client on the other side but you can't

be reinventing your process or team or dynamics each pitch 'cause then you don't have anything, you don't have a point of view, it's really hard. If you can get the machine running ... I mean you're not going to win them all, we have to recognize that and there's too many variables and somebody's brother-in-law knew some guy and you know there's connections and those things happen. But if you can get the machine humming, and then principally adopting things then you have a much better chance of winning (AI13, p5, 164-171)

We go back and forth do you want the best presenters in the agency pitching? Clients want to meet their team and so there's always at least we struggle with it, I'm assuming other agencies struggle with it, um, so your day-to-day person is going to be a great day-to-day account person but can they sell the CEO? Maybe not, so we always have to have a mix and so it depends on how much you have to accommodate for someone who may not be a great presenter. So in one pitch, the account director may do a lot of heavy lifting and in another pitch we may have to minimize them in the Pitch (AI12, p7, 254-260)

Consultants also weigh in on their thoughts regarding how important is to use the actual people that will be working on the Pitch versus sending in a group that will deliver the best pitch presentation. As with agencies, consultants differed in their viewpoints regarding who should be sent in to deliver the Pitch.

A lot of agencies have pitch teams that are kind of like, you know, SWAT teams and they're great at pitching and then they disappear and the client knows they disappeared and all of a sudden the client's got a whole bunch of juniors or people at the same level who aren't as skilled but the pitch team has moved on to three more pitches. At the end of the day all you're doing is guaranteeing you're going to get fired by that client, there are agencies that work under that philosophy (CI2, p13-14, 510-515)

It's fun to see the team that's gonna work on the Pitch. I say to all my agency clients, only the best actors go on stage, only the right chemistry, the right cast goes on stage. Does that mean that agency might be forced into a bait and switch situation later on ... yeh, possibly, but you know what? It's a problem they're only going to have if they win. So you always use the best actors and not necessarily the department heads and so on. They are also non-pc factors that have to be considered: boys versus girls, diversity, young versus old. I tell my agencies, look if I had a not very attractive fifty-plus unmarried woman as a chief decision-maker, I



ain't puttin' a hot-looking twenty-eight year old like you in high heels in the room (CI5, p3, 97-104)

Within each constituency, there was debate regarding who should actually work on the Pitch. Regardless of whether the viewpoint was to use the best presenters or if it was to use the actual team of people that will be available to work in the account, each view was backed up by the acknowledgement that people do matter; either because of their presence or because of their absence.

### ***Connection Points***

The next component that contributes to emotionally-driven attraction is the extent that the three constituencies connect. *Connection Points* includes two types of connection. The first refers to the amount of actual contact that occurs between the various parties. The second refers to the extent that the constituencies connect on common thoughts and ideas. One of the things that was mentioned by all respondents in some form was the extent that the agencies have access to the clients. The quantity and quality of the interaction between clients and agencies could contribute to the level of emotionally-driven attraction each party had toward one another throughout the pitch process.

Agencies in general felt limiting the contact between them and the clients was not beneficial. "The agency believes, the more times you can meet the people in person, the better" (AI1, p5, 193-194). "In a pitch process, it's typically controlled by a consultant. It's difficult to have access to the clients other than the few times you're allowed during the process. So our interaction, as with all agencies, is pretty limited" (AI13, p2, 49-51). One agency respondent discusses three different pitches that ranged along the spectrum from very little contact to a large amount of contact.

In a pitch we did for [Company X] it was a situation that I just explained to you where we got briefed for an hour and then we were expected to come back with an answer 6 weeks later and we had very little access to the clients, the company staff, their consumers in between and we were operating in isolation and had to try and find the answer. You know it is like throwing a ball in the dark.

In the middle of the spectrum, we pitched for [Company Y] account and we got a brief which was pretty good from the client. We didn't have much contact with the clients until we came back but having said that, they gave us an hour session with one of the key people there, one of the key decision-makers, they gave us access to their product development people, their R&D labs, they gave us all of the information on stuff they have done before so they gave us a lot of what we needed and they gave us access to the right people.

And then the far right hand spectrum is sort of the [Company Z] pitch. I think it might be because the woman running the Pitch was an ex-agency lady and I think she just knew the problems you've got with pitching and the false environment and all of those issues pretty well and wanted to try and knock as many of those walls down as she could (AI14, p2-3, 76-89)

For consultants, the viewpoints were mixed. Some felt as if contact between the agencies and the client worked to the client's benefit "where clients declare themselves available 24/7 for calls, for conversations, for meetings to discuss anything, learn anything and so on, those have been the best pitches" (CI5, p6, 221-222).

I want to have as much contact as possible between the contending agencies and the client and it really is how much the client will allow because the client doesn't have an unlimited amount of time and when they are talking to 3 or 4 agencies, there is just so much interaction they can have, but we certainly try to design a process that maximizes the amount of contact. I can't imagine a consultant making a rational case for limiting the contact; it is so counter-intuitive (CI4, p2, 83-87)

Other consultants felt the contact between agency and client needed to be limited because it could be overwhelming to manage for the client. This can be especially true in

the early stages of the pitch process when the potential agencies have not been narrowed down. It may be challenging for a client to handle multiple phone calls, respond to emails, and schedule various meetings solely related to the pitch process while juggling the normal day-to-day business activities.

So one of the things we always discuss is what the client contact policy is moving forward and what I usually recommend is that requests go through me via email and then the client decides how we're going to respond. Are we going to respond by calling them? Sometimes they ask to interview people, I want it to be comfortable for the client but I want somebody to be kind of forcing the agencies to organize their requests so that they're not random and also so that if someone says "Well, I want a copy of your last 3 years media plans" and some unknowing client sends them out and the other shops don't get them, then that's a problem (CI1, p8, 313-322)

Usually they deal with us directly but just to protect the client because it's so time consuming, this full-out process that we just talked through can take anywhere between 3 and 4 months. So even though a client will make the decision to hire a consulting firm like mine to manage and help them navigate the process, it's still a fair amount of time for the client. Suppose it is a retailer and the agency says, "We want to go visit your stores" well you know and they want to take videos, if they go walking into the store to take photographs, the store manager may say, "what are you doing in here with that video camera?" So and a lot of times the agencies will ask for similar, have similar questions. They'll say, "Can we have the latest research you did?" So why should the client get 3 emails asking the same question if it comes to the consultant and we know that several of them are asking the same thing, we can navigate that (CI3, p2-3, 73-81)

It is not merely the amount of time clients and agencies actually spend together, that may contribute the emotionally-driven attraction, it is also the quality of the interaction and the extent that the two parties really get to know one another. "The more ways you try to connect with them during the pitch process, the more you learn about them, the more they develop a positive perception about you" (CI2, p6, 206-207).

I am so painstakingly going to great depths to find out who are we meeting with? What are they like? I dig Google ... are they young? Old? They got kids? They got no kids? Do they drink beer and if so from a bottle or a glass? What do they drive? Are they bottom-line people? Or do they love to hear process? The more that you can do that, it's just more about audience analysis and trying to because the old adage of "opposites attract" may work in the personal world but it doesn't really work in the business world. It's really hard to get opposites to attract so the more like-minded they are, like wow we identify with each other, I can talk to you, I can relate to you, you can relate to me (AI13, p6, 206-213)

It's something that I think is an important point about pitching new business because what we did was start from the perspective of recognizing what we knew the client would think about us and so many agencies start from the point of hoping that the client thinks what you want them to think about you. We went in and said, "Look we know what you think we are, we're not that" and everything we did, demonstrated that. Every way we communicated with them demonstrated that (CI2. P3, 111-115)

Attraction can mean something very different for clients, agencies, and consultants as they enter the pitch process. As suggested in the literature, clients may be attracted to an agency based on previous work created for another client or from hearing rave reviews about the agency. An agency may be attracted to a client based on their overall reputation in the consumer market and the potential visibility the agency may gain from adding the client to its current roster. For consultants, attraction plays a different role. Although the consultant will not be directly involved in the client-agency relationship once the work has been awarded, it is in the best interest of the consultant's reputation to facilitate the most suitable matches. In order to do this, a consultant must be familiar enough with both the clients and agencies so that he or she can help identify the particular features and attributes that are most important to the client and then help identify the agencies that best exemplify those characteristics.

Rational and emotional attraction should both be considered through all levels of attraction. It is up to all parties involved to make sure there is a balance. Emotionally-driven attraction does not always take into consideration the feasibility of the relationship and rationally-driven attraction may fail to consider whether the two parties would actually work well with one another.

For instance, an agency may be emotionally attracted to a client that is extremely successful in the consumer marketplace because they feel that it would be a great addition to the agency roster and would elevate the agency's reputation; however, perhaps the agency does not have enough internal resources to support the work should it be awarded. In addition, a client may be emotionally-driven to hire the agency that has done amazing work for other clients; however, the agency may not be a good match geographically or economically. As the pitching process evolves, rationally-driven and emotionally-driven attraction need to be consistently assessed.

As supported by the various respondents, the development and experience of attraction is divided into RATIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION and EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION and is characterized by *Capabilities and Compensation, Size and Scope, People Business, and Connection Points*. The table on the following page provides a summary of these categories, themes, and repeating ideas.

**Table 4 – RQ1: Development and Experience of Attraction**

<b>I. RATIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION</b>	
<b>A. Capabilities and Compensation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “When you hire a plumber, do you hire him for his personality or his plumbing skills?” (CLI3, p8, 268).</li> <li>2. “What’s your experience? What are your capabilities? It’s kind of getting an assessment. (AI3, p2, 58-59).</li> <li>3. “The agency financial compensation model is as ridiculous a compensation model as you’re gonna find” (CI2, p11, 415).</li> <li>4. “...we’re not always willing to pay for their best” (CLI3, P6, 198).</li> </ol>
<b>B. Size and Scope</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “I want to see what kind of work they’ve done and are they deep enough and wide enough that they are stable” (CLI3, p8, 285-286).</li> <li>2. “We are a global company so we look for global capabilities” (CLI, p3, 76).</li> <li>3. “There is an amazing group of agencies not in New York and if you’re so small-minded to think that’s the center of the universe. It’s not. It’s not anymore” (AI12, p5, 156-158).</li> <li>4. “the geography and size thing are the two biggest issues” (CI6, p2, 72).</li> </ol>
<b>II. EMOTIONALLY-DRIVEN ATTRACTION</b>	
<b>A. People Business</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “There is the human nature element which will always be there” (AI3, p11, 398).</li> <li>2. “It sounds so trait to say this, but it is a people business” (AI5, p2, 55).</li> <li>3. “Clients don’t hire agencies, they hire people” (AI12, p9, 346).</li> <li>4. “the agency is only as good as the account team that you hire” (CLI1, p4, 127-128).</li> </ol>
<b>B. Connection Points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “The amount of time I get to spend with the agency initially is kind of like a first date” (CLI3, p10, 344-345).</li> <li>2. “The agency believes, the more times you can meet the people in person, the better” (AI1, p5, 193-194).</li> <li>3. “I want to have as much contact as possible between the contending agencies and the client” (CI4, p2, 83-87).</li> <li>4. “I can talk to you, I can relate to you, you can relate to me” (AI13, p6, 212-213).</li> </ol>

#### **5.4b The Development and Experience of Trust**

The second research question asked how trust was both developed and experienced during the pitch process. “One of the biggest things that is part of a pitch is trust” (AI14, p1, 27). “Trust is such an underlying factor for success no matter what” (AI3, p7, 251-252).

Trust is the biggest thing for any relationship ... any client/agency relationship whether in the pitching process or not. A lot of that trust, to your point exactly, is held with certain individuals and not necessarily the agency itself. That is why individuals can leave an agency and take a giant client with them because that person has embodied what the client knows is going to be the only way that they are going to feel comfortable making decisions. It is obviously better when that is not the case, in a perfect world, there should be a number of people at the agency that make an account or make a client feel comfortable and that they have that trust (AI1, p7, 256-262)

The interviews revealed the three main levels of trust (pre-experiential, early-experiential, and established-experiential) as identified by Davies and Prince (2005) were also present in the current study. ***Pre-experiential Trust*** referred to the level of trust that clients and agencies have towards one another based on reputations and previous work. This type of trust is not the result of direct experience. ***Early-experiential Trust*** was the level of trust that evolved from pre-experiential trust. This began to develop once the client and agency began to have minimal contact with one another in the form of the RFP and early meetings. ***Established-experiential Trust*** began to increase as the Pitch progressed and the clients and agencies were learning more about one another.

This last type of trust would continue to develop once the pitch process was over but obviously once a client has selected a particular agency, the extent of the experiences between client and agency change dramatically because both parties become significantly

more invested in the relationship. With greater investment, the presence of trust becomes increasingly important.

Although participants in all constituencies agreed that trust was a vital part of the client-agency relationship, for many respondents, articulating how trust was developed and experienced throughout the pitch process seemed to be quite difficult. After analyzing the data, the way in which these various levels of trust were developed and experienced was captured in two categories: TRANSPARENCY and MUTUAL RESPECT. Within these two main categories were the themes *Honesty*, *Open Dialogue*, *Great Expectations*, and *Constructive Feedback*.

## **TRANSPARENCY**

Transparency refers to the way in which the constituencies are open and honest with one another and where all the information that is required from one another is being able to be shared freely. The two themes that emerged from the data were *Honesty* and *Open Dialogue*. A client discusses how an agency can develop and build trust by detailing the ways transparency can be established.

Make it clear you want a strategic partner; make sure that you have the right level of importance to them without having too much importance but what that leads to is our agencies were more than willing to be very transparent about pricing and cost information.

I think for most of the marketers there's distrust around "Oh, they're trying to screw me" and it's always around pricing, not always, there's other things but if you have an agency who's willing to be extremely transparent about, "Look, here's what it costs us, here's what we're paying our people, here's the profit we're making, come in, audit us, make sure that's all true." Then what we can end up doing is agreeing upon, yep this is really the margin we're willing to pay and you guys are willing to take, you know it's a fair thing, yep these overheads, we've checked them out, there really what's happening.



So you know we go in, we audit our suppliers on an ongoing basis, not with overkill but ongoing, we know exactly what they're making, we feel comfortable and confident with that and they're willing to share it with us, well there are lots of agencies that are going to be like, "I'm not sharing that information with you" that's what causes distrust (CLI1, p10, 372-384)

### ***Honesty***

This theme is based on the extent that the communication that occurs between agencies, clients, and consultants is straight-forward with no lies or misrepresentation.

"Do I trust you comes from are you going to tell me the same old things and are you telling me the truth about your agency? And on top of it, be yourself" (AI7, p8, 305-306).

"Don't lie. Don't pretend to be somebody you're not, because clients will smell it on you in a heartbeat" (AI7, p10, 397).

The first part weighs heavily on an agency's ability to package and present itself and it's not always honest. It's sometimes an overstatement and it's sometimes not as good as it should be. Whereas the next round really relies on sort of putting the human connection to the process and then allowing more transparency to evolve as it goes forth (CI1, p6, 228-233)

If they have been really honest with us about their situation about why they parted with their previous agency, about where their business is at and where it needs to get, about who's who in their company. They can sometimes tell you, "Listen, the truth is, we have just got to do something that will please Bob" that level of honesty and openness is a good insight into trust. You can ask other people that have worked with them in the same way they will ask our clients or ask other agencies that you have worked with so and so what are they like? Are they trustworthy? Can they work well? Do they want to do the work we want to do and etcetera (AI14, p7, 220-226)

One of the tenants of [agency name] was, and we told our clients, brutal honesty, we're going to be completely honest with you, we want you to be completely honest with us and that actually is one of the things that won us the business (CI2, p3, 116-118)

You start off there by being honest, and say listen, I don't mean to be asking if you want to have kids on the first date but from an economics point of view, how much money are you looking to pay the agency? I think clients will have a lot of respect for that, well were we honest ... so it's also very much on the part of the agency to kind of ask questions and try to build that relationship (AI3, p8, 280-284)

Honesty is required from all constituents in the pitch process. The absence of honesty can negatively affect the entire pitch process. One consultant discusses the impact of a particular pitch process where the consultant was not being honest.

I mean I walked away from a Pitch the night before the presentation when I was running [agency name] because I found out that the consultant had lied to us. They had other agencies in the process, one dropped out four weeks in. She called me up and asked us to be in the Pitch and basically said we were at the same stage as every other agency and just through some friends I found out that a competitor, when we were going down for our first briefing, a competitor was going down making their final presentation (CI2, p12, 453-461)

The establishment of honesty may seem extremely intuitive when considering both the ability to trust and be trustworthy; however, in the context of a pitch process, there are many instances where the perception of honesty may vary. The extent that an agency feels honest information is being conveyed may be vastly different from the perception of the client involved and vice versa.

I remember I did a pitch several years ago and I caught one of the four, one of the six semi-finalist agencies in four out and out fabrications and the client had ranked this agency the first out of six agencies and I just told them that I am not trying to move you away from this agency but I want you to know, I am going to tell you about four fabrications in their presentation and then they can do what they want with that (CI4, p4, 149-152)

I was meeting a new agency the other day and I found that just in the course of what they were saying to me, there were several things that they said early in the meeting that they later contradicted later in the meeting and I just thought, I walked away with a sense of I want to trust them and I

liked them but it's like if they're contradicting those things that they say were an absolute rule early on are things that they're violating later on.

In addition, as discussed in the earlier section, there were mixed opinions regarding the agency's use of different people for the Pitch than would be actually working on the business should it be awarded. Some clients view this to be a "bait and switch" scenario. "People who pitch must be the people who work on the business, no bait and switches" (CLI2, p4, 147) and yet agencies may not view it as being dishonest as much as they do "putting their best foot forward." These examples illustrate that even though being honest may seem extremely straight-forward, there are instances where the truth may be distorted unknowingly or unintentionally.

### ***Open Dialogue***

This theme refers to the extent that agencies, consultants, and clients all maintain an open line of communication where thoughts and ideas are openly shared both within and across constituencies. "We have a working relationship with this agency that we really like and that is if they don't like something, we want to hear it and they'll tell us" (CLI5, p9, 319-320). Agencies and clients commented that when information is willingly provided by the other party, it indicates that a level of trust is present.

We want everybody to be a part of the team which means that we don't want them to not speak because they're afraid their boss is gonna say, "That was a bad idea" but we want all of them to have a voice in the process (CLI5, p9, 326-328)

I don't think there is anything you can do to fake that. I think that trust is built on the fact that I asked a question and I liked the way the agency answered it and I, the client, feel like they answered it in a very open and honest way in a way that there was nothing being hidden. It's little things

like that, it's not, and it's the fact that I've had 3 meetings with them and they've been consistent in each of those meetings (CI6, p6, 222-225)

However, even though open dialogue is encouraged as a way to help build trust, many agencies and clients are cautious regarding the quantity of information shared during the early stages of the pitch process. For an agency, there may be some reservation with sharing too many creative ideas until a particular contract is signed.

You have to be careful in the pitch process to not give too much away because that's where it gets really shady because some clients are really sort of underhanded about it because depending on how they set up the contract. I've been in a situation where the contract, when I say contract, the, it was stated in a way that if you submit an RFP which means, if you send me your resume, you are agreeing to and it started listing all of these contract negotiations like: you won't raise the fee, the fee is set, we own all the work, we pay you \$15,000 and we own all the work, I forget what number but it was an ungodly low amount of money for what they were basically saying. And what you're agency is doing there is putting themselves in a situation where they're like "OK, do we want to do this? Because if we win it, they get everything" and it's underhanded and I've seen clients put agencies through 6 month pitch processes only to keep the incumbent ... that's how we know their shopping out for free work (AI6, p4, 124-134)

For a client, until a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) is signed, there may be a level of apprehensiveness regarding the extent of information they want to share. Usually only one agency is selected at the end of a pitch process and therefore sharing information with all of the agencies before a formal contract is signed may be perceived risky for the client.

So, the insight would have to come from doing research without really getting too deep into our business. This information that we're willing to give accompanies with a NDA, at the end of the day, and NDA, it's a legal contract. We don't want to give out our information or our "secrets" until their basically an agency of record or at least a partner with a contract (CLI4, p7, 243-246)

Some clients are great and others are less so or the information they give is so jaded because they want to keep it under lock and key, so that's why the process, no matter like, at the end of the day, it just seems to be more in a vacuum and not based on the real-world tenants if you will (AI3, p6, 204-207)

One individual commented how there was nothing he felt his particular agency could actually do or say initially that would automatically generate trust; instead he suggested one of the best ways for potential clients to begin to establish a level of trust is to speak with some of the agency's existing clients.

I think get them in front or at least talking to some of our existing clients. I don't think they are going to believe it from us. I think if we say we are gonna be on time, we are gonna be on budget, we're gonna do all the work you want if I were them, I wouldn't believe it. I would have to speak to other customers and clients and ask, what are they really like to work with? When the going gets tough, how do they behave? I think the strongest way to get trust is to speak to our other clients? (AI14, p3, 114-118)

The data seems to indicate the necessity of clients, agencies, and consultants to all work together to find a balance between providing enough of an open dialogue to facilitate the development of trust but not so much as to create feelings of vulnerability.

## **MUTUAL RESPECT**

This theoretical construct refers to the way in which the various constituencies view one another in a positive manner and the way in which professionalism is exhibited when dealing with one another. "There was mutual respect and like among all members of the team. We trusted one another. This fostered an environment in which each team member felt comfortable sharing thoughts and making suggestions" (AD13).

Like trust, respect can develop before actually having experience with a particular person or organization. For instance, a client may have a certain level of respect for an

agency's creative talent based on a particular campaign the agency created. Likewise, an agency may respect a client for its ability to maintain a strong brand for many years. The presence of mutual-respect can help accelerate the development of trust.

It's not about liking one another, it's about respecting one another and the ideas that are generated as a result of your ability to communicate with one another so at the end of the day, the decision is not based on how well do we like someone, it's based on what ideas were generated as a result of our ability to work with one another (CLI1, p7, 249-252)

In addition to the mutual respect that is formed before actually having experience with a particular individual or organization, mutual respect also refers to the manner in which clients, agencies, and consultants treat one another during the course of the pitch process. Several of the respondents shared stories relating to specific instances where there has been a great deal of disrespect that has occurred either in a meeting or even in a final pitch presentation.

We had one final six years ago in [location name] where the client seemed so disinterested and were very disrespectful to us. They had their laptop computers out with wireless and a couple of them had their checkbooks out. Here we are, we busted our gut and did all of this stuff ... that is extremely disrespectful (AI3, p7, 241-244)

If you see the agency sitting there and team members are checking their Blackberries and snoozing and not paying attention to what their associates are presenting, you know, you see it or they get cut off or a senior person, the CEO or the President cuts off his team members and there seems to be an edge there, ya pick that up (CI7, p3. 107-110)

Like honesty, respect is a quality that should be expected but unfortunately is not always delivered. In most cases, if respect is not given, respect is not received. For agencies, consultants, and clients taking part in a pitch process, the level of mutual respect is fundamental in the development of trust.

### ***Great Expectations***

Another aspect of establishing trust during the pitch process deals with the setting clear expectations. When expectations are communicated clearly, it allows for all parties to not only be on the same page but to also have an anchor point in which to assess a level of satisfaction. For instance, if clients are not clear with what they expect from their agencies when going through a pitch process, the agencies cannot be held accountable if those particular things are not addressed. During the course of the interviews, one client told me how frustrated she was at agencies when they would bring in trinkets and gifts to the various presentations and meetings.

Don't send gifts, sometimes even in the Pitch itself, a lot of the agencies come in with mugs and pens and leave all of that behind, in fact it works against them rather than, it doesn't make it more endearing. I mean we would do that when I was on the agency side. We would bring in those things as well, you want an electronic version of their presentation, you know I don't need a box of mints with their logo on it; we don't need flowers on the table. It really turns a lot of people off ... (CLI2, p2, 69-73)

When asked if that expectation was clearly communicated to the agencies either in the RFP or in an additional document, she explained that it was not but throughout the course of our conversation, she began to reconsider. After a few moments of discussion, she proceeded to share the following:

I think I am going to start putting that in the RFP now that we've talked, because I think it's only fair that we tell them. It's not fair to set them up and then we're annoyed because they did something that we told them not to do. That's not really fair (CLI2, p3, 97-100)

The respondents indicate that one of the ways trust can be established is by meeting or exceeding expectations because it indicates not only that you can follow-

through with what is expected but you also care enough to do so. This was a sentiment shared by both agencies and consultants as revealed below.

Lots of times they make cuts based, right after the chemistry meetings to decide who they want to meet with, who they want to be in the room with for the next five years or something so that's why in the chemistry meetings you always try to have something in that meeting that in addition to giving the client a good idea of who you are as a company and what your interest in them, you give them something in there they can, it's kind of like a free idea, something that they didn't ask for, something that shows that you care about their business and that you care about them and go a little above and beyond what's expected (AI2, p3, 85-91)

So it's the same way you establish trust with anybody. You start dating somebody and if you realize that they could actually be cheating on you. How do you establish that trust? How do you establish that they are cheating on you? It's really kind of expectations being met and then when suddenly something is a little bit different, you pay attention to that, you don't know that you're paying attention to that but somewhere it's adding up and you may just not feel right in your stomach and not be able to articulate it but that's really the summation of all those things affecting you (CI6, p2, 222-235)

Sometimes clients may choose to go through a pitch process for the purpose of seeing what other options are available. If clients are going to do this, they should make sure they communicate their expectations to the agencies regarding the outcome of the Pitch. Based on this information, an agency may choose to not participate in the Pitch because it may not feel it's worth the expense if the client is not seriously considering a change. Failure of a client to communicate this information to the agencies could result in a loss of trust when it is revealed at a later point. One client discusses how it has dealt with this situation.

I am fairly up front with the people who are coming into pitch who are new. I will tell them what we're doing and that they're going to have to



blow us away to make a change but that we're sort of just out there looking right now (CLI4, p9, 330-332)

Along the same lines, the clients need to be sensitive and respectful when it comes time to including incumbents in a pitch process. The mere fact that the account is being placed up for review can be extremely upsetting for the incumbent. At that point, the incumbent may feel as if all trust has been lost because the agency is considering terminating the relationship. If a client has already made the decision that the relationship is over, the incumbent should not be invited to participate in the pitch process because it sends mixed signals to the incumbent regarding the expectations of the client.

You know sometimes the brand will say, "Well, let's just invite them" and I'll say to them, "If you really have no intentions of hiring them, do not waste their time and money, don't waste ours." The winners see this ... it's not personal for these agencies, it's the nature of their business, but believe me, you want to be respectful, you're not saving them from any undue pain, it's the industry they're in (CLI2, p9-10, 329-333)

We let them pitch but it was so bad that they would have had to pull like miracle upon miracle to win the business and we basically told them just that. You know, we want you to be involved in this process but you're gonna have to pull a miracle. So they knew going in, they wanted the opportunity, they worked hard on the opportunity but honestly the trust wasn't there anymore. We'd had such a problem with them. They could have had the best ideas in the world and we were already sort of shut down (CLI4, p8, 298-303)

Clearly defining expectations can be difficult especially in regard to the pitch process because there are a multitude of subjective variables to consider. The extent that expectations are met or exceeded is highly driven by the perceptions of the individuals involved.

### ***Learning to Listen***

Each one of the other themes that contribute to the development and experience of trust have to do with speaking; telling the truth, creating an open dialogue, and defining clear expectations. This theme simply refers to the extent that parties actually listen to one another throughout the pitch process. “I’m a big believer the good Lord gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason and I think as business people, and I have to remind myself of this too, we don’t do enough listening” (AI3, p11, 408-409). “The other thing is, listen more than you talk. That is so critical. If you leave a room and they talked more than you did, you win” (AI13, p10, 382). By taking the time to listen to what the other party wants out of the relationship and what is expected from the Pitch, it provides an opportunity for clients, agencies, and consultants to establish some common ground.

I think it’s [trust] demonstrated through understanding their business and being willing to listen. I think when we were at our best, we were having discussions with the client. We weren’t in there to present to them. We had ideas, we had thoughts, but we wanted to hear their feedback and we wanted to engage them in a discussion and we wanted, we encouraged a debate, we encouraged push back, we would throw things out there, what do you think? Is this true about your business? If it’s not, tell us more, that kind of thing (AI5, p10, 370-374)

You approach it with a common ground which I think always helps to build that trust, because it is like “we understand each other” “we go through the same trials and tribulations on a day-to-day basis ...” and so it is much easier to build the relationship quickly with somebody you have something in common with (AI1, p7, 269-272)

Respondents indicated that although the importance of listening may seem fundamental in basic communication, it is often severely neglected. One consultant

shares a story below where an agency completely disregarded what the particular client requested.

I did a search last year, you know one of the agencies that competed in the final presentation made their final presentation and this client had five different target audiences and for the final assignment for the final challenge they were asked to develop a strategy and a print campaign for one of these five targets and this agency got up in this final presentation and presented the strategy and work for an entirely different target audience. They just presented for two hours and never explained why they ignored the assignment that they were given and we all stood there, just dumbstruck.

At the end of the presentation I raised my hand and I said “Why didn’t you address the assignment you were given?” and they said, “We didn’t agree with that assignment. We felt that was not a smart target to go after,” we said, “OK, thank you” and they were just out of hand. You just cannot ignore ... what they communicated to that client was that this is going to be an agency that doesn’t listen and that this is going to be an agency that is going to be very hard to work with. If they had different thoughts, they should have delivered the assignment and then provided a rationale as to why this other target audience was more important or more interesting and then show them work for that, but you just can’t do that in new business (CI4, p7, 251-265)

The above example illustrates how even though a particular agency may feel as if the client should consider an additional target audience, by not listening to the specific requests of the client, the agency communicated to the client that they could not be trusted to deliver what was asked. In addition, if a client and a consultant have been adamant about the rules of engagement and the specific things that agencies should and should not do and an agency does not listen and follow those parameters, trust can be lost.

If we start breaking their parameters within the pitch process of how much contact and how much they’ll let us speak to their people, I think it can only send them bad signals for what we are like to work with which is

they don't want to listen and they want to do it their way and the chances are they probably just finished a relationship with an agency that's done that to them in the first place (AI14, p7, 247-253)

Some agency respondents felt that if a client knew all the answers, it would not need the assistance of an agency therefore; the clients need to also listen to the agencies and their recommendations. However, the data revealed that clients are much more receptive to listen to agencies and embrace new ideas when they feel as if their initial requests have been addressed.

There was not one respondent who debated the important role trust plays in the pitch process but despite things like creating an open dialogue, providing feedback, being honest, setting clear expectations, and learning to listen, there wasn't any one magic formula identified for creating trust. Respondents agreed there were many different elements to how trust was created and experienced and that varied greatly on the particular individuals involved and the specific interaction that took place.

The various respondents indicated the development and experience of trust was the result of TRANSPARENCY and MUTUAL RESPECT and was characterized by *Honesty, Open Dialogue, Clear Expectations, and Learning to Listen*. The table on the following page provides a summary of these categories, themes, and repeating ideas.

**Table 5 – RQ2: Development and Experience of Trust**

<b>I. TRANSPARENCY</b>
<p><b>A. Honesty</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Don’t lie. Don’t pretend to be somebody you’re not” (AI7, p10, 397).</li> <li>2. “ ... we’re going to be completely honest with you, we want you to be completely honest with us” (CI2, p3, 117-118).</li> <li>3. “I, the client, feel like they answered it in a very open and honest way in a way that there was nothing being hidden” (CI6, p6, 223-224).</li> </ol>
<p><b>B. Open Dialogue</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I think that trust is built on the fact that I asked a question and I liked the way the agency answered it (CI6, p6, 222-223).</li> <li>2. “I’d say that I wish they’d give more collaboration, they were more open, I wish that they would share more data and information” (A18, p8, 285-286).</li> <li>3. “We want all of them to have a voice in the process” (CLI5, p9, 326).</li> </ol>
<b>II. MUTUAL RESPECT</b>
<p><b>A. Clear Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “... the reason that pitches occur because trust is being broken where an agency hasn’t delivered what the client wanted” (AI14, p3, 108-109).</li> <li>2. “I am fairly up front with the people who are coming into pitch” (CLI4, p9, 330).</li> <li>3. “It’s really kind of expectations being met and then when suddenly something is a little bit different, you pay attention to that” (CI6, p6, 232-233).</li> </ol>
<p><b>B. Learning to Listen</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “I asked, ‘so why did you hire us?’ they said, ‘because you listened, because you listened to us, you would respond’, it was a thoughtful dialogue” (AI13, p2, 74-76).</li> <li>2. “...they really listened to the creative feedback” (CI1, p11, 430-431).</li> <li>3. “We like clients who are willing to listen to us and allow us to make highly strategic and creative recommendations” (AI3, p1, 27-37).</li> </ol>

#### **5.4c The Most-Satisfying Pitch Processes**

The third research question sought to uncover attributes of the most-satisfying pitch processes in which the respondents had been involved. Overall, the most-satisfying pitches, as indicated by the respondents, were those that culminated the elements of trust and attraction and therefore resulted in some overlap between categories, themes, and repeating ideas. Even though every pitch is unique and individuals all have different perceptions regarding what is good and satisfying in terms of a pitch process, the data revealed three categories: CHEMISTRY, CLARITY, and COLLABORATION. Within these categories, six themes were identified: *Client-Agency Fit*, *Agency Team Spirit*, *Clear Communication*, *Accountability*, *Real-World Simulation*, and *Positive Energy and Attitude*.

#### **CHEMISTRY**

Participants repeatedly mentioned chemistry and its importance in all of the most satisfying pitches. Most commonly, chemistry was used in a context of referring to either the way in which a client and an agency “fit” together or the way in which an internal agency were able to work together throughout the entire pitch process. Chemistry, like trust, was difficult for the respondents to articulate but the fact it was mentioned by so many participants, clearly indicated its large role in the most-satisfying pitch processes. “It started to get into issues about chemistry and their knowledge about our company; whether they really could demonstrate that they knew our company ...” (CLI5, p7, 268-269).

The winning agency was really the underdog, a small independent company, but they were, it sounds really hokey, really nice people ... very

real, great history of experience, great creative and strategy and they just connected. They connected with each other and they connected with us and it was their knowledge, really how the brand team and the agency had a really robust discussion, they were really in sync. It was chemistry, it just connected (CLI2, p7, 254-258)

Seriously chemistry starts with respect and a level of mutual integrity and trust. Trust is such an underlying factor for success no matter what but chemistry is where you can have very informal conversations, almost in the same way you would talking about a sport's team or how the stock market is doing that day (AI3, p7, 251-254)

Respondents discussed two main types of chemistry. The chemistry between the client and the agency is represented in the theme *Chemistry-Agency Fit*. The chemistry occurring between agency team members is represented in the theme *Agency Team Spirit*.

### ***Client-Agency Fit***

Clients and agencies both discussed how the most-satisfying pitch processes occurred when both parties felt as if there was a “fit” between two organizations. There were several ways in which this client-agency fit was described. “You want it to fit for purpose ... it’s not just about finding a partner, it’s about fitting it in with your roster and the role of that partner on your roster” (CLI3, p7, 228-229, 257-258). “Do they have the right talent there to meet our needs and have they had the right set of experiences?” (CLI1, p3, 71-72). When assessing whether an agency was a good fit, clients seemed to place a great deal of value on agencies that would both respect the brand but also be able to take the brand to another level.

We were looking for work that was out there strategically and creative that was going to be a brand fit with where we know we wanted to take the brand and where we needed to evolve to so I think it was just really understanding that [agency name] brought to the table a very unique way of looking at things in a very nontraditional way in strategy and concept development ... it was just a good brand fit at the time with where we

knew we needed to go to be successful and to turn the brand around (CLI8, p2, 66-71)

The more successful ones are the ones who will provide the expertise but will be willing to be client-driven and ultimately we selected an agency who we knew they would be like that and they are like that because we are such a strong client. I say strong by saying we push back, even if they make a recommendation, we might say, great, but we're not going to go with it and some agencies and some agency personnel, they will really struggle with that and so we needed to get a sense of that before we actually made a hiring decision, that was very important to us because we know who we are, we're not an easy client (CLI5, p3, 101-106)

When assessing whether a client was a good fit, agencies seemed to place value not only in the strength of the brand but in the way the agency felt the client would interact with the various individuals on the agency team. Agencies know that the pitch process can be extremely intense and therefore working with a client who does not get along with the individuals only increases the stress and intensity.

Not only were we in love with the brand, but we fell in love with the client. We saw ourselves when we met the people at [client name] – they are young, articulate, and passionate about their brand and their business. They are the people we strive to be, the people we strive to please, the people we want to work with (AD13)

It is important to do your homework but I think you are looking to know that you are sitting across the room from reasonable people. One of the big things we look for are like do they like to laugh? I think we approach things in a very human way and if you are not sitting across the table from other humans, it may not be something we really want to pursue. I think there is the basic information, any research they are willing to share, those types of things that you always want to get. What is their budget? ... those types of things are always good to know, but I think also that chemistry is so important (AI1, p6, 235-240)

As the various respondents indicated, having a strong client-agency fit is vital for a relationship to be successful. Although the RFP can provide some general indication of



whether or not a client and an agency may be well-suited to work with one another, a true assessment can only be made once there has been ample opportunity for the two parties to meet face-to-face and spend some time working together. Because the client-agency fit is not only a characteristic of the most-satisfying pitches but also a characteristic of the most successful relationships, clients and agencies should not undermine the value of an accurate assessment.

### ***Agency Team Spirit***

Although strong chemistry between clients and agencies can ultimately determine whether or not a client and an agency will work well together, the aspect of agency team chemistry cannot be overlooked. “We have teams of people that you if you put them together, you know that they will do pretty astounding stuff” (AI8, p3, 94-95).

The chemistry within the agency team and how they work together in a presentation and through a process comes through loud and clear so agency A can be awesome when they have one team out there for one pitch and then be awful the next time (CI7, p3, 103-105)

We were a tight team. There were a couple things that we said that we were going to do, we never varied from those things and nobody could come in at the last minute and change anything. We decided at what point in the process we would lock and load on an idea and from that point on we would towards that idea, other people who would come in, other disciplines, they would be invited in from the beginning. They would all lock and load at the same time. We had the time to make not just the presentation but to make ourselves comfortable with each other (AI2, p1, 20-26)

Clients are unlikely to select an agency where the individuals on the team do not have a strong level of chemistry. They feel it is important to hire an agency that is not only familiar with one another but one who actually enjoys working together. “When you get people who can focus, you tend to get good teamwork and people that aren’t sort

of distracted. You get a sense of who's passionate about a particular project and who works really well together" (AI8, p3, 91-94. "We know each other pretty well and we make damn sure that the chemistry on the team is good and we spend a lot of time together as a pitch team" (AI14, p4, 142-143).

I guess one thing agencies I still don't think understand is that we can figure you out in ten minutes when you are giving your credentials because we watch you. We know if you know each other. We know if you've worked together because it's very evident when they come in whether they really know each other whether they've worked together and we're looking for that and when we went through the evaluation process, that was really one of the areas we specifically looked for (CLI7, p5, 191-196)

That team was so compelling to be around; you just wanted to be part of it. You watched them have fun, you watched the dynamic, you watched how engaged they were, not to say that others aren't, but there was a magic of how they related to one another and how it felt to be interacting with them in a room (CI1, p7, 246-250)

We always looked like a group of people who honestly liked each other and liked working together and it's amazing how a group of strangers can pick that up, they can tell when you're faking it, they can tell when you don't like each other. They can tell when you're making jokes at each other's expense where it's not really meant to be out of affection. They can read that so clearly, I don't know why, they don't really read too many things but they can read that because we honestly and truly were a tight team, we came off as the kind of people that people wanted to work with (AI2, p1, 28-34)

Making sure the agency team has chemistry, though extremely important and noted as a one of the main attributes of most-satisfying pitches, can be difficult to ensure. For instance, some agencies may not have the resources to keep changing out their pitching teams if the chemistry is not working. In addition, the people that may have the best chemistry may not necessarily be available to work on the Pitch.

## CLARITY

One of the dominant characteristics of the most-satisfying pitches was the presence of clarity; where everyone involved in the process had a clear understanding of what was required and a clear direction as to what was expected. In a process characterized by such a great deal of complexity, the presence of clarity in as many ways possible is fundamental to the success of a pitch process. Clarity was established through *Clear Communication* and *Role Definition*.

### *Clear Communication*

This theme referred to the way in which clients, consultants, and agencies could communicate in a manner that was effective and beneficial to the overall pitch process. Although the specific elements of what is considered to be effective can be subjective, in the context of the most-satisfying pitch processes, there was a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the importance of communicating clearly.

I think the best reviews are those where it's really clear understanding of what it is they want and why they're doing it and you have buy-in at the outset from your clients and you have clients who are not wishy-washy or who will put a stake in the ground around something because there are a lot of insecure people who really aren't always confident about what they want, you know and so it starts with that (CI1, p4, 139-142)

So much of it is a communications piece. I mean obviously you have to have the smarts, you have to have the intellect, and you have to have the product at the end ... the work. But so many times, the agency just doesn't communicate well what they're doing. It is hard to force fit that in. What a client really wants to see is how do you think? How do you respond? (CI7, p3, 94-97)

Some respondents felt as if effective communication was tied directly to the way in which one party was able to engage the other. As one respondents stated, "people that

engage me usually do better in the Pitch. Now is it because their just better communicators or they have more information from me? I don't know, but those are the guys who pop" (CLI4, p6, 212-214).

I would say what stood out for us was their presentation, their creativeness, and again, once again, it really came down to their handling me on how they just stayed on top of me and I don't mean in a negative way. They constantly checked in making sure what they were doing was correct, asking me for some clarifications, or what do you think if we do this? and I think again, they engaged me. I could answer the questions and they sort of helped them really define their presentation to closer to what the other agencies probably could have done because they didn't talk to me (CLI4, p6, 203-209)

Others respondents discussed how in addition to the amount of content presented and the way it is delivered, effective communication was also tied directly to the ability of the other party to ask smart questions. "It's also very much on the part of the agency to kind of ask questions and try to build that relationship (AI3, p8, 280-284). "The best pitches and what usually works is a dialogue throughout and honestly most of the people on our side will ask questions, they're not shy about that" (CLI2, p6, 212-213). One agency respondent discusses what is believed to be the best example of effective communication.

The ultimate pitch presentation in my mind would be one word and that one word would be so powerful and so on point with what the client was looking for that they wouldn't have any questions. They would just smile and shake your hand. Of course, that's never going to happen. But that would be it ... just one slide with one word and it would be so thoroughly thought out (AI7, p10, 373-376)

Regardless of the respondent and the constituency, most every participant agreed with the fundamental role effective communication played in the most-satisfying pitch

processes. The ability to communicate should be a prerequisite for anyone working on a pitch process because so much is at stake for all parties involved. An agency can have an amazing idea but if it is unable to communicate the idea in a way the client understands, the idea is lost. Likewise, a client may know exactly what the organization needs but if that is not communicated to both the clients and the consultants, there will be a strong likelihood the client will not be happy with the outcome.

The most-satisfying pitches were all characterized by the abilities of clients, consultants and agencies to not only communicate the information to one another in a clear manner that was understood but to also engage with one another in a manner that projected interest, involvement, and commitment.

### ***Accountability***

In addition to providing clear and effective communication, another important characteristic of the most-satisfying pitch processes was the level of accountability exhibited by all of the individuals involved. Respondents indicated that accountability referred to the extent that the roles of everyone involved were clearly defined so that everyone knew who was responsible for each particular task.

It was always clear who was running the show. There was no ayatollah confusion and no misdirection as a result of the confusion. The ayatollah led and listened, and let the core members of the team lead, as they deemed necessary (AD13)

It had all the elements I think of what makes a really good pitch. It had a very small team, I think there were maybe four or five of us working on it and the reason that's a good thing is because you're all accountable so there's a seriousness to it. Again, I go back to that large team. When you have too many large people, you have a lot of people saying stuff and confusing the issue but you don't have anyone with accountability because there's so many people but when you have four or five, you're all focused

on it, you're all in it together. It was kind of a drawn out pitch and so we had a lot of time to sort of know and so by the first week we were all like best buds and sort of got it and I think the material was interesting (AI6, p8, 295-302)

Participants remarked how in addition to every person involved knowing exactly what his or her role was in the process, individuals stood up and took responsibility for their assigned tasks. "It was a well-staffed team. It was a perfect example of any sort of layers or disciplines or anything being absolutely pushed aside. Everybody was in it together to do the best work possible" (AI1, p8, 330-332)

... there were a lot of people during that pitch process who really helped out and played a much more senior role than they maybe had before and I think maybe because of that really gave it more effort than they would have day to day (AI1, p8-9, 339-341)

We each did our thing and at no time felt like someone was scrutinizing every move we made (or didn't make). Assignments were divvied out and handled without territorial disputes or "my job/not my job" attitude (AD13)

We made that decision on the first day and our philosophy or our belief in running a new business pitch is, decide that stuff early and spend all that time you have on the Pitch making it look really smart as opposed to spending all your time figuring out what are we going to say and trying to figure out how to bring it to life (CI2, p8, 286-289)

## **COLLABORATION**

Instead of a sterile scenario where the client creates the assignment, the consultant delivers the assignment, and the agency completes the assignment, many participants indicated the most-satisfying pitches were those characterized by a high level of collaboration between all parties involved. This referred to the ways in which agencies and clients would spend more time working together.

So the good ones are highly-collaborative, in terms of having cross-functional teams working all together and then the short answer is yeh, we had pretty good, not as good access to sort of collaborating with the client as we would have liked to, but pretty good, that's a start anyway (AI8, p3, 80-82)

Actual collaboration between client and agency can result in a much more enjoyable process and a more successful product. "The ones where you are really collaborating a lot with the client or the potential client through a lot of different levels and across a lot of different functions, are really good ones" (AI, p1, 37-38).

### ***Real-World Simulation***

A collaborative process provides clients and agencies the ability to simulate, as closely as possible, what the every-day working relationship would actually be like beyond the confinements of the pitch process. In many cases, working collaboratively produces work that is closer to what the client wants because there is ongoing input from both parties. "It cuts down on any cost of them having to bill stuff that we'll never use, which is very inconsiderate of the agency and yeh, just totally avoids the whole dog and pony show that ends up really ineffective" (CLI1, p6, 218-220).

Clients and agencies both discuss how when there is the opportunity for client to actually work with the various agencies in a collaborative manner, the decision-making process can be so much easier because by simulating what an actual working relationship may be like, things may be revealed that would otherwise not be brought to the surface.

... the decision became really really obvious and clear, that's the thing that stands out because when you see people working and your really see it working versus trying to decide and trying to remember "what example was who's? and "who talked about this?" and that's where she had that

moment of “Okay, people are collaborating and they’re working off of each other, they’re reacting to one another” that you just don’t have much trouble making a decision, which so often in the pitch process you do (CLI1, p7, 240-245)

Obviously it was satisfying because we won it and it is a big pitch and we are very happy but the truth is I think the process, [name of consultant omitted] was involved in it, she runs a great process. It wasn’t created in the sense of let’s try to create a really linear process where we get 5 minutes with each agency and then they come back at the end of it and present their ideas. What they did really well, [client name], was they tried to create a simulation of what a working environment would be so they said to us, in the second part of the pitch process we’ve just found out we have won an award for something how would you use that award, it was like a real problem. We got to do a workshop with them and their existing agencies for their media company. We were thrown into a workshop with all of those different clients and their other agencies and that is how we were assessed. We weren’t assessed by the output of the workshop, we were assessed by how well we worked together with that team of clients and team of their other agencies and that to me was the closest process to actually depicting what is real life in real life. (AI14, p2, 41-52)

I think a workshop where you work collaboratively with a client is a best practice way of ensuring whether you are like-minded and can work together. I think a very clear understanding of the type of work they want to do whether it is examples from other categories or stuff they have done in the past, that level of creativity they are prepared to accept, is important. (AI14, p7, 236-239)

Having a high level of collaboration can help make the overall relationship more productive because both parties have the ability to have a dialogue that really gets to the heart of what needs to happen in order to make the relationship successful. “We don’t want you to spend a lot of time on the big Pitch, what we want you to do is think about these things and come to the Pitch ready to collaborate and talk with us about what we would do” (CLI1, p4, 149-151).



### *Positive Energy and Attitude*

When respondents discussed their most-satisfying pitch experiences, there were several comments referring to the extent the individuals involved were excited to be working on the business. The most-successful pitches were described in a way that indicated the various individuals who were involved exhibited a great deal of energy and a positive attitude throughout the pitch process.

There's a very big difference between being presented to by a group of people who are very excited to be there and who have a lot of passion for something and people who don't and even people who are faking it versus people who are genuine. And I think you always have to, I can't imagine that you'd ever expect to win if you didn't have people who legitimately really thinking they could make a difference and they wanted to own a piece of business (AI8, p3, 106-111)

Once we kinda ya know held hands and looked at each other and said "we're gonna do the best we can" and what it did was stimulate more activity for other people to come out. It stimulated content, it stimulated ideation, it stimulated creativity because everybody was enthused and energetic (AI13, p1-2, 38-40)

From preparing the RFP through the final presentation, the mood was always positive and energetic. Not just the mood of the team, but the mood of the agency about our participation. There is truly such a thing as positive energy and it pulsed from our pores. The agency wanted us to win the business as much as the team wanted to win (AD13).

Even though the majority of the pitch processes identified by agencies as "most-satisfying" involved the agency winning the business, there were a few where this was not the case. "The most satisfying pitch process was a pitch I did when I was at [agency name] for [client name] and we did not win the business" (AI13, p1, 10-11).

It was not the outcome ... it was the most satisfying thing that we did to the degree that we actually spent time after the Pitch analyzing what made it so good? Why was this was so good? What happened? And we wrote up a little thing about what happened during the process that made it so rewarding (AI13, p1, 14-17)

It did happen that we, throughout the pitch process, had really great chemistry with the client as well. It was a huge blow when we didn't get the business. We really thought based on the meetings and based on the chemistry meeting beforehand that it had gone incredibly well. But I left that pitch process feeling so proud of the agency that I worked for and the people that I worked with ... We just had so much fun. There wasn't the same kind of pressure that there had been for other pitches. That was probably the most enjoyable experience and I think we did some really amazing work for an otherwise super boring category (AI1, p8-9, 335-343)

There were several that went off extremely well and you walk away and you don't win the business and you say, "I don't think I would have done anything different" and it's a really good feeling to feel that way because the choice basically came down to the preference and that's probably the most frustrating part of the pitch process is at the end of the day, all things being equal, a client is going to choose based on a gut instinct, the president's preference, you never know. We had clients calling us afterwards saying, "You guys were such a close second and honestly me and my team chose you, but our president and the CMO wanted the other agency" and there ya go! Yeh, it's absolutely heart-wrenching so that happens unfortunately a lot (AI5, p2, 41-48)

As supported by the various respondents, the most-satisfying pitch processes experienced CHEMISTRY, CLARITY, and COLLABORATION and were characterized by *Client-Agency Fit*, *Agency Team Spirit*, *Clear Communication*, *Accountability*, *Real-World Simulation*, and *Positive Energy and Attitude*. The table on the following page provides a summary of these categories, themes, and repeating ideas.

**Table 6 – RQ3: Most Satisfying Pitches**

<b>I. CHEMISTRY</b>
<b>A. <i>Client-Agency Fit</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "...it was the right fit for the agency, there's just some brands that fit your agency" (AI12, p1, 17-18).</li> <li>2. "I've never known a client who hired an agency that they didn't fall in love with in a very personal way" (CI4, p5, 189-190).</li> <li>3. "...not all agencies are suitable for all brands" (CLI3, p7, 227).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Agency Team Spirit</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "I don't ever recall hiring an agency when the chemistry wasn't good between the people on the agency team" (CLI2, p7, 240-241).</li> <li>2. "The other piece of it that's important as I talk about that dynamic is the chemistry of the team itself ... hugely important" (AI3, p2, 57-58).</li> <li>3. "A pitch process is all about team dynamics" (AI13, p1, 19).</li> </ol>
<b>II. CLARITY</b>
<b>A. <i>Clear Communication</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "... had an understanding or demonstrated an interest in knowing about our company and were asking the right questions (CLI5, p7, 269-271).</li> <li>2. "It's also very much on the part of the agency to kind of ask questions and try to build that relationship" (AI3, p8, 280-284).</li> <li>3. "I think the communication be clear and appropriate" (CLI2, p3, 74-75).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Accountability</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "there were maybe 4 or 5 of us working on it and the reason that's a good thing is because you're all accountable" (AI6, p8, 296-297).</li> <li>2. "Everybody was in it together to do the best work possible" (AI1, p8, 331-332).</li> <li>3. "The more successful ones are the ones who will provide the expertise but will be willing to be client-driven" (CLI5, p3, 101).</li> </ol>
<b>III. COLLABORATION</b>
<b>A. <i>Real-World Simulation</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "...it gets to the heart of the matter and simulates the real life experience" (CLI1, p6, 215-216).</li> <li>2. "I think one thing that's really important is to have teams that collaborate but are still really very tight" (AI8, p2, 73-74).</li> <li>3. "It cuts down on any cost of them having to bill stuff that we'll never use" (CLI1, p6, 218).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Positive Energy and Attitude</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "It stimulated content, it stimulated ideation, it stimulated creativity because everybody was enthused and energetic" (AI13, p1-2, 39-40).</li> <li>2. "it's their energy level" (CLI2, p7, 248).</li> <li>3. "There's a very big difference between being presented to by a group of people who are very excited to be there and who have a lot of passion for something" (AI8, p3, 106-108).</li> </ol>

#### **5.4d *The Least-Satisfying Pitch Processes***

After discovering the various elements of satisfying pitch processes, the opposite side of the spectrum was explored. The fourth research question asked respondents to share their least-satisfying pitch experiences. The majority of the elements mentioned were just simply the opposites of those identified for the most-satisfying pitch processes. Overall, the data revealed three categories: CONFLICT, CONFUSION, and CONSTRICTION. Within these three categories, six themes were identified: *Personality Clashes, Culture Clashes, Lack of Leadership, Lack of Preparation, Not Enough Time, and Idea Inhibition.*

#### **CONFLICT**

Just as the most-satisfying pitch processes are characterized by the presence of great chemistry, the least-satisfying pitch processes are those where the various parties involved, for whatever reason, do not seem to get along well; where there are several areas of disagreement and instances of not seeing eye-to-eye. “Sometimes you are just not meant to be. It may be the coolest brand or the coolest product but for some reason the personality of the agency and the personality of the client just don’t match up” (AI1, p6, 244-246). When individuals do not get along with one another it can lead to a great deal of time wasted and can create an overall feeling of discomfort for both the client and the agency.

#### ***Personality Clashes***

One of the biggest areas of conflict during a pitch process occurs when various individuals do not get along well with one another. This can be either within the agency

team or between the client and the agency organizations. “There’s a lot of waste that happens in the pitch process, a lot of internal arguing, you know a lot of who’s gotta be right and it just gets in the way of success” (CI2, p8, 312-314). “You could just sort of see a conflict. Like somebody would say something and you could tell that some of the other people in the room didn’t necessarily agree” (CLI6, p4, 125-126). “You can have a very experienced team but if you don’t have the ability to communicate with one another, like oil and water, that makes a difference,” (CLI1, p3, 85-88).

... if you don’t have good internal relationships with the people doing the Pitch, you’ll fail because you won’t be able to get anything accomplished, nobody will like anything, there will be a confidence drop. It’s just a horrible situation and I have been in a couple of those too where nobody liked each other and everybody hated what they were doing. It was just a nightmare and a client can see through that ... It is just a horrible way to do business (AI2, p4, 154-158)

Communication is a lot and the client is a little bit more to blame to a degree because it’s like, just tell your agency you’re not happy with them. They’re passive aggressive or just not confrontational or the client just doesn’t want to do those things (AI3, p10, 366-368)

Sometimes it is subtle things, it’s either they are all engaged, that’s the word that I hear a lot when we talk about evaluating the agencies. They are either engaged in the presentation and the process ... You can tell those agencies that didn’t work on this as a team. It’s either in the way they look at each other, it’s their responses to their questions, and it’s their energy level. You know sometimes, if somebody on the team is saying the wrong thing in a pitch, you get the senior agency folks giving like the evil eye. I mean you pick up on those things (CLI2, p7, 245-250)

Individual personalities can be difficult to control on both the client and the agency side and you never quite know how various individuals will work together until it actually happens. One consultant comments, “It’s very much an ego business. I don’t have a lot of tolerance for that” (CI6, p6, 219).

You don't have any time, you don't have a couple weeks to sorta get in each other's flow and that's a struggle because there are different working styles and people are bringing different approaches to the table, different points of view. You have to check your ego at the door, because you don't have time to get mad, or get upset or get hurt, because you know you're in these rooms and you're with these people for 2-3 hours at a time, and there's a lot of cursing, there's a lot of disagreement, there's a lot, can be, storming out of the room. And you also can't be too nice either, everything can't be agreeable because you don't get anywhere (AI6, p3, 99-105)

Most individuals involved in pitching know there are going to be times when, for whatever reason, personalities do not click and conflict ensues. "Our worst accounts have the worst people managing the accounts. No matter what we do, they're never happy, they're never enthusiastic ... we will try to tell them something and they get upset because we're teaching them about marketing or whatever" (AI15, p5, 190-193). Although some conflict may be manageable because it signifies people are passionate about their work and their ideas, many of the least-satisfying pitches contained a level of conflict that was toxic for everyone involved.

### ***Cultural Clashes***

Just as the most-satisfying pitches can be attributed to the way in which a client organization and an agency fit together, the opposite is true for the least-satisfying pitches. In many cases, at various points within the pitch process, one or both parties will realize the partnership will not work out based on the fact the two companies are just too different.

When you see there's an agency that's pushing edginess where we don't think it's a good fit. We got some of that out of our visits with them. There were some that were just ... we got the feeling they would push for creative discomfort for us. And that was, some what we got out of it is some agencies have philosophies that they stick with and that's how they

run their business. In other words, this is how we do it, this is what we believe, this is how we operate so if you don't want to buy into this client, then maybe this is not the right fit (CLI5, p3, 93-99)

If you know there's an issue and you don't address it, and believe me, there are agencies that will do that. There are agencies that will say, "screw them, this is who we are" well then why are you in the Pitch? I'm not saying compromise your integrity or compromise your brand for pitch, I'm saying at that point, there are things you shouldn't pitch if they don't fit your brand (CI2, p11, 403-408)

In addition, just as the most-successful pitches were characterized by the presence of positive attitudes and energy levels, the opposite is true for the least-satisfying pitches. If individuals are not excited to be working on the business and do not really feel motivated to put a great deal of energy into the pitch process, it will not work.

Only go into the pitch process if you really want to win the business. If you don't, if you're not sure, or you are just kind of doing it because you have nothing else going on or you're not really excited about the business, you're not gonna win. It's a big cost of both people's time and resources and therefore you gotta make it, if you're gonna do that, make sure it's something you really want to be doing (CI6, p11, 429-433)

Another consultant shares an example of a cultural clash when a particular agency, who was previously well-regarded by the client, showed a high-level of arrogance and disregard during a particular pitch process. This supports the idea that like personal relationships, sometimes it takes additional time to really assess whether two parties are well-suited for one another.

We sent out an initial RFI questionnaire and this famous agency did not answer at least half of the questions that we asked and I asked them well, you didn't answer the questions and they said, "well, we thought they were irrelevant" and in spite of that, the client wanted to see them in the credentials meeting. They wanted to meet them in person. The client

wanted that kind of work and so we gave them an agenda for the credentials meeting and we asked them to cover a lot of things that they refused to answer in the RFI questions and the new business person from the famous, well-regarded agency, sent back the agenda I sent him and did the track changes in red pointing out all of the things that were redundant that we asked for in the RFI stage before. I said, “You know they are back in there because you didn’t answer them the first time and the client needs your answers to these questions before they can consider you”. Needless to say, my clients fell out of love with this agency. Another thing I always tell agencies, I don’t care who you are, there may be a few exceptions when this can work, but I don’t care who you are, I don’t think there is any room for arrogance from an agency in a search process and there are some agencies that are very very arrogant and they probably get by with this sometimes but that is not smart at all. Clients do not react well to that (CI4, p6, 217-232)

As the examples above indicate, most of the cases identified by the respondents had less to do with the quality of work presented and more to do with the quality of the interaction between the various parties involved. These accounts support the notion that not all agencies and clients are well-suited for one another and the earlier on in the pitch process this is discovered, the better.

## **CONFUSION**

This construct refers to the way a particular pitch process can become extremely chaotic and how many of the least-satisfying pitches were those characterized by a great deal of confusion; where participants were unclear of the overall direction.

Clients have questions at all stages and there’s confusion sometimes and I think it’s important for me to be there so I understand the context of things that were discussed. If the client or the agency has questions I want to make sure that they’re not misunderstanding each other and so and I just think that so many factors influence a decision, it’s such a complex thing that I think you need to be there and provide guidance. And plus at the end of each review, I think it’s really important for me to give the agencies, to the degree they want them and they don’t really always want them, a good fair debrief on how they performed and what they did well and what they didn’t do well (CI6, p6,203-209)



When respondents discussed the confusion that was present in the least-satisfying pitch processes, it was usually because individuals were not all on the same page or because they were not well prepared. These findings contributed to the themes *Lack of Leadership* and *Lack of Preparation*.

### ***Lack of Leadership***

Even though many pitch process are characterized as formal and structured, oftentimes, the actual individuals behind the process may not be quite as organized. When there is confusion over roles and responsibilities, it results in confusion relating to both the overall direction and strategy of the Pitch. “There were too many big decision makers in the room and everybody had an opinion and it led to a lot of fighting and it led to what I believe wasn’t really our best work” (AI1, p9, 344-346). The comments below from agency respondents discuss pitch processes where there was a lack of leadership.

I’ve been in those pitches and there’s no defined clarity of roles and responsibilities. The people who are charged with being involved on the pitch team don’t really understand what they are supposed to be doing. It’s never been articulated to them what they’re supposed to be doing. There’s no articulation of ownership, and you have overlapping, people doing the same things so you have redundancies. There is really lack of leadership and a good pitch team has to start out as a democracy but has to end as a dictatorship (AI13, p7, 243-248)

[agency name] has a huge issue with throwing everyone into the pie and again, no one is accountable, you’ve got too many Indians and not a chief and it’s counterproductive and I think that’s honestly one of our biggest issues here. We’ve been told that in no uncertain terms. (AI6, p9, 332-340)

There wasn’t clarity of decision makers. There was one senior person said we’re going to do this and another one said, no we’re not going to do this and so the support team so are we doing this or not? There was no, who’s in charge? And there was things coming in from the outside all the time,

we gotta do this, well OKAY, so without leadership and that focus, you have this ... like a group of people doing work but nobody saying, look here's the charge this is what we have to do (AI13, p8, 271-275)

In addition to not knowing who is in charge, some respondents mentioned instances where individuals in key roles made mistakes that may have attributed to the loss of the account. "I've been in pitches where the CEO calls someone on their team the wrong name!" (CLI7, p10, 377).

There was one that was so bad. The agency leader was reading the names of his people and how could a man be in that position and not say, "Meet Bob, Meet Larry, etc." and that was just humiliating and mispronouncing things, so that was a disaster. The clients wanted to leave as soon as it was over (CI3, p6, 225-227)

Regardless of the size of the agency, the client organization, and the account, there has to be an element of leadership. Leadership provides direction and clarity which is greatly needed from all constituencies involved during an intense pitch process.

### ***Lack of Preparation***

When respondents discuss the least-satisfying pitches, one of the common factors discussed was the lack of preparation. This consisted throughout all phases of the pitch process from the RFI stage through the final pitch. Time and time again, respondents mentioned instances where the other party failed to adequately prepare and it resulted in negatively impacting the pitch process. One consultant shares a mistake that was made during the Pitch because of a lack of preparation.

We sent out the RFI questionnaire to eighteen agencies and one of the agencies that responded is one of the most prominent well-respected agencies in the business and everybody would agree that this agency qualifies this way and they sent a thirty-eight page RFI response and they had the wrong logo and tagline for some other client on the bottom of every

single page. On the first page of that document there were like ten or twelve typos or something and when I took all this stuff to show the client, I said, now I am gonna show you this and it's not gonna make you happy. This is the eighteenth worst response we got but this is not the eighteenth worst agency. I promise you this is a great agency. I handed the client the document and he just threw it in the wastebasket and said "I have no interest in this agency". I always tell agencies, there is a lot of hubris and arrogance in the agency world and a lot of agencies think that they get an automatic pass into the final round just because of their reputation. Well most clients are not steeped in agency reputations. It's all about them and what's in it for them and they took a look at that and said, "We don't want anything to do with an agency like that". They didn't care who they were or what their reputation was (CI4, p5-6, 194-209)

Another consultant describes how when agencies are not prepared it shows greatly in the way they conduct meetings and presentations. Some agencies may try to compensate by either presenting too much material or speaking extremely quickly.

Campaign after campaign and the more we show, the more likely it is they'll see something to make them love us and as a result, they present way way too much stuff and so meetings end up going over time, that's one of three reasons, the biggest of the three reasons for why meetings go over time. And so they cram everything in and they're talking too fast (CI5, p7, 249-252)

When we wing it as professionals, we take three times longer to say things badly. We start talking and we can't pause because we're afraid that they'll realize we don't know what we're going to say next so we just keep going until finally we think we have a thought and then we sorta state it but we know it's not quite right semicolon then we go on to explain it a different way, ramble on a little bit more, and try to discuss the other side of it semicolon and then we come back with a final sort of thought, something we missed period (CI5, p7, 253-258)

Failure to prepare for a pitch process is not beneficial to anyone. It is frustrating to agencies when clients are not fully prepared to answer their questions and it is upsetting for clients if they think agencies do not take the time to learn and understand

their business. Lack of preparation can create distraction and can lead to a series of events that ultimately result in not being prepared to handle the pitch process effectively.

There was some good research and there were parts of the process that were interesting and fun but I think by the time we got to the final meeting, it was pretty obvious that we had been sort of distracted in the process. We had too many things on the plate. We were pitching other pieces of business at the same time. There were too few resources, there were too many cooks in the kitchen, and honestly I don't think for that pitch that we really maybe even deserved to win. We weren't able to come to the table with our best foot forward because of the process issues we were having internally (AI1, p9, 346-351)

You're selling yourself ... it's an interview. If you're going in to interview with a company, you're going to do the research on the company, like really really really do the research on the company, really try and understand the culture of the company (CLI7, p10, 372-374)

Respondents agreed that the pitches that were the least-satisfying usually had some aspect of disorganization where one or both parties were not prepared. Whether it is the initial phone call, a chemistry meeting, or the final pitch presentation, all parties involved in the pitch process owe it to each other to always be prepared.

## **CONSTRICTION**

This construct refers to how there is a large amount of work that has to be done during a pitch process in an extremely short amount of time. "You're in such a condensed time period that oftentimes every emotion you might feel over a three year relationship, you feel in three weeks and when you're pitching" (AI12, p6, 228-230). Clients, agencies, and consultants all expressed a certain level of frustration with how the pitch process can be extremely constrictive. The themes revealed within this construct were *Not Enough Time* and *Idea Inhibition*.

### ***Not Enough Time***

One of the factors mentioned most often when dealing with the aspect of constriction was the concept of not having enough time. The aspect of time was discussed earlier and so the fact that it also proved to be an issue when participants were describing their least-satisfying pitch processes, affirmed its huge role in the pitch process.

The worst ones are where nobody has enough time to actually bring anything of value to the client and you know it. If you're management, if my boss says you're gonna do this and don't care how much or how little time or resources the team has, you just have to do it and you put yourself in a situation where you haven't thought about it enough and you don't have the right people and all that kind of thing, there's nothing worse than going in with nothing to add because you just don't, you know I think it's pretty obvious when you're not in there with your heart in the game or spent enough time doing stuff (AI8, p5, 180-186)

Each constituency faced a different challenge within this theme. For clients, the speed of business and the evolution of the industry create a great deal of pressure on companies to continually assess and revamp their marketing activities. This involves requiring a quick turnaround for certain projects. One consultant comments, "A lot of agencies have processes for really integrating the client in their work process and we don't have enough time usually to allow that" (CI1, p9, 363-365).

I just think you just have to spend a lot of time together and let people instinct start to take hold so that people get a sense of what kind of folks they're dealing with and you have to get generally good at facilitating the kinds of discussions that let people be frank and forthright enough that you actually end up with a really good sense of one side or the other where they're coming from (AI8, p5, 175-178)

Respondents indicated that because so many of the pitch processes are under tight time constraints, it forces decisions to be made extremely quickly so that deadlines can be made. In many cases, these decisions do not always prove to be wise ones.

We only interacted twice with them and I have to say that I think in the end just going back to the agency that we hired for a year and then let them go, I think we could have done a better job, if we had done a better job of making the assessment up front we wouldn't have hired them in the first place. But the only way we would have been able to know that is if we decided that our criteria wasn't going to be just based on the creative that we were going to produce, they happened to come up with the winning idea. So that was number 1, we did do that and maybe we shouldn't have or maybe we should have had that as just one criteria but not the driving criteria. And then the second thing is we obviously didn't do enough assessment to understand what the working relationship was going to be like. I don't know if it was because they weren't up front about it or if we just didn't ask the right questions (CLI5, p13, 467-475)

Overall, the way in which time is constricted during the pitch process seems to be an issue for many respondents and has been attributed to some of the least-satisfying pitch processes. Agencies feel powerless because they have to work within whatever time constraints are imposed by the client. Consultants, similar to agencies, do have to satisfy the client and make sure the timeline is followed. Clients also have a difficult task in keeping up with the market and their competitors and therefore they too may always feel there is never enough time to get everything done.

### ***Idea Inhibition***

As discussed, the issue of not having enough time was a huge characteristic of the least-satisfying pitch processes. The lack of time also played a role in the theme of *Idea Inhibition*. According to respondents, some of the least-satisfying pitch processes included instances where there was a perception of idea inhibition either created by the

confinements of a systematic process or by the way in which the various individuals did not feel completely free to communicate and expand upon their ideas. After experiencing many unsatisfying pitch processes, one client shares how a particular pitch process may be somewhat inhibitive for the agencies.

... it's not really a fair representation of their [agencies] abilities to say now what would you do with our brand and give them some direction because we provide scientific information behind everything to give them a better shake but because so much of the creative process in our view is an outcome of a collaboration between our own brand team and the agency, it's really, how well do we collaborate to come up with the ultimate result? And in the pitch process if all you say is here's our thing, now what would you do? you miss a great part of that in the collaboration piece of it and so we've just gone to the place where we're like, we're not sure if it's a fair representation of what they're really capable of, plus it's a lot of work for them, it's a lot of cost, and we don't know that it adds that much value (CLI1, p4, 131-140)

Another client discussed what she said to an agency after being disappointed with the extent of the creative ideas produced by the agency. "I mean we go to the agencies for escape, to have like the creativity bounce off the walls that we can't get in our home office and you guys were like all in suits in a quiet room" (CLI6, p3, 102-104). Agency respondents also discuss how the constraints of the pitch process can make it difficult to provide work of value because not only is it a quick timeline but there are also limited opportunities for contact and collaboration.

Your worst case pitch is where you get given a brief in an hour format where the client comes and briefs you for an hour and you are allowed to call them maybe two weeks later and ask them some questions for an hour over the phone and you have to come back with an answer i.e. this is your strategic position for your brand and these are the ads that you want to run and that is really hard to do because work isn't created in isolation. There is no way we will know what they have done before, there is no way we will know where the work will lead you, there is no way we will know what the chairman really likes and doesn't like. You can only get to that

kind of parameters of what we can do by working really collaboratively with clients (AI14, p2, 57-64)

As discussed earlier, clear communication and direction is vital in the pitch process as it ensures all parties involved are on the same page. Its absence can create a multitude of problems. One agency respondent shares frustration regarding the ways ideas were inhibited based on a client changing its mind mid-pitch.

When clients indicate, hey, you know we're open-minded to changing this and that and there's no sacred cows and we want you to be aggressive and we want you to whatever and you go in there and you bring in ideas that are not even really that far out there but just further than their used to being pushed, which they asked to do and they turn around and say, "Oh you know what, we'll never go away from this" or "gosh, we've rethought whether we really want to make some of the changes" those are pretty irritating because it's like you know what, if there are sacred cows, at least let your partners or potential partners know about them so they can either say hey we agree with that and here's a way we would change what you're doing and change your prospects without getting rid of ... I don't know whatever the thing they can't see themselves changing. Or at least come in and say, here's why we think you should kill that sacred cow but if you're being blind to that kind of stuff, it's bad (AI8, p5, 189-198)

Overall, respondents were genuinely frustrated with the way in which many pitch processes, just by their very nature, can inhibit a great deal of creative thinking. Many of the comments from the respondents regarding the theme *Idea Inhibition* related to several of the other themes. For instance, many participants discussed how the aspect of time and the way in which the whole process was so rushed severely impacted the whole creative process. In addition, when there are personality and cultural clashes ideas may also be inhibited if individuals do not feel comfortable to express their own thoughts. In most cases, if there is a severe clash, one or both parties will decide to terminate the relationship as soon as possible; however, because many pitch processes do not build in a



great amount of contact between clients and agencies, there may be instances where certain issues are not discovered until much later in the process.

As supported by the various respondents, the least-satisfying pitch processes experienced CONFLICT, CONFUSION, and CONSTRICTION and were characterized by *Personality Clashes*, *Cultural Clashes*, *Lack of Leadership*, *Lack of Preparation*, *Not Having Time*, and *Idea Inhibition*. The table on the following page provides a summary of these categories, themes, and repeating ideas.

**Table 7 – RQ4: Least-Satisfying Pitches**

<b>I. CONFLICT</b>
<b>A. <i>Personality Clashes</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “... the personality of the agency and the personality of the client just don’t match up” (AI1, p6, 244-246).</li> <li>2. “...sometimes there are agencies that leave and we’re like, “oh my God, those two hated each other!”(CLI2, p7, 235-236).</li> <li>3. ... if you don’t have good internal relationships with the people doing the Pitch, you’ll fail” (AI2, p4, 154-155).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Cultural Clashes</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “...there are things you shouldn’t pitch if they don’t fit your brand” (CI2, p11, 407-408).</li> <li>2. They said, “We just don’t think that we’re going to be able to satisfy you, we’re really concerned” (CLI5, p3, 109-110).</li> <li>3. “We got the feeling they would push for creative discomfort for us” (CLI5, p3, 95-96).</li> </ol>
<b>II. CONFUSION</b>
<b>A. <i>Lack of Leadership</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “There wasn’t clarity of decision makers” (AI13, p8, 271).</li> <li>2. “... no one is accountable, you’ve got too many Indians and not a chief” (AI6, p9, 338).</li> <li>3. “I’ve been in pitches where the CEO calls someone on their team the wrong name!” (CLI7, p10, 377).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Lack of Preparation</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Do your homework, it’s an interview ...” (CLI7, p10, 372).</li> <li>2. “I think by the time we got to the final meeting, it was pretty obvious that we had been sort of distracted” (AI1, p9, 347-348).</li> <li>3. “When we wing it as professionals, we take three times longer to say things badly” (CI5, p7, 253-254).</li> </ol>
<b>III. CONSTRICTION</b>
<b>A. <i>Not Enough Time</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “The worst ones are where nobody has enough time to actually bring anything of value to the client and you know it” (AI8, p5, 180-181).</li> <li>2. “A lot of agencies have processes for really integrating the client in their work process and we don’t have enough time usually to allow that” (CI1, p9, 363-365).</li> <li>3. “... every emotion you might feel over a three year relationship, you feel in three weeks” (AI12, p6, 229).</li> </ol>
<b>B. <i>Idea Inhibition</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “...that is really hard to do because work isn’t created in isolation” (AI14, p2, 61).</li> <li>2. “... we go to the agencies for escape, to have like the creativity bounce off the walls that we can’t get in our home office and you guys were like all in suits in a quiet room” (CLI6, p3, 102-104).</li> <li>3. “If there are sacred cows, at least let your partners or potential partners know” (AI8, p5, 194-195).</li> </ol>

## ***5.5 Additional Findings***

The previous two sections discussed both general findings and findings related to the research questions. This section discusses findings that emerged from the data that shed light on some additional areas of interest within the pitch process that may warrant further exploration.

### ***Role of the Incumbent***

The role of the incumbent had been mentioned a great deal by respondents when discussing the elements of developing and experiencing trust because in many cases, when a particular piece of business is up for review, it may indicate the client no longer trusts the incumbent to meet expectations. “When you go out for a pitch, there is a reason why your out for pitch. If it’s just to consolidate or just to open up the business again, if it’s money or if it’s pricing ...” (CLI4, p8-9, 321-323). There are exceptions, for instance if a new CMO has been hired and just wants a change of agency or if it is a governmental account that is required to go through a review every few years. For incumbent agencies, the decision to participate in a pitch process must be heavily evaluated. Three agency respondents discuss the thought process that is required to make the decision.

If you are defending your business because a new person has come in and he just wants to see what’s out there, I think you have a really good chance of retaining the business because you just have to WOW him and let him see you are still the best agency he can get. If you are defending your business because the client has had one too many unhappy meetings and too many unhappy projects, if the client is really unhappy with the agency and the client organization is not going to change, then it’s really pointless to try and defend it because you could do a bang-up job and they would say, “why haven’t you been doing this all along?” It’s a real squirrely thing. It’s very rare that an agency decides not to defend, but more times

than not, we should just back out; take our losses and leave. (AI2, p6, 216-224)

Pitches happen for 2 or 3 reasons. One because a new client has come in and wants to impose his era or her era and his or her people, two because the relationship has broken down, and three because there has been and that is part of two as well, there has been issues within the agency, like the teams being changed or they haven't been able to meet in time or budget, etc. and if it is the case of number one where someone else has come in and they want to bring in their own people, we might re-pitch for it if we have a lot of love for the brand and think we can continue to do good work, etc. And we feel it is a level playing field (AI14, p3, 96-102)

Yeh, I think a lot of it depends on what we believe to be the reason and whether we have a chance. We pretty much know, we'll have known if there is trouble in the relationship and we'll make a call as to whether or not the clients are sincere in wanting us to continue and if it's not, it's a heart to heart with them to say, "does this really make sense for both of us?" because it's very expensive for an agency to pitch and it takes a lot of resources away and so you weigh that against what the current state of the relationship and can we really rectify what their concerns are. Again, it goes back to what we talked about first and that is, it could just be that the chemistry is beyond the point where it's something that can be fixed and a lot of times, I would say probably most of the times it happens to us in that scenario, there's an entirely new marketing team on the client side. Most of the times there is a new player and they just flat out want a new agency. They have an agenda, a new CMO comes in, a new director, they have their own view on who or what their agency should be and you don't stand a chance (AI5, p8, 280-290)

Clients, agencies, and consultants all agree that being an incumbent in the pitch process is extremely difficult. "Incumbents typically have a 3 to 5 percent chance of keeping the business so the odds are against you. Chances are it's in a pitch because they just don't like you anymore for whatever reason" (AI6, p9, 352-354.)

I've been doing this for 11 years and I've only had 2 incumbents win in all that time, the odds are really against them ... partially because usually what the problem is not something that can be resolved through a speculative review process (CI1, p10, 373-375)

For clients, dealing with incumbents can be tricky because as mentioned, for whatever reason, the client is dissatisfied with their performance and that is why the business is up for review; however, many clients feel as if they owe the incumbent the chance to save the business. The decision on whether to include the incumbents in the pitch process can be difficult. “We had a very rough situation because our incumbent was involved and they basically knew we included them in the Pitch but they knew that they were on sort of thin ground so to speak” (CLI4, p5, 190-192). Although the odds are against you when you are the incumbent in a pitch process, one client discusses how incumbents should not automatically think it is a bad idea.

We went through this pitch process where the incumbent was ... we had full intentions of pulling away and when we went out to pitch, we realized that we probably were in the best place and what we did is because then you're like, Oh my God we have to come back now and now the leverage has switched to their side so to speak. We said to them, you position it in a way like, hey listen, we want to continue doing business with you but you need to fix x ,y and z and we're going to go up for review in a year if it doesn't change again ... it's not always a bad idea for the incumbent to pitch because a) we didn't find one that we liked and b) they have the opportunity to sort of really go through all of the issues and really go back out and try to win the business again (CLI4, p8, 312-320)

Most consultants usually advise their clients to not participate in the pitch process if they are the incumbent. “You may as well start looking for a new account and save the time and money doing that” (CI5, p5, 194-195).

It's the hardest thing to do. The chance of retaining a business once it goes into review if you're the incumbent is low. The problem is that you've had so much experience of “you can't do this, we tried it, it didn't work” kind of a thing so you walk into it with all that baggage. Somebody coming in new who hasn't had that or somebody asking questions that the agency may have gotten shot down for 2 years ago but now maybe you've thought about it differently whereas the agency, the incumbent would be resistant to ask that again where somebody new doesn't know and suddenly it sounds fresh in the moment and suddenly it seems like “wow,

we're getting so many new ideas from these guys" so I think it's that core dynamic (CI6, p6-2, 238-245)

Overall, the respondents, regardless of constituency, agreed that the role of the incumbent was not desirable in any pitch process. The relationship dynamics are extremely different when an incumbent is involved in the pitch process because obviously there is history and so the parties are not learning about one another for the first time. After listening to the various respondents, it was determined the incumbent agencies really face the biggest burden and the highest level of risk. Defending business can be expensive and a waste of time if the client has no intention of objectively evaluating the incumbent agency; however, not defending an account can appear as if the agency does not value the account enough or believes it may not be the best agency to handle the business.

### ***Presentation Style***

As discussed previously, agencies face conflicts when deciding what individuals to deliver the pitch presentation considering their best presenters may not actually be the ones who will be working on the account. "There is no question that an agency's capabilities come into play but I really believe that the team that you put in the room is the most critical factor in determining whether or not an agency wins a pitch or not" (AI5, p2, 48-50). "I would say what stood out for us was their presentation, their creativeness ..." (CLI5, p6, 203).

... so what's important is to put on a great show, a piece of theater. So to get that done, I tell my clients they should appoint a pitch captain for each pitch and this person, usually a rotating individual, not the same person, will decide who goes in the room, will decide what they're going to say,

will write their parts, and will decide what creative work gets shown ... (CI5, p9, 341-344)

Considering most clients' require the people delivering the Pitch are the ones who work on the account, agencies are left in quite a predicament. This predicament is further accentuated by understanding the value that many respondents place on the actual presentation style.

What really sticks out, it's interesting, the team where the people are the most relaxed in their presentation that are the most natural, that are the most conversational are the most engaging and likeable. Regardless of anything that took place before any little chachsky, that is what the majority of people connect with and like I said, if I had sat through all of these presentations, I would have really coached my team and myself when I was on the agency side to just take a deep breath and be real. Just be real (CLI2, p7, 221-226)

I think that they may have been the best presentation I have ever seen. An agency that does a presentation like that, wins. It's as simple as that ... presentation is everything. If you don't have the content, obviously you're not gonna win. But if you can do a presentation like that and have substance behind it, you don't lose. You just don't lose. A lot of agencies don't have a proper appreciation for the importance of presentation skills (CI4, p3, 122-126)

In the AAAA survey, *Agency Search –What Matters? Winning Strategies for Ad Agencies* (2007), the importance of presentation style received mixed reviews from participants. "Some marketers see it as important and necessary for agency selection, while others feel it is overrated and that substance outweighs the style of presenting" (p. 37). Because there is such discrepancy regarding preferences to presentation style, agencies should be diligent in discovering what particular presentation style is appreciated by the particular client involved in the pitch process.

## ***Role of Procurement***

With the ever-changing pitching landscape the extent of who is involved also changes. One thing mentioned by several respondents was the increased role of procurement professionals in a pitch process. This was supported by the results of the AAAA survey, *Agency Search –What Matters? Winning Strategies for Ad Agencies* (2007). According to the survey, procurement specialists were usually involved in the negotiation of compensation and contracts; however, they were also involved in areas such as selecting the search criteria for agencies and participating in the selection decision.

An average of 38 percent of firms (small, medium, and large) surveyed indicated the presence of procurement specialists in the search process. Medium and larger firms showed a great deal more procurement involvement than the smaller firms. One consultant explains in detail how this has changed the way a lot of pitches are being conducted.

The other dynamic, I don't know if this has come up in your research thus far, is the role of procurement in the client corporations. Has anyone talked to you about that? That's an important new trend because the industry of search consultants, is a small industry, it's a little cottage industry, that probably goes back about 20 years or so as agency choices started to become more complicated.

In the past five years or so in corporations, and all the big corporations have procurement departments, sometimes they're called procurement, sometimes they're called strategic sourcing, a procurement or a sourcing executive will take the point of view, "Don't call me purchasing, purchasing buys paper-clips and we try to add value" but you know someone who might have been sourcing sheet metal for a big industrial company, an automotive company, they're buying sheet metal and now they're buying agencies???

I had one conversation with one [procurement professional] and she said, "I've never bought agencies before" because it's different, it's buying



intellectual property so I think Advertising Age today survey a couple years ago that something like twenty-two or twenty-three of the twenty-five largest advertisers have purchasing or sourcing or procurement people involved with agencies. Some of them want to count the hours, billable hours, right whereas a marketer might be less concerned about that, they care more about output or the outcome. Output is more important than hours and outcome is more important than output (CI3, p5, 181-195)

One client discusses how in many cases, when procurement is involved in the pitch process, “it marginalizes the effort that you went through to choose the agency and it doesn’t take into consideration any of the less quantitative elements” (CLI6, p8, 294-295). A few agencies indicated that although the involvement of procurement professionals is increasing, certain industries and companies are more likely to use them than others.

The pharmas are totally driven by procurement. I’m sure you’ll find that when you talk to the pharmaceuticals and we’re not driven by procurement and part of the reason for that is that in our business, we have to spend our advertising dollars because we are required as a franchise to spend a certain amount every year so there is no opportunity to come in and say, “Oh, we’re not going to spend on advertising because we would like to get a little bit more of the bottom line this year,” or “We’re going to take the money we would have spent on advertising, associated fees, and all that and we’re going to put that into capital spending.” That doesn’t happen in a franchise organization. We have an agreement with your franchisee that you have to meet so part of it is we know what our budgets are going to be, we know what’s available, and no one is going to come in and take it away (CLI7, p3, 77-85)

That [involvement of procurement] has become huge. I will say though, on the pitches that I saw procurement involved were much larger corporations. The corporations where you would expect to see more stringent processes and legal agreements. We didn’t see it a lot, but saw more of it, saw definitely a trend towards more involvement by procurement. It complicates it (AI5, p4, 117-120)

Although procurement professionals may be helpful to include once the decision has been made, bringing them in too early in the pitch process may not be beneficial for

anyone involved. This is because selecting an advertising agency to perform creative duties is vastly different from choosing the brand of napkins that will be provided in the break-room or the kinds of chairs that will be in all of the conference rooms. The differences that set the various advertising agencies apart cannot be neatly confined to a quantitative measure such as cost and therefore cannot be evaluated in the same manner as something more tangible. Therefore, although it may be beneficial to involve a procurement specialist when drafting up final contracts with the winning agency, their value in the actual selection process has yet to be determined.

#### ***5.6 Development of Advertising Agency-Client Relationships During the Pitch Process***

The data from this study has led the researcher to develop a general conceptual model of the way in which relationships between advertising agencies and clients develop during the pitch process. Because the pitch process is both dynamical and complex, the model can only capture the high level concepts that emerged from the study. This model portrays the relationship between clients, agencies, and consultants as the pitch process evolves from early pitch, to mid-pitch, to final pitch. Unlike many of the previous relationship models that depict the stages of a relationship in a purely linear form, this model recognizes that although some of the elements may operate linearly, other components are largely interactive. This is why the large black arrows have points going in both directions; indicating that the relationship can move both forwards and backwards depending on the specific relationship dynamics.

During the early pitch stage, clients, agencies, and consultants all become aware of one another either through an existing relationship, third-party source, industry news,

etc. If the initial attraction and pre-experiential trust experienced between the various parties involved is favorable, the relationship will move into the mid-pitch stage; the largest, most complex part of the entire pitch process. It is characterized by four key elements: presence of a consultant, level of formality, logistical factors, and relational factors. As indicated by the arrows, each one of these elements can have an impact on the other. Likewise, a change in one of the elements can result in a change in one or several of the others.

The presence of a consultant consists of the way in which the consultant is involved within a pitch process and the establishment of a level-playing field. Regardless of whether a consultant is involved, there will be a level of formality that is characterized by either playing by the rules or going with the flow. The pitch process is characterized by a high level of complexity where there are both relational factors and logistical factors that determine how the Pitch is experienced. Even though this study was mainly concerned with the relational component, the data revealed several logistical aspects that could not be over-looked. The logistical factors include: time, technology, frequency of contact, and size, structure, and scope. The relational factors include: defined expectations, connection points, clear communication, and client-agency fit.

During the mid-pitch phase, all of the parties involved are continually assessing the relationship based both on how the four main elements are interacting. Based on this interaction, clients begin to narrow down their list of potential agencies that will make it into the final pitch stage and the agencies evaluate whether the business is still worthwhile to pursue. At any point throughout the process if the level of attraction and

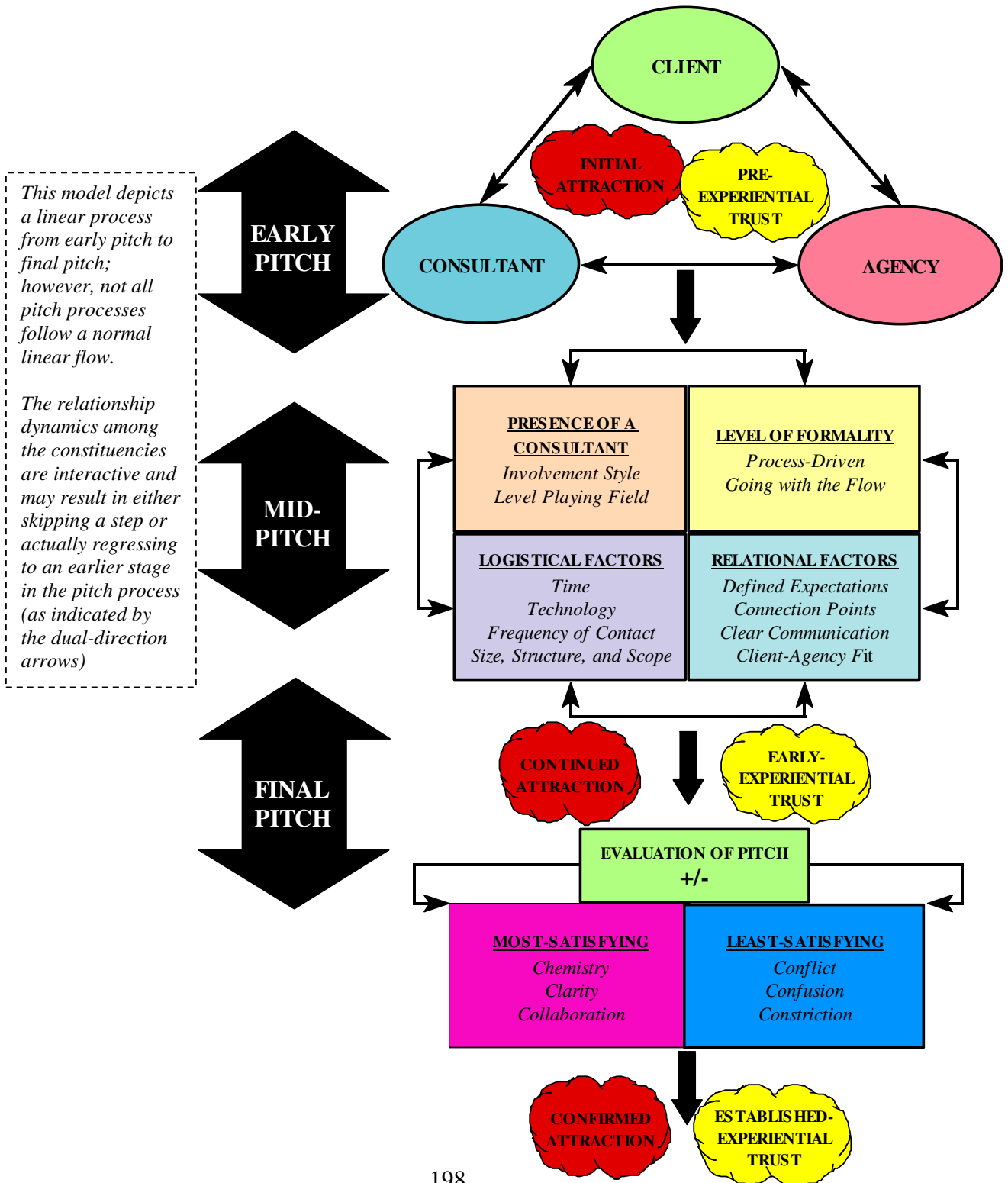
the extent of trust plummets by any of the parties involved it will affect the forward motion of the relationship. Obviously if a client decides a particular agency is not a good fit for its organization, it will choose to not advance that agency to the final pitch phase. Likewise, if an agency decides the organization may be difficult to work with, the agency may choose to back out of the process. When the levels of attraction and trust continue to remain high through the mid-phase, the relationship enters the final pitch phase. At this point, the parties involved are able to evaluate whether the pitch process could be considered as one of the most-satisfying or least-satisfying pitch processes. The most-satisfying pitch processes are characterized by chemistry, clarity, and collaboration. The least-satisfying pitch processes are characterized by conflict, confusion, and constriction.

As stated earlier, because relationship dynamics among constituencies provide an interactive force, the way that each pitch process develops is largely dependent upon the particular individuals involved. For instance, a pitch process could evolve smoothly from early pitch to mid-pitch and then perhaps something happens during mid-pitch that serves as a set-back in the relationship by decreasing both attraction and trust. These set-backs can come in many forms including but not limited to: miscommunication, failure to meet expectations, and unrealistic time constraints.

Once the pitch processes has come to an end, the level of attraction is confirmed because a particular decision has been made and the extent of trust has developed because of the experience of the pitch process. The extent that the attraction and the trust are positive or negative is dependent on how the overall process was evaluated by the individuals involved. The figure below provides a visual depiction of the way in which

relationships between agencies, consultants, and clients develop during the pitch process. The following chapter explains the theoretical and practical implications of the results and provides ideas for future research.

Figure 2 - Development of Relationships During the Pitch Process



## **Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusions**

As the data revealed, the pitching process is far from simple and straight-forward. This research provided not only an opportunity to explore a previously neglected topic, but it also supported the researcher's assumptions regarding the importance of relationships during the pitch process. After reviewing all of the categories, themes, and repeating ideas it was determined that there was a great deal of overlap between the different aspects of the pitch process; supporting the notion that although the pitch process can be considered somewhat linear in the way it evolves, there are a multitude of forces that consistently interact.

### **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was extremely applicable in the current study. SET views the relationship in economic terms: profits, benefits, rewards, costs, and alternatives. These are all weighed up before a relationship exchange takes place. The data in this study provided strong support for SET.

Respondents identified a people-centric and a capability-centric role of a relationship in the pitch process. These two distinct categories provided the basis for the various elements of attraction, highlighted where individuals place value, and indicated areas where exchange will occur. Respondents who subscribed to the people-centric view of relationships seemed to mention aspects of attraction that were more emotionally-driven whereas respondents who subscribed to the capability-centric role of a relationship mentioned aspects of attraction that were more rationally-driven. Respondents would indirectly place certain values on attributes of attraction and the

extent that these attributes would be exchanged in a particular relationship. The way that attractiveness was exhibited by the various respondents played a key role in the assessment of the value of the exchange.

For instance, simplistically speaking, if a particular client placed a great deal of value on the particular capabilities an agency could provide to its organization and one agency had all the capabilities the client was looking for, the value of that exchange may be perceived high and the client would be willing to continue to pursue the relationship. In addition, in the case where the client was adamant about an agency not trying to be friends with the client, the extent that a particular agency tried to call the client and do the various things that the client perceived to be unattractive, the exchange would not be greatly valued and most likely not pursued.

The development and experience of trust was another area where all parties involved in the relationship were weighing up costs and benefits associated with the exchange. Respondents indicated honesty and mutual respect as two main drivers of trust. The extent that these elements were experienced within a particular relationship would affect the value of exchange. For instance, one agency respondent mentioned how everything was going well with a particular pitch process until he found out the particular search consultant had lied to him regarding specific details of the Pitch. With this information, the value of the pitch process immediately decreased and the particular agency respondent withdrew from the Pitch. This was a case where it was determined that the benefits of going through with the Pitch did not outweigh the costs.



The data reveals numerous examples where individuals are assessing the value of the potential relationship. Because the pitch process is characteristically expensive for all parties involved, it is beneficial to understand the various profits, benefits, rewards, costs, and alternatives associated with involvement as early in the process as possible.

Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) was partially supported in this study. ECT helps explain how satisfaction is experienced based on expectations being confirmed or disconfirmed. Traditionally, this theory has been used in buyer-seller relationships where the product is tangible; however, it still has some application to the current study with the exception of a few weaknesses.

Generally speaking, the ability to be satisfied or dissatisfied is usually the result of particular expectations being confirmed or disconfirmed. In the case of the current study, although respondents were able to articulate the most and least satisfying pitch processes, the extent that these expectations were communicated beforehand was not emphasized; therefore making it difficult to assess the level of confirmation and/or disconfirmation. This sheds light on a potential weakness of the applicability of ECT to the current study because it assumes expectations are actually set before a particular event, in this case the event is the pitch process.

In a buyer-seller relationship, the individuals involved usually have set expectations before purchasing a particular product and therefore, the extent that the product does or does not live up to the expectations, affects the level of satisfaction. In the case of the pitch process, although the RFP and initial meetings may outline some of the more common logistical expectations (agency location, amount of contact, pitch team

being the actual team working on the account, details of the deliverables, etc.), there were many cases where the specific relational expectations were either not communicated or not actually known before a pitch process began.

For instance, one client was extremely adamant that agencies did not bring any sort of gift or small give-away to the presentation. The client admitted that if an agency did this, the client would count it against them; however, these expectations were never communicated to the agencies involved in the Pitch. The same was true in the situation where the client was emphatic that the agencies not try to create a personal relationship with the client; this expectation was not communicated to the particular agencies involved. When respondents fail to communicate particular expectations to one another, it can be unfair to hold them accountable if these expectations are not met.

In addition, failure to communicate expectations may inhibit the level of satisfaction that may be experienced. In the case of pitch processes, because each pitch is as unique as the individuals involved, it can sometimes be difficult to foresee all the possible areas that may or may not cause satisfaction; however, where at all possible, all parties involved should share these expectations with one another. Doing this will not eliminate all instances where people are dissatisfied with a particular pitch process but it may help increase the instances where people are satisfied.

## **6.2 Practical Implications**

There are many practical implications for this study. First and foremost, this study provides an overview of how the various constituencies experience the pitch process and the role that attraction and trust play throughout the process. Clients,

agencies, and consultants may be able to gain some insights regarding the different aspects of most-satisfying pitches and least-satisfying pitches. Reviewing these may bring attention to some aspects that should be addressed when participating in a pitch process. Because there has not been a study that has delved into the relationship dynamics of the pitch process, this study provides support for why this early stage of the client-agency relationship is so important.

This study, through the words of many respondents, indicates there is a great deal of dissatisfaction associated with the pitch process. It does not mean that respondents did not report satisfying examples, but overall, there was a general level of discontent with the way pitching is handled. The biggest complaint across all constituencies dealt with the sterility of the pitch process; how there are very few instances where it simulates a real working relationship. This affects clients, agencies, and consultants.

Although the speed of business is exceptionally high and organizations are constantly trying to stay ahead of competition so they can weather various economic challenges, the pitch process should not be rushed. If more time was spent during the pitch process allowing clients and agencies to truly simulate a working relationship, it would benefit everyone involved. This does not necessarily mean that the pitch process should take extra months to complete; it simply means that more time should be spent devising and designing a pitch process that is the most applicable to a working relationship.

When you consider the amount of money and time it costs all constituencies when involved in a pitch process, it seems reasonable to think a more efficient and beneficial

system could be developed. This is supported by the data. Respondents discussed how the most-satisfying pitch processes were characterized by collaboration and the least-satisfying pitch processes were characterized by constriction. Based on the data from this study, several recommendations can be made for each constituency involved.

### ***Client Recommendations***

The client has a great deal of responsibility in the pitch process because after all, it is the client who is ultimately looking for an agency to handle its marketing and/or advertising. Although it can be difficult, clients need to understand that a demanding timeline during a pitch process is detrimental to all who are involved. Based on the level of investment required from all constituencies just to participate in a pitch process, the added pressure of time-sensitivity only adds more anxiety to an already stressful situation. Clients need to take this into consideration and actually anticipate beginning a pitch process with a greater time cushion so that the sense of urgency does not inhibit or negatively affect the outcome.

Although clients may use consultants to help locate appropriate agencies and may depend on the advertising agencies to come up with the fabulous creative ideas, clients need to spend significant time internally discussing their expectations for the pitch before ever hiring a consultant or speaking with an agency. All of the individuals who will be leading the pitch on the client side need to make sure they are on the same page so that when it comes time to meet with both consultants and agencies, there is no confusion.

One of the most common frustrations revealed by both consultants and agencies was the fact that many clients had no idea who they were as an organization. Without a

clear direction from the client, consultants have an exceedingly difficult time identifying agencies that would be a good fit. Likewise, agencies, although responsible for bringing creativity and fresh perspective to a pitch process, cannot spend the entire pitch process trying to guess what the client stands for and what sort of direction the client wants to follow. Clients also need to make sure they provide the most comprehensive answers to any of the questions asked by the pitching agencies because greater clarification can help the agencies produce greater insight.

In addition, as more and more clients are involving procurement departments in the pitch process, there needs to be more focus on making sure these individuals are helping and not hindering the process. Clients can continue to involve them when it comes time for contracts to be drawn up and fees to be negotiated; however, a great deal of caution should be used when giving procurement individuals a great deal of power in the actual selection of a particular agency. It is recommended that if a client does want to involve its procurement department in a pitch process that the procurement professionals are trained and made aware that assessing the value of advertising and creative services is vastly different from the evaluation of a specific tangible good.

Another recommendation for clients is to specifically communicate their expectations of the pitch process to the consultants and prospective agencies. The research indicated that although the RFPs that are prepared may contain a great deal of information and questions relating to past experience and capabilities, few address the expectations of the relationship during the pitch process. If a consultant is being used, the client needs to communicate these expectations so that the consultant can make sure

to facilitate the process with these expectations in mind. Some of the data from the client respondents indicated that they actually wanted more contact with the agencies than the consultant recommended. If expectations are not communicated, they cannot be met.

### ***Consultant Recommendations***

Consultants are hired by clients to not only make the pitch process run more smoothly but to also offer objective perspectives and wisdom from past experiences. As stated earlier, one of the main goals of a consultant is to provide a level playing field for all agencies participating in a pitch process so that no single agency gets an unfair advantage. Although adhering to standards of consistency can be extremely beneficial, it can also create so much sterility that clients may not really be able to differentiate among agencies. Many consultants follow a pretty systematic process regardless of the clients and agencies involved and this may or may not always provide the greatest benefit. A consultant needs to make sure to ask clients some key questions that indicate the desired level of involvement with potential agencies and not simply impose their beliefs on their clients.

With pitch processes, one size, or in this case one way, certainly does not fit all. Consultants need to find ways to balance providing both a level playing field but also opportunities that allow the agencies to showcase some of their unique qualities and attributes. Interview participants did mention a few such processes where they were allowed to collaborate and simulate a more natural working environment; however, these did not seem to be the norm.

Although the demanding schedules of businesses today create a great deal of time pressure, consultants need to communicate to clients that rushing through such an important process can result in a poor outcome. Clients turn to consultants as their trusted advisors to help guide them through an extremely complex situation; therefore, the consultants have the responsibility to make sure the client obtains the greatest result possible. As indicated by the respondents, the pressure of time was considered a huge factor in the least-satisfying pitch processes. Although consultants cannot control the particular needs of the client's timeline, consultants can help shape the clients' expectations of the pitch process so that clients are fully aware that a rushed process can produce less than optimal results.

### ***Agency Recommendations***

Agencies may oftentimes feel powerless in a pitch process because ultimately they can put forth all of their time, effort, and energy and still walk away from a pitch process with nothing to show for their huge investment. Like clients, agencies need to have a clear vision of who they are as an agency and what sort of clients fall in line with the agency mission. When economic times are tough, any client may be viewed as a good client to an agency; however, agencies do need to possess a level of selectivity when it comes down to deciding which accounts to pursue.

Agencies need to consistently work on their desired client profile list. Key individuals within each agency need to meet regularly to assess the strengths of the agency as well as identify potential areas of growth. Before pursuing a RFP, the agency needs to strategically evaluate how well the prospective client aligns with the strengths

and capabilities of the agency. This is not to say that an agency should never pursue a client outside of its comfort zone; however, when considering the amount of investment that is required, the decision to participate in a pitch process should never be taken lightly.

Just as a client provides the RFP, it would be beneficial for the agency to have a similar document perhaps titled Clarification for Proposal (CFP). This would be a document that asked all of the questions that the agency felt it needed to know before entering into the pitch process; those not addressed on the RFP. The CFP may have some questions that remain the same for every potential client and then have other questions that are specific to a particular client. The scope of questions could range from finding out about the client's preferred interaction style and presentation format to finding out about any specific things or topics that should be avoided.

This recommendation is the result of two insights revealed from the data. One client indicated that if an agency brought in any gifts it would automatically count it against them and another client indicated how frustrating it was when agencies only brought in their best presenters for the final presentation instead of the individuals who would be actually handling the business. Although it may be difficult to obtain answers to every question, agencies need to be proactive in obtaining as much information as possible from potential clients or consultants. Clarification can only optimize the pitch process and agencies shouldn't be afraid to ask questions they feel will help them produce the best final product.



When search consultants are involved in a pitch process, they can largely influence the rules of engagement; particularly the amount and type of contact each agency has with the client. The specific role the consultant plays throughout the pitch process is determined by the client. Some clients turn the entire pitch process over to the consultant whereas other clients may want to be more involved. If agencies spend time building and maintaining relationships with search consultants, they will become more familiar with the ways in which each search consultant handles the pitch process. Because there are fewer search consultants than there are agencies and clients, it is common for a particular agency to work with a search consultant multiple times; therefore, it is beneficial to the agencies to invest time in nurturing these relationships.

Lastly, agencies need to facilitate an environment that promotes strong team cohesiveness; especially when working on a pitch process. Although this can be a challenge, the importance of chemistry within the agency team was something that many client respondents mentioned. Pitch processes can be a challenge for agencies because in addition to maintaining the day-to-day work, individuals have to devote significant amounts of time to focus solely on the pitch process. Sometimes the individuals who are pulled together to work on a particular pitch process may have never worked together in a team dynamic.

Agencies need to find ways to facilitate greater inter-agency relationships so that individuals within different departments and specialties at least have some level of familiarity with one another. Although the individuals who are brought together on any one pitch process can vary significantly based on availability and specialty, agencies

should try to strategize ways to better organize the flow of current versus prospective work.

Even though agencies cannot guarantee when the RFPs will arrive and what staff will be available at that moment, they can be proactive in finding ways to ensure that whatever team is assembled will be able to work well together. This does not assume that a particular pitch team cannot have disagreements or points of contention but it does mean that the agency needs to do everything in its power to assemble a group of people that will represent the agency well and will enhance, not inhibit one another's strengths.

One recommendation is to have each newly assembled pitch team do a series of team-building exercises before ever starting to work on the new business pitch. Agencies may find that although every moment counts when participating in a pitch process, it may be beneficial for the pitch team to spend a little time breaking the ice and working on a no pressure creative activity before delving into the high pressure client work. Agencies may decide that it may work better to conduct team building sessions throughout the year with various combinations of individuals rather than wait until a new RFP comes through the door. Each agency is structured differently and so there is a multitude of ways that this recommendation could be put into practice.

### **6.3 Future Research**

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between clients, agencies, and consultants during the pitch process. Because there were no previous studies that specifically focused on the relationship dynamics of the pitch process, the data from this study has provided a great foundation for which additional

studies can be based. Many of the categories and themes could actually prove to be pivot points for future studies.

For instance, one future study could specifically focus on the extent that clients, agencies, and consultants communicate pitch expectations to one another. The data from the study revealed that although individuals may have clear expectations in their head, the extent that these were communicated to the other parties involved in the pitch process was minimal. It would be interesting to analyze a series of RFIs and RFPs to look at the way the various requirements are stated and find out if the way in which the agency is interpreting the RFI/RFP is the way the client intended. Because the RFI/RFP can serve as an initial filter deciding who makes it forward to the next phase, more research could be done specifically focused on this step of the pitch process.

Additional research could explore the element of time. Many respondents indicated how the pitch process always seemed so rushed that it was hard to produce great work within the time constraints. A future study could compare the lengths of various pitch processes from start to finish to see if the length of the process actually played a role not only in the outcome but the longevity of the relationship. The study could look at whether there is a certain degree of time pressure that produces positive results versus producing negative results. In addition, when considering time, it would be interesting to break down the actual amount of contact that the various parties had throughout the process; including on the phone and in person. The supposition is that pitch processes that have forced a decision to happen either too soon or without enough contact can result in second-guessing a decision.

In addition to exploring the extent that specific expectations are communicated among parties and the element of time future studies could focus on the inter-agency pitch team dynamics and the various ways agencies encourage and nurture a team environment. Because clients mentioned the importance of the agency team exhibiting a certain level of chemistry and cohesiveness, it is clearly an area that warrants exploration. Additional research could explore the way in which specific relationships develop within a particular pitch team and the way in which these intra-organizational relationships can impact inter-organizational relationships with both clients and consultants.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Before conducting this study, it was assumed that the pitch process was an extremely important phase in the development of the client-agency relationship. After all, this was where the relationship between client and advertising agency first had the opportunity to develop. It was suspected the pitch process would be somewhat complicated but the extent of that complexity was not realized until delving into the minds of thirty-four respondents who each had significant experience in pitching.

Through in-depth interviews, it was discovered that the pitch process is complex, stressful, exhilarating, tiresome, energizing, and deflating. Through conversations with clients, agencies, and consultants, it was determined that a person cannot be thin-skinned or faint of heart to embark on the challenge of a pitch process. Respondents discussed the various ways attraction and trust were both developed and experienced throughout the pitch process as well as the particular characteristics associated with the most and least satisfying pitch processes. Although many of the responses offered a unique perspective

based on the particular role the participant played in the pitch process, a series of categories, themes, and repeating ideas were identified that help summarize a highly-detailed process.

Even though there was a great deal discovered about the pitch process throughout the course of this study, the findings can best be summarized by stating that the pitch process is in serious need of a make-over. The researcher determines two main takeaways from this study. Firstly, the concept of time is crucial and needs to be more efficiently used by clients, consultants, and agencies during the pitch process. This doesn't necessarily mean that the pitch process has to be longer but the quality of interaction between all parties involved needs to increase so that it more closely simulates how a real-working relationship would function. The role of attraction and trust do play a key role in the pitch process; however, the lack of actual face-time between clients and agencies may negatively impact their development. Secondly, expectations need to be clearly communicated by both parties from the first point of contact. This doesn't simply refer to the logistical expectations listed in the RFP but also refers to the expectations of how the relationship should function.

The result of a pitch-process can require a celebration or a letter of termination; result in a creative home-run or a major creative strike-out; build careers or break reputations; you name it, the pitch process has a great deal riding on its outcome. With so much at stake, the pitch process should never be undermined. By having the opportunity to explore the pitch landscape, it was determined that what was uncovered in this particular study was only the beginning.

After all, it is Friday afternoon and in the last three hours, three phones rang in the offices of three different advertising agencies located in three separate cities, and each received three extremely different types of news. As one pitch process comes to a close, another one is not too far behind because for every agency that wins, there are several more agencies that lose. Each pitch process produces new stories and insights for this researcher to gather. And on that note, it is Friday afternoon; there are some calls that need to be made.

## Appendix A: Omnicom Group Family Tree

OMNICOM GROUP			
Global Networks	DDB Worldwide Communications (2.62B)	BBDO Worldwide (\$2.39B)	TBWA Worldwide (\$1.78B)
Agencies within Global Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DDB Worldwide Communications</li> <li>Alma DDB</li> <li>Interbrand</li> <li>Rapp Collins Worldwide</li> <li>Roberts &amp; Tarlow</li> <li>TracyLocke</li> <li>Tribal DDB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BBDO Worldwide</li> <li>Organic</li> <li>Proximity Worldwide</li> <li>AtmosphereBBDO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TBWA Worldwide</li> <li>Agency.com</li> <li>Integer Group</li> <li>TBWA/WorldHealth</li> <li>Tequila</li> <li>Zimmerman Advertising</li> </ul>
Other Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corbett Accel</li> <li>Healthcare Group</li> <li>Critical Mass</li> <li>Cutwater</li> <li>Dieste Harmel &amp; Partners</li> <li>Direct Partners</li> <li>Doremus</li> <li>Element 79 Partners</li> <li>EVBSan Francisco</li> <li>Footsteps</li> <li>GMMB</li> <li>GMR Marketing</li> <li>Goodby, Silverstein &amp; Partners</li> <li>Grizzard Communications Group</li> <li>GSD&amp;M's Idea City</li> <li>Javelin Direct</li> <li>LatinWorks</li> <li>Marketing Arm</li> <li>Martin/Williams</li> <li>Merkley &amp; Partners</li> <li>Red Urban</li> <li>Rodgers Townsend</li> <li>Russ Reid Co.</li> <li>Serino Coyne</li> <li>Spike DDB</li> <li>Targetbase</li> <li>TPG Direct</li> <li>Unit 7</li> </ul>		
Media Agencies	<b>Omnicon Media Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OMD Worldwide</li> <li>PHO</li> <li>Icon International</li> <li>Novus Print Media Network</li> <li>Ketchum Directory Advertising</li> <li>Resolution Media</li> </ul>		

*Results from Advertising Age DataCenter Analysis, May 5, 2008 (B = billion M = million)*

## Appendix B: WPP Group Family Tree

WPP GROUP					
Global Networks	Young & Rubicam Brands (2.15B)	Ogilvy (\$1.84B)	JWT (\$1.49B)	Grey Group (1.18B)	United Group (\$115M)
Agencies within Global Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Y&amp;R</li><li>• Blast Radius</li><li>• Bravo Group</li><li>• Burson-Marsteller</li><li>• Campaign Palace</li><li>• Kang &amp; Lee</li><li>• Landor Associates</li><li>• Marsteller</li><li>• RTC Relationship Marketing</li><li>• SicolaMartin</li><li>• Sudler &amp; Hennessey</li><li>• VML Wunderman</li><li>• Zaaz</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ogilvy &amp; Mather</li><li>• Worldwide</li><li>• Neo@Ogilvy</li><li>• OgilvyAction</li><li>• Ogilvy HealthWorld</li><li>• Ogilvy</li><li>• Interactive</li><li>• OgilvyOne Worldwide</li><li>• Ogilvy PR</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JWT</li><li>• Batey</li><li>• JWT Specialized Communications</li><li>• Malone Advertising</li><li>• RMG Connect</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grey</li><li>• GHG (Grey Healthcare Group)</li><li>• G2</li><li>• Winglatino</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Berlin Cameron United</li><li>• Cole &amp; Weber United</li><li>• United’s non-U.S. shops</li></ul>
Other Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brouillard Communications</li><li>• CHI &amp; Partners</li><li>• Soho Square</li><li>• Tapsa</li><li>• UniWorld Group</li></ul>		<b>WPP Digital</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 24/7 Real Media</li><li>• Blue Interactive Marketing</li><li>• Bridge Worldwide</li><li>• HealthWallace</li><li>• Quasar Media</li><li>• Schematic</li></ul>		
Media Agencies	<b>Group M</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MindShare Worldwide</li><li>• Mediadge:cia</li><li>• MediaCom</li><li>• Group M Search</li><li>• Maxus</li></ul>				
WPP Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FullSix</li><li>• Asatsu-DK</li><li>• Chime Communication</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• GIIR</li><li>• HighCo</li><li>• STW Group</li></ul>		
Market Research	Kantar Group				

*Results from Advertising Age DataCenter Analysis, May 5, 2008 (B = billion M = million)*



## Appendix C: Interpublic Group of Cos. Family Tree

INTERPUBLIC GROUP OF COS.				
Global Networks	McCann Worldgroup (2.53B)	DraftFCB (\$1.24B)	Lowe (\$518M)	Hill Holiday (\$154M)
Agencies within Global Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• McCann Erickson Worldwide</li><li>• Avrett Free Ginsberg</li><li>• Campbell Mithun</li><li>• Casanova Pendrill</li><li>• Fitzgerald &amp; Co.</li><li>• FutureBrand</li><li>• Gotham</li><li>• Jay Advertising</li><li>• Martin Agency</li><li>• McCann Healthcare Worldwide</li><li>• Momentum Worldwide</li><li>• MRM Worldwide</li><li>• NAS Recruitment Communications</li><li>• TM Advertising</li><li>• Weber Shandwick</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DraftFCB</li><li>• DraftFCB Healthcare</li><li>• Hacker Group</li><li>• Rivet</li><li>• R/GA</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lowe Worldwide</li><li>• Lowe Healthcare Worldwide</li></ul>	Hill Holliday Abece
Other Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accentmarketing</li><li>• Berenter Greenhouse</li><li>• &amp; Webster</li><li>• Campbell-Ewald</li><li>• Carmichael Lynch</li><li>• Dailey &amp; Associates</li><li>• Deutsch</li><li>• IW Group</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jack Morton Worldwide</li><li>• Mullen</li><li>• Octagon</li><li>• Siboney USA</li><li>• Sloan Group</li><li>• Tierney Communications</li><li>• Translation Advertising</li></ul>	
Media Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Universal McCann</li><li>• Initiative</li><li>• Reprise Media</li><li>• ID Media</li><li>• Newspaper Services of America</li></ul>			
Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DeVries Public Relations</li><li>• GolinHarris</li></ul>			

*Results from Advertising Age DataCenter Analysis, May 5, 2008 (B = billion M = million)*

## Appendix D: Publicis Groupe Family Tree

<b>PUBLICIS GROUPE</b>				
<b>Global Networks</b>	<b>Publicis Worldwide (1.20B)</b>	<b>Leo Burnett Worldwide (\$1.07B)</b>	<b>Saatchi &amp; Saatchi (\$740M)</b>	<b>Digitas (\$415M)</b>
<b>Agencies within Global Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicis Worldwide</li> <li>• Publicis Modem &amp; Dialog</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leo Burnett Worldwide</li> <li>• Arc Worldwide</li> <li>• Beacon Communications</li> <li>• Lapiz Hispanic Marketing</li> <li>• Vigilante</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saatchi &amp; Saatchi</li> <li>• Team One Advertising</li> <li>• Saatchi &amp; Saatchi X</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digitas</li> <li>• Digitas Health</li> </ul>
<b>Other Agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amazon Advertising</li> <li>• Bartle Bogle Hegarty</li> <li>• Bromley Communications</li> <li>• Burrell Comms. Group</li> <li>• Conill</li> <li>• Fallon Worldwide</li> <li>• Kaplan Thaler Group</li> </ul>			
<b>Media Agencies</b>	<p><b>Starcom Mediavest Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MV42</li> <li>• SMG Directory Marketing</li> <li>• SMG Search</li> <li>• Spark</li> <li>• Tapestry</li> </ul> <p><b>Zenithoptimedia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moxie Interactive</li> </ul> <p><b>Medias &amp; Regies Europe</b></p>			
<b>Healthcare Agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicus N.Y.</li> <li>• Publicis Selling</li> <li>• Solutions Group</li> <li>• Saatchi &amp; Saatchi Consumer Health &amp; Wellness</li> <li>• Williams-Labadie</li> </ul>			

*Results from Advertising Age DataCenter Analysis, May 5, 2008 (B = billion M = million)*

## **Appendix E: Preliminary Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 1**

### *Professionals working in Advertising Agency*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pitch process?
2. How does your agency currently handle or manage the pre-pitch/pitch process?
  - a. Do you have a specific department that seeks out new business?
    1. How many people usually work on pitch? How are they selected?
3. When you think of the pitch process, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
4. How much communication does your agency have with the client/organization during the various stages of the pitch process?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
5. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was won), what would you consider to be the “most satisfying” pitches?
  - a. In your opinion, what made these pitches so good?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular client going into the Pitch?
  - d. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
6. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, what would you consider to be the “least satisfying” pitches?
  - a. In your opinion, what made these pitches so challenging?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular client going into the Pitch?
  - d. What do you think could have been done to make it/them better?
7. What do you think is the most important information the agency must communicate to the prospective client during the various phases of the pitch process and why?
  - a. What about the client? What information should they provide?
8. Do you ever get feedback from clients regarding the pitch process?
  - a. If so, what are some examples?
  - b. If not, do you think this should be required?
9. Why do you think clients are or should be attracted to your agency?
  - a. How do you exemplify these particular qualities/attributes?
10. Do you think trust plays a key role during the pitch process?
  - a. Why? or Why not?
11. As an agency, what are some things a client can do to make you feel “trusted”?
  - a. What are some examples of being trusted?
  - b. What are some examples of not being trusted? What are some ways you think trust can be accelerated during this phase of the relationship?

**Appendix F: Preliminary Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 2**  
*Professionals working for a client or an organization that uses an advertising agency*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pitch process?
2. Do you use a consultant to assist in agency selection?
  - a. Why? Why not?
3. When you think of the pitch process, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
4. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was awarded), what would you consider to be the “most satisfying” pitches?
  - a. In your opinion, what specifically made these pitches so good?
  - b. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
5. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, what would you consider to be the “least satisfying” pitches?
  - a. In your opinion, what made these pitches so challenging?
    1. What could have made it/them better?
6. How much communication does your organization have with the advertising agencies and or consultants during the various phases of the pitch phase?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
  - b. What can be especially helpful?
  - c. What can be especially irritating or frustrating?
7. As a client, what do you think is the most important information to communicate to the prospective agencies during the pitch process?
  - c. Why?
  - d. What about the agency? What information should they share?
8. Do you think trust plays a key role during the pitch process?
  - a. Why? or Why not?
9. What are some of the key things that attract you to a particular agency?
  - a. In your experience, when working with an agency, have the factors that attracted you in the first place been sustained over the course of the relationship?
10. As client/organization, what are some things an agency can do to earn your trust?
  - a. What are some examples when you have trusted an agency and why?
  - b. What are some examples when you have not trusted an agency and why?
  - c. What are some ways you think trust can be accelerated during this phase of the relationship?

## **Appendix G: Preliminary Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 3**

### *Professionals working as consultants for clients/and or advertising agencies*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pre-pitch/pitch process?
2. When you think of the pitch process, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
3. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was awarded), what would you consider to be one of the “most satisfying” pitches?
  - a. What specifically made this pitch so satisfying?
  - b. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
4. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, what would you consider to be one of the “least satisfying” pitches?
  - a. What made this pitch so challenging?
  - b. What could have made it better?
5. How much communication does your organization have with the advertising agencies and clients during the pre-pitch phase?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
  - b. What can be especially helpful?
  - c. What can be especially irritating or frustrating?
6. As a consultant, what do you think is the most important information for both parties to one another during the pitch process?
7. Can you tell me about the role you think trust plays during the pitch process?
8. As a consultant who has seen a variety of client-agency relationships, what are some things agencies can do to earn trust from you and the various clients?
  - a. What are some examples when you have trusted an agency and why?
  - b. What are some examples when you have not trusted an agency and why?
9. What are some of the biggest reasons a client is attracted to a particular agency?
  - a. What do you think an agency can do to appear more attractive to a client?
10. What are some ways you think trust can be accelerated during this phase of the relationship?

## **Appendix H: Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 1**

### *Professionals working in Advertising Agency*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pitch process?
2. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was won), what would you consider to be one of the “most satisfying” pitch processes?
  - a. In your opinion, what made this pitch process so satisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this process from early pitch to final pitch?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular client going into the pitch process?
  - d. Where and how was this information gained?
  - e. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
3. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, what would you consider to be one of the “least satisfying” pitches?
  - a. In your opinion, what made this pitch process so unsatisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch process?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular client going into the Pitch?
  - d. Where and how was this information gained?
  - e. What do you think could have been done to make it better?
4. Why do you think clients are or should be attracted to your agency?
  - a. How do you exemplify these particular qualities and attributes?
5. Can you tell me about the role you think trust plays during the pitch process?
6. As an agency, what are some things a client can do to make you feel “trusted”?
  - a. What are some examples of being trusted?
    - i. How is this experienced?
  - b. What are some examples of not being trusted?
    - i. How is this experienced?
  - c. What are some ways you think trust can be accelerated during this phase of the relationship?
7. When you think of the pitch process in general, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
8. How much communication does your organization have with the advertising agencies and or consultants during the various phases of the pitch process?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
  - b. What can be especially helpful?
  - c. What can be especially irritating or frustrating?
9. As an agency, what do you think is the most important information to communicate to the prospective client during the pitch process?
  - a. What about the most important information a client should communicate to all potential agencies?

## **Appendix I: Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 2**

*Professionals working for a client or an organization that uses an advertising agency*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pitch process?
2. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was awarded), what would you consider to be one of the ***“most satisfying”*** pitch processes?
  - a. In your opinion, what made this pitch process so satisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch process?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular agency going into the Pitch?
  - d. Where and how was this information gained?
  - e. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
3. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, (regardless of whether the account was awarded), what would you consider to be one of the ***“least satisfying”*** pitch processes?
  - a. In your opinion, what made this pitch process so unsatisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch process?
  - c. How much did you feel you knew about the particular agency going into the Pitch?
  - d. Where and how was this information gained?
  - e. What do you think could have been done to make it/them better?
4. Do you use a consultant to assist in agency selection?
  - a. Why? Why not?
5. Can you tell me about the role you think trust plays during the pitch process?
6. As a client, what are some things an agency can do to earn your trust?
  - a. What are some examples when you have trusted an agency and why?
  - b. How do you show that you trust an agency?
  - c. What are some examples when you have not trusted an agency and why?
  - d. What are some ways you think trust can be accelerated during this phase of the relationship?
7. What are some of the key things that attract you to a particular agency?
  - a. In your experience, when working with an agency, have the factors that attracted you in the first place been sustained over the course of the relationship?
8. How much communication does your organization have with the advertising agencies and or consultants during the various phases of the pitch phase?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
  - b. What can be especially helpful?
  - c. What can be especially irritating or frustrating?
9. When you think of the pitch process in general, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
10. As a client, what do you think is the most important information to communicate to the prospective agencies during the pitch process?
  - a. What is the most important information a prospective agency should communicate to a client?

## **Appendix J: Research Materials - Qualitative Interview Protocol - 3**

### *Professionals working as consultants for clients/and or advertising agencies*

1. Can you tell me a little about your particular job?
  - a. How long have you worked in this industry?
  - b. How long at your particular company?
  - c. What is your specific role in the pitch process?
2. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in (regardless of whether the account was won), what would you consider to be one of the “*most satisfying*” pitch processes?
  - a. What made this pitch process so satisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this process from early pitch to final pitch?
  - c. Would you have changed anything? If so, what?
3. When you think of some of the pitches you have been involved in, what would you consider to be one of the “*least satisfying*” pitches?
  - a. What made this pitch so unsatisfying?
  - b. What specifically was done to prepare for this pitch?
  - c. What do you think could have been done to make it better?
4. In your experience working with both clients and agencies, can you tell me a little about the role that trust plays during the pitch process?
5. As a consultant who has seen a variety of client-agency relationships, what are some things agencies can do to earn trust from you and their various prospective clients?
  - a. What does the relationship look like between client and agency when trust IS present?
    - i. Can you give me an example?
  - b. What does the relationship look like between client and agency when trust IS NOT present?
    - i. Can you give me an example?
6. What are some of the biggest reasons a client is attracted to a particular agency?
  - a. What do you think an agency can do to appear more attractive to a client?
7. When you think of the pitch process, what comes to mind?
  - a. Positive aspects? Negative aspects?
8. How much communication does your organization have with the advertising agencies and clients during the various phases of the pitch process?
  - a. Are there specific “best practices” according to what should or should not be done?
  - b. What can be especially helpful?
  - c. What can be especially irritating or frustrating?
9. As a consultant, what do you think is the most important information for both parties to communicate to one another during the pitch process?



## Appendix K: Recruitment E-mail

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I hope this letter finds you well. I am in the final stages of my doctoral program and am writing my dissertation on the topic of relationships between clients and their advertising agencies during the pitch process. My focus is on all of the activities and dynamics involved *before* a particular account is awarded. I would like to invite you to participate in this study and to help shed some insight on this important phase of the client-agency relationship.

In this qualitative study, I hope to talk to several professionals in advertising agencies, client organizations, and consulting firms in an attempt to better understand the pitch process and its role in the client-agency relationship. As a professional in this industry, I know that you have valuable experiences and knowledge in this area. There has been very little academic research that has focused on this particular phase of the relationship and so with your assistance, I can help fill this void.

Attached is a consent form for this study. Please read over it and let me know if you would be willing to participate in the study. If you agree to participate, we would set up a time for a 45-minute-1 hour phone interview at your convenience. All information would be private and confidential, as personally identifiable information would not be connected to the data or the final research product. No personal names of individuals or any organization will ever be reported. This study will be conducted with the ultimate goal of fulfilling the requirements of my doctoral program and having the research published in an academic conference or journal.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you and hope that you will consider taking part in this study. You are the key to a better understanding of this important stage in the client-agency relationship and your participation will assist in the future development of this area.

Sincerely,  
Jodi Lisa Smith  
Ph.D. Candidate  
The University of Texas at Austin  
jodilisa@mail.utexas.edu  
(210) 849-8765 (mobile)

## Appendix L: Consent Form

### **An Exploration of Clients and Their Advertising Agencies during the Pre-Relationship Phase**

**Conducted By:** Jodi Lisa Smith, Advertising Doctoral Student (PI) - IRB PROTOCOL # 2007-11-0063

210-849-8765 (mobile), [jodilisa@aol.com](mailto:jodilisa@aol.com)

University of Texas at Austin, Dept. of Advertising, A1200  
Austin, Texas 78712

**Faculty Advisor:** Jef Richards, Professor

512-471-8118 [jef@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:jef@mail.utexas.edu)

University of Texas at Austin, Dept. of Advertising, A1200  
Austin, Texas 78712

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time by simply telling the researcher.

**The purpose of this study** is to learn about the client-agency relationship during the various phases of the pitch process and to further understand the role that trust and attraction play during this important stage.

**If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:**

- Answer interview questions about the “most satisfying” and “least satisfying” pitches
- Provide examples from your professional life.
- Allow me to audiotape the interview.

**Total estimated time to participate in study:** 45 minutes-1 hour

The interviews will be **audio-taped** and transcribed so that the researcher can examine the content in greater detail. The cassettes will be coded so no personally identifying information is visible on them. To ensure confidentiality, the tapes will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's home office and will be heard or viewed only by the two investigators conducting this research. The written transcripts of the interviews will be retained for possible future analysis.

**Risks and Benefits** of being in the study:

- A possible risk involves the **loss of confidentiality**, though you will not be connected to your results.
- There is a slight risk of **psychological or emotional stress**, though it is highly unlikely.
- A possible benefit is a better understanding of this phenomenon through your participation.

**Compensation:** You will not be compensated for this research.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept private. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Lisa Leiden, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

*Upon request, you will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**If you agree to the terms of this consent form and wish to participate in this study, please respond to this e-mail. The PI for this study will then contact you to set up a telephone interview to discuss the topic of relationships between clients and advertising agencies during the pre-relationship phase.**

## Appendix M: List of Themes and Codes

THEME NAME	CODE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
1. Agency Team Chemistry	AGC-TM-CHEM	Specific details relating to chemistry occurring between the agency pitch team
2. Agency/Consultant Dynamic	AGCS-DYN	The way in which agencies and consultants work together
3. Anti-traditional pitch	ANT-TRD-PCH	Comments regarding dislike toward traditional pitch process
4. Attraction	ATT	All factors related to what attracts clients, consultants, and agencies to one another
5. Best Practices	BSTP	Specific mention to industry standards and what is “usually” done
6. Chemistry Defined	CHEM	Articulation of what chemistry looks like and how it is experienced
7. Clear Communication	CLR-COMM	The importance of clear communication and specific examples
8. Client Responsibility	CLT-RSPLY	Details specific responsibilities the client is held accountable for and what is expected from the client
9. Client-Agency Fit	CLT-AGC	Articulation and importance of the ways clients and agencies work together based on how well their respective organizations are matched.
10. CMO Turnover	CMO-TO	Mention and impact of CMO turnover to pitching landscape
11. Collaboration	COLLAB	Emphasis on client and agency working together on projects throughout the pitch process
12. Commitment to Long-Term Relationship	CMT-LTR	Understanding the goal of the relationship when entering a pitch process
13. Compensation Issues	COMP	Specific comments related to how compensation is handled
14. Connection Points	CONN-PTS	Ways in which the various constituencies come together through the Pitch (common points of interest, goals, culture, etc.)
15. Contact During Process	AM-CONTACT	Amount and type of contact that occurs throughout the process (meetings, presentations, etc.)

### Appendix M: List of Themes and Codes (Cont'd)

THEME NAME	CODE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
16. Differentiating Factors	DIFF-FACT	Indices of ways constituencies set themselves apart during the Pitch
17. Different Parts of a Pitch Process	PCH-PRCSS	Focus on the specific logistical steps that are taken throughout the Pitch (RFI, RFP, etc.)
18. Consultant Role	CSLT-RLE	Views on the presence and functions of a consultant
19. Consultant Style	CSLT-STY	Differentiates between preferences on consultants and the ways pitches are handled
20. Consultant Process	CSLT-PRCSS	Provides specific details on the processes consultants follow
21. Efficiency of Pitching	EFFIC-TIME	Details the concept of time and how it is managed
22. Evolution of Advertising Industry	EVOL-AD	Discusses the way the advertising industry has changed over the years
23. Evolution of Consulting	EVOL-CSLT	Discusses the way the consulting role has changed over the years
24. Evolution of Pitching	EVOL-PCH	Discusses the way the pitching process has changed over the years
25. Expectations	EXPECT	Outlines specific expectations constituencies have of one another going into the pitch process (Geography, Talent, etc.)
26. Formality	FRML	Describes level of formality experienced
27. Going the extra mile	EXTRA-MLE	Mentions specific things done during the course of the Pitch that indicate extra effort
28. Honesty	HNST	Details the importance of honesty during the Pitch from all parties involved
29. Idea vs. Reality	IDE-REAL	Differentiates between ideas that are generated during the Pitch and those that can actually be realized
30. Importance of Winning	WIN	Focuses on what “winning” a pitch means
31. Incumbents	INCUMB	Explains the challenges and issues faced when incumbents participate in the pitch process

### Appendix M: List of Themes and Codes (Cont'd)

THEME NAME	CODE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
32. Information Availability	INF-AVAIL	Comments on the vast amount and accessibility of information
33. Least-Satisfying Pitches/Bad Pitch Experiences	L-SAT-PCH	Key factors responsible for the least satisfying pitches
34. Level Playing Field	LVL-PLAY	Consultants role ensuring rules of engagement are followed
35. Most-Satisfying Pitches/Good Pitch Experiences	M-SAT-PCH	Key factors associated with the most satisfying pitches
36. Non-Traditional Pitch Process	NON-TRAD	Details other types of pitch processes companies are beginning to use
37. Perfect Pitch Scenario	PER-PCH	Identifies the ways a pitch would be conducted if the respondents had a choice
38. Picking a Direction	DIR	The importance of clients and agencies deciding the direction of the Pitch early in the process
39. Pitching Pitfalls	PCH-PFALL	Highlights common mistakes that occur during the pitch process
40. Relationship Defined	REL-DEF	The way in which the various constituencies discuss the role of relationships in the pitch process
41. Pitching Team being Account Team	PCH-TM-ACT	Thoughts on the pitching team being the same and different than the team that will actually work on the business
42. Presentation Style	PRES-STY	Specifics on presentation styles
43. Relationship Maintenance	REL-MAINT	Ways an existing relationship can be maintained so that a pitch process can be avoided
44. Role of Procurement	RLE-PROCUR	The increasing role that procurement is playing in pitches
45. Role of RFP	RLE-RFP	Discusses specific functions and elements of the RFP
46. Role of Trust	RLE-TRUST	The ways in which trust is experienced and can be accelerated during the Pitch
47. Rules of Engagement	RULE-ENG	Specific rules and processes that must be followed during a pitch
48. Size/Structure/Scope	SZ-STR-SCP	Role of organization size, structure, and geographical scope
49. Talent to Task	TAL-TSK	Matching client's task to agency talent
50. Words of Wisdom	WRDS-WISD	General thoughts on improving the pitching process

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