Collaborative working arrangements are proving increasingly popular across the corporate world. Some use this approach internally, with either their own research and development teams or often support from external freelancers, whilst increasingly some are collaborating externally, partnering with other businesses in the delivery of services or large scale projects. To achieve optimum results from their resourcing strategy - leading to improvements in quality, time and cost for each hire - they probably need to start building stronger collaborations with their recruitment suppliers too.

One of the problems with a traditional PSL, and the popular but slightly lesser used Master Vendor and Vendor Neutral models, is that too often the relationship between recruitment agency and their client becomes transactional, with success determined by metrics such as cost and speed of submission. In a tight labour market, in which skills are hard to find and the best candidates difficult to attract, if recruitment agency suppliers are going to deliver, then there needs to be a much more strategic partnership. The Supply Chain research showed a clear desire for agency partners to also be able to provide strategic insights into areas such as workforce planning and innovative sourcing - this can only be successfully delivered through a more collaborative relationship.

There are four clear benefits for in-house recruitment teams in working collaboratively with their agency suppliers:

1. **Strategic Insights** - The agency partner becomes the client’s eyes and ears in the market. They can advise on remuneration trends, skill availabilities, locational data and the best way to approach relevant candidates. Offering market intelligence and a perspective on what motivates job seekers in different sectors can help the client understand complexities around filling specific roles.
2. **Better Employer Brand Exposure** - In a closer working relationship the agency partner will gain a much more detailed understanding of their client’s EVP and brand, and their values and purpose too. They can better communicate the benefits of working for their client, and help navigate the best candidates through the recruitment process.
3. **Improved Candidate Experience** - The agency has a vested interest in their client’s candidate experience as it reflects on the agency too. They can be the trusted advisor that lets their client know if that experience is falling short, and might negatively impact their chances of winning round the top rated candidate.
4. **Recruitment Becomes Less Reactive** - When the client/agency partnership works well, and there is trust and belief in each other’s approaches to finding the best people, then talent acquisition can become a lot more proactive. Traditional PSLs might work best reactively when there is an urgent need, with little time to conduct a proper search and build rapport with the right candidate. More effective long term workforce planning can’t rely on a ‘distress purchase’ approach, it needs a more strategic plan that allows the agency time to focus its efforts on specialist roles and building candidate pools.

For agencies there are two big challenges in building stronger, collaborative relationships. Firstly to prove that there is value to the client in developing the partnership. They must demonstrate how effectively client recruitment needs can be serviced, and long-term access to strategic skills enhanced, through a more collaborative partnership. Show the strengths of each consultant’s networks and how they can quickly and effectively reach the best people. The value that the agency can show will help define the scope of the relationship.

Secondly by showing the level of insight and market intelligence that people have within the company regarding industry trends and pay scales, candidate preferences and competitor activity. Agencies must establish thought leadership within their specialist niche and show a thorough understanding of the market, its intricacies and nuances, how they identify the best candidates and how they can reach them.

If you are an agency looking to fully embed a closer working relationship then there needs to be two-way trust so let clients see how you work. Spend time with their recruiters, and let them come and spend time with your consultants too. If you are going to represent them in the market, and be seen as their ambassadors and strategic partner, then candidates will often trust the quality of their vacancies by the service offered from the recruiters chosen to fill them. The most productive agencies earn that trust.