

Motivation in Assessment Centres: Does it depend on the type of task?

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Purpose of this paper

This paper shares a study carried out to explore aspects of participants' motivation in Assessment Centres, which could possibly affect the reliability of results, especially when used for decision-making in a talent management context.

Challenges commonly experienced

- Why do we see fluctuations (low convergent validity) in performance across exercises?
- Could the participant's mood or level of stimulation significantly affect performance?
- Do task-based differences exist in participant motivation?
- Which other factors could relate to differences in motivation?
- Is the participant's perception of objectivity related to task performance?
- Could a participant be more motivated to put an effort into tasks where they believe they can influence the result as opposed to tasks that are objectively scored?

Origins of this investigation

Sylvia Roch, Vipanchi Mishra & Eugene Trombini's paper,
“Motivation in assessment Centers: Does it depend on the task?”

(Poster presented at the 26th annual meeting of the Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, Chicago, IL, 2011)

- Embarked on a similar study in the South African context

Possible reasons for different levels of motivation

- “I don’t feel like it”
- “I cannot influence the result”
- “I don’t believe the process is administered fairly”
- “I can influence the result”



Previous research concerning motivation

- Very little research has investigated the impact of participants' perceptions about the tasks / exercises
- Research by Roch et al (2008, 2009) found that:
 - participants more motivated to perform tasks where they believed they were able to influence the outcome (e.g. a role-play vs. ability tests)
 - participants also believed that objective tests (abilities) were procedurally more just than interviews and essays, which are qualitatively scored.
- Roch et al (2011) could not find studies directly linking participant motivation to performance in assessment centers, although literature investigating cognitive ability tests has found a significant relationship between motivation and performance
 - e.g., Chan, et al., 1997; Ployhart, Ziegert, & McFarland, 2003; Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Yonce, 2009

Aim of the study

- To investigate the influence of participant motivation across different tasks in assessment centres and specifically identify the variables that may impact participant motivation.
- To increase assessment centre reliability by controlling for these variables. Possible variables according to Roch could be:
 - situational factors
 - fairness perceptions and procedural justice
 - face validity
 - test taker motivation and perceived influence over their ratings
 - anxiety of the participant
 - assessment centre administrator behaviour
 - the nature of the assessment centre exercise

Research questions

- Questions explored in this research include:
 - Participants will perceive different levels of influence on task performance, perceptions of objectivity, and other factors, depending on the type of exercise
 - Participants will perceive ability tests as more objective but less easily influenced in comparison to role-plays, group exercises and presentations
 - Participants will perceive their performance as stronger in role-plays, group exercises and presentations compared to ability tests and personality questionnaires
 - Participant motivation may be influenced by various factors, which may differ depending on the type of exercise
 - Participant motivation influences performance on the different types of exercise

Description of the current study

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- Client organisations utilising Assessment Centres were approached to participate in the project
- Upon completion of the Assessment Centre, participants completed a short questionnaire exploring their reactions to the experience
- Sample:
 - 163 participants
 - 4 companies
 - 75% assessed for selection

Questionnaire and items

- **Perceived Influence:**
 - “I believe I had influence over how the rater will evaluate my performance”
- **Perceived Objectivity:**
 - “I believe the ratings of my performance on the test / task will be made objectively”
- **Perceived Performance:**
 - “I think I did very well in the test / task”
- **Perceived Anxiety:**
 - “I felt nervous when taking the test”
- **Perceived Consistency of Process:**
 - “The procedure used to arrive at the ratings has been applied consistently”

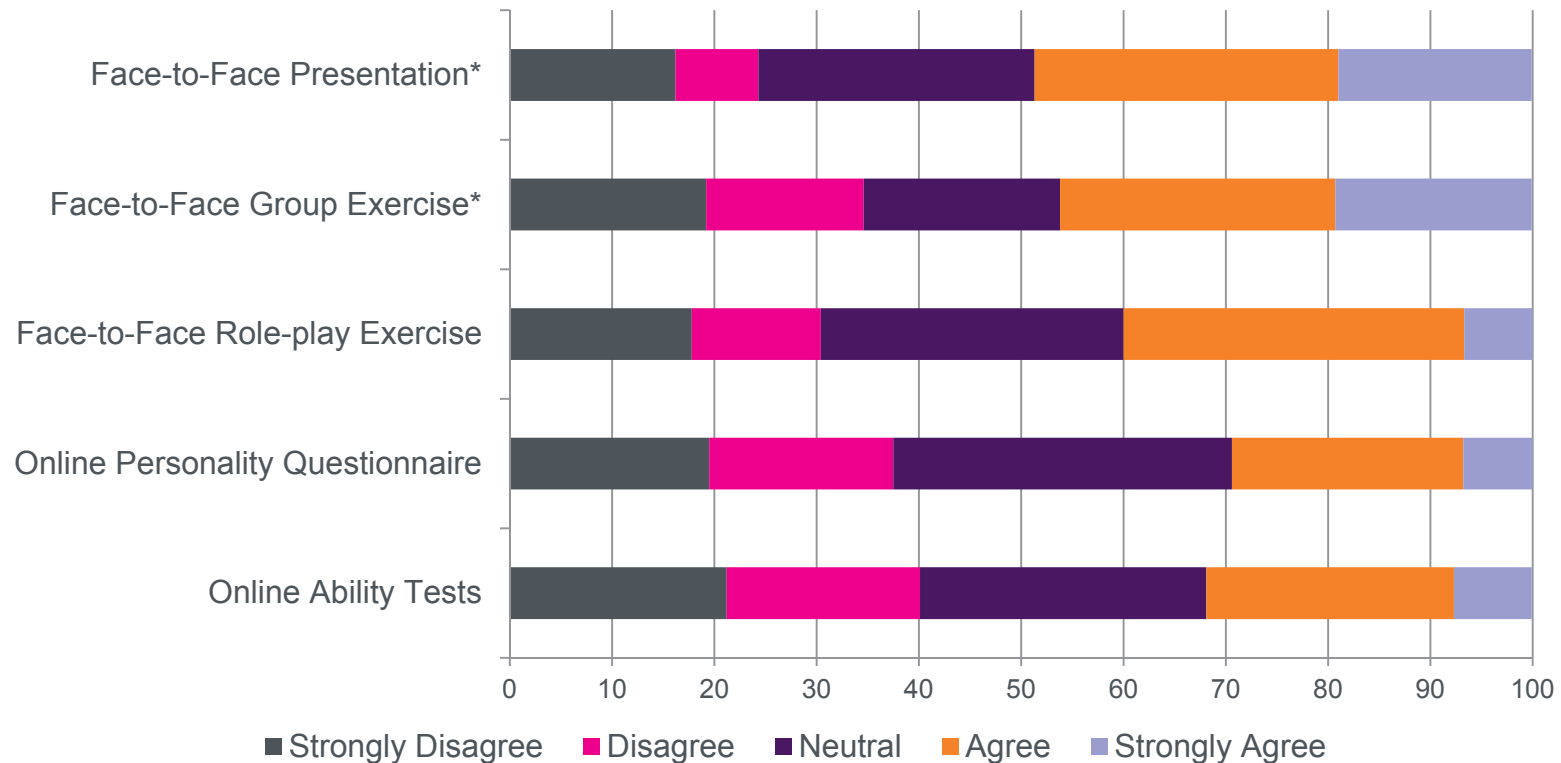
Questionnaire and items (cont.)

- **Participant Motivation:**
 - “Doing well on the test / task was important to me”
 - “I tried my best on the test / task”
- **Belief in Tests:**
 - “The test is probably a good way of selecting people for jobs”
 - “Companies use tests like these to make sure they have the best employees”

Participant experiences reported

Perceived influence

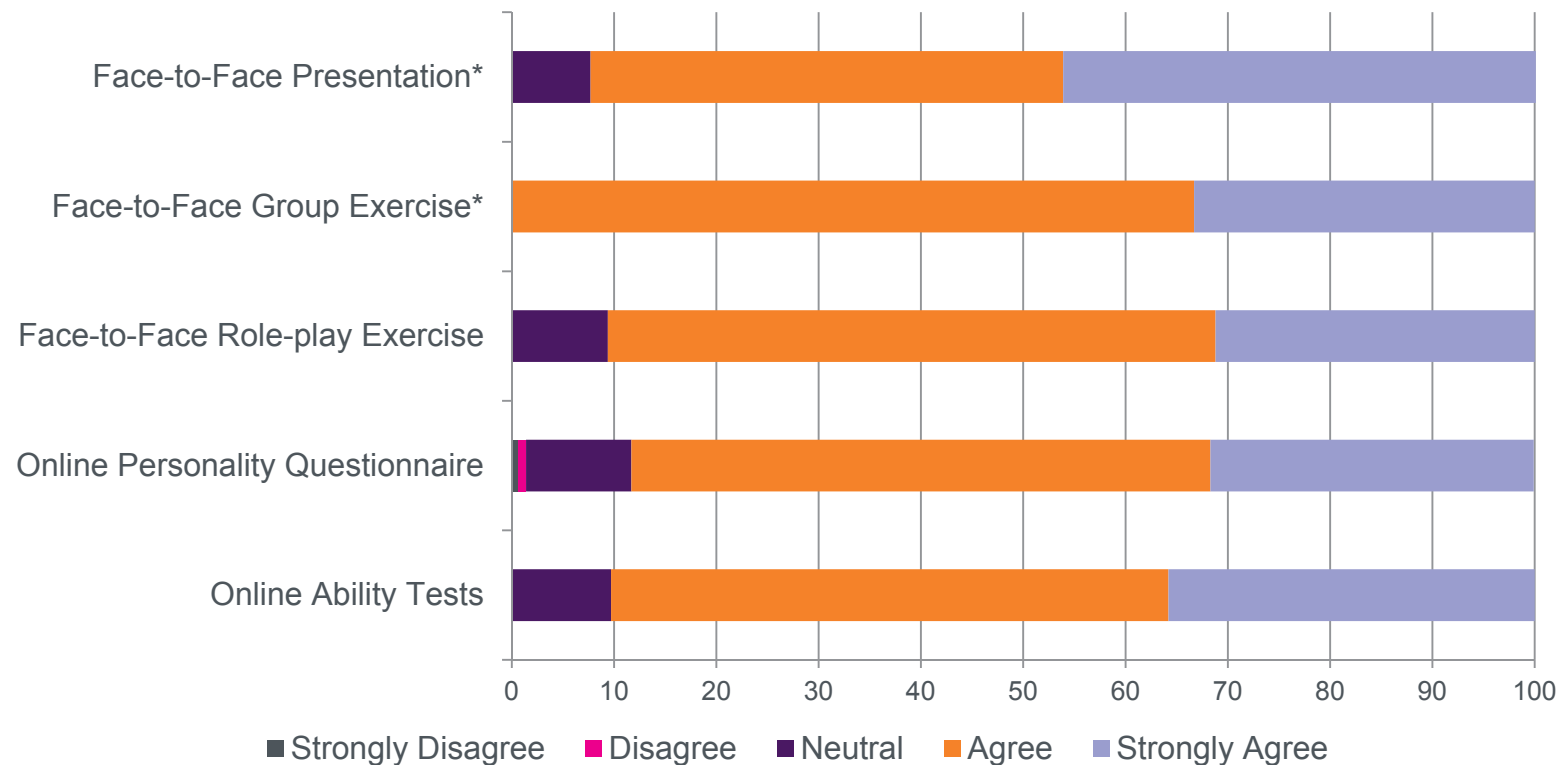
Where assessed for selection, participant ratings of Perceived Influence were highest for the Role-play Exercise, although differences are small



* Completed for development purposes

Perceived objectivity

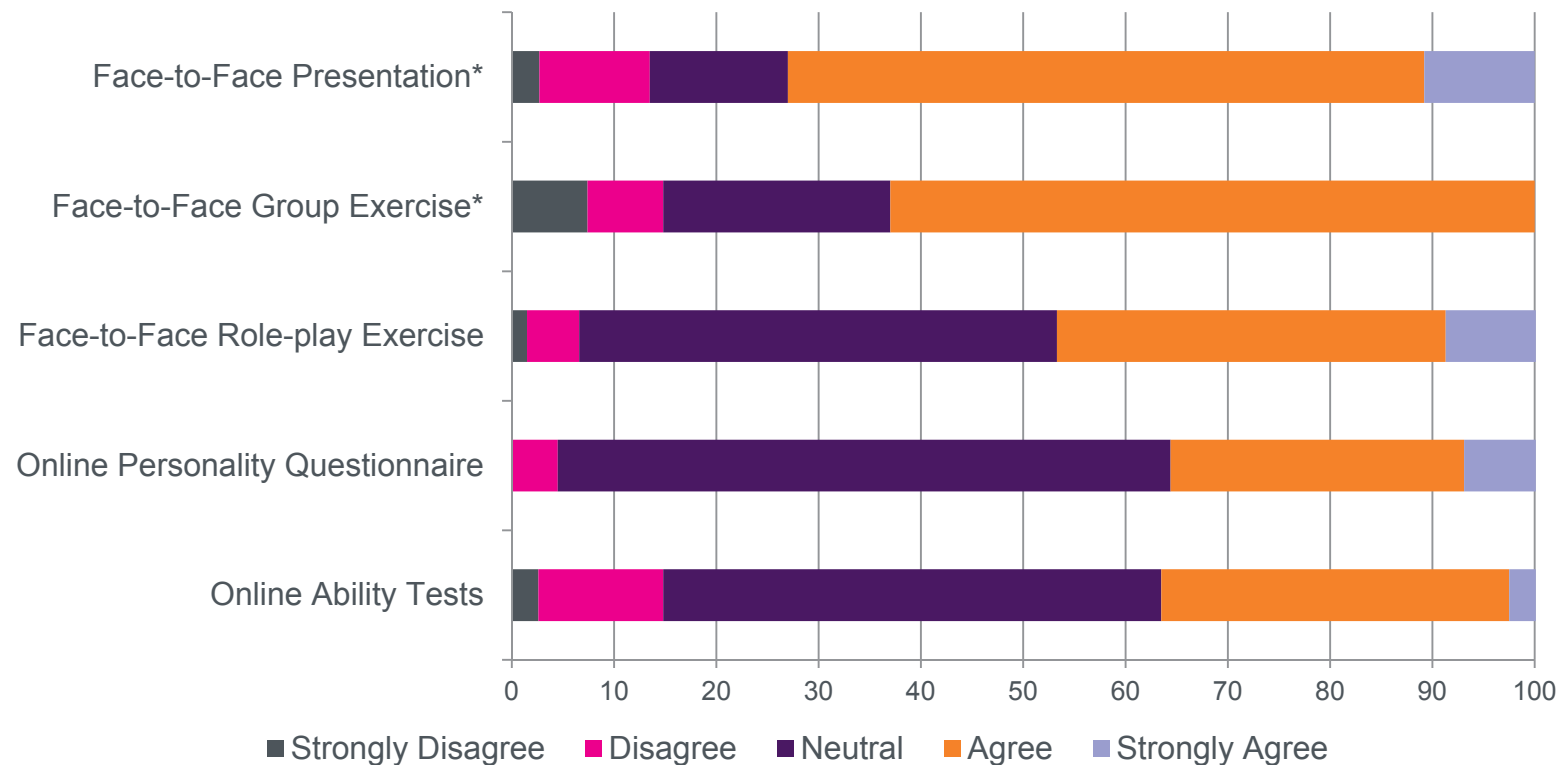
Where assessed for selection, participant ratings of Perceived Objectivity were similar across the different tasks



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Perceived performance

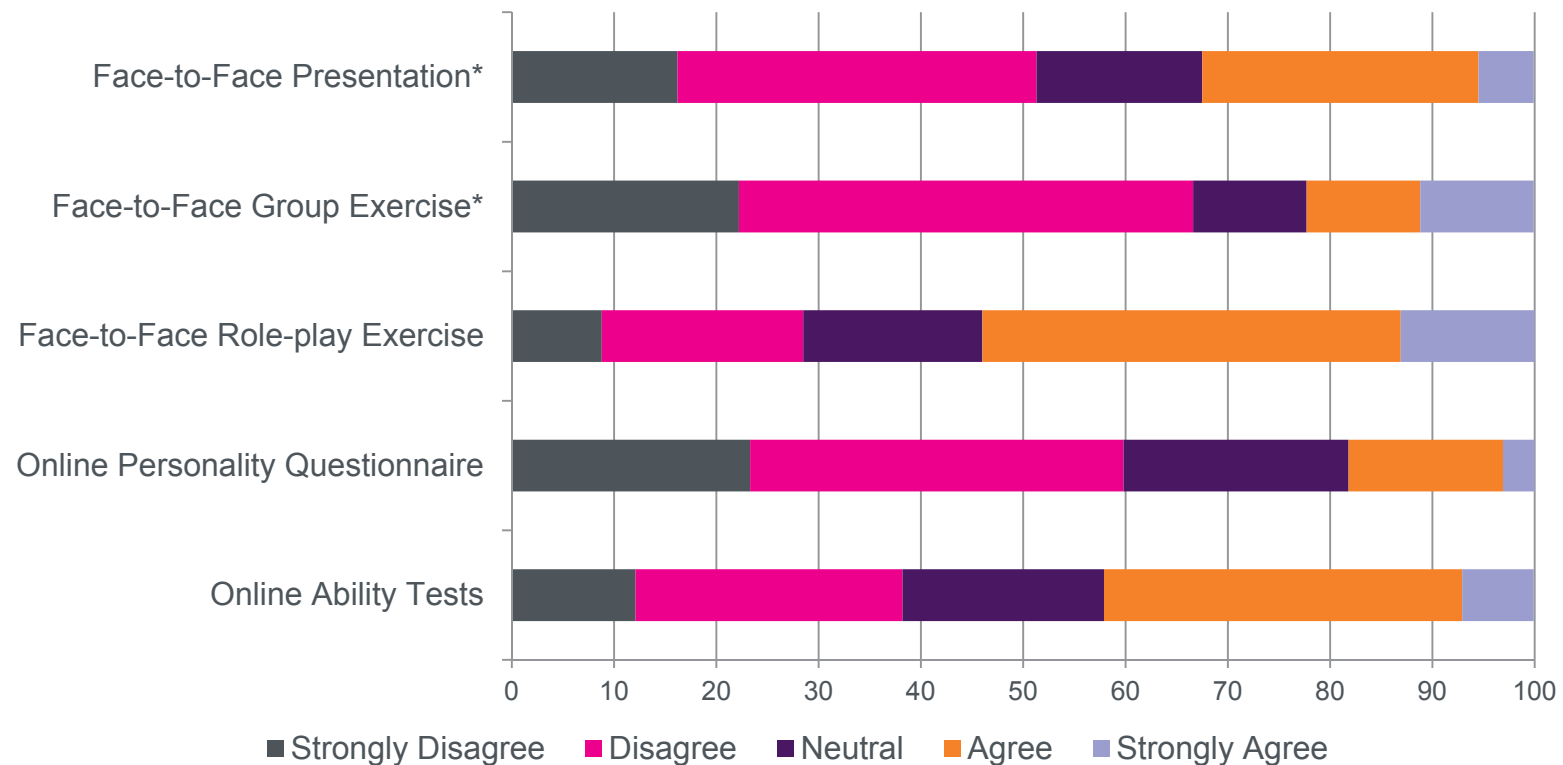
Where assessed for selection, participants believed they performed marginally better on the Role-play Exercise, and less so on the Ability test



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Perceived anxiety

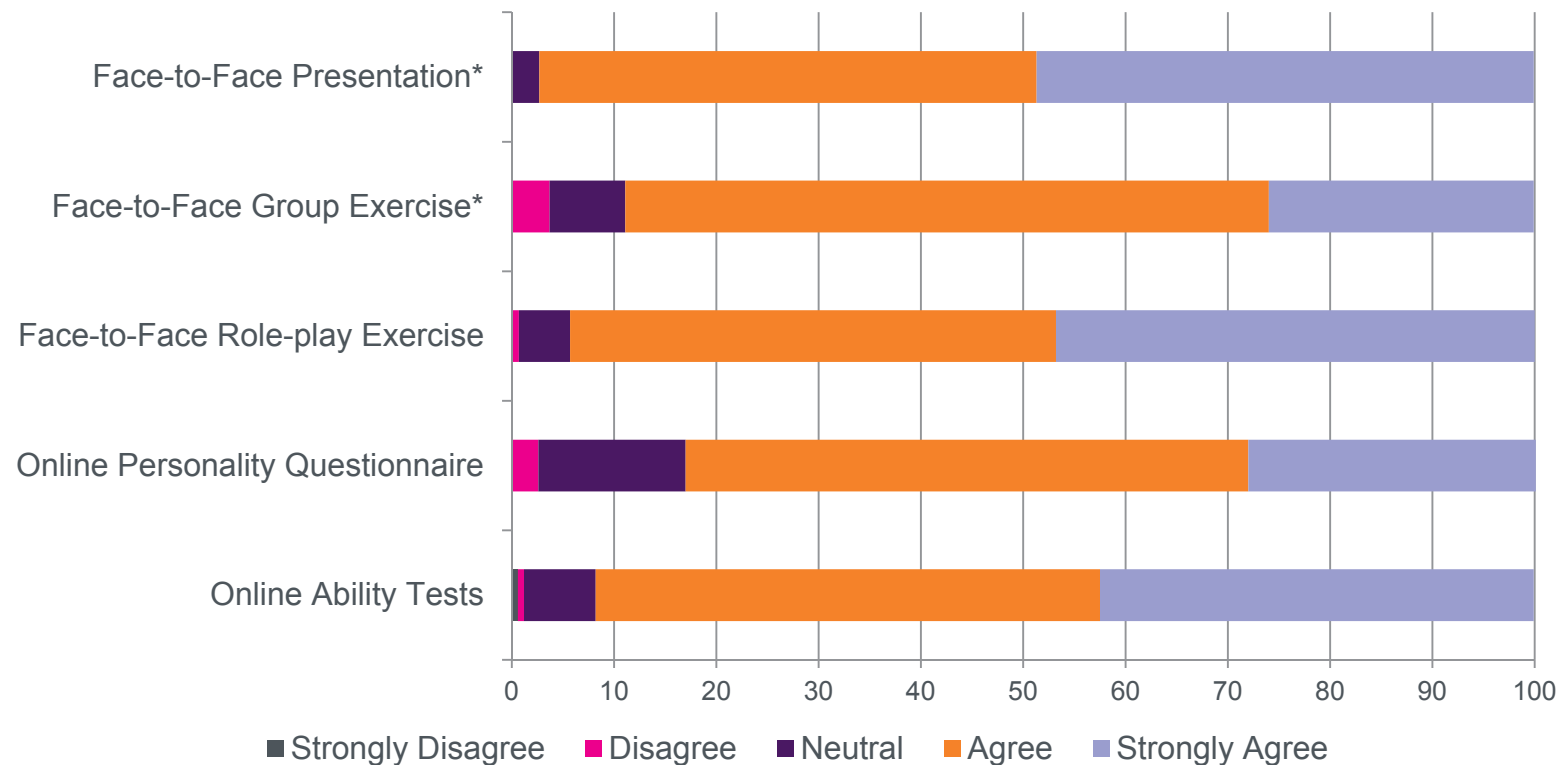
Where assessed for selection, participants reported most anxiety on the Role-play Exercise, followed by the Ability Test



* Completed for development purposes

Participant motivation

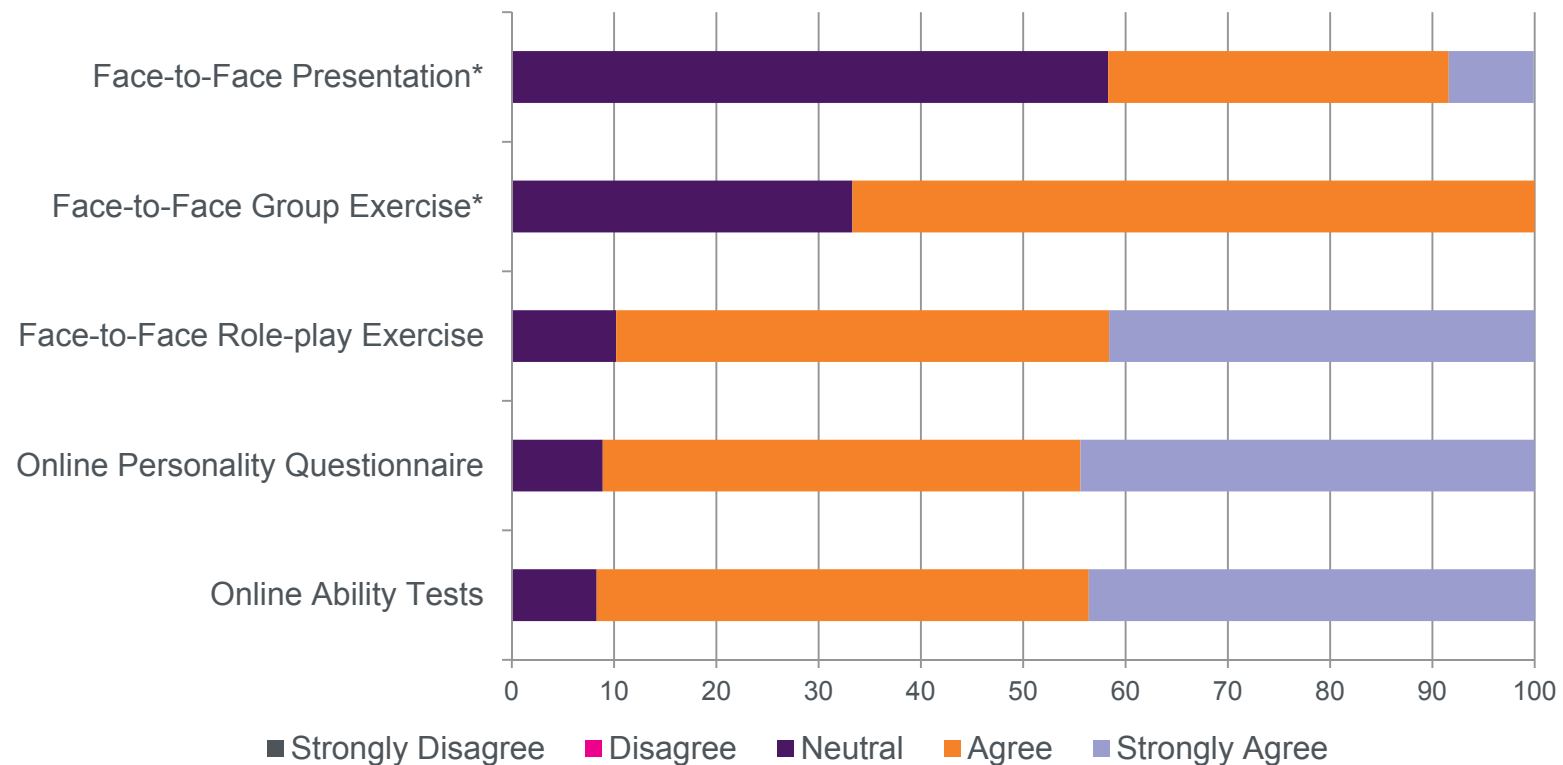
Where assessed for selection, participant motivation was described as highest on the Role-play Exercise and the Ability Test



* Completed for development purposes

Perceived consistency of process

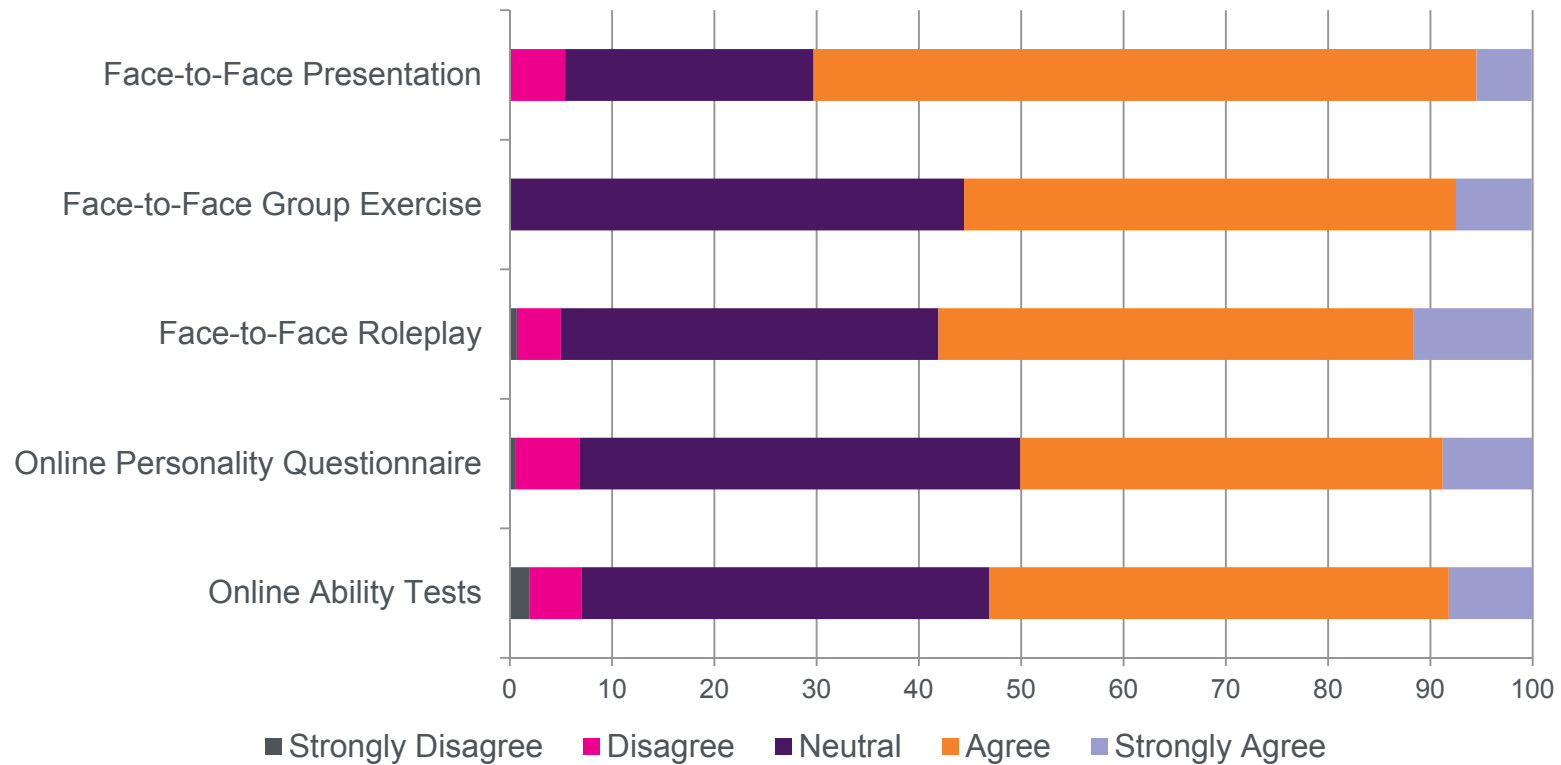
Where assessed for selection, participant ratings of the Perceived Consistency of Process were similar across the different tasks



* Completed for development purposes

Belief in tests

Across both assessment purposes, participant ratings of their Belief in Tests were fairly similar across the different tasks



* Completed for development purposes

Participant perceptions and reported task motivations

Relationships between participant perceptions: Ability tests

Participants reporting higher levels of anxiety felt they did not perform well on the Ability Tests.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 Perceived Anxiety | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| 2 Perceived Performance | -0.29** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 3 Perceived Objectivity | | | 1.00 | | | | |
| 4 Perceived Influence | | | | 1.00 | | | |
| 5 Perceived Consistency | | | 0.31** | | 1.00 | | |
| 6 Belief in Tests | | 0.22** | 0.31** | | 0.43** | 1.00 | |
| 7 Participant Motivation | | 0.33** | 0.18* | | 0.25** | 0.29** | 1.00 |

Taking into consideration all 6 factors simultaneously, Perceived Performance makes the strongest contribution to predicting Motivation (similar to Roch et al, 2011)

Relationships between participant perceptions: Personality Questionnaire

Belief in Tests consistently shows relationships with Perceived Performance, Objectivity and Consistency (for Abilities & Personality)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------|-------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 Perceived Anxiety | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| 2 Perceived Performance | | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 3 Perceived Objectivity | | | 1.00 | | | | |
| 4 Perceived Influence | | | | 1.00 | | | |
| 5 Perceived Consistency | | | 0.27** | | 1.00 | | |
| 6 Belief in Tests | | 0.29** | 0.37** | | 0.40** | 1.00 | |
| 7 Participant Motivation | 0.16* | 0.27** | 0.21* | | 0.21* | 0.32** | 1.00 |

Taking into consideration all 6 factors simultaneously, Perceived Performance makes the strongest contribution to predicting Motivation (similar to Roch et al, 2011)

Relationships between participant perceptions: Role-play

Similar to the Ability Tests, participants reporting higher levels of anxiety felt they did not perform well on the Role-play.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 Perceived Anxiety | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| 2 Perceived Performance | -0.31** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 3 Perceived Objectivity | | | 1.00 | | | | |
| 4 Perceived Influence | | | | 1.00 | | | |
| 5 Perceived Consistency | 0.18* | | 0.34** | | 1.00 | | |
| 6 Belief in Tests | | | 0.29** | | 0.29** | 1.00 | |
| 7 Participant Motivation | | 0.21* | 0.19* | | 0.17* | 0.26** | 1.00 |

Taking into consideration all 6 factors simultaneously, Perceived Performance makes the strongest contribution to predicting Motivation (similar to Roch et al, 2011); Belief in Tests also provides makes a significant contribution

Participant perceptions and actual performance

Participant perceptions and actual task performance

Similar to Roch et al (2011), Motivation predicted performance on the ability test only

| Participant Motivation | | Perceived... | | | | |
|------------------------|---------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| | | Influence | Objectivity | Performance | Anxiety | Consistency |
| Ability Test | 0.277** | 0.008 | 0.249* | 0.201* | .010 | 0.226* |
| Role Play | 0.122 | 0.073 | 0.117 | 0.155 | -0.027 | 0.134 |

Relationships between participant perceptions and actual task performance on the Group Exercise and Presentation Exercise are excluded due to limited sample size.

- Interestingly, those participants who performed better in the Role Play also tended to perform better in the (verbal) ability test, and have higher preferences for Detail Conscious and Evaluative
 - Participants assessed for selection, rather than development, performed slightly better on both the ability tests and Role Play
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Summary of observations

Summary of observations and recommendations

- Participant perceptions of different Assessment Centre tasks do vary, although the differences observed were not as strong as noted in the Roch et al (2011) study
- Participants' perceptions of their performance significantly impacted their motivation across all tasks
- Participant motivation to perform influenced actual performance on the cognitive ability test
- Further research needed to investigate:
 - Other common Assessment Centre tasks
 - The influence of the purpose of the Assessment Centre
 - The generalisation of these findings in the South African context

Summary of observations and recommendations

- *“Results suggest it is important for Assessment Centre designers to pay attention to task-related motivational differences, and address the most important factors linked to motivation in the instructions (and design) of each task”*

(Roch et al, 2011)

- In this study, while Perceived Performance was the greatest contribution to Participant Motivation, aspects of Objectivity, Consistency and Belief in Tests showed relationships as well
- Implications for Assessment Centres practitioners in their design, information-sharing and facilitation of Assessment Centres

References

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