



MEET THE FUTURE

DOES THE FUTURE HAVE ROOM FOR
FACE TO FACE
COMMUNICATION?



#FUTUREF2F



Exploring the value of face to face communication

A study of the value of face to face communication based on interviews with over 750 respondents.

FOREWORD

Organisations are increasingly growing their people's capabilities and want the experiences their employees have in training and education programmes, to translate into real, valuable business results. Those responsible for learning and development within organisations know they live in times of great change and are aware that much of this change is being driven by digital technologies. But do we know the impact of this on how we learn and retain new skills and our employees communication and learning preferences?

Here at Loughborough University's School of Business and Economics we fully utilise the best of new technology to deliver blended and on-line learning. Face to face will always be the better medium for communications. In terms of learning most of what we pay attention to is not what is said but how it is said, due to the nuances in body language, timing and behaviours. On-line learning cannot always deliver this which leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

While advancements in technology have benefited the learning industry and education, they have also created challenges for learning leaders and this report helps to demonstrate some of the issues around preferences and impact of face to face communication.

Dr Cheryl Travers
Director of Executive Education
School of Business and Economics



INTRODUCTION

This NEW research, undertaken by imago and Loughborough University School of Business and Economics in conjunction with The Right Solution, examines the favoured forms of communication for learning new skills, retaining important information and aiding business success, with particular insight into the preferences of tomorrow's business leaders. It provides valuable insight into the preferred forms of communication for business and education activities.

A total of 779 respondents made up of conference and meeting organisers, conference and meeting attendees, undergraduate and post graduate students, academics and lecturers participated in focus groups, telephone, online and face to face interviews.

Meeting and event organisers from corporate and public sector organisations will find the results invaluable for planning and developing effective communication with their employees to increase motivation and productivity. Universities will better understand students' preferred forms of communication to gain and retain information and aid learning.

METHODOLOGY

The results outlined here are based on data collected by conducting focus groups, personal interviews, exit surveys and online questionnaires with a total of 779 respondents during Spring 2015. Questionnaires were adapted to suit each target group while also allowing comparisons to be made between groups.

Respondents were made up of:

- 479 undergraduate or postgraduate students including MBA students at Loughborough University School of Business and Economics (future leaders)
- 195 conference and meeting organisers (those who use external venues for meetings)
- 95 delegates attending events at imago
- 10 focus group attendees (academics, lecturers, organisers and future leaders).



Focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted with academics, lecturers, organisers and future leaders. Participants were invited with a clear brief explaining the purpose of the research to guide them through preparation in order to use their time effectively and get right to the heart of the issues for most valuable forms of communication.

Attendees of the first focus group all had more than 15 years experience in teaching, learning and organising meetings. They were able to provide their perspective as presenters and organisers, and feedback from their own delegates. The second focus group was attended by MBA students of Loughborough University (future leaders). All views on face to face communication and learning helped shape the online and telephone research that followed.

Personal interviews

These were carried out with delegates, organisers and future leaders. The participants were asked open questions to gain insights and in depth knowledge of their experience and expectations for favoured forms of communication, meeting environments and technology requirements.

Online and telephone surveys

Questionnaires were customised to suit each of three groups: organisers, attending delegates and students. Each included bespoke questions to explore what is of prime importance to them in a face to face learning environment, their favourite forms of communication and what contributes to effective learning and helps them to retain knowledge longer.

SUMMARY OF KEY RESULTS

1 Preferred forms of communication

Students, delegates and organisers all agreed that they gained more value from face to face learning than conference calls, emails and other forms of communication.

Students gained more value from face to face learning than working online or independently. 36% said they prefer to communicate with their peers via phone compared to 15% who prefer facebook.

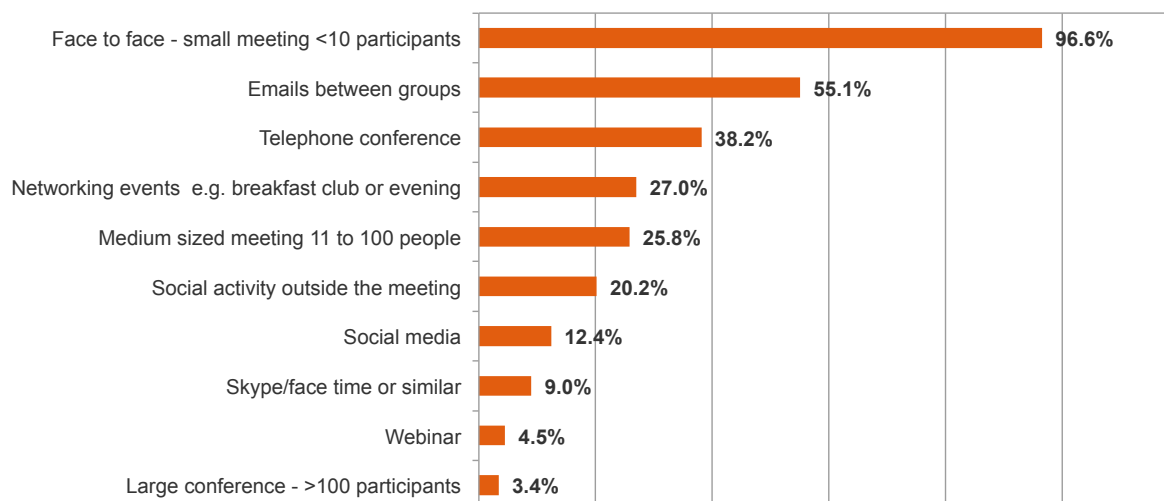
Face to face is preferred as it enables you to read facial expressions, interact with people and test understanding. Relationships can be developed face to face in a way that phone or email doesn't allow. Focus group attendees agreed that 'two way participative communication creates a learning environment as opposed to a teaching environment'. They cited 31 positives of face to face communication such as – fresh ways of thinking; team unity; (perceived) investment in employees; engagement and enjoyment – and just one negative – that people can distract each other.

The most favourite form of communication for meeting attendees (delegates) is small face to face meetings for fewer than 10 participants and the least favourite is large meetings for more than 100 participants. Opportunities for more personal attention and guidance are clearly preferred as Students endorsed this view with their top favourite for learning effectively being tutorials and the least favourite being watching others through social media channels.

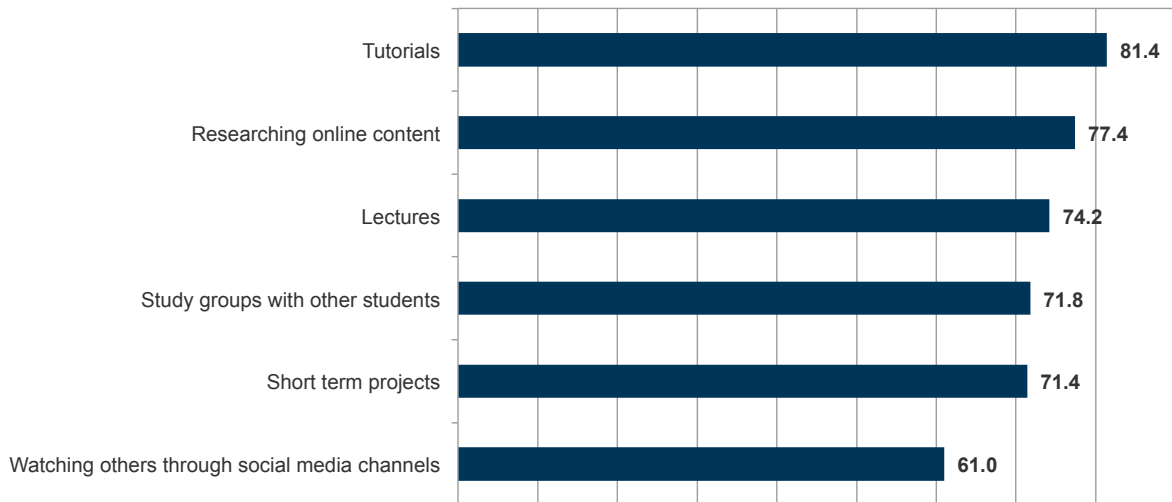


96.6%
of delegates prefer
face to face meetings

Delegates' favourite forms of communication with colleagues for day to day work & business success



Students' most/more valuable communication forms for learning effectively



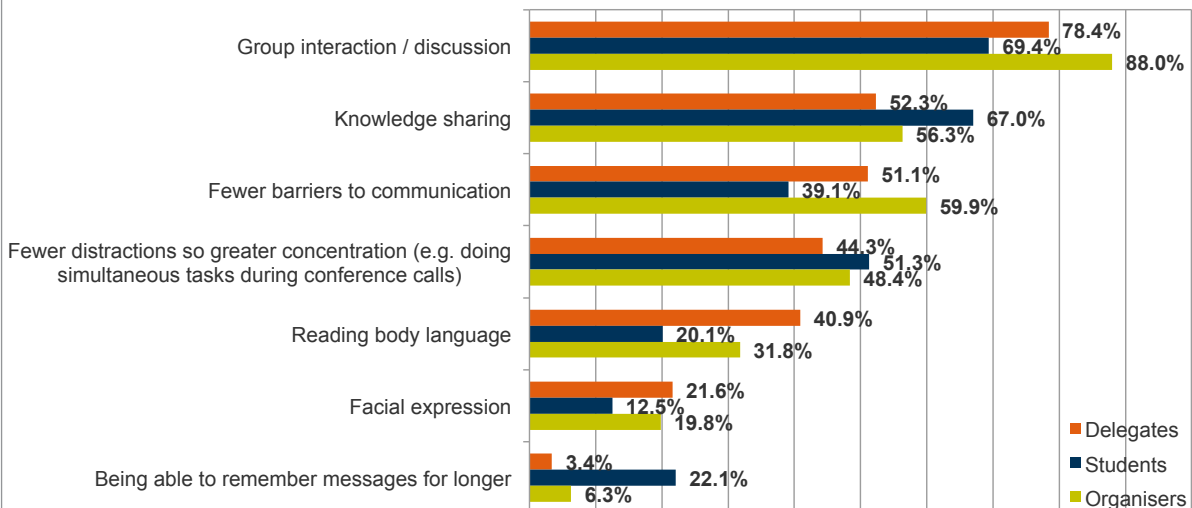
2 Benefits of meeting face to face

Up to 88% of each respondent type – students, organisers and delegates – said that group interaction and discussion was the top benefit of meeting face to face in a learning environment.

Followed by up to 67% who said knowledge sharing and up to 60% who felt it was the fact that there are fewer barriers to communication.



What are the benefits of meeting face to face in a learning environment versus other forms of communication (top 3)?



Delegates and students retained information for 2-4 weeks after a face to face meeting, longer than other forms of communication. Focus group attendees said “Face to face communication stays in the memory as you can more easily associate it with the personality”. “Key messages are distinct when you are meeting face to face but they can become lost when communicating online”.

On a scale of 0 to 100 delegates ranked engagement during typical face to face meetings or learning with an average 85% whereas students ranked it an average 73%.

88%
of respondent's rate group interaction and discussion as the key benefit



3 Most valuable element of face to face learning

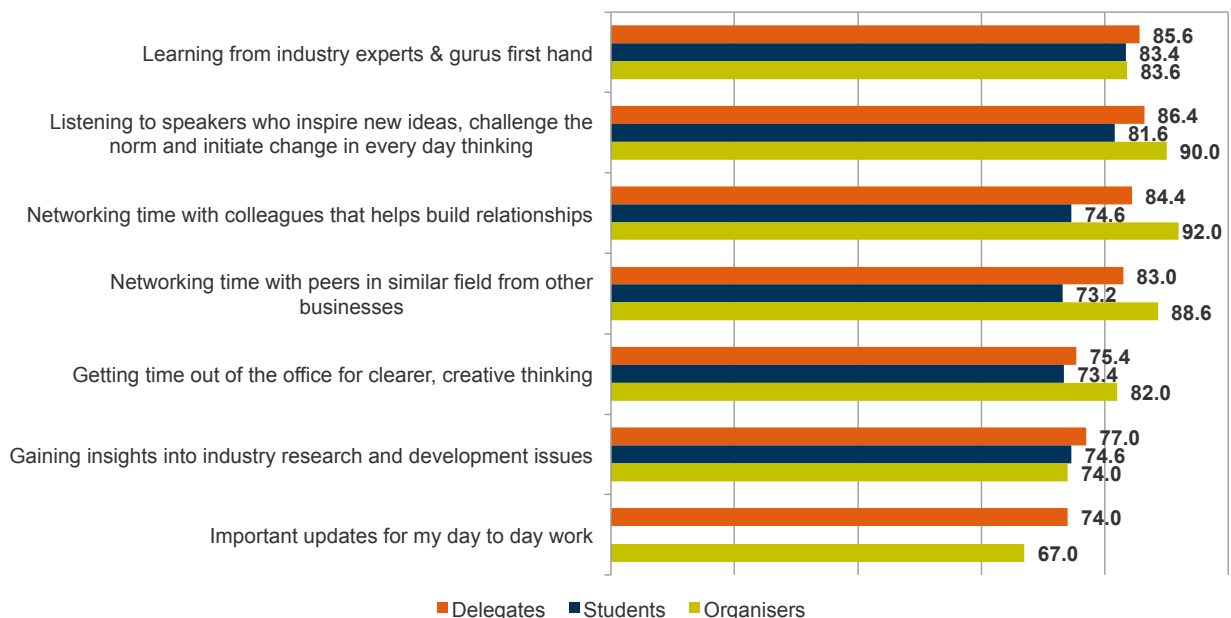
Delegates rated listening to speakers who inspire new ideas, challenge the norm and initiate change in every day thinking as the most valuable element of face to face learning.

Whereas students rated learning from industry experts first hand as most valuable. Interestingly, organisers thought networking time with colleagues was most valuable yet delegates did not rate it so highly.

listening

to inspirational speakers is the most valuable element face to face learning

What are the benefits of meeting face to face in a learning environment



4 Contribution of face to face communication

Face to face communication was considered by delegates and meeting organisers to contribute most to effectiveness of negotiation for contracts or business deals, followed by learning new skills and training on key aspects of their job. Meeting organisers also thought it was effective for interviewing to find the ideal candidate.

Focus group attendees made the following comments:-

"People buy from people, no matter how good the product is, if you don't buy into the person, you are not going to buy the product".

"Face to face is a way of developing relationships that can't be done via email or phone".

"It [face to face] gives three things... better interaction, better engagement and better understanding".



face to face

results in better interaction,
better engagement,
better understanding



face to face

can disappoint if attendees
have nothing to take away from
the experience

5 Strongest emotions experienced at face to face meetings

When asked to state the three strongest emotions experienced at their most recent face to face learning experience delegates opted for:

Comfortable	35.5%
Engaged	23.7%
Happy	15.8%

Other positive words frequently mentioned were interested, motivated and excited. 6.6% said stressed and 4% said challenged.

Students in contrast cited the following words as their strongest emotions:

Inspired	34.2%
Comfortable	31.7%
Interested	18.9%

13.2% of students also said stressed and 10% said bored. However, other words frequently mentioned were engaged, relaxed, confident, focused and happy.

Focus group attendees agreed that face to face meetings have lots of positive associations but they can also disappoint if attendees have nothing to take away from it, saying presenters and facilitators need to structure communication well.

6 Preferred presentation formats

An interactive format of exercises and questions for face to face meetings and visuals/PowerPoint/video/graphics was rated of more importance to help retain information by up to 81% of each respondent group. Informal creation of content on the day was of less importance and Social media during meetings was considered least important. Virtual meetings are considered helpful only once you already know the people you are communicating with, even though they are more environmentally friendly and efficient in saving travel time.

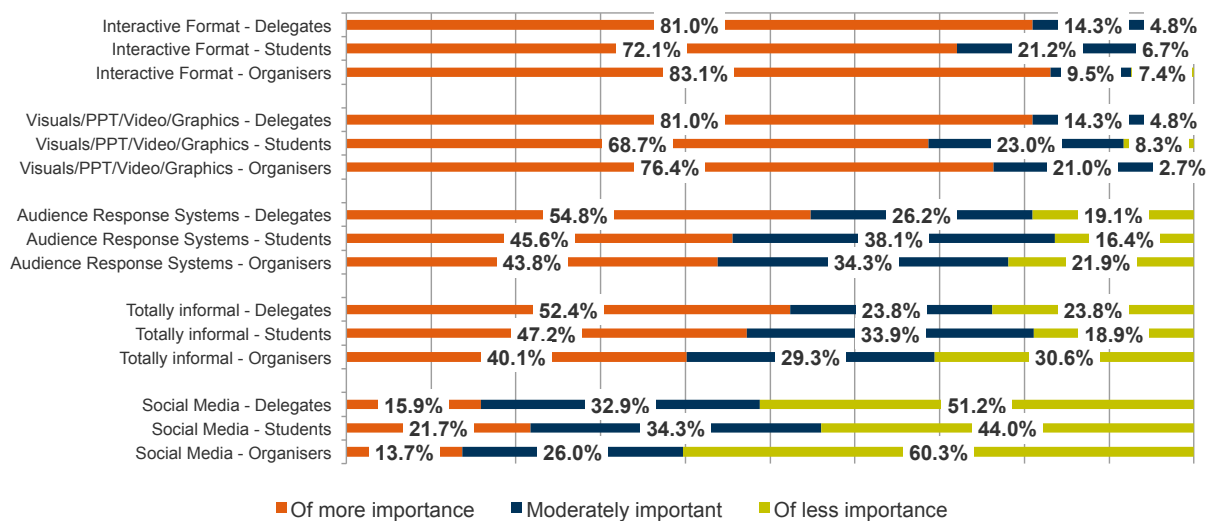
81%
of respondents prefer
interactive meetings

One focus group attendee said “there is nothing better than a white board and pen or a flip chart to help with group cohesion”.

77%
students do not think
social media is important
to help retain information



Presentation style & use of technology that helps you retain information





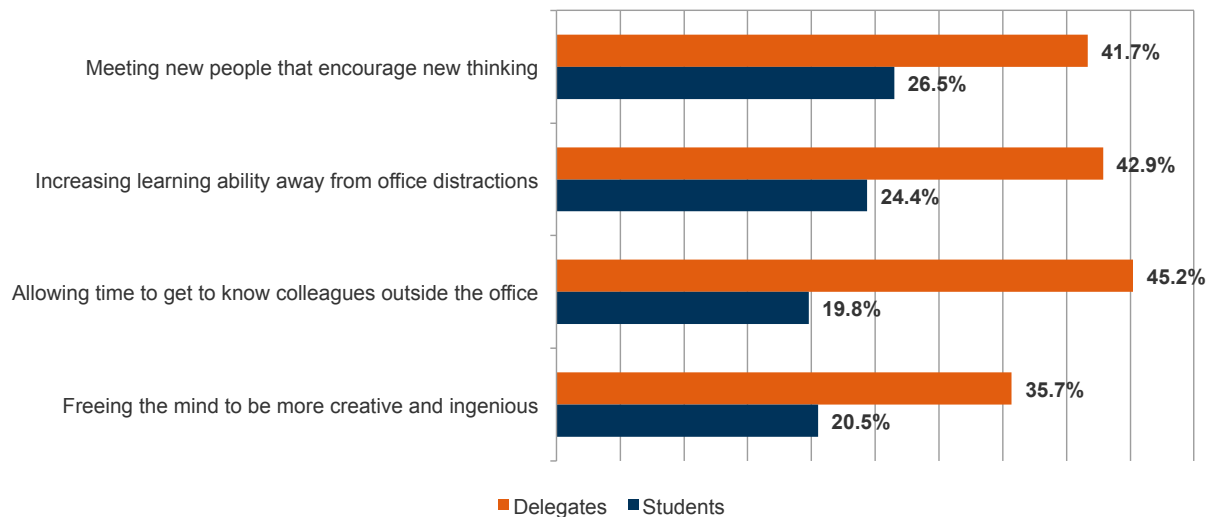
7 Value of offsite environment/ external venues and technology

Delegates felt getting to know colleagues outside the office was most valuable from an off-site environment whereas students considered meeting new people that encourage new thinking most valuable, followed by increasing learning ability away from office distractions which was also rated highly by delegates.

Focus group attendees agreed that a neutral environment encourages a fresh approach to thinking, with interactive sessions and good food investing in employees to make them feel rewarded.

online messages
are often forgotten after a week

Most important elements in offsite environments as opposed to in house



bright,
quiet and distraction free

85% of organisers considered it important for a venue to have the latest technology for them to book it. They also rated sufficient bandwidth in WiFi to enable easy access to information over high resolution data projectors and screens.

However when asked to describe in 5 words the ideal meetings environment to ensure a successful meeting with happy delegates, 45% said light, bright or natural daylight. 25% said quiet, calm or without distractions and 16% said space and surroundings. Words relating to technology didn't feature at all!

The ideal meeting environment of the future would be flexible to enable any arrangement of seating and have enough plugs and sockets for charging multiple devices. 68% of students selected mobile apps as the technology that most enhanced their experience and understanding of learning and 65% selected social media.

How venues are researched by organisers

83% of organisers use websites for information and research on venues, followed by 67% who trust word of mouth.

19% of organiser respondents use venue finding agencies and 4.6% use social media.



Value of feedback on venues

140 organisers provided spontaneous comments on the importance of feedback on venues for future planning. Sample comments (verbatim) are as follows:

"Feedback is really helpful and very valued"

"Word of mouth very important, but alongside value for money"

"It plays a huge part – if my team do not have a good experience at a venue, it is extremely unlikely that I will use that venue again."

"Whilst positive feedback is good for the ego, negative feedback drives the desire to improve the product and its delivery".

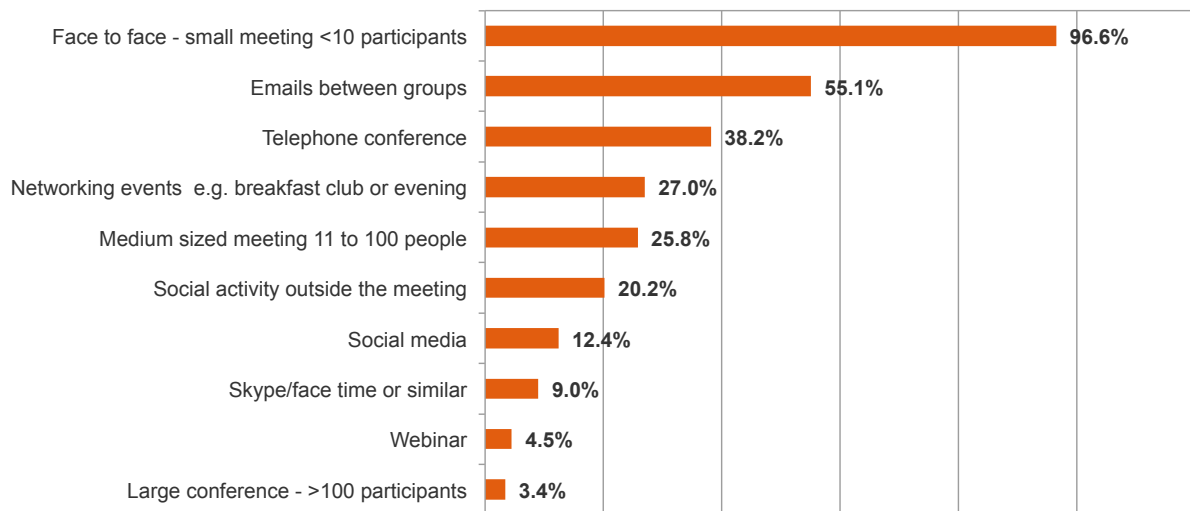


RESEARCH RESULTS FOR EACH RESPONDENT GROUP

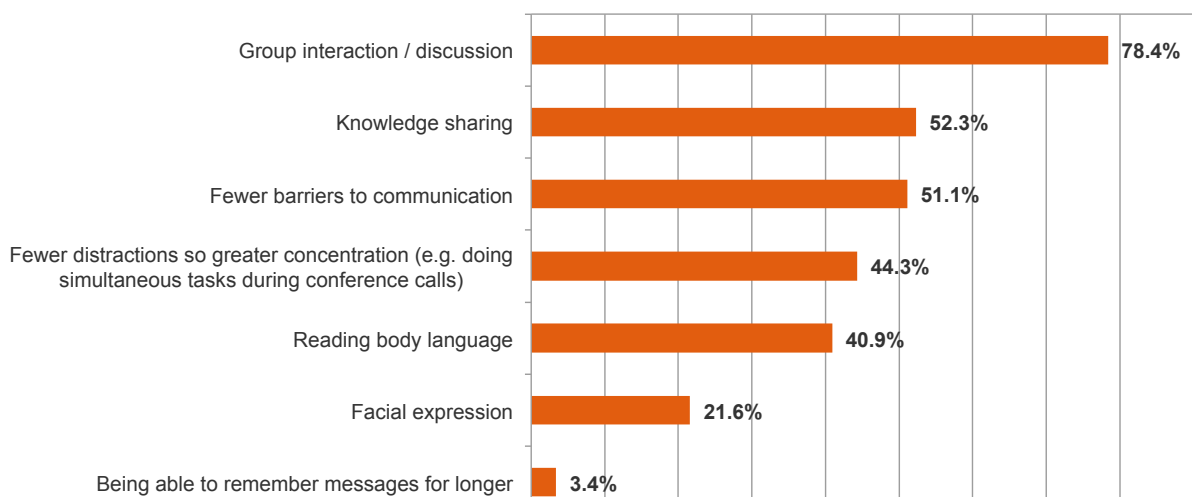
The individual results for each respondent group are now outlined.

Delegates 95 respondents

Which are your favourite forms of communication with colleagues to help you in your day to day work & achieve business success (top 3)?



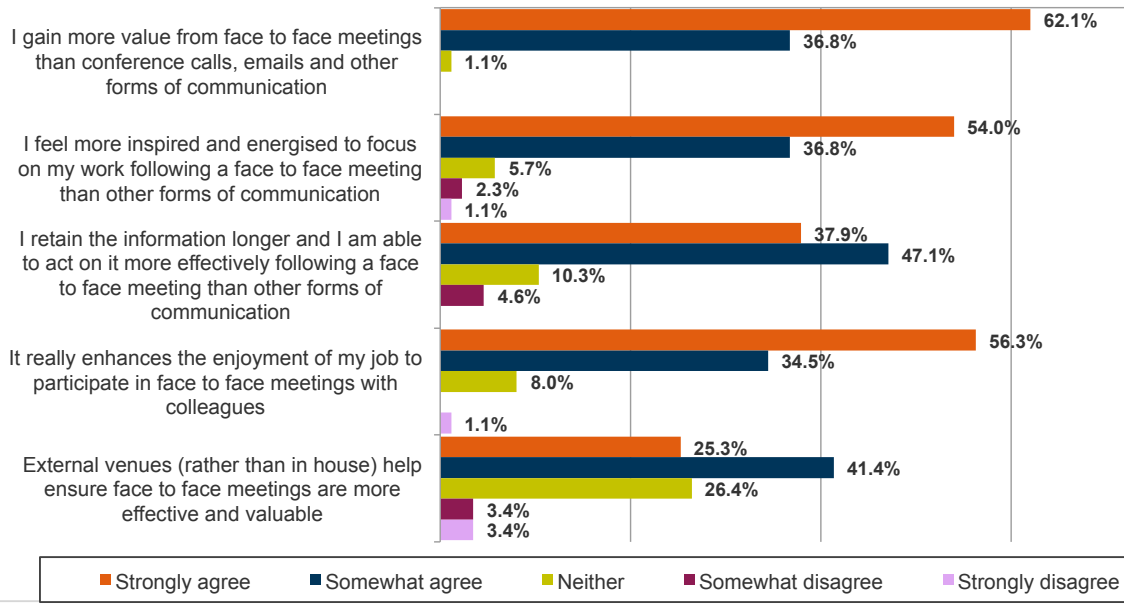
What are the benefits of meeting face to face in a learning environment versus other forms of communication (top 3)?



What are the most valuable elements of a face to face learning (satisfaction score out of 100)?

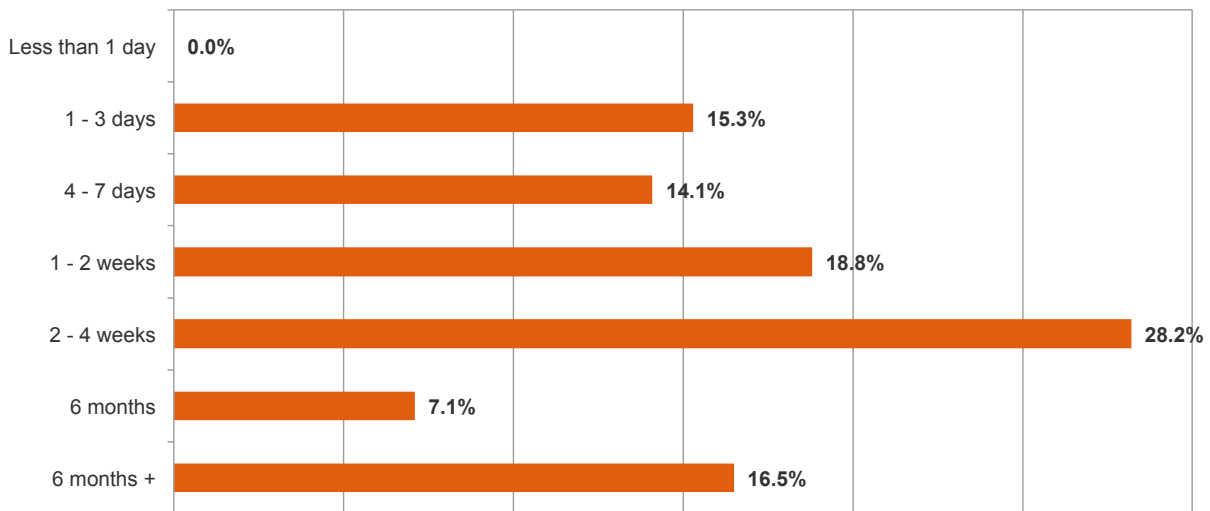


Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements



Delegates ranked an average **85%** engagement during typical face to face meetings

Think of the face to face meeting you most recently attended, how long did you remember the key messages and experience from that meeting?



23.6% of delegates reported retaining information for 6 months or more and of the remainder, the average retention time was 14 days.

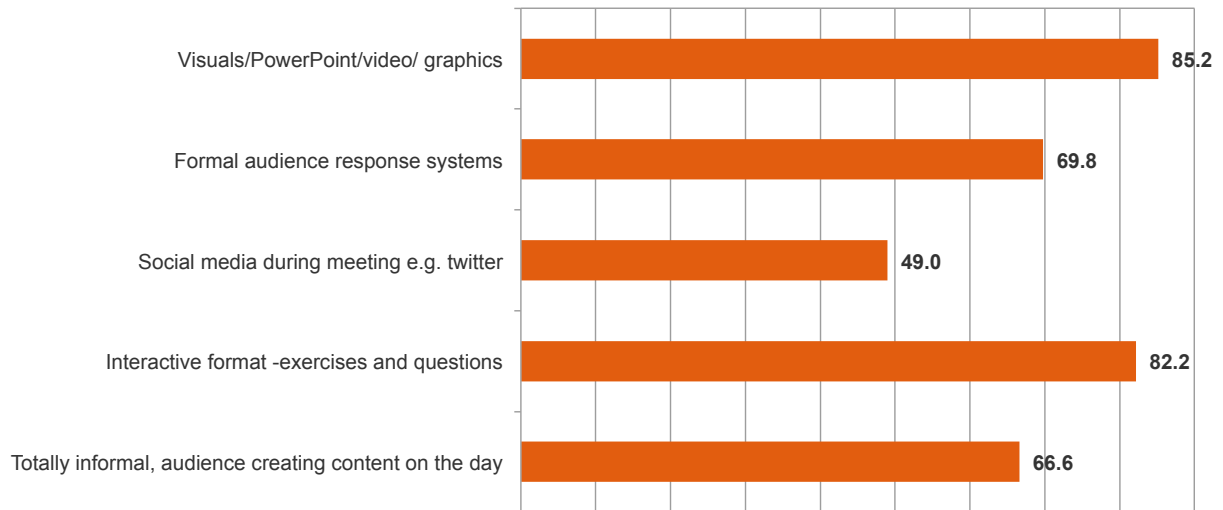
Strongest emotions at most recent meeting

Comfortable	35.5%	Motivated	11.8%
Engaged	23.7%	Excited	7.9%
Happy	15.8%	Stressed	6.6%
Interested	13.2%	Valued	4.0%

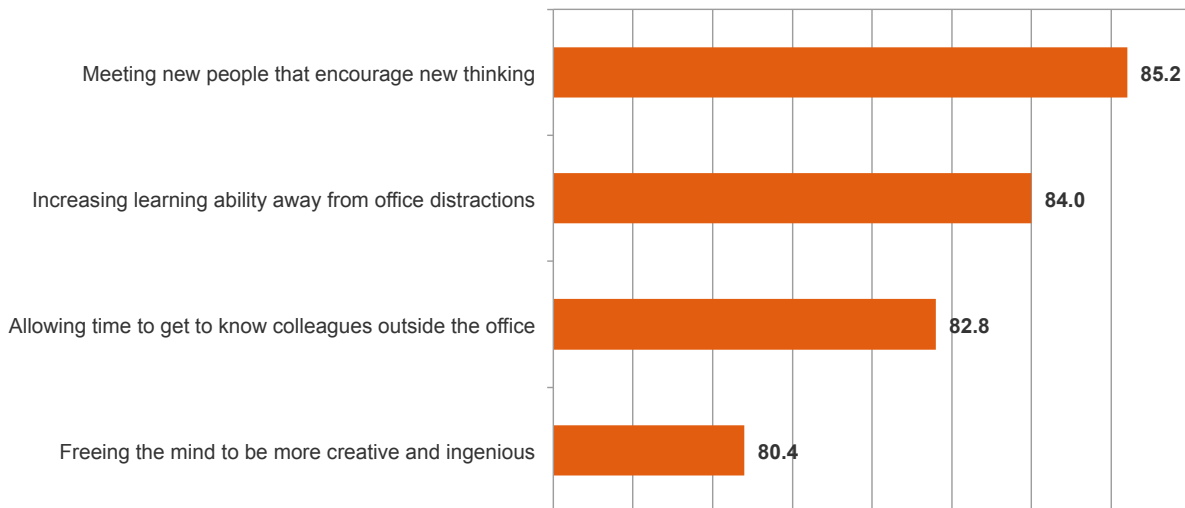
How does face to face communication as opposed to other forms of communication, contribute to effectiveness for the following (satisfaction score out of 100)?



Thinking of presentation style and use of technology during face to face meetings, what helps you to retain information? (confidence score out of 100)

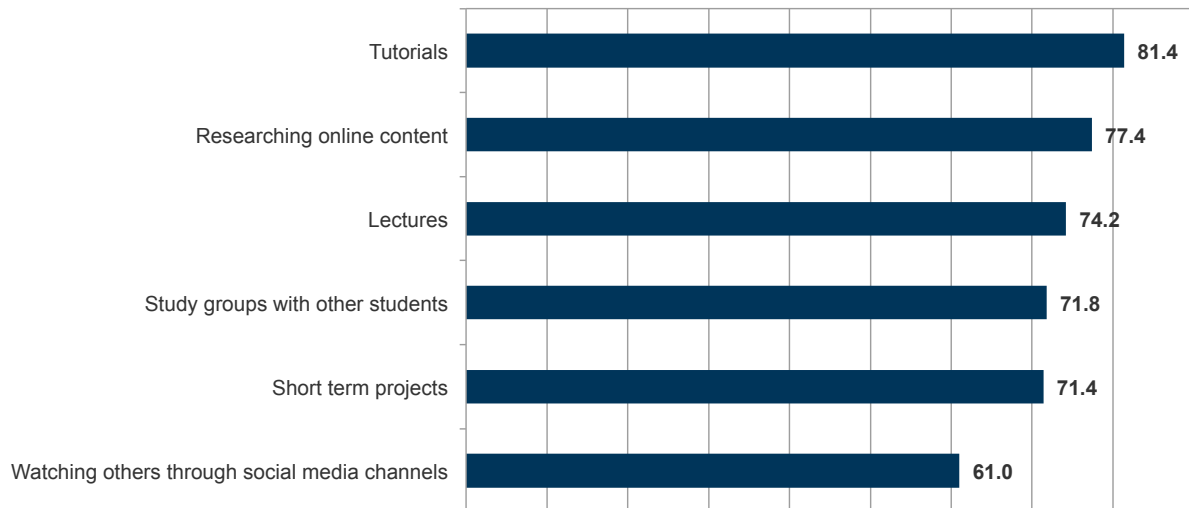


How valuable is an offsite environment as opposed to in house meeting rooms for (confidence score out of 100):

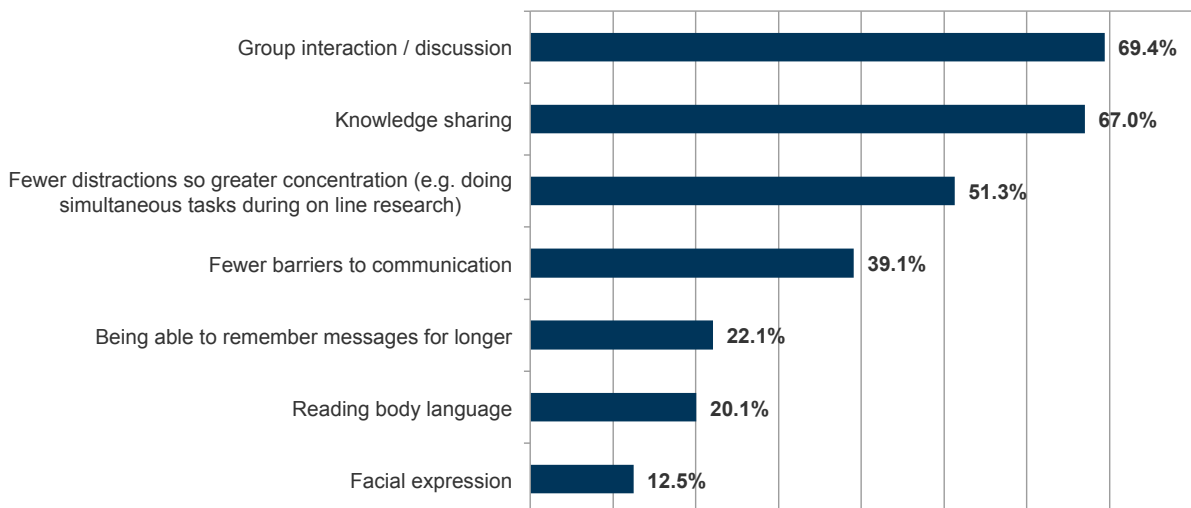


Students 479 respondents

Rate accordingly which of the following are most valuable in helping you to learn effectively (confidence rating out of 100)



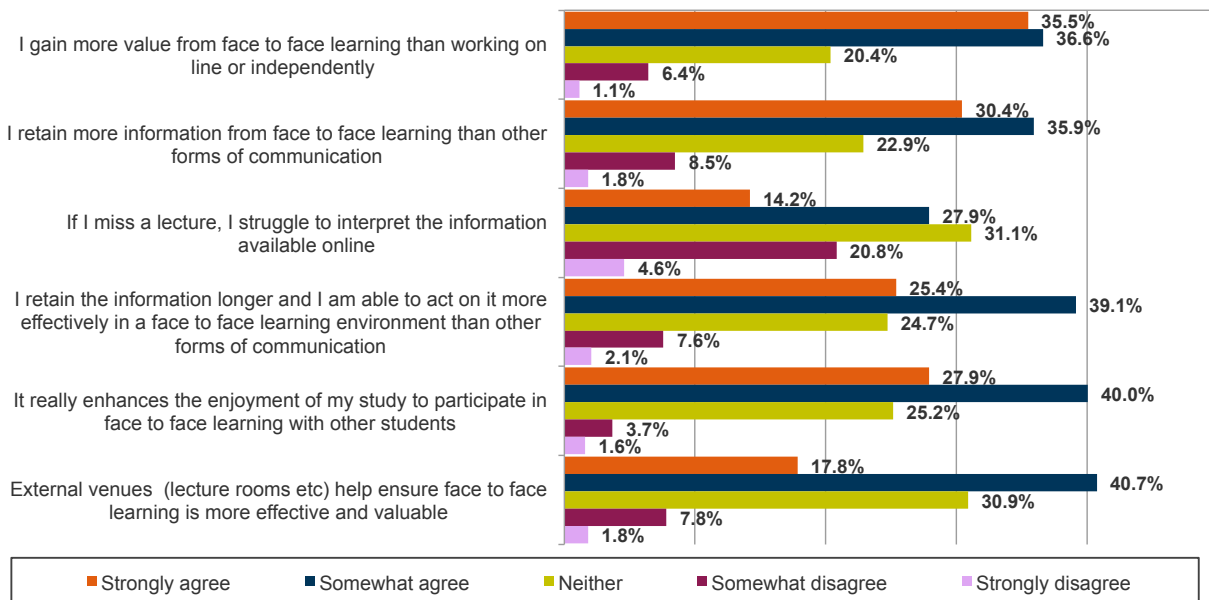
Select 3 of the following that you think are the top three benefits of face to face in a learning environment rather than other forms of communication?



What are the most valuable elements of a face to face learning (value score out of 100)?



Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

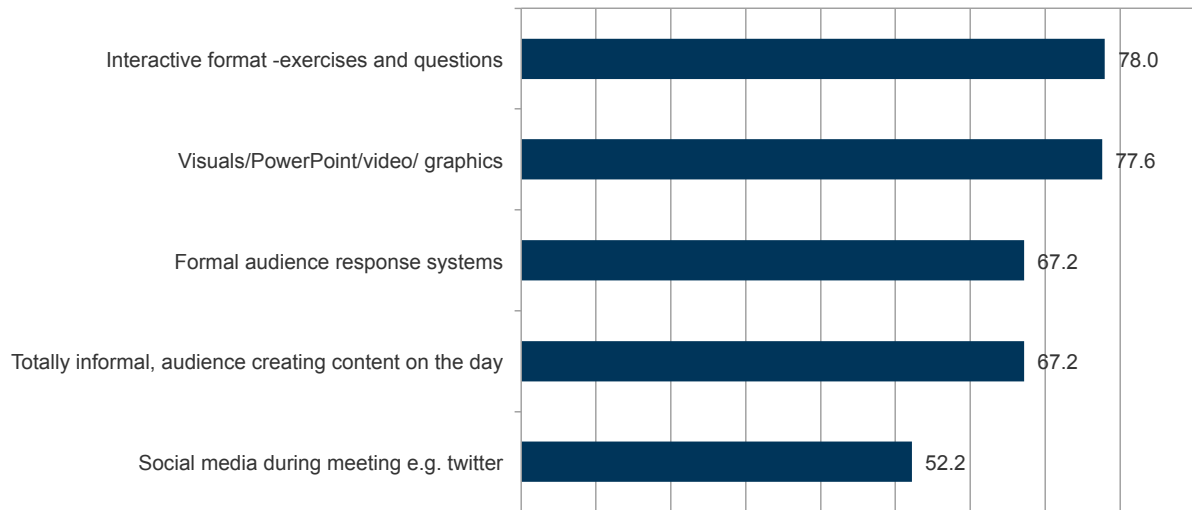


Students ranked their engagement during typical face to face learning at **73%**

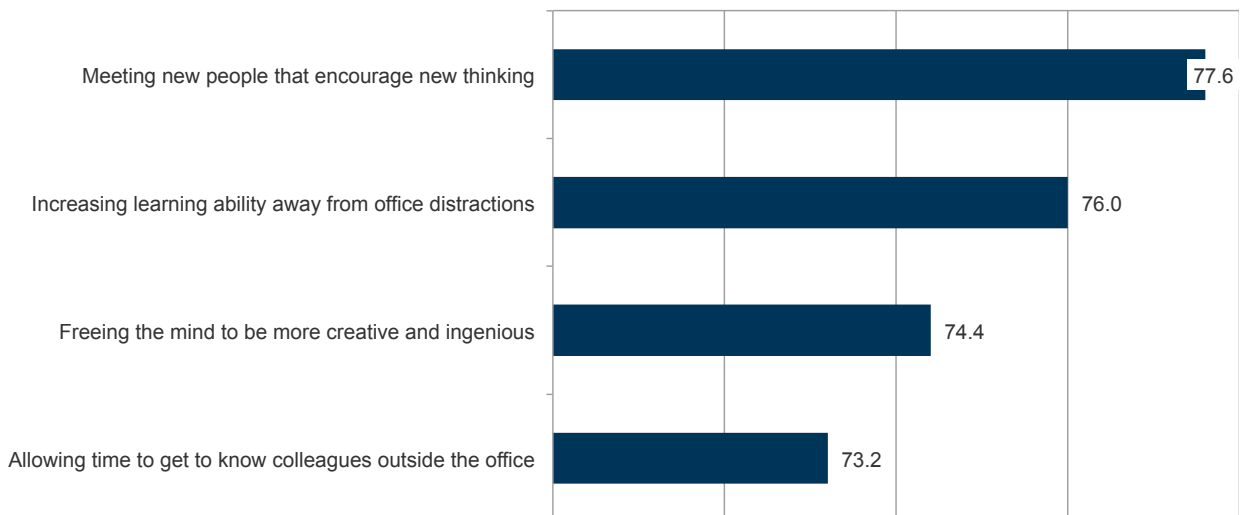
Strongest emotions experienced during face to face learning

Inspired	34.2%	Bored	10.0%
Comfortable	31.7%	Relaxed	8.9%
Interested	18.9%	Confident	6.4%
Engaged	13.9%	Happy	6.0%
Stressed	13.2%	Focused	3.6%

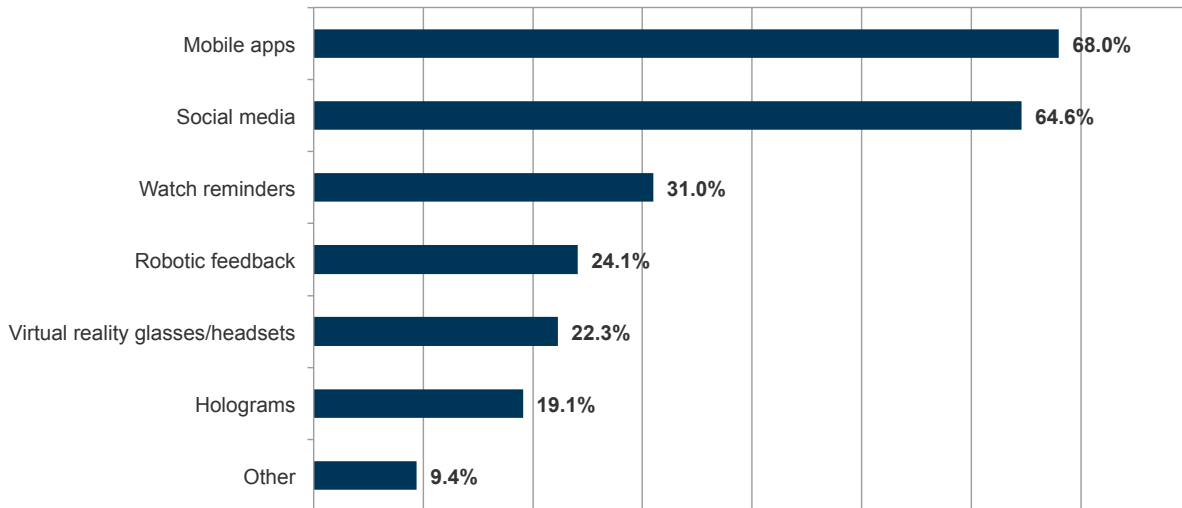
Thinking of presentation style and use of technology during face to face meetings, what helps you to retain information (confidence score out of 100)?



How valuable is an offsite environment as opposed to in house meeting rooms for:



What kind of technology most helps enhance your experience and understanding of learning (top 3)?

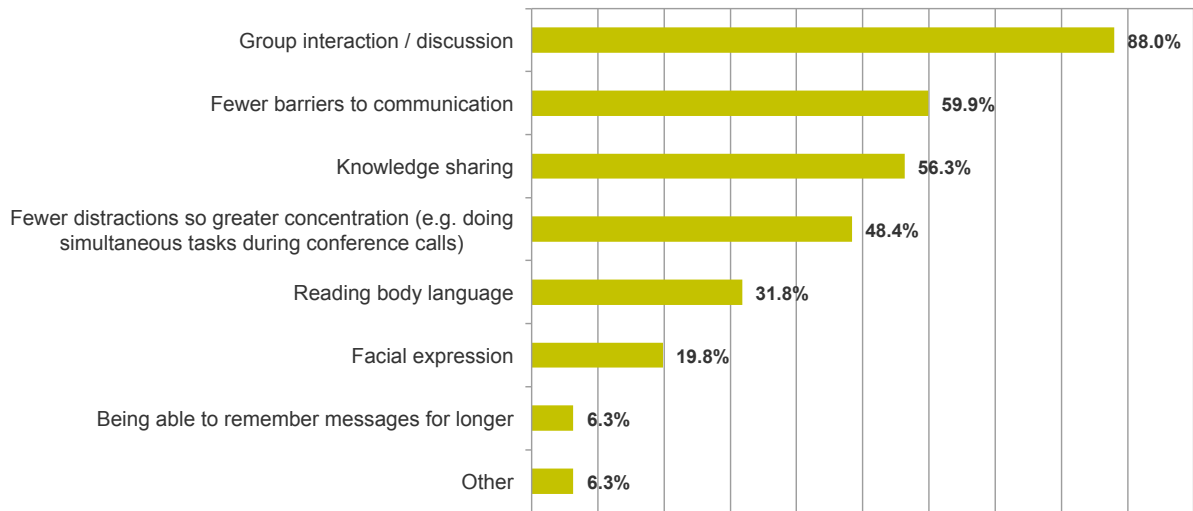


How do you prefer to interact with friends/peers in everyday life?

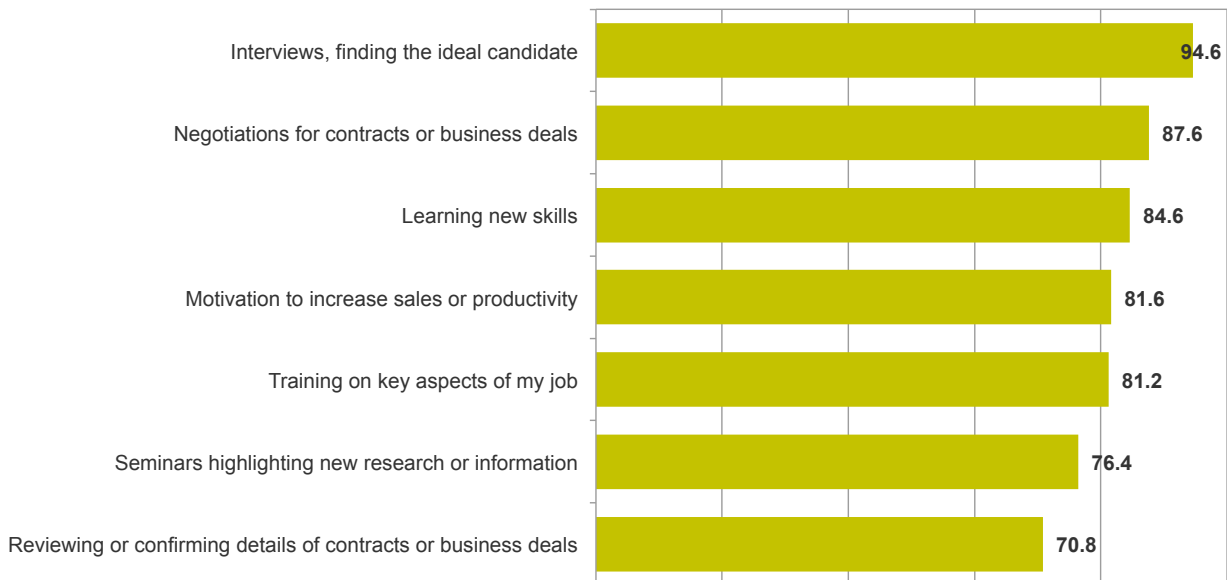
Phone Call	36.0%	Whatsapp	6.8%
Text Message	21.1%	Other Social Media	6.5%
Skype	20.8%	Facetime	2.9%
Facebook	14.9%	Snap Chat	1.0%
Email	10.1%	Instant Messenger	0.7%

Organisers 195 respondents

What are the benefits of meeting face to face in a learning environment versus other forms of communication (top 3)?



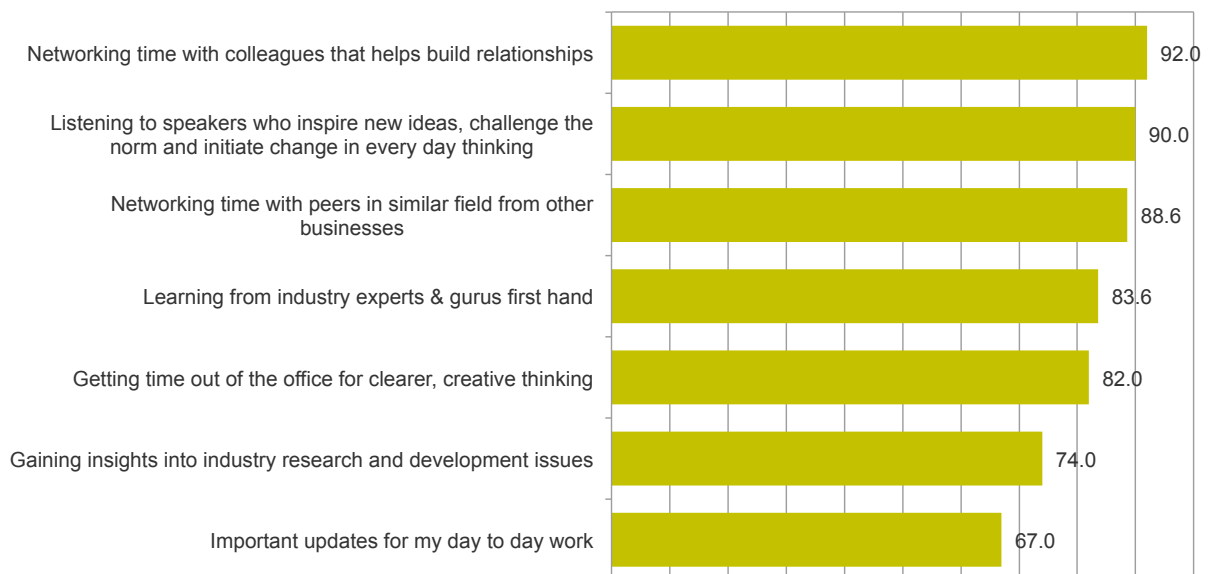
How does face to face communication, as opposed to other forms of communication, contribute to the effectiveness of the following (confidence score out of 100)?



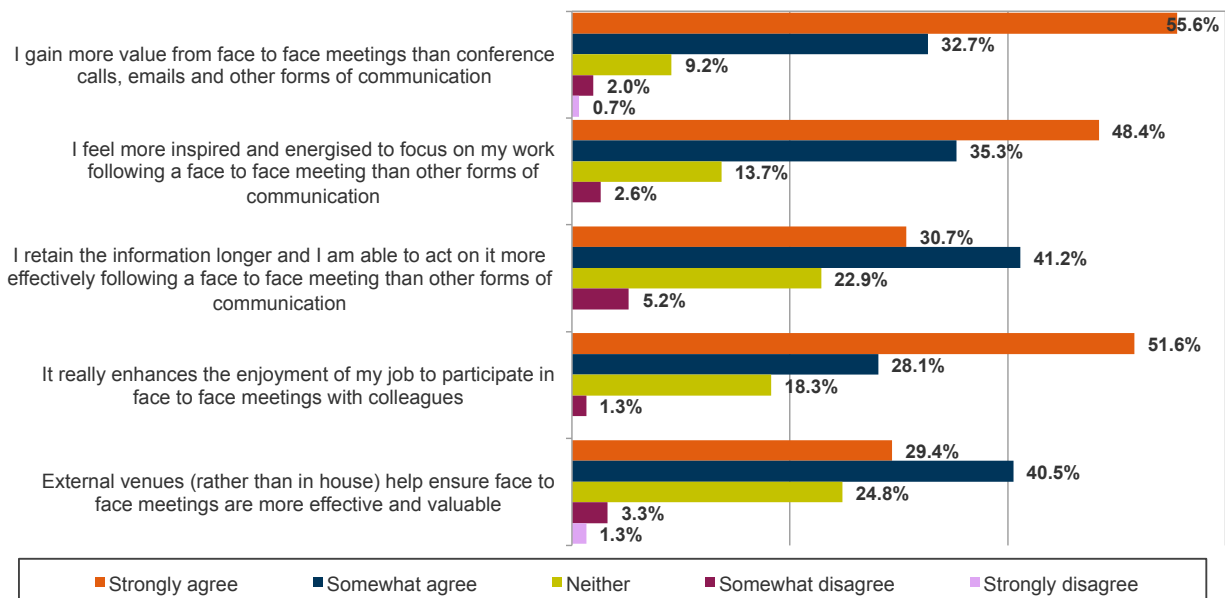
Organisers described the ideal meetings environment with the following most popular words:

Words used	%age of respondents
Light, bright, natural daylight	45%
Quiet, calm, (no) distractions	25%
Space, facilities, surroundings	25%
Clean	16%
Good food	6%

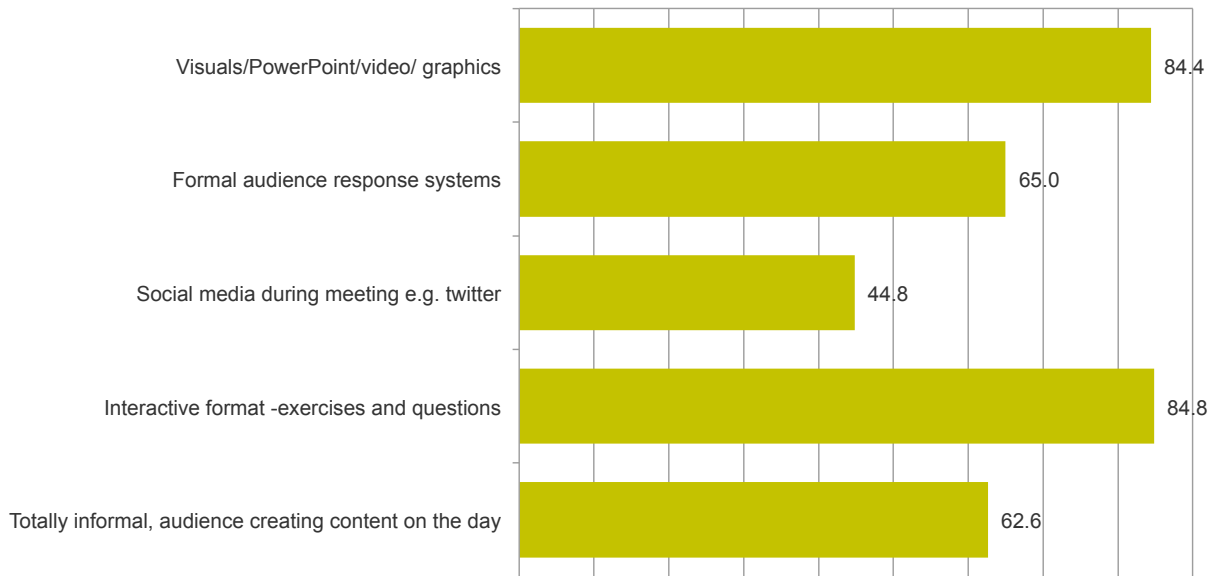
What are the most valuable elements of a face to face learning at an external venue (value score out of 100)?



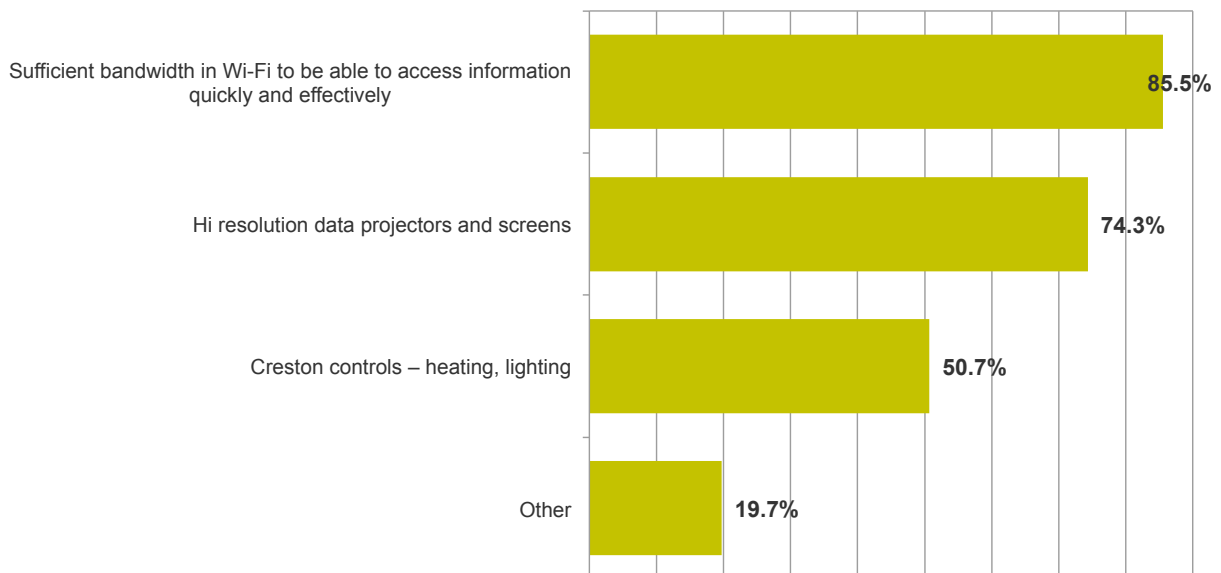
Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements



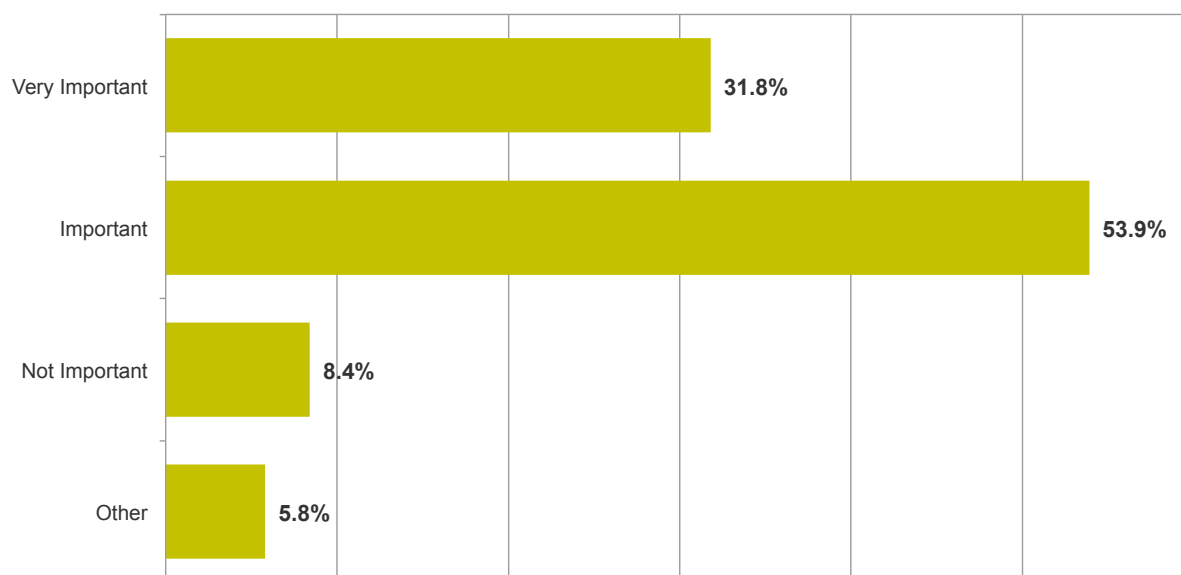
Thinking of presentation style and use of technology during face to face meetings, what helps you to retain information (confidence score out of 100)?



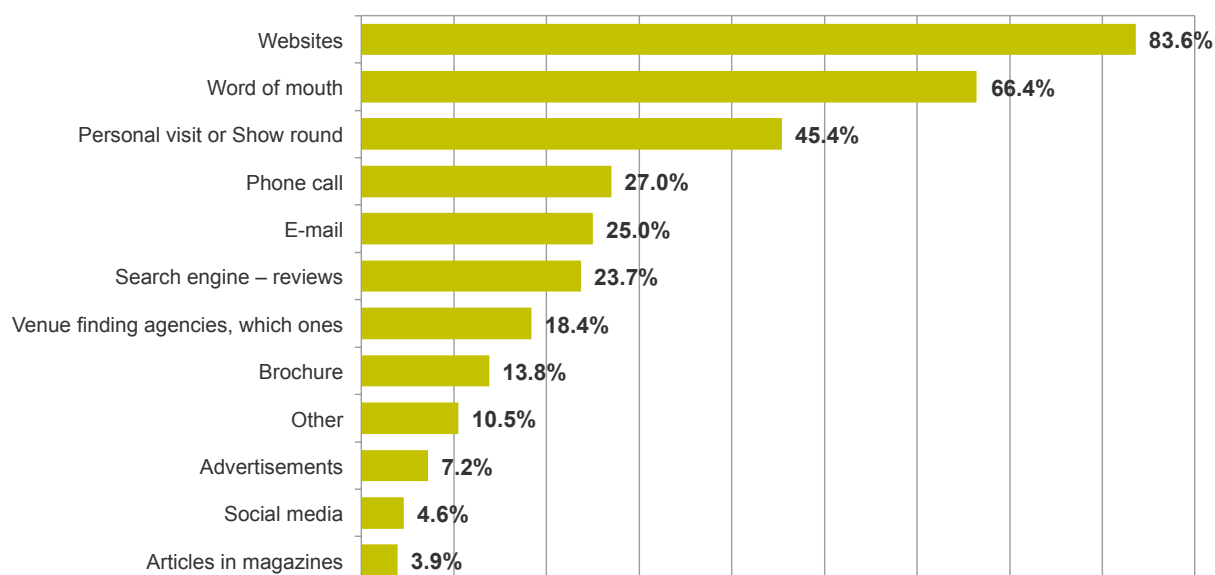
Which of the following technologies do you look for when booking a venue for a meeting?



How important is it for a venue you use to have the latest technology for you to book it?



How do you find information or research venues for your events?



To what extent does positive feedback for a venue play a role in your decision for future event planning? How do you receive this feedback? Please state and give reasons.

140 organisers provided spontaneous comments on the importance of feedback in their future planning.

Sample comments are as follows:

“Feedback is really helpful and very valued” “Word of mouth very important, but alongside value for money” “It plays a huge part – if my team do not have a good experience at a venue, it is extremely unlikely that I will use that venue again.”

“Whilst positive feedback is good for the ego, negative feedback drives the desire to improve the product and its delivery”.

