

Group discussion



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Introduction Discussions of any sort are supposed to help us develop a better perspective on issues by bringing out diverse view points. Whenever we exchange differing views on an issue, we get a clearer picture of the problem and are able to understand it. The understanding makes us better equipped to deal with the problem. This is precisely the main purpose of a discussion. The dictionary meaning of the word Group Discussion is to talk about a subject in detail. So, group discussion may refer to a communicative situation that allows its participants to express views and opinions and share with other participants.

It is a systematic oral exchange of information, views and opinions about a topic, issue, problem or situation among members of a group who share certain common objectives. G D is essentially an interactive oral process. The group members need to listen to each other and use voice and gesture effectively, use clear language and persuasive style. GD is structured: the exchange of ideas in a GD takes place in a systematic and structured way. Each of the participants gets an opportunity to express his/her views and comments on the views expressed by other members of the group.

GD involves a lot of group dynamics, that is, it involves both -person to person as well as group to group interactions. every group member has to develop a goal oriented or group oriented interaction. A participant needs to be aware of needs of other group members and overall objectives of the discussion. Definition: Group discussion may be defined as – a form of systematic and purposeful oral process characterized by the formal and structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem or

situation for developing information and understanding essential for decision making or problem solving.

Group Discussion and Other forms of Oral Communication There are several types of oral group communication. In Public Speaking, the speaker is evaluated by the audience; however there is not much interaction between audience and speaker. Audience, for the most part would only listen to the speaker. In the interview, a panel of members would assess the candidate for the requirement of selection or promotion etc. In meetings, there are discussions on issues mentioned in the agenda. Meetings may have multiple agenda.

A chairperson conducts the meeting and controls and concludes the deliberations.. Group Discussion differs from debate in nature, approach and procedure. Debates include representation of two contrasting viewpoints while GD can include multiple views. A GD may help achieve group goals as well as individual needs. The examiner observes the personality traits of several candidates who participate in the G. D. Importance of Group Discussion skills A Group Discussion helps problem solving , decision making and personality assessment.

Whether one is a student, a job seeker , a professional engineer or a company executive one needs effective GD skills. Students need to participate in academic discussions, meetings, classroom sessions or selection GDs for admission to professional courses. A job-seeker may be required to face selection GDs as part of the selection process. Professionals have to participate in different meetings at the workplace . In all these situations, an

ability to make a significant contribution to group deliberation and helping the group in the process of decision making is required.

The importance of GD has increased in recent times due to its increasing role as an effective tool in a)problem solving b)decision making c)personality assessment. In any situation of problem, the perceptions of different people are discussed, possible solutions are suggested. The best option is chosen by the group. While taking a decision, the matter is discussed, analysed, interpreted and evaluated. While using GD as a tool for personality assessment, a topic-a problem, an opinion or a case - is given to the group consisting of eight to ten members seated in a circle.

The total time given for discussion is usually 30 minutes. Each candidate is expected to voice his opinion and offer counter arguments. The selection committee evaluates the candidates on the basis of their personality, knowledge, communication skills and leadership skills. Hence it is important to be able to take part in the GD effectively and confidently. Participants should know how to persuade their group members, how to reflect leadership qualities and how to make the group achieve its goal. Characteristics Of Successful Group Discussion

For any group discussion to be successful, achieving group goal is essential. Following characteristics are necessary: Having a clear objective: The participants need to know the purpose of group discussion so that they can concentrate during the discussion and contribute to achieving the group goal. An effective GD typically begins with a purpose stated by the initiator. Motivated Interaction: When there is a good level of motivation among the

members, they learn to subordinate the personal interests to the group interest and the discussions are more fruitful.

Logical Presentation: Participants decide how they will organise the presentation of individual views, how an exchange of the views will take place, and how they will reach a group consensus. If the mode of interaction is not decided, few of the members in the group may dominate the discussion and thus will make the entire process meaningless.

Cordial Atmosphere: Development of a cooperative, friendly, and cordial atmosphere avoid the confrontation between the group members.

Effective Communication skills: The success of a GD depends on an effective use of communication techniques.

Like any other oral communication, clear pronunciation, simple language, right pitch are the pre-requisites of a GD. Non-verbal communication has to be paid attention to since means like body language convey a lot in any communication.

Participation by all candidates: When all the members participate, the GD becomes effective. Members need to encourage each other in the GD.

Leadership Skills: Qualities like initiation, logical presentation, encouraging all the group members to participate, summarizing the discussion reflect the leadership qualities.

Evaluation in a GD

In any kind of GD, the aim is to judge the participants based on personality, knowledge, communicative ability to present the knowledge and leadership skills. Today team players are considered more important than individual contributors. Hence the potential to be a leader is evaluated and also ability to work in a team is tested. The evaluators generally assess the oral

competence of a candidate in terms of team listening, appropriate language, clarity of expression, positive speech attitudes and adjustments, clear articulation, and effective non-verbal communication.

Personality: Even before one starts communicating, impression is created by the appearance, the body language, eye-contact, mannerisms used etc. The attire of a participant creates an impression, hence it is essential to be dressed appropriately. The hairstyle also needs to suit the occasion. Other accessories also have to be suitable for the occasion. The facial expression helps to convey attitudes like optimism, self-confidence and friendliness. The body language, a non-verbal communication skill gives important cues to personality assessment.

It includes the posture of a person, the eye-contact and overall manner in which one moves and acts. In the entire participation in the GD, the body language has an important role in the impact created. As non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body movements, gestures, facial expressions, and so on can speak louder than words, examiners closely watch the non-verbal behaviour of candidates. They generally evaluate the body language cues of candidates to determine personality factors such as nervousness, cooperation, frustration, weakness, insecurity, self-confidence, defensiveness, and so forth.

So, it is important to be careful while using non-verbal messages. However, one should recognise the power of non-verbal messages and use them effectively. **Content:** Content is a combination of knowledge and ability to create coherent, logical arguments on the basis of that knowledge. Also a balanced response is what is expected and not an emotional response. In a

group discussion, greater the knowledge of the subject more confident and enthusiastic would be the participation. Participants need to have a fair amount of knowledge on a wide range of subjects.

The discussion of the subject must be relevant, rational, convincing and appealing to the listeners. One needs to keep abreast with national and international news, political, scientific, economic, cultural events, key newsmakers etc. This has to be supplemented by one's own personal reasoning and analysis. People with depth and range of knowledge are always preferred by dynamic companies and organisations. The topics for GD tests may include interesting and relevant ideas pertaining to social, economic, political or environmental problems; controversial issues, innovations or case studies.

To read daily newspapers, relevant magazines and periodicals, to watch news bulletins and informative programmes on television are simple ways to gather the general knowledge. One can use the Internet to improve one's knowledge about recent developments in different areas. Internet is a valuable source to acquire information along with multimedia form. Subject knowledge also includes the ability to analyse facts or information in a systematic way and to place them in the context of the framework of one's personal experiences. For the expertise in the GD, the only way is to practice wherever one can.

The other members can evaluate the performance and give suggestions. Communication Skills: First and foremost feature of communication skills is that it is a two way process. Hence the communicator has to keep in mind the listeners and their expectations. The participants need to observe the

group dynamics. Since GD tests one's behavior as well as one's influence on the group, formal language and mutual respect are obvious requirements. One may not take strong views in the beginning itself but wait and analyse the pros and cons of any situation. If one needs to disagree, learn to do so politely.

One can directly put forward the personal viewpoint also. One may appreciate the good points made by others; can make a positive contribution by agreeing to and expanding an argument made by another participant. An idea can be appreciated only when expressed effectively. A leader or an administrator has the ability to put across the idea in an influential manner. Hence the participants in a group discussion must possess not only subject knowledge but also the ability to present that knowledge in an effective way. Since oral skills are used to put across the ideas, the ability to speak confidently and convincingly makes a participant an impressive speaker. The members of the selection committee closely evaluate the oral communication skills of the candidates. The effective communication would imply use of correct grammar and vocabulary, using the right pitch, good voice quality, clear articulation, logical presentation of the ideas and above all, a positive attitude. It is expected that there are no errors of grammar or usage and that appropriate words, phrases etc. are used. One should try to use simple and specific language. One should avoid ornamental language.

Clarity of expression is one of the important criteria of communication. When there is clarity of thinking, there is clarity in usage of language. Positive Speech Attitudes is another criterion of evaluation in the GD whereby the participant's attitude towards listeners including other group members is

judged. The temperament of the participant is also evaluated through the speech pattern. Listening Skills: Lack of active listening is often a reason for failure of communication. In the GD, participants often forget that it is a group activity and not a solo performance as in elocution.

By participating as an active listener, he/she may be able to contribute significantly to the group deliberations. The listening skills are closely linked to the leadership skills as well. Leadership Skills: The success of any group depends to a large extent upon the leader. One of the common misconceptions about leadership is that the leader is the one who controls the group. There are different approaches to the concept of leadership. By studying the personality traits of great leaders or actual dimensions of behavior to identify leadership one can learn to cultivate essential traits of leaders.

In a GD, a participant with more knowledge, one who is confident, one who can find some solution to the problem and display initiative and responsibility will be identified as the leader. A candidate's success in a GD test will depend not only on his/her subject knowledge and oral skills but also on his/her ability to provide leadership to the group. Adaptability, analysis, assertiveness, composure, self-confidence, decision making, discretion, initiative, objectivity, patience, and persuasiveness are some of the leadership skills that are useful in proving oneself as a natural leader in a GD.

The leader in a group discussion should be able to manage the group despite differences of opinion and steer the discussion to a logical conclusion within the fixed time limit. The examiners will assess whether each participant is a

team player who can get along with people or an individualist who is always fighting to save his/her ego. Employers today look for candidates who can work in a team-oriented environment. GD participants need a number of team management skills in order to function effectively in a team. Some of the skills needed to manage a group effectively include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination.

In a selection GD, the group, which may consist of six to ten persons, is given a topic to discuss within 30 to 45 minutes. After announcing the topic, the total GD time, and explaining the general guidelines and procedures governing the GD, the examiner withdraws to the background leaving the group completely free to carry on with the discussion on its own without any outside interference. In the absence of a designated leader to initiate the proceedings of the discussion, the group is likely to waste time in cross talks, low-key conversations, cross-consultations, asides, and so on.

The confusion may last until someone in the group takes an assertive position and restores the chaos into order. It could be any candidate. In order to get the GD started, the assertive, natural leader will have to remind the group of its goal and request them to start the discussion without wasting time. A few examples of the opening lines are given below:

- Well friends, may I request your kind attention? I am sure all of us are keen to begin the GD and complete it within the allotted time. Let me remind you that we have only thirty minutes to complete the task. So, let us get started.
- My dear friends, may I have your attention please? As you all know, we have to complete the discussion in 45 minutes and we have already used up five minutes. I think we should start the discussion now.

Hello everybody. I am

sorry to interrupt but I have something very important to say. We are here to discuss the topic — " Human cloning should be banned. "—and the time given to us is just 30 minutes. Let us begin, shall we? Leadership functions during a GD include initiative, analysis, assertiveness and so on. GD doesnot have a formal leader, hence one of the participants is xpected to take the initiative. The leader will promote positive group interactions; point out areas of agreement and disagreement;. help keep the discussion on the right track and lead the discussion to a positive and successful conclusion within the stipulated time. The ability to analyse a situation is a quality of leadership. Analytical skills and objectivity in expressing opinions are absolute requirements for leadership. With patience and composure one can develop the analytical skills. Reaching consensus by considering the group opinion will make the GD successful.

Assertiveness, that is an ability to bring order to the group by handling the conflict is another desirable quality of leadership. Self confidence is a quality which helps win the agreement from other participants. In GD, participants can make a favourable and forceful impact on the group by being persuasive and convincing. In order to be persuasive, one has to advance strong, convincing, and logical arguments properly supported by factual data and forceful illustrations. A firm tone and a sober voice would also help in establishing oneself.

A leader's ability to convince others and make them accept his/her views and suggestions will establish his/her credentials for leadership. Leaders are characterised by a high level of motivation and can motivate others too. A person with motivation can work hard to do the best job possible and can

achieve targets. Team Management skills are important for a leader to manage the members of varied interests. Some of the skills needed to manage a group effectively include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination. Try this quiz