

11.1 WHAT IS A GROUP DISCUSSION?

We often find people discussing various social, economic, and political issues. These discussions might be both informal and formal. Informal private discussions can take place at a restaurant, at a recreation club, at a college canteen, at a bus stop, at a coffee shop, or even at home. On the other hand, formal discussions may take place at an office, at a meeting place, at a conference hall, or at a recruitment centre. Why do people discuss? The most obvious answer is that we involve in discussion in order to

One gets involved in a discussion in order to develop a better perspective on key issues by bringing out various viewpoints.

develop a better perspective on key issues by bringing out various view points. When we exchange differing views on an issue, we get a clear picture of the problem and are able to understand it. This understanding makes us better equipped to deal with the problem. This is precisely the main purpose of a discussion.

Let us now try to understand the term 'group discussion'. The literal meaning of the word 'discuss' 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 to 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.

Group discussion (GD) is basically an interactive oral process. Here, the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings takes place through oral communication. Each member of the group listens to other members as well as gives his or her views orally. He or she has to use clear language, persuasive style, and has to use voice and gesture effectively. This means that participants need to be proficient in oral communication in order to take effective part in a group discussion.

A participant should be concerned with the ego needs of other participants, unity of the group, and the overall objectives of the discussion.

GD is a group process, i.e., it involves both person-to-person as well as person-to-group interactions. Every group member has to develop goal-oriented or group-oriented interaction. Effective interactions in discussion should lead to unification between the activities of individuals as a work team, and towards the achievement of common group goals. A participant should be concerned with the ego needs of other participants, unity of the group, and the overall objectives of the discussion.

GD is systematic. Each participant knows the topic in advance and has the opportunity to use his/her experience and knowledge to understand and analyse the topic. The exchange of ideas in GD takes place in a systematic and structured way. The participants are seated face-to-face and each participant gets an opportunity to express his/her views and comment on the views expressed by other members of the group. A formal speech making or group procedure may follow in order to ensure optimal participation.

The goals or objectives of a discussion are generally decided before the discussion takes place.

GD is a purposeful goal-oriented activity. The goals or objectives of a discussion are generally decided before the discussion takes place. This means that each participant is usually aware of the purpose or purposes of the discussion in advance. A GD may help achieve group goals as well as individual needs. Group goals are common and shared by each participant whereas individual needs may be the personal goals of the members of the group.

Group discussion is a systematic and purposeful interactive oral process.

Participants need to be proficient in oral communication in order to take effective part in a group discussion.

GD is systematic. Each participant knows the topic in advance.

To conclude, we may define group discussion as a form of systematic and purposeful oral process characterised 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.

11.1.1 Group Discussion versus Debate

Group discussion differs from debate in nature, approach, and procedure. Debates are intended to advocate a particular point of view while GDs raise a particular issue for a positive exchange of views. Unlike debate, which is competitive in nature, GD is basically a cooperative group process. A debate follows a limited approach because the speaker must argue either in favour or against a given point of view. On the other hand, in GD the approach is not limited to the support of a single point of view.

Although both debate and GD are formal situations, debate is more formal in procedure than GD. In order to ensure that all facts, viewpoints, suggestions, or solutions are considered before a decision is taken, a flexible procedure is followed in GD. Moreover, decision in a debate depends on voting while a GD is designed to reach group consensus.

Debates are intended to advocate a particular point of view while GDs raise a particular issue for a positive exchange of views.

11.2 IMPORTANCE OF GROUP DISCUSSION

The ability to take effective part in GD is one of the most important skills that contribute to professional success. Whether one is a student, a job seeker, a professional engineer, or a company executive, one needs effective GD skills. A student may have to take part in academic discussions, student meetings, group deliberation, interactive 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.

Group discussions aid in problem solving, decision-making, and personality assessment.

A job seeker may be required to face selection GDs as part of the selection process.

Professionals in different fields also have to take part in professional meetings and discussions. All these situations require the ability to make a significant contribution to group deliberation and help the group in the process of decision-making.

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, and (c) personality assessment. In most of the organisations, companies, and institutions, group discussion aids in problem solving and decision-making. When a problem situation arises, the concerned people discuss it. They exchange their perceptions about the problem and its possible solutions. The alternative solutions are discussed and analysed, and the best option is chosen by the group. Similarly, whenever there is a need to take a decision in a particular case, the matter is first discussed by a group of people and the different aspects are analysed, interpreted, and evaluated. This leads to effective decisions.

The members of the selection committee closely evaluate the different skills reflected by the candidates and those who reflect leadership qualities and emerge as natural group leaders are normally shortlisted for a personal interview.

GD is also used as a technique for personality assessment of candidates for job selection or admission to professional courses. Groups of six to eight members are formed, and are given a topic to discuss within a limited time (generally 30 to 45 minutes). The given topic may be an opinion, a problem or a case. The members of the selection committee closely evaluate the different skills reflected by the candidates

and those who reflect leadership qualities and emerge as natural group leaders are normally shortlisted for a personal interview.

Thus, all of us need effective GD skills. It can do wonders for us and may ensure academic success, popularity and power in an organisation, a job offer that we always waited for, or admission to a course that is going to change our life. Therefore, it is important to be able to take part in a GD effectively and confidently. Participants should know how to persuade other group members, how to reflect confidence while speaking, how to reflect leadership qualities, and how to make the group achieve its goals. They should have the ability to take initiatives during a discussion, present their personal views in an effective way, develop their ideas logically, analyse and respond to the views expressed by other members, and emerge as the natural leader of the group.

Participants should know how to persuade their group members, how to reflect confidence while speaking, how to reflect leadership qualities, and how to make the group achieve its goals.

11.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL GROUP DISCUSSION

Effective group discussions achieve group goals and aid in decision-making. However, a large number of group discussions end without a group consensus. It is therefore, important to know the characteristics that make a group discussion successful. Successful group discussions share some or all of the following features:

11.3.1 Agreement on Group Goals

An effective GD begins with a purpose, which is shared and understood by all the group members. As the participants know why they are taking part in the discussion, they can concentrate better and can be more active in realising the group goals. They can smoothly work from a general purpose to specific goals. Moreover, the agreement on group goals brings clarity and provides direction to the group.

Agreement on group goals brings clarity and provides direction to the group.

11.3.2 Goal Oriented Interaction

Successful discussions motivate group members to have goal-oriented interactions. Effective GD members are not only aware of the group goals but also work towards the attainment of these goals. As they are more interested in achieving these group goals than promoting their personal interests, they develop and promote meaningful interactions that aid in implementing the purpose of the discussion.

Effective GD members are not only aware of the group goals but also work towards the attainment of these goals.

11.3.3 Agreement on Procedures

Participants of a successful GD develop procedures to guide them. They 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. In order to ensure attainment of group goals, they may develop norms of interaction. If the participants of a GD fail to do so, there may be anarchy and the more assertive and aggressive members might dominate and monopolise the entire discussion. This may make the entire process meaningless.

Participants of a successful GD develop procedures to guide them.

Members cooperate with each other as they understand and appreciate different points of views, different positions, opinions, ideas, and approaches enrich the process of discussion and broaden the horizon of the group.

11.3.4 Cooperative and Friendly Atmosphere

An important characteristic of successful GDs is the development of a cooperative, friendly, and cordial atmosphere where disagreements do exist but they do not lead to serious conflicts. Members cooperate with each other as they understand and appreciate different points of views and try to pool them together in order to develop group consensus. There may be direct but goal-oriented confrontation as each member presents his/her points of view as well as reservations and differences. However, these different positions, opinions, ideas, and approaches enrich the process of discussion and broaden the horizon of the group.

11.3.5 Use of Effective Communication Techniques

The success of a GD depends on an effective use of communication techniques. Effective GD members keep the channels of communication open and speak clearly and precisely using simple words, short sentences, correct articulation, and appropriate pronunciation. They are direct, specific, and try to avoid and check barriers to group communication. Moreover, they use non-verbal communication tactfully and interpret the body language of other participants. As they are active team listeners, they encourage others to speak.

Effective GD members keep the channels of communication open, speak clearly and use non-verbal communication tactfully.

11.3.6 Equitable Distribution of Participation

An effective GD ensures an equitable distribution of participation by all. Each member is important and no one is allowed to dominate or monopolise the discussion. As optimal participation by all is the group-goal, members encourage each other to participate. Reluctant and shy members are drawn into the discussion.

11.3.7 Shared Leadership

There is generally no elected or formal leader in a GD. The leadership functions are shared and performed by the various members of the group. As there is a willingness on the part of each participant to reach to a group consensus, they come forward to perform leadership tasks such as starting the discussion, keeping the discussion going, encouraging non-participants to speak, making periodic summaries, checking the group progress, and so on.

Leadership functions are shared and performed by the various members of the group.

11.4 GROUP DISCUSSION AS A TOOL FOR SELECTION

Group discussion has emerged as an effective and potentially powerful technique for evaluating personality traits of candidates for job selection or admission to professional courses. The GD test occupies a major position in the employment procedure of nearly all industrial concerns, public limited organisations, and multinational companies. More than any other selection method, GD tests are relied upon for making hiring decisions. These selection GDs may vary from a brief discussion on a simple topic to an exhaustive interactive discussion of a controversial issue or an actual company problem. However, they all intend to evaluate the depth and range of the candidate's knowledge, his or her ability to orally present that knowledge in a convincing manner, and his/her effective group communication, leadership, and team management skills.

Selection GDs may vary from a brief discussion on a simple topic to an exhaustive interactive discussion of a controversial issue or an actual company problem.

There are four major areas of evaluation in selection of GDs: subject knowledge, oral communication skills, leadership skills, and team management.

11.4.1 Subject Knowledge

As all participants must possess a thorough understanding of the topic on which they are supposed to speak, subject knowledge is the first requirement of effective participation in a group discussion. Participants need to have a fair amount of knowledge on a wide range of subjects. They should know all about national and international affairs, burning social and economic topics, scientific and environmental issues, key newsmakers, controversial topics, and a lot more. Although a GD test is not designed to assess the ability of the candidate's general awareness of the environment around him/her or to test his/her knowledge of current events, he/she is expected to be aware of such matters of everyday observation or experience as may be expected of an educated person. People with depth and range of knowledge are always sought after in dynamic companies and organisations.

The topics for GD tests may include interesting and relevant ideas pertaining to society, culture, polity, economy, scientific and technical research; social, economic, political or environmental problems; controversial issues; or case studies. The best way to keep one abreast of latest events and national as well as international developments is to read daily newspapers, good magazines and periodicals, watch news bulletins and informative programmes on television. Moreover, we should use the Internet to improve our knowledge

Although a GD test is not designed to assess the ability of the candidate's general awareness of the environment around him/her or to test his/her knowledge of current events, he/she is expected to be aware of such matters of everyday observation or experience as may be expected of an educated person.

about recent developments in different areas. The World Wide Web is a vast database of current authentic materials that presents information in multimedia form and reacts instantly to a user's input.

Subject knowledge also implies the ability to analyse facts or information in a systematic way to correlate them with personal experiences and exposure. It is this ability to analyse existing knowledge and assimilate new ideas that can give birth to bright and brilliant ideas and schemes. In all group discussions, people with ideas carry the day. A person putting forward new ideas that may work, will be accepted as the natural leader of the group. During a selection GD, participants are supposed to analyse the topic and give their interpretation of it. Examiners will evaluate each person's contribution to the discussion or the ideas put forward by them based on its relevance to the topic, original approach, and wide perspective.

Subject knowledge also implies the ability to analyse facts or information in a systematic way to correlate them with personal experiences and exposure.

11.4.2 Oral Communication Skills

The participants in a group discussion must possess not only subject knowledge but also the ability to present that knowledge in an effective way. As the exchange of ideas in a group discussion takes place through speech, one of the prerequisites of success in group discussion is the ability to speak confidently and convincingly. In fact, a vital part of every successful group discussion is high quality oral communication. The members of the selection committee closely evaluate the oral communication skills of the candidates. They 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.

Listening Skills

When a person takes part in a group discussion, he/she cannot contribute to the stated purposes of the communication unless he/she is listening properly.

As all comments during a group discussion must be heard and understood, listening skills are probably one of the most important communication skills that one needs in order to be successful in a GD. When a person takes part in a group discussion, he/she cannot contribute to the stated purposes of the communication unless he/she is listening properly. By participating as an active listener, he/she may contribute effectively to the groups deliberations. Moreover, active participation as a listener in a group and its discussions and deliberations make a person a successful leader because a good leader is a good listener.

Appropriateness of Language

During a GD, the selection panel judges a candidate's grasp of language and ability to use appropriate words and expressions. Appropriateness of language demands that there should be no errors of grammar, or usage and there is precision in the use of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Participants must be certain that they are expressing their ideas precisely and exactly so that their listener is able to understand them without confusion and misunderstanding. They should be simple and concise, avoiding difficult words, unfamiliar phrases, or flowery language.

Clarity of Expression

Clarity is the art of making your meaning clear to your audience. The secret of clear expression is clear thinking. Sloppy, illogical, or incomplete thinking may cause lack

Sloppy, illogical, or incomplete thinking may cause lack of clarity during a GD.

of clarity during a GD. A confused person is likely to confuse others. So, it is essential to think clearly and positively. In addition, direct, clear and specific language should be used during a GD, rather than roundabout constructions, indirect expressions, exaggeration, artificial eloquence, and ornamentation in speech.

Positive Speech Attitudes

The selection panel also evaluates speech attitudes and adjustments. Is the participant a responsible group communicator or a careless speaker? Is he/she mature and dignified or immature and apologetic? Is he/she positive towards his/her listeners or antagonistic to them? Is he/she a relaxed speaker or a tense one? Is he/she sincere to other speakers or just indifferent? The examiners closely watch these aspects. So, it is important to reflect positive speech attitudes and adjustments during a GD.

So, it is important to reflect positive speech attitudes and adjustments during a GD.

Clear Articulation

The quality of a person's voice and articulation plays an important role during a GD. A participant can easily impress the other members of the discussion group as well as the selection panel if he/she has a cheerful voice with good articulation. Avoid a slow or weak voice, a monotonous tone, and indistinct articulation. Do not speak too fast. Be slow, clear, and distinct.

Non-verbal Cues

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. A person's body language must reflect his/her self-confidence, cooperation, positive attitude, openness of mind, and sincerity.

A person's body language must reflect his/her self-confidence, cooperation, positive attitude, openness of mind, and sincerity.

11.4.3 Leadership Skills

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. The examiners evaluate a candidate's unique set of personal skills, which allow him/her to prove himself/herself as a natural leader in a GD. Thus, it is necessary to reflect the qualities of leadership in order to create the right impression on one's examiners. Adaptability, analysis, assertiveness, composure, self-confidence, decision-making, discretion, initiative, objectivity, patience, and persuasiveness are some of the leadership skills that are tremendously useful in proving oneself as a natural leader in a GD.

Although leadership functions are shared in GD, each participant should try to be the first one to perform the function whenever a need arises.

Leadership functions during a GD include initiative, analysis, assertiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, patience and composure, persuasiveness, and motivation.

In every group discussion, there is an element of leadership. We can define leadership in GD on a functional basis. Thus, anything that contributes to goal achievement can be considered a leadership function. Although leadership functions are shared in GD, each participant should try to be the first one to perform the function whenever a need arises. Leadership functions during a GD include the following:

Initiative

Initiative is a vital element that forms the basis of leadership during a GD. As there is no formal leader to conduct the discussion, someone in the group has to take the initiative to perform the required leadership function. A person can display his/her ability to take appropriate initiative by performing the following leadership functions:

- initiate the proceedings of the discussion;
- create an atmosphere in which members feel free to participate;
- promote positive group interactions;
- point out areas of agreement and disagreement;
- clarify points when required;
- keep the discussion on the right track; and
- lead the discussion to a positive and successful conclusion within the time allotted.

Analysis

The ability to analyse a situation, a problem, or a condition is the mark of a successful leader. Those who lack an analytical bent of mind and rational thinking cannot be successful in a GD. A leader should be able to analyse the given topic for discussion in order to develop his/her own point of view. His/her capacity to analyse the subject in a convincing manner and present all the facts logically can help in carrying the rest of the group with him/her. Moreover, the leader should listen carefully to each participant in order to analyse his or her opinions and views. A positive analysis of all the views, suggestions, proposals, and solutions exchanged during the discussion can lead to the identification of common elements that may form the basis of group consensus.

Those who lack an analytical bent of mind and rational thinking cannot be successful in a GD.

Assertiveness

A leader has to be bold and assertive without being offensive, aggressive, and rigid. If a person is mild and weak, he/she will be too eager to give up in the face of opposition and obstacles. In fact, a weak, submissive, and passive person can never be successful as a group leader. Assertiveness is a desirable leadership quality that can make a person successful during a GD. If one is assertive, one can tackle obstacles and handicaps effectively. Assertiveness can help in bringing order to a chaotic group, encourage balanced participation, deal with conflict effectively, and lead the discussion to a positive end. By taking a firm stand, an assertive leader can control members of the group who are more interested in sabotaging the discussion rather than contributing to its success. It is always desirable that the leader does not take a rigid stand but he/she must be able to assert himself during a GD.

A leader has to be bold and assertive without being offensive, aggressive, and rigid.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the hallmark of a leader. Selection experts and examiners always look for a candidate with a strong but realistic level of confidence. So, it is important to remember to talk with confidence and self-assurance. A participant's confidence will not only impress the examiners but also help him/her lead the group and instill confidence in each of its members. A leader can tackle problems with confidence and find workable solutions with ease. However, he/she should avoid being boastful and pretending that he/she knows everything and has a solution for every problem. He/she should not forget that over-confidence causes failures whereas under-confidence leads to lack of productivity.

Selection experts and examiners always look for a candidate with a strong but realistic level of confidence.

Objectivity

Objectivity is the quality of being impartial, rational, and factual. In order to be successful as a group leader, one needs to view a situation or a problem dispassionately and objectively. In other words the leader's approach should be systematic, scientific, and realistic. As group discussion is an exchange of views and opinions on a specific topic, there would be conflicting views and heated arguments. The leader should not become sentimental because if he/she gets emotional and excited, his/her ideas may get jumbled and arguments will become dogmatic and self-appointed. The leader can overcome opposition by adopting a logical, rational, and practical viewpoint, and utilising concrete and foolproof illustrations and examples. As he/she should be rational rather than emotional, irrational ideas and emotional bias should not influence him/her. A leader's ideas and arguments should be fully backed by relevant facts and figures, this will give validity and appeal to his/her arguments.

In order to be successful as a group leader, one needs to view a situation or a problem dispassionately and objectively.

Patience and Composure

Patience is the key to successful leadership in GD. A successful leader never loses his cool and is not easily provoked. Even in the face of extreme provocation, the leader keeps a patient profile. So, during the GD it is essential to keep one's cool and not get provoked. Handling a group of heterogeneous elements requires a lot of patience and composure. It is always difficult to bring a group of people together to discuss an issue amicably because a few in the group would try to monopolise the group and create problems. In such a condition, if

the leader wants to bring the discussion to a successful conclusion, he/she has to tackle the situation with tact and patience. His/her ability to keep cool and maintain his/her composure despite provocation will help bring together people with different temperaments and strike a consensus in the GD.

Persuasiveness

One of the vital prerequisites for success in group discussion is the ability to persuade other members of the group to accept and believe in what one says. Persuasion is an art that requires an ample amount of convincing power. This art can be acquired by consistent practice. 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 superiority. Listeners should immediately realise that the speaker means business. A leader's ability to convince others and make them accept his/her views and suggestions will establish his/her credentials for leadership.

In order to be persuasive, one has to advance strong, convincing, and logical arguments properly supported by factual data and forceful illustrations.

Motivation

Those determined to win are highly motivated and have the ability to motivate others. Motivation constitutes the base on which group leadership can grow. All organisations look for candidates who are motivated and can accept challenges. A person with motivation can work hard to do the best job possible and can achieve targets. Examiners can easily evaluate a participant's level of motivation during a GD. A leader can display the quality of motivation by being an active and positive contributor to the process of discussion. By clarifying the topic of the discussion, explaining its different aspects, and providing enough material for other members to follow and discuss, a leader can motivate them to take an active part in the group deliberations. Moreover, by encouraging the shy ones to speak and promoting optimal participation, he/she can involve everyone in the group to bring the discussion to a successful conclusion.

Those determined to win are highly motivated and have the ability to motivate others.

11.4.4 Team Management

Apart from subject knowledge, oral communication, and leadership skills, every participant needs team management skills in order to be successful in a GD test. 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.

Team management skills include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination.

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.

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.

Adaptability

Adaptability refers to the ability to adjust with other members of the group and get along with them. It is an important leadership quality that one needs in order to be an effective team player. A person who lacks the ability to get along with others will not succeed as a group leader because an effective leader has to rise above his personal likes and dislikes in order to accommodate the larger interests of the group. In most group discussions there are several categories of participants who might differ from each other in temperament, IQ, social attitudes, personal preferences, points of view, and other aspects. In order to emerge as the natural leader of a group, one has to adjust oneself suitably with others in the group. In fact, by being adaptable and flexible the leader will be able to carry the entire group with him/her.

By being adaptable and flexible the leader will be able to carry the entire group with him/her.

Positive Attitude

A team player should have a positive attitude because no one would like to work with a person who always complains and is negative towards everything and everyone. In a GD, each participant should get an opportunity to offer his/her valuable viewpoint to the enrichment of the discussion. Therefore, every participant should encourage other members to contribute effectively to the group process. Sometimes one may have to face aggressive, rigid, authoritarian, obstinate, and quarrelsome people, but a cheerful approach and a positive attitude will help in dealing with them tactfully. If a team mate shows respect for their ideas and handles them with tact and understanding, they will automatically look up to him/her for help and support. Thus, if a person has a positive attitude, he/she can bind the team and get along well with his/her teammates, including the difficult ones.

If a person has a positive attitude, he/she can bind the team and get along well with his/her teammates, including the difficult ones.

Cooperation

The very idea of group discussion is based on the concept of cooperation, where all members are expected to work as a team. A team derives its success from the inherent factor of cooperation. Each member supports the other member because the success of each member depends on the success of the team. On the other hand, a hostile approach by any member will go against the spirit of cooperation and will result in either delaying or sabotaging the entire process of discussion. It is, therefore, very important that every group member subordinates his/her ego as well as his/her individual interest to the larger group interest of the group working together in order to achieve the group goal within the time allotted.

Coordination

Group discussion is a group activity wherein the success of the group depends on the involvement of each member of the group. It is important that each participant reflects team spirit by developing coordination during the discussion. As a group cannot function as an effective team and accomplish a task without a coordinator, an assertive team member should come forward to accept the leadership by coordinating its activities. A person can emerge as the natural leader and coordinator of a group with a positive approach, a tactful handling of difficult situations, resourcefulness, and objective behaviour.

A person can emerge as the natural leader and coordinator of a group with a positive approach, a tactful handling of difficult situations, resourcefulness, and objective behaviour.

11.5 GROUP DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

As group discussion is a systematic and purposeful oral process characterised by the formal and structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem, or situation, it should be well planned and well conducted. Seven strategies have been described here for participating in group discussions.

11.5.1 Getting the GD Started

As mentioned before, there is generally no elected or formal leader in a GD. So, there is no one to get the GD started. 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 you.

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 — “Reduction of IIM fees is a retrograde step”—and the time given to us is just 30 minutes. Let us begin, shall we?
- Hello friends! May I have your kind attention for a few seconds, please? I am sure you will agree that we are here to exchange our views on the reservation policy of the government and we have to complete the discussion within 35 minutes. As we have already used up more than five minutes, we should begin the discussion now. Shall we start?

Once the GD has been successfully initiated, the leader should propose the procedures to be followed during the discussion. The procedures may include time management, order of speaking, length and nature of individual contributions, and nature of group interactions. It is very important to follow a plan that includes time for every individual speaker as well as for the exchange of views, suggestions, and solutions. All members of the group should be in agreement on these pertinent items. While trying to get the GD started, the leader should attempt to create an atmosphere in which all members feel free to participate.

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.

While trying to get the GD started, the leader should attempt to create an atmosphere in which all members feel free to participate.

11.5.2 Contributing Systematically

The success of a group discussion depends on systematic contribution by each member of the group. In order to make systematic contributions to the group deliberations, all the group members should understand the process of reflective thinking. They should be able to identify the stage of the discussion (i.e., individual stage, where each member has to systematically present his or her views without any disturbance; or group interaction stage, where members have to exchange views and opinions in order to reach to a group consensus) and contribute accordingly. When a participant makes a contribution, he/she should ensure that his/her contribution

- relates to what has previously been said by other members,
- focuses on the theme of the discussion,
- deals with the specific point under consideration,
- is directed towards the overall objective of the GD, and
- is as per the requirement of the particular stage of discussion.

A group discussion has two stages: an individual stage and a group interaction stage. Individual stage, where each member has to systematically present his or her views without any disturbance; or group interaction stage, where members have to exchange views and opinions in order to reach to a group consensus).

Moreover, contributions must reflect the depth of understanding and knowledge of the subject as well as the participant's ability to analyse it. Each participant must see the topic from his/her perspective so that his/her background and personal experiences give it a new interpretation, which may prove valuable to the group for taking a decision.

11.5.3 Creating a Friendly Cooperative Atmosphere

Creating an atmosphere conducive to positive discussion is the responsibility of each member of the group.

Creating an atmosphere conducive to positive discussion is the responsibility of each member of the group. A friendly, cooperative atmosphere encourages effective and positive deliberations that lead to successful conclusion. Although a GD is a serious and formal occasion, there is no need to make it too serious and boring. It is desirable to make it an enjoyable experience for all. Members of a group discussion can do much to create a conducive and friendly atmosphere. The following suggestions may be helpful in this regard:

- All participants should help the group to make the discussion lively and pleasurable.
- Participants should develop a consensus regarding group standards early in the discussion.
- In order to maintain friendly attitudes, participants should demonstrate a sense of fair play by treating others as they would like themselves to be treated.
- Participants must conduct themselves with decorum and dignity.
- All participants must show interest in what others say.
- Every participant should make sure that other members feel free to express their views, opinions, comments, and feelings.
- Members must be kept informed of their own progress and they should be appreciated for contributing effectively to the group goals.

11.5.4 Moving the Discussion Along

A GD without a leader may drift without a proper direction. A leader should ensure that the GD moves along the right direction so that it is able to complete the task within the fixed time limit. He/she should make sure that every member of the group gets some time to present his/her views and no one member monopolises the discussion. No one should be allowed to do all the talking because the purpose of a GD is to exchange views, and not to hear just one person. If someone tries to take too much time, the leader may politely thank the aggressive member but firmly ask him/her to give the next person a chance to speak.

It is very important to avoid any digression that may sidetrack the group. The leader may volunteer to avoid digressions and bring order out of chaos by requesting the members to see reason and come to the point. The following are some examples of how to do this:

- I do understand your point but I think we should stick to the main subject at hand.
- I see what you mean but it would be better if we limit our discussion to the given subject.
- That is all well said but I do not find a link between what you want to say and the subject in hand. Could you please return to the main point?

Each participant must see the topic from his/her perspective so that his/her background and personal experiences give it a new interpretation, which may prove valuable to the group for taking a decision.

If someone tries to take too much time, the leader may politely thank the aggressive member but firmly ask him/her to give the next person a chance to speak.

- That is not the main point under discussion. Let us come to the main subject.

The leader may use other techniques to keep the GD on the right track. He/she can emphasise the point that everyone has to keep the objectives of the GD in mind and adhere to the time schedule. He/she may summarise or clarify the points already put forward by the group members and thereby focus their attention on the main objective of the GD and keep the discussion from slowing down.

The leader may summarise or clarify the points already put forward by the group members and thereby focus their attention on the main objective of the GD and keep the discussion from slowing down.

11.5.5 Promoting Optimal Participation

As the success of a GD largely depends on the involvement of each member of the group, the leader should promote optimal participation. As every member has a resource potential that can be used to make the discussion successful, the leader should encourage non-participants to speak. With patience, restraint, and proper motivation, he/she can inspire even the shy and reluctant members to give their views on the given subject. It will not only reflect his/her leadership qualities but also lead the discussion to a successful conclusion. Leaders may find the following suggestions quite helpful in this regard:

- Make each member feel that his or her contribution is necessary to make the discussion successful.
- Encourage each member to make his or her maximum contribution.
- Recognise members of the group who have not talked and request them to express their views.
- When a member makes a contribution, the leader may request the non-participating members to comment on it.
- Direct some relevant questions related to the topic to reticent members.
- Try to control talkative members.
- Make talkative members take responsibility for getting non-participants to speak.
- Avoid pushing the GD too fast, and take care of slow speakers.

11.5.6 Handling Conflict

One important aspect of participating in any group discussion is dealing with conflict. As a group always tends to be heterogeneous, conflict is natural in any group activity and may sometimes be desirable for the success of a group process. Expect differences of opinions during a GD but do not let these conflicting opinions go against the basic purpose of a GD. Do not be a silent spectator when two or more people are in conflict. Although conflict resolution is a complex art, a leader needs to remember just a few simple tips in order to handle conflict during a GD. The following suggestions will help leaders deal with conflict during a GD:

- Maintain a friendly attitude and try to create an atmosphere in which people respect conflicting opinions as they feel free to express their opinions and expect others to talk freely. This will generate goodwill and take care of conflicts within the group.
- Strictly follow that has been decided earlier in the discussion.
- Avoid conflicts between persons and not conflict between ideas.
- Clarify conflicting statements given by group members so that they do not lead to personal differences.
- Provide positive guidance to the group by making occasional summaries.

- When two people are in conflict, they should both be encouraged to express themselves completely and then their views can be summarised. This will satisfy the egos of both the group members.
- Help establish an attitude of critical objectivity.

11.5.7 Effecting Closure

In the absence of a designated leader to close the discussion formally, the group is likely to continue until the examiner announces that the time is over. Every member has to see that the GD ends with positive conclusions within the given time limit. In order to complete the GD within the allotted time, the leader has to remind the group of its goal and request them to reach to a group consensus. He/she should do the following himself/herself or get them done by other group members in order to develop group consensus:

- Summarise the progress made by the group.
- Put forward the common points of agreement.
- Indicate the differences that need to be resolved.
- Review decisions/suggestions/views already decided.

Once the closure of a GD is successfully initiated, the leader may propose the consensus views, if any. It is not essential that every GD ends with a consensus but every GD must end with some positive conclusion. The leader must emphasise the points of agreement in order to indicate a common viewpoint regarding the topic.

It is not essential that every GD ends with a consensus but every GD must end with some positive conclusion.

11.5.8 Techniques for Individual Contribution

As indicated before, every GD should have two distinct sections, an individual section where each member of the group presents his/her views and a group interaction section where members exchange their views and try to reach to a group consensus. Sometimes the two sections are mixed up and the group is not able to develop a procedure to conduct the discussion because no one emerges as the natural leader of the group. This is a very difficult situation, and might lead to confusion and chaos. Members of a group discussion should not let this happen. All participants should ensure that the group follows certain norms regarding individual contribution and group interaction.

Techniques for individual contribution involve analysing and interpreting the given topic, which may include opinions, problems/ issues, or case studies.

Sometimes a group is not able to develop a procedure to conduct the discussion because no one emerges as the natural leader of the group.

Topic Analysis

Speaking in a GD involves no planning, preparation, or practice. Participants have to speak on the spur of the moment. As they do not have any aids to help them know what to say, their presentation depends on their reading, knowledge, experience, and background. Participants should think about the topic with a cool and open mind in order to analyse what they know about the topic. All the aspects of the topic should be examined and related to their personal experiences; this will give them fresh ideas. In order to understand the topic and analyse it, participants need to ask themselves the following questions:

- What is this topic all about?
- What do I know about it?
- What do I personally think about it?
- Does it require a judgement from me?
- What should my point of view be?
- What should my approach to the topic be?

It is generally a good idea to begin your presentation with an expression of gratitude to the earlier speakers for their ideas.

The first speaker has the extra responsibility of introducing the topic to the group members. The rest, however, should refer to the earlier speakers. It is generally a good idea to begin your presentation with an expression of gratitude to the earlier speakers for their ideas. Participants should express their agreement/disagreement with others politely.

While analysing a given topic, participants should identify the nature of the discussions can be classified into three types, i.e., opinions, problems or issues, and case studies. Different strategies should be followed to express views on these different types of topics. The following suggestions will help participants make their contribution valuable to the group:

The first speaker has the extra responsibility of introducing the topic to the group members.

Topics given in group discussions can be classified into three types, i.e., opinions, problems or issues, and case studies.

Discussing Opinions

The topic of a group discussion could be a one-sentence opinion. These opinions may relate to any of the following:

- (a) Social issues (Example: There should be no reservation in jobs)
- (b) Economic conditions (Example: Sick public sector companies should be privatised)
- (c) Moral issues (Example: Human cloning should be banned)
- (d) Political concepts (Example: Parliamentary democracy has failed in India)
- (e) Ongoing issues and debates in society (Example: Uniform civil code is essential for social harmony in India)

When an opinion has to be discussed, the participants should begin his/her individual presentation by interpreting the opinion and making his/her stand clear. For example, if the topic is “Reduction of IIM fees is a retrograde step”, the participant should begin by clearly stating his/her point of view, i.e., “I strongly feel that reduction of IIM fees is a retrograde step” or “The decision of the Government of India to reduce IIM fees is a positive step.” Next, he/she must state why he/she thinks so, supporting his/her point

The talk should be concluded with a thesis statement that restates the point of view.

of view with examples and illustrations. As every participant’s purpose is to influence the group members’ choices by shaping, reinforcing, or changing their responses to the idea being discussed, views must be presented in a logical and convincing manner. No member will accept a point of view if that is not supported with sufficient data. Finally, the talk should be concluded with a thesis statement that restates the point of view. One needs to be concise, to the point, and direct.

The participant should begin by clearly stating his/her point of view.

Discussing Problems

If the topic is a ‘problem’ or an ‘issue’, GD participants must try to understand the nature of the problem. There are three types of problems—problems of fact, problem of value, and problem of policy. In a problem of fact, one is concerned with the truth of a statement (Example: Inflation is inevitable in a developing country), or an explanation of a fact (Example: Glorification of violence and crimes in Indian films accounts for the high crime rate today). However, with a problem of value one is concerned with certain questions related to value judgements or the desirability of some actions, concepts, persons, processes, or things (Example: Has the American war against Iraq helped Iraqis?). Finally, a problem of policy is concerned with certain questions related to policy decisions (Example: What should the government do to control corruption at high places?). The participant may decide his/her approach as per the nature of the problem.

Once the problem is defined, the next step is an analysis and examination of available facts, supporting the given conclusion, explanation, or statement about the problem.

There are three types of problems—problems of fact, problems of value, and problems of policy.

If the topic is a ‘problem of fact’, participants should begin their presentation with a definition and interpretation of the ‘problem’. It is important to see the problem from one’s own point of view, which could be different from those of other group members because of one’s unique background and experience. Once the problem is defined, the next step is an analysis and examination of available facts, supporting the given conclusion, explanation, or statement about the problem. The analysis may

involve a brief review of its history or background, its causes, its effects, attempts to solve it, or the present state of the problem. The participant may decide the amount of information to be included and the focus of his/her contribution according to the particular statement to be discussed. Finally, one may conclude one's talk with a thesis statement that restates one's point of view. If the topic demands, the conclusion may reflect the speaker's understanding of the possible solutions to the problem.

While expressing an opinion on a 'problem of value' or a 'problem of policy', GD participants should begin their presentation with an interpretation of the given question from their point of view. Once the question is interpreted, the next step is an examination of the question according to their perceptions of what is desirable and proper in the given situation. The point of view may be supported with facts, examples, and illustrations. Finally, the presentation must be concluded by restating the point of view.

Once the question is interpreted, the next step is an examination of the question according to their perceptions of what is desirable and proper in the given situation.

Discussing Case Studies

We may define a 'case study' as an actual problem situation in an organisation, demanding immediate attention and solution.

Companies, big or small, face many challenges in order to survive in the competitive business environment. Similarly, institutions and government organisations have to face difficult situations due to the bitter reality of the 'survival of the fittest'. Thus, the recruitment process in many organisations may focus on evaluating the candidate's analytical and problem-solving skills and they can ask students to discuss a case study. We may define a 'case study' as an actual problem situation in an organisation, demanding immediate attention and solution.

To discuss a case study, GD participants need to follow an entirely different strategy. They should begin their presentation with a brief summary of the case and their interpretation of the situation, emphasising the need to solve the problem immediately. Next, they can suggest ways and means to solve the problem situation. They may propose and examine several possible solutions or alternative courses of action and then choose the most effective one, giving reasons for their choice. Participants may use persuasive language while making other members accept the solution/s proposed by them. Finally, they may conclude by summarising their plan to solve the case.

2. Study the following table and identify the strategies that may be effective in dealing with opinions/problems/case studies during a GD:

Opinions	Problems	Case Studies
1. Analyse and interpret the given opinion.	1. Interpret the given problem for discussion from your point of view.	1. Summarise and present the main facts of the case.
2. Always disagree with the given opinion.	2. Always evaluate the seriousness of the problem.	2. Suggest ways and means to solve the problem situation.
3. Make your stand clear in the beginning.	3. Always describe the history and background of the problem.	3. Begin your presentation with a solution to the problem situation.
4. Support your views with quotations by eminent people on the subject.	4. Never mention the causes of the problem.	4. Examine several alternative courses of action.
5. Illustrate and support your point of view.	5. Examine the statement/question about the problem objectively.	5. Propose the most effective solution, giving reasons for accepting it.
6. Repeat your point of view.	6. Support your point of view with facts, examples, and illustrations.	6. Use persuasive language.
7. Present both aspects of the opinion in detail.	7. Mention the solution/s to the problem as per the need of the topic.	7. Force other members to accept only your proposal.
8. Express your point of view only after listening to all the speakers.	8. Conclude by restating your point of view.	8. Conclude by summarising your plan to solve the case.

11.5.9 Group Interaction Strategies

Group discussion is a forum that provides opportunities for interaction. This interaction is possible only if every member of the group contributes and demonstrates his/her level of understanding on the given topic for discussion. However, there are several unpredictable factors involved in a GD. These include the setting, the examiners, other group discussion participants, the requirements of the selection procedure, etc. You hardly know anything about them. You need several skills and micro-skills in order to emerge successful in a GD test. In order to ensure an impressive performance in a GD test, you should know how to exchange opinions and suggestions in group discussions.

There are several unpredictable factors involved in a GD such as setting, examiners, other group discussion participants, requirements of the selection procedure, etc.

Exchanging Opinions

GD is a cooperative exercise where opinions and views of each member of the group are important for developing consensus and reaching to a conclusion. So, you have to ask for opinions, give opinions, support opinions, balance points of view, or express agreements and disagreements.

Asking for Opinions

You may ask one person to give his or her opinion on any point or your request might be directed at a group of people in general. Study the examples in Table 11.1.

Exchanging opinions during GDs include asking for opinions, giving opinions, supporting opinions, balancing points of view, agreeing, and disagreeing.

TABLE 11.1 Examples of Obtaining Opinion During Group Discussion

<i>Directed at One Person</i>	<i>Directed at a Group of People</i>
What is your opinion about this?	What is the general view on this?
What do you feel about it?	What is the general feeling about this?
What do you think about that?	Any reaction to that?
Have you any strong view on this?	Does anyone have strong views on this?
Have you any strong feelings about that?	Does anyone have strong feelings about that?
Do you want to make any comments?	Does anybody have any comments to make?
Do you have anything to say?	Does anybody have anything to say?

Giving Opinions

During a GD you may have to give your opinions about the subject being discussed. You also have to react to the views given by other members. You may express an opinion in a strong way, neutral way, or in a tentative way. It is very important to make other members aware of the nature of your opinion. If the other members know that you have strong views on something, they may not like to argue with you or ask you to change your views whereas they might like to convince a person whose views are neutral or tentative (Table 11.2).

TABLE 11.2 Different Types of Opinions

<i>Strong Opinions</i>	<i>Neutral Opinions</i>	<i>Tentative Opinions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have no doubt that ... • I'm pretty sure that... • I'm quite convinced that... • It's perfectly clear to me that... • I'm convinced that... • I'm sure that... • There's no doubt that... • I strongly believe that... • As far as I am concerned... • I'm totally convinced that... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that... • I feel that... • I believe that... • From a social point of view... • The way I find it is that... • As I see it... • As I find it... • According to me... • The way I see it is that... • Personally, I think... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It appears to me that... • It seems to me that ... • I'm inclined to think that... • I tend to favour the view that... • As it appears to me, ... • I can reconcile to the view that... • I might accept the view that...

Supporting Your Opinions

In order to make your views acceptable to the other group members, you need to support them with facts, examples, illustrations, or arguments. Sometimes you may feel that giving one reason or consequence for your point of view is sufficient to convince the listeners. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- I have no doubt that capital punishment should be abolished because it promotes barbarism, which is no longer valid to our modern ideas, times, and values.
- I'm convinced that our company must open new branches because our business has expanded.
- I think we should go ahead with the project as it will help us establish the name of our company in India.
- I'm pretty sure that reducing the prices will improve our sales.

However, in many cases during a discussion, more than one reason may be needed to support your opinions. In order to develop your opinions by giving a series of causes or consequences, you may have to use connectives or transitional words. Some examples are given below.

- I think implementing uniform civil code in India is out of question. First of all, it would be impossible to develop a civil code that is acceptable to all the religious groups in India, and what's more, forcing any civil code on an unwilling group would go against the democratic spirit and lead to social unrest.
- I think we should go ahead with the plan to reduce the price of our car. This will help us clear the old stock and apart from that it will pose tough competition to other cars in this segment and improve our sales.
- Capital punishment should not be abolished. First, if we abolish death sentence, there won't be fear in the minds of the criminals because it serves as a deterrent, and in addition, absence of the death sentence will encourage personal vendettas, as the relatives of the victim might take law in their hands to punish the killer.
- We must reduce our energy consumption. First, there's the high price of oil and electricity. Secondly, there's the long-term danger of using up oil stocks.

Balancing Points of View

In order to be reasonable and rational, GD participants may have to balance points of view by trying to look at both sides of a given opinion. They need to balance advantages and disadvantages. The following are some examples.

- The fall in interest rates is good for industry as it makes borrowing cheaper. However, it might adversely affect the balance of payments situation in India by affecting the exchange rates and making essential imports like oil more expensive.
- Of course, reducing the prices of our car will help us clear the old stock and improve our sales, but it will adversely affect the company profits and can damage the company's image in the long run.
- Although capital punishment serves as a deterrent by instilling fear of the law in the minds of the criminals, it promotes barbarism, which is no longer acceptable to our modern ideas, times, and values.

Sometimes you may feel that giving one reason or consequence for your point of view is sufficient to convince the listeners. However, in many cases during a discussion, more than one reason may be needed to support your opinions.

Agreeing and Disagreeing

Agreeing and disagreeing are the two aspects of interaction in a GD. When a participant agrees or disagrees to someone or accepts or rejects the suggestions and proposals given by other members, he/she should clearly express his/her agreement/disagreement. When you agree with someone your expression of agreement should indicate to the listener the strength of your agreement, which might be strong or neutral. Look at the following examples given in Table 11.3.

When you agree with someone your expression of agreement should indicate to the listener the strength of your agreement, which might be strong or neutral.

TABLE 11.3 Examples of Strong and Neutral Agreement

<i>Strong Agreement</i>	<i>Neutral Agreement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I strongly agree. • I quite agree. • I completely agree. • I'm in complete agreement. • Of course, yes. • Yes, certainly. • Yes, definitely. • Exactly. • Precisely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I agree. • Yes. • Of course. • Right. • That's true. • You are right. • OK • That's fine. • I think you are right.

Similarly, our expression of disagreement should indicate to the listener the strength of our disagreement. Read the examples in Table 11.4.

TABLE 11.4 Examples of Strong and Neutral Disagreement

<i>Strong Disagreement</i>	<i>Neutral Disagreement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I strongly disagree. • I disagree completely. • This is totally unacceptable. • That is out of question. • Definitely not. • Of course not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I disagree. • I don't agree. • No. • That's not true. • That's not right. • I think you are mistaken.

Exchanging Suggestions and Proposals

An opinion is what seems to be probably true while a suggestion is a proposal to do something.

During a group discussion, participants need to get the suggestions of other members of the group in order to conduct the discussion, and to explore possible solutions to actual problem situations. There is a difference between an opinion and a suggestion. An opinion is what seems to one to be probably true while a suggestion is a proposal to do something.

Exchanging suggestions and proposals include requesting and making suggestions/proposals, and accepting and rejecting suggestions/proposals.

Requesting Suggestions

Your request for suggestions might be directed at one person or it may be an open request for the group. Look at the following Table 11.5.

TABLE 11.5 Examples of Request for Suggestion

<i>Directed at One Person</i>	<i>Directed at a Group of People</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you suggest? • What is your suggestion? • What would you suggest? • What should we do? • What do you recommend? • Do you think we should...? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any suggestions? • Any recommendations? • Do any of you have any suggestions? • I'd like to have some of your recommendations. • Do any of you want to make any suggestion/recommendation?

Making Suggestions

During a case study discussion, participants, particularly leaders, may have to make suggestions or present various alternatives to solve the problem situation. Like opinions, suggestions may also be strong, neutral, or tentative. Study the following examples in Table 11.6.

TABLE 11.6 Examples of Different Type of Suggestions

<i>Strong Suggestions</i>	<i>Neutral Suggestions</i>	<i>Tentative Suggestions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's no way but to... • There's no alternative but to... • The only way is to... • The only alternative is to... • The only solution is to... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I suggest that... • I would suggest that... • We should... • My suggestion is that... • My recommendation is that... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One alternative could be... • One way would be to... • One solution could be... • How about ———ing ... • What about ——— ing...

Several phrases may also be used to put forward alternatives. The following are some examples.

- There are at least three different ways to deal with this situation. The first solution is to... Another possibility could be... The third alternative can be...
- There appears to be at least two solutions to this problem. One solution could be to... Another alternative is to...

Accepting and Rejecting Proposals

While discussing a problem or a case, proposals put forward by other members of the group may need to be accepted or rejected. As the leader's acceptance will show his/her support to the concerned member, the expression he/she chooses should indicate the strength of his/her support. Strong phrases may be used to indicate a strong acceptance while the use of weak phrases or informal expressions might show neutral or weak support. Some examples are given in Table 11.7.

TABLE 11.7 Examples of Strong and Weak Support

<i>Strong Support</i>	<i>Weak Support</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sure that is the best option. • It is the best solution. • It is an excellent idea • I strongly favour this. • I'm strongly in favour of that. • That's a great idea. • I'm completely in favour of that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good idea. • It appears to be a good idea. • It may be tried. • Sounds OK. • Sounds fine. • OK. • Fine.

Similarly, the expression of rejection of a proposal put forward by other members must indicate the strength of the rejection. Strong, standard or diplomatic rejections may be used according to the need of the situation. Table 11.8 gives some examples.

TABLE 11.8 Examples of Different Types of Rejections

<i>Strong Rejections</i>	<i>Standard Rejections</i>	<i>Diplomatic Rejections</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not possible/feasible. • It's not possible to accept that. • I can't accept it. • I'm strongly against that. • I'm completely against this. • I really find it unacceptable. • I'm absolutely against this proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sorry, but that is not possible/feasible. • I'm sorry I can't accept that. • I'm afraid I am against that. • I'm sorry, but that is not acceptable. • I'm afraid that is not practical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I appreciate your point of view but ... • That's a good idea but I still feel that... • You have a point but... • I can see your point but... • That sounds interesting but... • That's a good point but I still think that...

When a leader supports or rejects proposals or solutions given by other members, he/she has to give reasons for doing so. Look at the following examples.

- I'm sure that is the best option. My first reason is that ... My second ...
- It is the best solution. Firstly because... Secondly....