



TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (KAS – 301)



UNIT – 4 **TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

TOPIC : GROUP DISCUSSION

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1. GROUP DISCUSSION

- "Group" is a collection of individuals who have regular contact and frequent interaction and who work together to achieve a common set of goals.
- "Discussion" is the process whereby two or more people exchange information or ideas in a face-to-face situation to achieve a goal.
- 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.

- In group discussions (GDs), a particular number of people (approximately three to eight) meet face to face and, through free oral interaction, develop, share, and discuss ideas.
- Group discussions are widely used in many organizations for decision-making and problem solving.
- They are also used widely as a personality test for evaluating several candidates simultaneously to select personnel for positions of responsibility, especially in the service sector, and also to select students for admission to professional institutes.

2. OBJECTIVES OF A GROUP DISCUSSION

- Produce a range of options or solutions, addressing a particular problem or an issue.
- Generate a pile of ideas by examining issues in greater depth, looking at different dimensions of these issues.
- Broaden the outlook of the participants through cross-fertilization and exposure to new and different experiences and ideas and enrich their understanding of the issues under discussion.
- Develop their skills in interpersonal communication and in expressing their views in a clear and succinct manner.
- Effective means of changing attitudes through the influence of peers in the group
- Valuable means of obtaining feedback for the training team on verbal skills, motivation level and personal traits of the participants and characteristics of the group

3. TYPES OF GROUP DISCUSSION

3. 1. TOPIC BASED GDs

Topic based GDs can be classified into 3, they are as below: -

Factual Topics - Controversial Topics - Abstract Topic

a) Factual Topics: Factual topics are about practical things, which an ordinary person is aware of in his day-to-day life. Typically these are about socio-economic topics. These can be current, i.e. they may have been in the news lately, or could be unbound by time. A factual topic for discussion gives a candidate a chance to prove that he is aware of and sensitive to his environment. **Examples:** The education policy of India, Tourism in India, State of the aged in the nation.

- **b) Controversial Topics:** Controversial topics are the ones that are argumentative in nature. They are meant to generate controversy. In GDs where these topics are given for discussion, the noise level is usually high, there may be tempers flying. The idea behind giving a topic like this is to see how much maturity the candidate is displaying by keeping his temper in check, by rationally and logically arguing his point of view without getting personal and emotional. Examples: Reservations should be removed, Women make better managers.
- **c) Abstract Topics:** Abstract topics are about intangible things. These topics are not given often for discussion, but their possibility cannot be ruled out. These topics test your lateral thinking and creativity. Examples: A is an alphabet, The number 10

3.2 CASE-BASED GDS

- Another variation is the use of a case instead of a topic. The case study tries to simulate a real-life situation. In case studies, a short description of a situation (called a "case") is given to all the participants. The case will typically be a problem situation that requires a solution. The participants have to study the case, analyze the problem and then discuss various situations to the problem.
- A case study in a GD is all about analysis, since everybody is given the same information and thus starts from the same base
- Topics for the case study in group discussions are mostly current affairs-related. Current socio-economic environment, government policies, innovations, global economic atmosphere or socio-political debates prevailing in popular media. Read up about as many case study topics as you can.
- The purpose of these case-based GDs is to judge the candidate's knowledge, communication skills, leadership qualities and ability to make logical arguments and convince the opposite party, qualities necessary for being a good manager

4. TWO MAIN CATEGORIES OF GDS

- ORGANIZATIONAL GD
- SELECTION PROCESS GD

4.1 ORGANIZATIONAL GD

- In organizations, GDs are mainly used for group decision-making. Members of the interacting group take the responsibility of explaining their ideas and arriving at a consensus.
- GDs can help reduce many problems inherent to traditional interactive groups. The word 'traditional' here refers to an organizational set-up wherein hierarchy is given considerable importance.
- In such organizations, the group decision-making process may involve groupthink. A team suffering from groupthink will place so much value on maintaining loyalty, unity, and agreement that critical thinking and open enquiry are prevented.

The following techniques may be used:

- Brainstorming
- Delphi technique
- Nominal group technique

4.2 SELECTION PROCESS GD

Evaluation and Analysis

The four components generally evaluated and analyzed in a **GD** are as follows:

- ☐ Knowledge
- ☐ Communication skills
- ☐ Group behaviour (team spirit)
- ☐ Leadership skills

4.2.1 KNOWLEDGE

- The depth and range of knowledge as well as analytical and organizational abilities of the candidate are judged.
- One should be able to grasp the situation and analyse it not just at a mundane level, but with a wide perspective.
- For instance, assume that the participants are asked to discuss the topic 'All tests and examinations should be abolished from the university education system'. Whatever be their stand, they should discuss not only the benefits or problems at their own institutions, but also those at the national and international levels. This approach will give a wider scope for the topic to develop and become more interesting. As a member of the group, one is expected to contribute substantially to the discussion.

4.2.2 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

During a GD, an individual's skills will be assessed in terms of the following:

a) Active listening: Listening is as important as speaking in a GD. Unless we listen to others, we may not be able to continue the discussion in the right direction. As participants are interdependent in a GD, it is extremely necessary to listen very carefully. Only then will we be able to pick up the thread of discussion and continue.

b) Clarity of thought and expression: The panel's perception of a candidate's personality and his/her ability to influence and convince others depends considerably on the correct use of tone, voice, and articulation. It is not sufficient to have ideas. They have to be expressed effectively. More than words, it is the tone in which they are spoken that conveys the right message.

- **Tone:** Quality or character of the voice expressing a particular feeling or mood
- **Voice:** Correct projection of voice
- **Articulation:** Act of speaking or expressing an idea in words
- **Fluency:** Speaking or writing in an easy, flowing style
- **Modulation:** Variations in tone or volume of voice
- **Good delivery:** Ideas expressed fluently in the right voice, right tone, and right articulation

- **C) Appropriate language** :The language used should be accurate and free of grammatical errors. The language used should be direct, clear, and precise, with the ideas flowing in an organized manner. Do not use jargon that everyone in the group may not be familiar with, as it may lead to a lack of clarity. Moreover, extensive use of jargon, high-sounding words, or ambiguous expressions may project the individual as a show-off and will certainly not endear the person to the group members.
- **D) Appropriate body language** :The scores in a GD depend not only on verbal communication skills, but also on non-verbal skills. Our body language says a lot about us. Our gestures and mannerisms are more likely to reflect our attitude than what we say. Panelists keenly observe the body language of the candidates and give due weightage to this aspect in their assessment of candidates.

4.2.3 GROUP BEHAVIOUR (TEAM SPIRIT)

- An individual's group behaviour is reflected in his/her ability to interact with other members of the group on brief acquaintance.
- Emotional maturity and balance promotes good interpersonal relationships. You are expected to be more people-centric and less egocentric.
- For example, when someone provokes us with a personal comment, do we keep our cool or do we react with anger? Does our behaviour come across as objective, empathetic, and non-threatening? These are the traits of a good team player.
- The successful candidate is the one who shows an active interest in the proceedings by being involved throughout the GD.
- Our success in a GD depends on how well we play the role of an initiator, informer, illustrator, leader, coordinator, and moderator.
- The ideal candidate will share time with others, listen, and react to their views. Hence, a good communicator is one who opens, rather than closes gates. as the discussion proceeds, they might keep quiet, or vice versa.

4.2.4 LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- The success of any team depends, to a large extent, on its leader.
- A group cannot carry on its assigned work effectively without a leader. Although there is no appointed leader in a recruitment GD, a leader usually emerges as the discussion proceeds.
- The candidate who possesses both functional and coordinating abilities will emerge as the leader.
- Functional ability involves knowledge, mental and physical energy, emotional stability, objectivity, communication skill, integrity, and emotional intelligence.
- Coordinating ability involves traits such as group adaptability and group motivation. Group adaptability means the ability to adjust with other individuals in the group, and to serve as a cohesive force that binds the group into a single unit rather than a collection of people.
- Group motivation means the ability to motivate and influence others, to bring out the best participation from the members, and to nurture cooperation, understanding, and team spirit among the team members.
- Hence, leadership means influencing the proceedings by constructive participation, rational arguments, convincing other participants of a particular point of view, building support by working with supporters in the group, logically weakening the opponent's point of view, etc.

5. STRATEGIES FOR GOOD GD

5.1 Speaking in Group Discussions

- Seize the first opportunity to speak if you have a good understanding of the topic of discussion.
- Listen patiently to others and then react to their viewpoints.
- Speak clearly and audibly so that everyone hears and understands.
- Be concise in your expressions. Do not repeat ideas just for the sake of speaking something.
- Ask for clarification, if necessary.
- Facilitate contribution from others.
- Use statistics and examples to justify a view point.
- Avoid talking to only one or two persons in the group.
- Assume an impersonal tone. Treat all members as fellow participants; none in the group is either a friend or a foe.
- Be assertive without being aggressive; be humble without being submissive
- Raise your voice (just enough to be heard) and speak out a strong point in case of a fish market-like situation in a GD.

5.2 DISCUSSING PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

- In a discussion, identifying the problem can sometimes be a little difficult.
- The problem can be related to a personal, social, physical, or mental aspect, or it might be organizational—technical, managerial, or business related.
- The problems related to an organization are easier to analyse and solve, because in an organization the number of possibilities of the cause of a problem and the consequences of the solution are relatively simpler to analyse than the problems related to a society.
- Problems must be discussed in detail so that each participant of the team understands it.
- For example, if a department is not working satisfactorily, then we should try to define the problem exactly, i.e., whether the problem is with the efficiency of the department or the output of the department.

5.3 CREATING A CORDIAL AND COOPERATIVE ATMOSPHERE

- Listen to others' viewpoints with an open mind and interest.
- Respect others' ideas and try to understand the speaker's perspective.
- Develop mutual trust among each other.
- • Avoid being too formal with others (e.g., knowing the names of others will help in addressing them by first names rather than using Mr/Ms; using I/you/we and active voice rather than impersonal passive voice—'Reena, I am unable to get your point. Could you please give some statistics and elaborate further?').
- Adopt a friendly attitude so that others put forth their ideas freely.
- Use body language effectively to convey interest and sincerity in the discussion.
- Avoid being friendly with only one or two participants in the group.
- Be objective and unbiased in the discussion.
- Allow others to speak.
- Recognize significant contributions by others and appreciate them.

5.4 USING PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES

- Our ability to make others believe in what we say is important in GDs. In other words, mastering the art of persuasion or convincing others is crucial for GDs and the following tips may be helpful in this regard:
- Do your homework and be knowledgeable about the topic of discussion.
- Show maturity while reacting to others (by exhibiting appropriate body language and a firm tone of voice; by not interrupting somebody abruptly).
- Listen carefully and then react.
- Always use evidence (statistics/examples/testimonies) to justify your views.
- Establish mutual respect.
- Win the confidence of others.
- Be considerate.
- We may have a strong view on some issue. However, if others give evidences against these views, be willing to listen.
- Always be friendly and respectful during GDs.

5.5 BEING POLITE AND FIRM

- As already mentioned, we need to be assertive but not aggressive in a GD and by being firm and polite we satisfy this requirement.
- When we feel that a particular idea suggested by another member may not go well with the organization, we need to express our view firmly, but politely.
- There are various expressions that can be used to express politeness with firmness.

Sample expressions:

- I understand that this idea may be liked by everybody. But, I am afraid it will not gel with our organizational environment. I'm afraid this idea may not work in our system. (when we have to tell somebody something they may not like) Has this idea failed? I am afraid so. I wonder if I could have one more example on this point. (when asking somebody for a clarification)

5.6 TURN-TAKING STRATEGIES

- Can I interrupt?
- Would you mind me completing this idea?
- Will you allow me to speak?
- These are some of the utterances you might have heard in a GD because the members would not have used the turn-taking strategies effectively.
- In a well-managed GD, members participating actively take turns through spoken and nonverbal modes in a GD in order to express their views.
- On the other hand, if the discussion is dominated by only one or two members, turn-taking is not used effectively.
- The term 'turntaking' refers to a speaker giving a chance to others to comment on or question the point raised by him/her during a discussion. This process is repeated by the members of a group and if it does not go smoothly, the discussion will not be useful and can end up in an unpleasant argument

5.7 EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

- Interventions or interferences are necessary in a GD for reasons such as correcting an error, controlling unruly behaviour, adding some detail, or asking a question for clarification.
- Generally members do not like intervention during their speaking turn. So, we should interrupt somebody only when there is a valid reason and also using appropriate phrases while doing so. It is always better to use expressions such as excuse me, sorry to interrupt, may I say something, can I add something, etc., before interrupting in order to avoid confusion and also to exhibit a decorum during a GD.
- The following are some sample expressions for effective intervention: Excuse me for interrupting you, but it is of two months' duration, not one month. May I interrupt? Let me correct the time frame. It is two months and not one month. I would like to say something, if I may. The duration is two months and not one month. Can I just say that the duration is two months and not one? Sorry to barge in... but this idea has already been discussed

5.8 REACHING A DECISION

- Most of the GDs end with a decision—either final or interim.
- Whatever the type of decision, it can be arrived at only when members participate actively to explore the topic, contribute significantly to the discussion, and reach a consensus or an agreement. After thoroughly discussing various points involved in a problem by analysing their pros and cons, the group finally arrives at a few solutions.
- After ranking the solutions by considering their feasibility or practicability in their organizational environment, the members will accept one solution.
- When they decide on this, it will be presented by the leader of the group to everybody. However, before presenting the solution, the speaker will summarize the main points of discussion keeping in mind the goal of the GD. At times, because of various constraints such as time, inadequate participation, preparation, etc., the group may not be able to decide upon the given issue and it may decide to meet again.
- In such cases, some interim or tentative decisions may be taken.
- For instance, if the administrative heads of a college discuss a revamping of the curriculum, they may not arrive at a final decision, but may be able to take decisions on certain courses



Tips for Success in GDs

The following is a list of tips for handling a GD successfully.

- Be thorough with current issues.
- Always enter the room with a piece of paper and a pen.
- Listen to the topic carefully.
- Jot down as many ideas as possible in the first few minutes.
- Try to dissect the topic and explore the underlying causes or consequences.
- Organize the ideas before speaking.
- Speaking first is a high-risk, high-return strategy. Hence, speak first only if there is something sensible and substantial to say.
- Try to contribute meaningfully and significantly every time you speak. Do not speak just for the sake of saying something.
- Identify supporters and opponents and allow the supporters to augment your ideas.
- Keep track of time and share time fairly.
- Have an open mind and listen to others' views.
- Maintain eye contact while speaking and listening.
- Do not indulge in parallel conversations.
- Use tact and wit. If you must use humour, do so judiciously so as not to hurt others or deviate from the topic.
- Display a spirit of cooperation and an accommodative nature.
- Draw out the silent members and encourage them to speak.
- If things get chaotic, take the initiative to restore order by providing a fresh direction to the discussion.
- Attempt to arrive at a consensus although the ultimate aim is to reach a conclusion. Within the specified time, the group may not be able to arrive at a consensus. However, working towards consensus will reveal the individual's capability and inclination towards being a good team player. GD Situation 10 in the CD demonstrates how to effectively conclude a group discussion.

