

19.4 DISCUSSIONS IN GROUPS

Discussion is a method to develop one's creative approaches to knowledge. In a discussion we learn to listen to others because we presume and believe that others do contribute positively. We learn to speak our own points to others with vigour and clarity. We also learn to synthesize the points before concluding the views.

Discussion is a process of reflective thinking. In a discussion we may continue for some time with predetermined issues but we cannot sell our preconceived idea. It is reflective because our thinking depends upon what others think and what others express. It also depends on where or in which direction the stream of arguments moves. We are supposed to participate in a discussion not as a propagandist but as a critic. A healthy and successful discussion eliminates conflicts and achieves a consensus. In a discussion each participant displays his or her imaginative thinking by offering suggestions, adding ideas but deferring the solution until all ideas have been appropriately enumerated.

The salient features of group discussion are as noted below :

(i) **Interface** : A basic feature of group discussion is interaction among the various members of the group. They see, hear and communicate with each other orally by paying attention to each other.

(ii) **Leader and Members** : Group discussion is effective only when there is a group of members and a leader. The leader has to summarise facts and information, integrate, stimulate thinking, and agree to a unified solution of the

problem. The members of group become actively related to each other in their respective roles.

(iii) **Participation** : The effectiveness and efficiency of a group discussion depends to a great extent upon the active participation of the members.

(iv) **Interpersonal Attraction** : Another characteristic feature of a group discussion is interpersonal attraction. As long as interaction continues, likes, dislikes, behaviour, temperament of members are known to each other. Among them, empathy develops and as such they share each other's problems.

(v) **Pressure to Conform** : In a group discussion, there is always an element of pressure to conform to the norms. The pre-defined and established standards are always enforced and followed.

(vi) **Conflict** : A conflict is a difference, disagreement, among the members of the group, which often arise during deliberations and discussion. A conflict is inevitable, and usually develops when alternative solutions are present. It can stimulate the members to find new solutions to the problem. Thus, conflict is not necessarily bad. But if conflict arises due to political behaviour of the members, it will have dysfunctional consequences.

19.5 CONSIDERATIONS IN GROUP DISCUSSION

19.5.1 Purpose of Discussion

The main purpose of group discussion is to judge how we behave in a group. Group discussion throws a platform to us to display our personality traits like our intellectual ability, creativity, approach to solve problems, leadership qualities, tolerance and group behaviour. In the process of our participation we judge the clarity of our thought and the felicity of our expression.

A group discussion also provides us with an avenue to train ourselves as professionals in this world efficiently. Though our participation in group discussions we prune our conceptual clarity. We learn to discern the various subtle nuances to approach a problem. Our reaction to others' views and opinions matures. In the process we also learn how to communicate our ideas effectively. Group discussions make us wise enough to see reasons. They teach us how to get rid of our biased judgements and avoid undertaking pre-judiced actions.

19.5.2 Objectives of Discussion

The main objective of a group discussion is to present a platform for group-learning. It aims at creating an opportunity to discuss a problem. The participants in a group discussion attempt at solving it. They share findings of each other, analyse and classify the established findings. Discussion as a process makes a group think together. The group does this thinking in a constructive style for problem-solving and decision-making. Group discussion intends to make

responsible professionals out of us. As a group there is a smooth flow of interaction and we learn the process of group dynamics.

19.5.3 Participants In Discussion

For a successful group discussion there should be an appropriate number of participants. It is, however, difficult to specify the number of participants that makes the discussion useful. It is true that the nature and effectiveness of discussion depends upon the number of participants. If a group is constituted of ten or more than ten members, some members tend to avoid participation. They remain as passive listeners. The significance of a group discussion is lost if each and every member does not participate actively in the discussion. Similarly, if the number of participants is less than five, the discussion does not hold effective because it lacks the diversity of opinions. Therefore, the optimum number of participants for an effective and successful discussion is between five to nine. A fruitful discussion, however, can take place when all members share views and exchange information with each other.

19.5.4 Time and Place of Discussion

A group discussion takes place in a room carefully chosen. It should be well-ventilated and illuminated. It should have a pleasant atmosphere having an elliptical arrangement of chairs for participants in which all participants should get an opportunity to see each other easily and equally. There should be a flipchart available displaying the problem of the discussion.

It should start with the announcement of the problem to the participants after they assemble. The participants are given five to ten minutes of time to brood over and collect their thoughts. The other way of holding it is by announcing the problem beforehand and the discussion starts when all the participants come prepared to the discussion table.

19.5.5 Role of Moderator

A group discussion takes place in the presence of an observer. The role of the observer is to learn and monitor the process of discussion. He or she keeps a watch on the participants and their participation. The moderator also sees that there is no clamour in the name of discussion. The moderator then evaluates the contributions by the participants.

19.5.6 Scope and Limits of Discussion

The discussion proceeds with the participants behaving responsibly. The smooth flow of discussion should lead members to arrive at an agreed solution or devising a strategy for an action with respect to a problem. Each participant should give a fair chance to other participants to express their opinions. The discussion should result in a crystallisation of thought in which there is the contributions of all the participants. In a discussion there is no place for an

emotional outburst or a display of excitement. If in the discussion a participant is found dominating others by speaking continuously for a long time, the other members should curb this flamboyance by interrupting politely so that others too make their contributions. To keep the discussion on the track a participant should summarise the points made till that time and then he or she should present his or her viewpoint.

19.6 DISCUSSION SKILLS

For an effective participation in a discussion, we require to improve our skills at two levels: first at the level of speaking, secondly at the level of listening.

19.6.1 Skills at the Level of Speaking

1. **Impressive Voice** : A participant should have a pleasing voice quality. He or she should pronounce words with proper stress and intonation. An impressive voice attracts other participants to hear what we speak. Therefore, we should try to have a baritone voice to impress all. He or she should enunciate his or her views distinctly. The voice should be easily heard and should be pleasant in quality revealing the speaker's personality.

2. **Pronunciation and Articulation** : The participant should know how to modulate his or her voice with effective articulation combining stress on syllables and appropriate subordination. He or she should know the right kind of pronunciation. Accordingly, he or she should speak with due modulation portraying mood and meaning effectively. The words should be spoken per unit of time with due regulation, rhythm and pause.

3. **Poise** : A general poise and bearing makes us maintain our cool. A poise does not allow us to pounce on someone or on some point of view. The poise also removes the know-all attitude. We breathe deeply, open our mouth wide. The poise also includes our preparedness, calmness, a courteous attitude and confidence. All these help us participate efficiently in a discussion.

4. **Effective Body Language** : For effective participation in a discussion we should avoid too many gestures or body movements while speaking. Our body language should not display any aggressiveness, irritation, tiredness, panic, hurry or hesitation. All these are negative traits. Other proficient participants exploit these and prove us inefficient in discussion.

5. **Command over the Subject-matter** : For effective discussion we should know how to mention our points that require specific attention and consideration. We should quote authoritatively citing references and other research findings. We should know how to explain, elaborate, compare, describe, illustrate, trace, relate, summarise and review matters. We should be well prepared for discussion being aware of the main field and the other related fields. We should have an adequate knowledge and information about the subject matter. We should know how to be methodical in expressing ourselves. We should talk in a sound manner. We must have read expository material on the theme.

General Dos and Don'ts

When you are participating in a GD, you need to remember some general dos and don'ts. During any discussion, there are some basic fundamental rules and etiquettes that you should abide by to make your contribution to the group valuable. When you do not abide by the discussion norms or remain passive, your image at the workplace suffers and you are not taken seriously. People who remain passive all the time are not taken seriously and people who are forever aggressive are made to stop speaking even before they have started. Extreme behaviour may create a poor image about you. Here is a table giving a few dos and don'ts while participating in a GD at your workplace (Table 17.2).

Table 17.2 Dos and don'ts when participating in a GD at your workplace

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be well-prepared before you attend a discussion.• Maintain balance while you speak. Listening is equally important.• Contribute uniformly to a discussion.• Keep your sentences or ideas simple and short.• Present your ideas logically and give a proper conclusion to them.• Give examples to reinforce your ideas.• Be polite to the person you are talking to, and maintain a positive body language.• In a discussion, plan the amount of time you should speak.• Think twice before you make any statement, especially to check if it would hurt the sentiments of any person in the group.• Always carry a pen and a notepad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak too fast or too slowly.• Make personal comments.• Be in a blame game mode during a discussion.• Discuss sensitive issues related to politics, religion, etc.• Take discussions lightly.• Hold parallel discussions.• Adopt a casual body language.• Divert from the topic of discussion.• Fiddle with your pen, tie, etc.• Be negative in your approach.• Frequently look at your watch or speak on the phone.• Show a lack of interest.