

GROUP DISCUSSION: AN EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Abstract: Group discussion is an essential requirement for securing jobs in the government or corporate world as well as getting admission to post graduate management courses in reputed institutions. Nearly fifteen to twenty students are seated in a group facing one another and generally a topic is given to them to discuss within a limited time of nearly an hour. The authorities do not take part in the discussion but monitor the participants from outside. Participants are required to initiate the talk and carry the discussion forward in a cooperative friendly atmosphere, giving chance for each member to share his views. Conflicts should be avoided or tackled mindfully by the leader coordinating all events in the group. A positive attitude should be maintained throughout and everybody should cooperate to reach a conclusion. Group discussion tests a student's knowledge about the subject as well as its range and depth. It also tests a student's oral communication skills, leadership skills and team management skills. The student who manages the group well coordinating all the activities and invigorating the group with his ideas is selected. Hence, group discussion is an effective, economical way of assessment.

Key Words: Group discussion, Leadership Skills, Oral Communication Skills, Team management, Assessment tool, Recruitment in MNCs.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Group discussion is an essential part of getting admission to highly reputed post graduate courses in esteemed colleges like IIMs and other top schools like FMS, IIFT, IMT, TAPMI etc. It is also a requirement for class I and class II services, SSB Bank Officers recruitment services etc. It has also become an essential tool for recruitment in multinational companies or the corporate world like TCS, SATYAM, WIPRO, INFOSYS, INFOTECH, ORACLE, CTS, and GOOGLE etc. It is a tool for selecting the best candidate who could become a team leader and lead his team well. A lot of students apply for these positions so group discussion is also an eliminating mechanism as only students whose performance is outstanding is selected. Group discussion is economical in terms of time spent on evaluation because it normally takes fifteen to twenty minutes to interview one candidate so within an hour only four to five candidates can be evaluated. In a group discussion nearly fifteen to twenty students participate hence by the end of an hour nearly twenty students can be evaluated and various parameters tested at the same time. According to Rizvi (2005), group discussion is an interactive oral process where each member listens to the others and also gives their own ideas. He also calls it a systemic, purposeful and a goal oriented activity. It is systemic because everyone takes part in a structured manner. It has a purpose and the goal is defined at the beginning of the group discussion. Nearly fifteen to twenty students are made to sit in a circle facing one another. A topic is given in advance and students are required to express their views and opinions. Students are free to voice their opinions even if it is totally against the views of the group. Students should patiently listen but should not get passionate about the topic and start fighting or express anger. Conflicts are not tolerated though conflicting opinion is welcome. There is no designated leader but students have to prove that they are capable of assuming leadership roles and lead a group. They can invigorate the group with their ideas and carry them along convincingly to reach a conclusion unanimously. Ramon and Singh (2006) have given some ground rules for discussion like respecting the opinions and time limitations; not arguing and listening effectively. Participants should enquire if necessary. Aspiring students miss a chance to prove themselves as they are unaware of the methodology and the skills that are tested in a group discussion. Section 2 gives the importance of group discussion, section 3 deals with methodology, section 4 states the qualities assessed in selection group discussion and section 5 gives the conclusion.

2. IMPORTANCE OF GROUP DISCUSSION:

Students and professionals are required to take part in discussions on an ongoing basis i.e. academic discussions, seminar deliberations, classroom discussions, professionals meetings and discussions, group discussions for admissions and placement etc. According to Rizvi (2005), group discussion is important because it helps in:

- **Problem solving**

Corporate houses nowadays gather their employees to discuss the problems they are facing. It is believed that if employees know all the aspects of the problem very well then it will not be difficult to find a solution.

- **Decision making**

Similarly, if you are armed with full information about an issue it becomes very easy to come to a decision.

- **Personality assessment**

Group discussion is also used as a tool for selecting candidates for jobs or admission to valued courses. It assesses a range of parameters selecting the best candidate displaying leadership qualities.

3. METHODOLOGY OF GROUP DISCUSSION:

Group discussion is a very systemic goal oriented activity as stated in Sec 1.0. Rizvi (2005) has given the following steps:

- **Initiating the GD**

When a topic is given to the group for discussion there is clamor as students are busy in small talks or doing their own things. One of the students could seize this opportunity by analyzing the topic quickly in this mind and then initiating the talk. Dudeja (2016) says that group discussion could be initiated by a quote, definition, facts, figures, shocking statement, logical question, short story or a general statement.

- **Participating enthusiastically**

Each participant has to speak and take the discussion forward. They cannot just nod their heads and say we all agree and there is nothing to discuss. This will defeat the purpose of group discussion. Everyone should exchange opinions and their views.

- **Having an informal atmosphere**

All the participants should maintain a friendly atmosphere conducive to the shy ones to open up. If the atmosphere is very formal participants will not be motivated to speak. A cooperative atmosphere will yield better results.

- **Carrying the discussion forward**

It should not happen that the discussion dries up and there is nothing to speak about. In this situation the leader should come up with new ideas and steer the discussion along. Sometimes some students try to monopolize the discussion and do not give others a chance to speak. The group leader should stop this. He can also clarify the points and take the discussion forward.

- **Ensuring maximum participation**

Some students are shy and do not want to speak, some others nod their heads along with others but shy away from giving their opinion. A leader can summarize the points and give a chance to the non participants to speak. Each and every member should be motivated to speak for the benefit of the group

- **Resolving fights**

Members are generally passionate about topics related with religion or politics. Sometimes a member feels he knows more than the others which cause conflict. Conflict is natural but it should not be accepted in a group. Participants should say 'yes' to diverse ideas but 'no' to fights. In case two participants start fighting, the group leader can summarize the points of both the participants and give a chance to the third one to speak.

- **Conclusion**

Participants must be able to reach a conclusion unanimously at the end of the discussion. In case it does not happen, the leader can emphasize on the points of agreement. Nagarathinam and Lakshmanan (2016) is of the view that the leader should summarize all the important points spoken. The GD should end with a positive conclusion within the allotted time. The leader has to remind the group to reach a consensus. If it doesn't end with a consensus it should give some positive conclusion. Lightfoot (2007) is of the view that to be successful in a Group discussion useful sub skills like analysis, persuasion, control over emotions, knowledge as to when to interrupt is also essential.

4. QUALITIES ASSESSED IN GROUP DISCUSSION:

Group discussion is used as an assessment tool for candidates seeking admission in prestigious colleges for management and other post graduate courses as well as students seeking jobs in multinational companies. Rizvi (2005) has highlighted four areas viz. Knowledge, Oral communication skills, Leadership skills and Team management skills. These are discussed in detail below.

4.1. Knowledge: Group discussion tests the knowledge of the participants because only students who have knowledge of the subject will be able to speak. It just doesn't test the knowledge but also the expanse of the knowledge and its depth. New ideas are very valuable and hence participants must be able to analyze the topic, assimilate, brood and come up with new ideas and take the group forward along with them. They should be well read and have knowledge of current national and international affairs. They must be able to link their thoughts as knowledge is interrelated.

4.2. Communication Skills: Participants must be able to communicate in a very nice manner and put their point of view. They must be able to consider the following three points:

- **Effective Listening** – A person will not be able to challenge the points of his teammate if he is not listening to him with concentration and care and moreover he also have to come up with new ideas that will not be possible without dwelling on what other teammates are saying or what their point of view is. Hence, listening is very crucial as Ragini (2013) opines that unless one listens one cannot contribute to the goal of communication.
- **Effective use of Language** – Student should use the language effectively. He should be proficient in the language and should not make grammatical mistakes. He should be precise in the use of words and should not use jargons, very ornate or difficult language. Student should not beat about the bush and should convey exactly what is there in his mind without confusing others. He should be loud and clear but not too fast and must have appropriate pronunciation at the same time his body language should complement what he is saying.
- **Correct Attitudes** – He should have very positive attitude and display maturity. He should not speak in an irresponsible manner and be apologetic later on. His attitude should garner trust instead of hostility.

4.3. Leadership Skills:

The crux of group discussion is to find a person who can manage a group very well and lead it too. The person should display the following characteristics:

- **Resourceful ---** The person should be resourceful and must be able to play all the roles aptly. He must be able to analyze the given topic fast in his mind and initiate the talk with his ideas in a convincing manner. At the same time he must be able to persuade others to believe in his ideas and also to contribute to the group with their own ideas. He himself should be intrinsically motivated in turn to motivate others by his thoughts, actions and positivity.
- **Self Confident and Assertive** – Self confidence is a trait of a leader, so the student should display confidence to instill confidence in others at the same time he should not be overconfident or boastful. A leader also has to be strong and assertive to save the group from being sabotaged by others. He should hold his stand and not give up.
- **Composed and Rational** – A leader should not get swayed by emotion otherwise he will become passionate and will not be able to take well balanced decisions. He should not be provoked easily and should maintain calmness and composure in all situations. He should be objective and impartial and should not side with individuals to build his credibility. His arguments should be backed by facts and evidence.

4.4. Team Management Skills:

A leader must be able to manage his team very well. There are many roles to be played and a leader must be able to initiate and play them well. He should have the following qualities to manage a team well.

- **Cooperation and Coordination**—a leader has to cooperate with the group and sometimes must rise above his interest and ego for the welfare of his team. Cooperation brings amity which overcomes a lot of problems. Ravichandran, (2019) says that group discussion is all about coordination and cooperation. A lot of activities need to be coordinated within a team for its effective functioning and a group leader must come forward and have the ability to coordinate activities in a group.
- **Flexible and upright** —a leader should not be rigid in his opinions but should be flexible enough to adjust to the opinion of the group and align himself to the group's goals. He should be upright and shun negativity as no one likes to work with negative people.

5. CONCLUSION:

Group discussion is a systemic, purposeful goal oriented activity. It is generally used for recruitment in multi-national corporations and for admission to post graduate management courses. It is cost effective and time efficient and hence a favorite of the evaluators. It has a structured methodology and it assesses the knowledge, oral communication skills, leadership skills and team management skills. Students aspiring for jobs or courses will really be able to compete well with the knowledge of the methodology of group discussion and the selection parameters. Raghuwanshi, (2011) feels that with noticing what others are doing in group discussion, practicing it and participating whenever the opportunity arises can hone your discussion skills.

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