

Communication Skills: Lecture No. 19

Module 7

Lecture 1

GROUP DISCUSSION



The image shows the cover of a lecture material. At the top right, there is a box containing the text "Communication Skills". Below this, there is a photograph of five people smiling and looking towards the camera. In the center, the title "GROUP DISCUSSION" is written in large, bold, black letters with a reflection effect. Below the title, there is a purple circular logo with a white spiral pattern on the left and a colorful illustration of five people standing in a circle on the right. At the bottom left, the name "T. Ravichandran" is written in blue. At the bottom right, the text "Module 7: Lecture 1" is written in black.

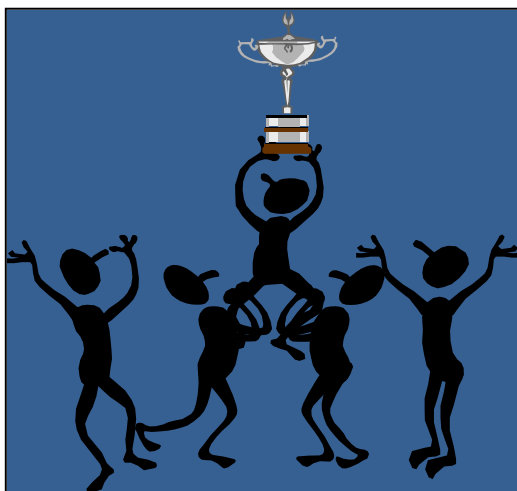
In this module you will learn and understand why one should participate in Group Discussion (GD), what is Group Discussion, what are the evaluation criteria used for selecting/filtering candidates, and how can one ensure success in GDs.



WHY GROUP DISCUSSION?

Today Group Discussion has become a mandatory elimination process for securing seats in higher education or for gaining lucrative job positions. Group discussion has become an integral part of assessment for entry into business schools where along with written tests and interviews equal weightage is given to GDs. In multinational corporations, most of the times, group

discussion is used for assessing some of the most pertinent personality traits relevant for their organizations.



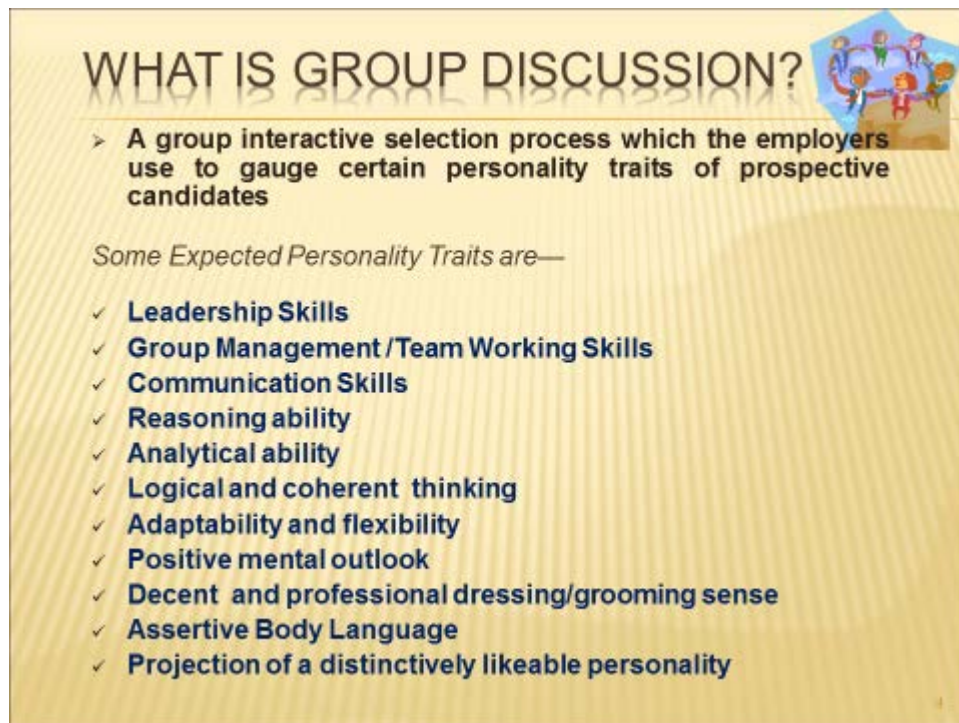
Group discussion offers an easy way to *evaluate* and *eliminate* several candidates *simultaneously*. Unlike cumbersome efforts taken in written tests such as setting question papers, correcting huge numbers of scripts, group discussion demands no prior work. The only work that needs to be done is finalizing a topic. But even the choice of a topic is often left to the

candidates! Besides, it is easy to select any desirable number of candidates, whether it is 5 out of 50 or 2 out of 20. Group discussion is thus found to be a *time and cost efficient* method. Above all, the best way to *identify a natural leader* is by using group discussion.

A natural leader is somebody who will emerge in a chaotic environment. You can observe this in any strikes by students or workers. When the strike begins just people gather for a common cause, but as it progresses, the natural leaders rise from a mass group of followers. These natural leaders exhibit all leadership traits and good coordinating abilities. Typical management GDs sound literally like fish market in which the real leader negotiates, resolves conflicts, coordinates and cooperates to bring peace to the whole group.

WHAT IS GROUP DISCUSSION?

Group discussion is a group interactive selection process, which the employers use to gauge certain personality traits of prospective candidates.



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Some Expected Personality Traits are—

- ✓ Leadership Skills
- ✓ Group Management /Team Working Skills
- ✓ Communication Skills
- ✓ Reasoning ability
- ✓ Analytical ability
- ✓ Logical and coherent thinking
- ✓ Adaptability and flexibility
- ✓ Positive mental outlook
- ✓ Decent and professional dressing/grooming sense
- ✓ Assertive Body Language
- ✓ Projection of a distinctively likeable personality

Group discussion involves interactive communication among group of people bound by a given/chosen topic. Usually, the candidates will be asked to respond to the topic within 15 to

20 minutes. Thus, time is a crucial phenomenon in group discussion. Given infinite time, everybody can speak on any topic. But when time is limited, it calls for one's presence of mind, mental alertness, ability to apply knowledge within the stipulated time. When the employers select a candidate, they looking for: leadership skills, group management/team working skills, communication skills, reasoning ability, analytical ability, logical and coherent thinking, adaptability and flexibility, positive mental outlook, decent and professional dressing/grooming sense, assertive body language, and projection of a distinctively likeable personality.

WHAT IS GROUP DISCUSSION?

Group discussion elicits the views of all participants and evolves a consensus through active and intense interaction. Even if somebody is passive, and somebody else is indifferent, it is the responsibility of other participants to involve them in the discussion in order to elicit their views on the topic before arriving at a conclusion. Often, introverted people keep the best views to themselves; a sensitive leader among the participants will not only note this but also gently persuade them to come out. Overall, the purpose and aim of group discussion is to elicit views from all and then arrive at a consensus. Consensus is the collective agreement on an issue after successive stages of conflict, agreement, disagreement, negotiation, and reconciliation. This is done through a very intense and interactive process.

Understand that group discussion is essentially about *group*—NOT *individual*—discussion! Hence, in a group discussion, an individual cannot choose to have a discussion with his known friend or somebody whom s/he likes to talk to. In fact, group discussion tests how one can push oneself out of the comfort zone and talk to strangers and win over them with logical and persuasive argument. That is why, a diffident candidate who only murmurs and avoids discussing gets eliminated in the preliminary round itself. A candidate, however self-centered s/he might be, should never ignore the fact that there are other participants who are equally interesting in sharing their views.

Understand that it is group *discussion*—NOT *public speaking* or *debate* or *interview*. How do we differentiate discussion from public speaking? When we say discussion, it involves so many people interacting with each other. In public speaking, the audience judges a speaker *without competing* with him. In group discussion, there are judges who assess the participants with whom the other persons are competing with equal interest. In public speaking, the speaker has already been conferred leadership by the audience. In group discussion, leaders are what the audience (or the judges) are looking for.

In a debate, there are two sets of participants representing two opposing sides. There are views and counterviews, points and counter points, and one set of people arguing for the motion, and the other, arguing against. Most importantly, there is the chairperson or the moderator who presides and gives the debate a proper shape and direction. No such moderator will be present in group discussion to direct its participants to amicably arrive at a consensus.

In an interview, an individual candidate faces a panel that evaluates the candidate's suitability for the concerned job. The panel, apart from testing the candidate's subject knowledge, will also make note of the psychological outlook and the positive frame of mind. But in the GD, the candidate is not sitting as an individual, but sits amidst so many other people in a group. And there is no visible panel that directly assesses the candidate by asking questions. If at all a panel is involved in assessing GD candidates, it will be kept invisible behind semi-transparent walls. The group discussion participant will not see any panel at all.

Once you clearly understand how group discussion is different from all other speech activities, you will develop the right frame of mind to attend a GD.

STRUCTURE OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Now let's briefly look at the structure of a group discussion. In fact, I would say that it's ironic that I have put structure on the title because GD operates as a structure-less activity. A group discussion is an unstructured activity: there is no moderator, there is no panel, there is no time-manager. It is deliberately set-up in such a manner that a spontaneous structure should evolve along with one's ability to structure an unstructured activity.

Another interesting thing about group discussion is that it starts with a leaderless group. Nobody is assigned the job of a leader or that of a moderator. Nonetheless, people imbued with such traits are the ones who will be finally selected from GDs.

There is no single leader assigned to do the role of a moderator in a GD for the specific reason that all the candidates are competitors and all are expected to exhibit leadership qualities in some form or other. Each candidate is expected to join the discussion without the presence and participation of the examiner.

A GD can have 10 to 50 participants and can last for 15 to 30 minutes. Within this limited time frame, one is expected to maximize one's participation and at the same time ensure that everybody's opinion is heard.

In the next lecture, I will discuss the basic components of group discussion in detail along with evaluation criteria for selecting/eliminating candidates.

FURTHER REFERENCES

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<http://www.indiabix.com/group-discussion/topics-with-answers/>

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