GROUP COMMUNICATION/

DISCUSSION ON CURRENT TOPICS:

INTRODUCTION

- **As against dyadic communication (i.e., one to one) and mass communication (i.e., one to many), group communication implies a many-to-many communication.**

- Teamwork and group communication form an integral part of most organizations that embrace the concept of an open organizational climate and participative management e.g., factories, corporate offices, research laboratories, universities, hospitals, law offices, government agencies, etc.

- This is largely because of the complexity of decisions that have to be made when we are dealing with groups as opposed to individuals.

- **Although teams are different from groups in that the former is process-based while the latter is function-based, they share common communication processes.**
- **For example, when a company sends one of its project teams to develop software for its clients abroad, that particular team carries out s process.**

In other words, a team's objective is set, and the members are assigned specific duties to achieve a specific goal; a group on the other hand is more involved in discussing and planning the achievement of long-term goals.

❖ However, groups develop into teams when their common purposes are clearly understood by all the members and their leaders are indentified.

How do members of an organization or a group communicate?

❖ The members of an organization may communicate in groups to achieve any of the following purposes:

❖ Share and exchange information and ideas.

❖ Collect information or feedback on any project/policy/scheme.

❖ Arrive at a decision on important issues.

❖ Solve a problem concerning the organization as a whole.

❖ Discuss issues involving the group itself or for the benefit of a larger audience.

❖ Elicit feedback upon any work undertaken or research performed.

What is the role of discussions in a communication?

♥ Discussions play a crucial role in relationship building and decision-making. There are various forms of discussions:

1. FORMS OF GROUP COMMUNICATION

➢ Depending on the purpose, structure, and characteristics, group communication takes various names such as discussion, meeting, conference, seminar, group discussion, symposium, convention, etc.

➢ Since all these forms of group communication involve oral communication, they require effective oral communication skills that would enable the

members to present and discuss their or their organization's points of view on the topic of discussion convincingly.

2. USE OF BODY LANGUAGE IN GROUP COMMUNICATION

- ➢ Body language plays a very significant role in group communication, which involves more interaction among the participating members than any other form of communication.

- ➢ Each member of the group has an opportunity to use body language for effective communication, unlike in public speaking and professional presentation, where only the speaker's body language is noticed.

- ➢ In a group, each person exhibits and observes the facial expressions, postures, and gestures of others in order to understand the intentions behind what is being communicated through words.

- ➢ However, depending on the degree of formality of the groups, the use of body language may vary.

- ➢ For instance, while formal meetings at workplace may not involve much use of body language, GDs, which are less formal, may entail more use of body language as an aid in effective communication.

Why is use of body language important in a conversation or a group discussion.

Given below are certain general guidelines for the effective use of body language in groups:

> ➢ Maintain eye contact while speaking and listening to others.

> ➢ Adopt facial expressions that show interest and enthusiasm in participation. Restrain emotional expressions during an argument or disagreement.

> ➢ While communicating in a small group, use small hand gestures in order to avoid encroaching upon the personal space of others.

> ➢ As the members sit and communicate with each other, their movement may be restricted to a certain extent in a group.

> ➢ However, try to bring in some change in posture even while sitting, for instance, sitting cross-legged, placing one arm on the back of the chair, leaning on the chair briefly, etc.

> ➢ While setting up the venue for group communication, there should be adequate space between the seats so as to avoid members from sitting very close to each other.

DISCUSSIONS

Why are discussions necessary and why are they important?

♥ Discussions are conversations held among people face-to-face or over phone. They may be formal or informal.

♥ They are generally initiated to exchange information, view and opinions, persuade, appraise, make decisions, or solve problems.

♥ Suppose you are, the president of the student's union of your college, wish to introduce some changes in the annual technical festival. Before convening a formal meeting, you might want to work out the details with your professor who is the faculty-in-charge of the festival.

♥ However, before going to your professor, you wish to call your friend and talk about the details with him.

♥ **Looking at these communication situations, you may find that your conversation with your professor may be called a formal discussion while your chat with your friend an informal one.**

♥ **Discussions may take place between two persons as seen in these examples or among three or more people in which case they may be called group discussions.**

Basic elements of a discussion or conversation on any concerned issue:

1.Introducing Oneself/Others

♦ While initiating a discussion with people we meet for the first time, we would first introduce ourselves and then ask others to introduce themselves so that the entire group knows each other before the discussion begins.

♦ While introducing oneself, it is preferable to use one's first name in informal situations and full name in formal situations.

♦ It would be appropriate to smile, look friendly, and keep the introduction very brief by giving our full name and designation.

♦ Avoid titles such as Mr, Ms, Dr, or Prof. While introducing oneself, but use them while introducing other. For example:

♦ Good morning, I am Dilip Kulkarni, Coordinator, and Techfest 2010 (introducing self) This is Mr. Naresh Kohli, leader of the sponsorship team: (introducing others)

♦ Excuse me, friends, could you please introduce yourselves? (If you want others to introduce themselves)

2. Leading and Directing Discussions

♦ When leading and directing discussions, we need to be very clear in our mind about the objectives of our discussion, to decide what has to be done in a situation and to know how to do it.

♦ It is good idea to give a brief introduction to the objectives and then invite suggestions from the members.

♦ We may have to repeat or paraphrase somebody's viewpoints in order to ensure that we have understood them correctly.

♦ The tips given below may be helpful:

Listen carefully.

Take notes on other's viewpoints.

Do not allow anybody to waste time.

Do not allow anybody to deviate from the main focus of the topic.

Get your doubts clarified from the speaker.

♦ After weighing all opinions, decide which one to accept and then seek final consent from other on this viewpoint.

- ♦ Decide what is to be done in particular situations and explain how to carry it out.

- ♦ Delegate responsibilities to each member and fix a deadline to complete the task.

- ♦ Motivate and inspire members in achieving the objective of discussion.

3. Expressing Opinions and Ideas

- ❖ **While expressing an opinion, we can follow the ORE (opinion, reason, and example) pattern as shown in the sample below:**

- ❖ **X: What do you think about stopping the use of mobile phones in our college?**

❖ **YOU: I think/in my opinion, it is not a good idea/I don't think it is a good idea (O).**

❖ **Y: Why?**

❖ **YOU: I feel that/my view is that mobile phones serve as the best tool to be in touch with others in college (R).**

❖ **X: Why do you want to be in touch through mobile phone when all your friends are available in college?**

❖ **YOU: Say, I am in the library and I want to ask my friend who is not with me about some information about the contents of a book or say my parents want to contact me urgently, they can send me a message or talk to me if I am free (E).**

❖ **Please note that even if others do not raise any interim questions, you can follow the ORE pattern. It gives others a complete picture about your opinion.**

4. Expressing Agreement/Disagreement

❖ While expressing your views, opinions, or suggestions during discussions with your group members, you cannot expect every member to agree with you.

❖ Some may have the same views, while some may have different. Likewise, you may also accept or reject others' suggestions.

❖ Though agreement can be expressed easily with words such as exactly, right, yes, etc., and with a spirited tone, disagreement has to be expressed politely using 'I am not so sure, Do you think so?, well, it depends, etc.', with controlled body language.

❖ However, if you know the others members very well, you can disagree directly using 'I disagree, I cannot agree with you, I am afraid your idea is wrong, etc'. Look at the following examples:

5. Agreement

❖ **X:** I say that we should not stop the use of mobile phones completely.

❖ **YOU:** Exactly. (Expressing complete agreement)

❖ **X:** Do you mean to say we should allow internet browsing during the working hours?

❖ **YOU:** Yes, that is exactly what I said. (Expressing complete agreement)

❖ **X:** I say that we should stop the use of mobile phones in our college.

❖ **YOU:** I agree if it is applicable only to the classrooms. (Partial/conditional agreement)

6. Disagreement

Although it is true that stopping the use of mobile phones may have some advantages, I do not think it is a good idea. (Strong disagreement) While I agree that stopping the use of mobile phones may have some advantages, I feel that we should discuss it thoroughly. (Polite disagreement)

7. Decisions and Intentions

♥ We may have good intentions, but if our decisions are incorrect, our discussions may not yield fruitful results.

♥ While an intention is what we intend or plan to do, a decision is what we will be doing.

♥ For instance, when we may intend to travel by air but decide to do so only when our ticket is confirmed.

♥ So, while intentions may refer to a probability of a desired action, decisions refer to settling or fixing on the same.

♥ At times intentions and decisions may be the same while at times, they may be different. During a discussion, we may have to express both.

♥ I wish/would like to adopt..; we are keen to bring in changes…; the company is eager to introduce…are used for expressing intentions while I will adopt…; we are bringing in changes…; the company is introducing…, etc. are used to express decisions. Look at the following statements:

- ♥ It is not a good idea to stop the use of mobile phones in college. What I would like to do/I may do is to stop using them in classrooms. (intention)

- ♥ It is not a good idea to stop the use of mobile phones in college. What I will do/I am doing is to stop its use in classrooms. (decision)

8. Raising Questions

You might have watched the discussions in parliamentary sessions that involve a flurry of questions. Raising questions is essential in discussions and an inherent part of it. Questions may be raised for various purposes, such as to get more information, to paraphrase, to raise a doubt, to make an offer, to seek permission, etc. See the following examples.

Could you elaborate more on that?

Are you trying to say that use of mobile phones should be completely stopped?

Shall I do this for you?

Shall we go ahead with discussing this point?

9. Giving and Receiving Effective Feedback

❖ Feedback is an important tool in assessing the effectiveness of communication. Both giving and receiving feedback are necessary to make a discussion goal-oriented.

❖ The following are a few useful tips when giving feedback: Be specific rather than general: if the topic is 'stopping the use of mobile phones in you college', provide specific feedback on the ideas to be implemented in your college rather than on those meant for universities in general.

❖ Check the accuracy: ensure that you know exactly what ideas were discussed before providing feedback on each.

❖ Demonstrate your good intentions: show that you are giving feedback with the intention of achieving the goal of the discussion.

❖ Commenting on the positive aspects first and then on the negatives is always helpful in this regard.

❖ Describe what you feel about other's ideas rather than evaluating the persons who spoke them.

❖ Choose the right time to give a feedback: Ideas are generally taken up one by one during discussions.

❖ Hence, feedback should ideally be given at the end of each topic discussed. Seeking feedback is always helpful in gauging the contribution of our points/views to the goal of the discussion.

❖ Hence, always show interest in receiving feedback from fellow participants. The following guidelines can be followed when receiving feedback:

Be open-minded while receiving feedback.

Display appropriate body language to show interest in receiving feedback.

Listen completely before reacting to the feedback.

If your views are criticized and the flaws pointed out, accept the comments if they are true of explain politely if your views are correct.

Suspend your judgment while listening to the feedback.

Ask questions or for examples if you need clarification on any feedback.

You can also ask the other participants' view on the feedback.

Appreciate the people who have provided feedback.

10. Discussing and Delivering Negative News

➤ Raising sensitive issues around improper behavior (e.g., ill-treating junior employees), providing a critical performance review (the employee having not performed well during a project), etc. may be considered as difficult or negative issues.

➤ Discussions on these matters generally involve a lot of emotional reactions both verbal and nonverbal.

➤ Such discussions may have to be handled skillfully so as to avoid unpleasant scenes during the discussion sessions.

➤ Follow these guidelines: Know the attitude of person with whom the difficult issue has to be discussed.

➤ Know the message to be delivered and the ensuing result. Identify the right words/language to be used during the discussion (e.g., 'I know that the project has gone wrong.

➢ I want to explore with you how to make it better.')   Do not point out mistakes personally, i.e., using the 'you' attitude (e.g., 'you have spoiled the project,'). Follow LEAD (listen explore, and deliver a solution) approach.

➢ Manage emotions. Do not allow others to dominate during the discussion of negative issues. Avoid blaming others.

➢ Instead, tell them how they could have behaved/performed in order to contribute significantly to the progress of their organization.

➢ Do not allow personal beliefs and values to interfere with your judgment. 'Try to look at things from others' perspectives as well. Be concise and timely.

➢ Be sincere in your discussion. (e.g., express your concern for the receiver). Use empathy:

➢ Imagine yourself in the receiver's position and then phrase the message. Keep the lines of communication open even after the discussion (e.g., if the receiver wants information regarding any other source or further assistance, provide the help if possible).

➢ Discussing difficult issues may be uncomfortable. However, if it is done with concern, compassion, care, and credibility, it would be possible to retain the goodwill of the receiver. Handled appropriately, such interactions may even help build a pleasant relationship.