

SMALL GROUP TECHNIQUES

Small group techniques are the means or methods used in group situation to bring about group act. There are time-tested techniques like lecture, debate, forum, dialogue, symposium, brain storming, etc through which group actions may be accomplished.

I. Lecture

It is normally used in formal situations. It requires thorough preparation on the part of the person who delivers the lecture.

Dynamic characteristics of lecture method

1. As an extremely formal technique, the lecture permits only one-way communication.
2. It allows for complete and detailed communication without any interruptions.
3. It is a very rapid method of conveying information to a group.
4. Control of audience is rigid since it is entirely in the hands of the speaker.
5. It is an abstract form of group interaction and hence calls for a high degree of competence from speakers and high level of audience co-operation.
6. Group members and leaders can put little control over content and approach.
7. It is difficult to measure the effect of speech on the group in an objective way.

Purposes

1. To present information in a formal and direct manner.
2. To supply expert information on a particular topic.
3. To identify the problems / problem areas in a given situation.
4. To explore the facts of the problem.
5. To explore one or several solutions to a problem
6. To have additional reading.
7. To inspire the group.
8. To direct/entertain the group by using skilled/experienced people
9. To share the experience of another person.

How to use this method

1. Have clearly in mind the objectives of the meeting and prepare the lecture accordingly.
2. Consider the other alternative means that may be used to accomplish the objective. It also depends on audience nature.
3. Provide a situation in which group members are physically comfortable.
4. Inform the speaker of the topic and make him to feel at ease in the speaking situation.

How to organise subject matter

1. **Chronological arrangement** - Introductory lectures are amenable for this type of arrangement.
2. **Logical arrangement** - Step by step approach. The abstract subject may consist concepts and principles. The lecturer should process the information from simple ideas to complex ones.
3. **Structural arrangement** - The lecturer may start either from lower unit or higher unit in the approved hierarchy.
4. **Arrangement according to importance:** This is called psychological approach. The information may be presented by arranging the points according to their importance.
5. **Arrangement according to contrast:** Contrasting facts can be an effective way of learning and it leaves a strong impression about the good effects of particular information.

How a lecture should be delivered

1. Don't write the entire lecture and read out the contents.
2. Look at your audience from time to time to get a personal approach.
3. Don't follow a rigid type of lecture.
4. Avoid nervous type of lecturing.

Cautions

1. Do not overuse this method.
2. The lecture is inferior to symposium for bringing out the divergent views up on the subject.
3. It is not so effective in moving a group towards consensus or action.
4. It is inferior to panel discussion in order to bring about a resolution of differences of opinion among groups.
5. It is inferior to role play in getting group members to get the point of view of others in a controversial situation.
6. The major defect is that it is the easiest way out for the speaker who has formal responsibility for group meeting.
7. The technique demands high level of competence on the part of speakers.
8. The group should be a responsive one and should have urge to learn from the lecture

II. Symposium

Symposium is a group of talks, speeches or lectures presented by several individuals on various phases of a single subject problem. The identified problem must have effective components amenable for the sessions.

A moderator often controls time and subject matter. Properly used, the talk should not exceed 20 minutes and the total time should not exceed one hour. In a symposium, the audience may or may not participate.

Dynamic characteristics of symposium:

1. Symposium is relatively a formal method and comparatively easy to organise.
2. It allows for systematic and relatively complete expression of ideas in an uninterrupted fashion.
3. Complex subject problems may readily be divided into logical component parts.
4. Structuring of presentation is obtained by pre-symposium agreement among participants.
5. There should be a minimum of duplication and time allotment should lead to precise and logical presentation
6. Control of subject and time can be done by pre-agreement
7. There is a minimum interaction between the participants.

Purposes: This method may be chosen

1. To present basic information i.e., facts or points of view of a particular subject problem
2. To present a relatively complete and systematic expression of ideas without interruption.
3. To bring together and focus different points of view within a logical, more generalised framework or content.

Symposium has a moderator/chairman

Duties of Moderator / Chairman: -

1. He should meet the symposium speakers well before the meeting and secure agreement on logical arrangement
2. Outline the areas to be covered and get an agreement on sequence and time allowances
3. He should meet them immediately before the meeting to review the above points
4. At the meeting, he should give the general setting of the problem and point out its significance, describe the sequence of each speaker and set out the atmosphere for listening and thinking by the group.
5. Inform the group of the procedure to be followed including the role of speakers and role of the group during and after the symposium.
6. Introduce each speaker in detail as his turn comes and establish the qualification of speakers to speak on the subject. This makes an impression over the audience.

7. Perform additional functions depending on what procedure has been set up to follow including summarising or follow up techniques such as
 - a) Give each speaker a specific time for a short statement of clarification
 - b) Allow each speaker to ask a few questions of any of the other speakers.
 - c) Involve the audience in direct questioning from the floor.

Duties of speakers:

1. They should attend the “planning meetings” organized by the moderator.
2. They should prepare concise well organised presentations that can be given within the time allotted.
3. Present the prepared material clearly and concisely in the allotted time.

Cautions

1. Care must be taken in choosing the subject and breaking it into meaningful and manageable component parts.
2. Careful selection is important in naming the moderator and the speakers.
3. Unbiased members who can approach the subject logically and present it without over emotional involvement should be selected.
4. The moderator is just not a speech maker but interpreter of speeches in the right time. He should be able to treat it properly.
5. In planning, limit the time of speeches and set a method for enforcing the time limitations.

While logical, precise presentations are the key to good symposium, the intent of the larger group must be stimulated and maintained if the symposium is to fulfill its objective.

III. Panel discussion

A group of speaker's usually 2-8 participants as panelist in a supposedly informal conversation on a topic for the benefit of listeners constitute the panel discussion.

It may be described as an informal committee discussion overheard by an audience. The form of discussion is conversational (i.e.) no speeches by members or by moderator should be permitted. A leader as a moderator or chairman introduces the speakers to the audience and encourages less talkative by administering effective questions.

Types of panel discussion

i) Chairman - member panel

This is also otherwise called Question - Answer panel. The presentation of the panel is actually a series of questions by the chairman and answers by the members of the panel.

ii) Set - speech panel

This is the pre-arranged panel. After the chairman introduces the topic, each one makes a prepared speech. When the last member made the speech, the panel is turned into a forum.

iii) Conversational Panel

After the members are introduced and topics communicated, the panel members hold a conversation on the topic with the questions and comments going from one member to another. From time to time, the chairman may throw out the questions or remarks to help the conversation.

Dynamic characteristics

1. The atmosphere of the panel discussion may be informal or at times formal also.
2. It can expose and focus on different points of view, facts, attitudes and a subject problem.
3. It allows for maximum interaction and inter-stimulation between panel members.
4. It often increases the interest of the audience with the specific subject because of active and dramatic presentation of subject matter.
5. It is a useful method of defining points of agreement, areas of disagreement and of approaching consensus.
6. It divides responsibility among the panel members by arranging prior meetings

Purposes: This method might be chosen

1. To increase an informal atmosphere for communication in the group
2. To identify the problems and issues to be considered and to explore them
3. To give the audience an understanding of the component parts of the problem
4. To get different facts and points of view brought into a discussion framework
5. To weight the advantages and disadvantages of the course of action
6. To motivate the larger group for the constructive thought and the action
7. To determine the areas of agreement and discuss the issue - bases and strive for consensus
8. To force a group for enabling them to join in the problem- solving process

Components of panel discussion

1. Chairman / Moderator
2. Panel members
3. Audience/Group members

Role Expectations of

a. Chairman

1. The chairman should select the panel members with utmost care.
2. The chairman should identify the people who are interested in the problem, have facts and opinions, represent different views and he/she must have had the required experiences.
3. The chairman should plan the meeting and should do the required physical arrangements.
4. The chairman should introduce the panel members to the audience.
5. The chairman should open the discussion with a relevant statement that will immediately focus the attention of the audience.
6. The chairman should ask the reflective thought provoking questions.
7. The chairman should probe for points of disagreement for leading the discussion.
8. The Chairman should present an effective summary that may lead for action.

b. Panel members

1. The panel members should prepare material and organise thoughts so cogently
2. The panel member should set an example of careful, reflective and rational thinking.
3. They should listen thoughtfully to the comments of other members and strive to get new points.
4. The panel members should watch for a right moment or occasion to present his/her view points.
5. The panel members should keep the atmosphere informal and conversational.
6. The panel members should contribute to the discussion by respecting other's views.

c. Group members

1. The group should have clear in mind the objectives of the meeting
2. The group should make sure that the topic selected be timely and significant.
3. The group can also play an effective role by selecting the chairman moderator who is unbiased, who can think rapidly and who effect reflective questions and finally summarise well.

Cautions

1. The success of this technique depends on the moderator and the panel members.
2. The discussion must not be monopolised and by one or two members.
3. The planning is an absolute necessity for the successful performance of this technique.
4. Allow enough time. Panels shorter than 30 minutes may not be a successful one.
5. The panel discussion should be concluded while the general interest of the group is high.

IV. Debate

Debate is a series of lectures for and against on a given topic by knowledgeable persons. The normal pattern is to have two teams on affirmative and negative side of the issue. The number of persons on both the sides should be equal. Each team will have a leader supported by his team members and there will be a chair or moderator who presides over the discussion.

Dynamic characteristics of Debate:

1. It can be easily organised at short notice.
2. It helps to attract the attention of audience and hold it to the end.
3. Topics with reference to felt needs may be identified so as to enthuse the audience throughout the debate.
4. Audiences are instigated to think seriously and analyse by the proceedings of the debate.
5. The range of the topic as well as the time can be prefixed on agreement.
6. It enables the participants to have a complete and unreserved expression of their ideas.

Purposes: This method is useful when

1. Topics of controversial nature are dealt with.
2. Formality of presentation is not an impediment to the group's listening and understanding.
3. When the group needs to be exposed to the pros and cons of the topic or decision.
4. When the participants have the capacity to present their side in a meaningful and interesting manner.
5. When there is a necessity to communicate different points of view in a larger group where total involvement is not possible.
6. Group members have only low level participation so as to stimulate their thought and action.
7. There is favourable atmosphere in the group to accept ideas presented by logical arguments of the participants.

Duties of the Moderator / Chairman

1. The chairman should meet the participants and get the sequence of appearance and time allowances.
2. Inform the group of the procedure to be followed including the role of the participants and the group.
3. The chairman should introduce the leaders and participants to establish their competence on the topic identified.
4. After the delivery of speech by each participant, the chairman should give a summary drawing the attention of people on salient features covered.

5. Chairman should throw a friendly challenge to the next speaker to disprove the previous speaker's points thereby increasing the anxiety of group to listen more carefully over the issues to be covered.
6. He should make arrangements by intimating the time prescribed for each participant without exceeding the limit.
7. The chairman should deliver an unbiased judgment, which should be logically acceptable, however, appreciating the laudable points of the conquered side also.

Tips for preparation of a good Debate

1. A good and interesting introduction. It may start with a story, good joke, a striking statement or citation, strong questions, etc relevant to the topic.
2. Give live examples to make the speech interesting
3. Include the details which are specific, familiar, unusual, humorous and controversial so that the debate is charged with vitality.
4. Initiate efforts to refer to the negative sides of the previous speaker and assist your points of view with reliable facts and examples.
5. Be sincere, courageous and express your views on support of your side without hesitation in a strong and persuasive manner
6. End up with impressive conclusion made up of the formal summary and a direct appeal to look the audience to your side within the allotted time.

Cautions

1. The range of subject should not be out of the purview of and interest of the group.
2. Emotional debate may become highly antagonistic and lead to conflict between groups.
3. Motive to win a debate may lead to distortion of information leading to ignoring the primary need of the audience.
4. It is useful only under certain purposes and under certain conditions.
5. The moderator and participants should be knowledgeable and should not be over enthusiastic and carried away by emotions.

V Forum

Question – answer period - It is a discussion period that may follow any one of the above methods of presentation. It consists of question period in which members of the audience may ask questions or make brief statements. The forum provides an opportunity for the audience to clear up obscure points and to raise questions for additional information. It also gives individuals an opportunity to state briefly their understanding of a point and see whether they have interpreted correctly the material presented. It is primarily a means of understanding information.

VI Buzz Sessions (Phillips 66 format)

With large groups when there is limited time for discussion, the audience may be divided into smaller units for a short period. This is called “buzz session” or ‘huddle system’ or “Phillips 66”. Groups of 6 to 8 persons get together after receiving Instructions to discuss about a specific issue assigned. The secretary of each small group will report the findings or questions to the entire audience when they are reassembled. This is actually a device to get more people to participate in a forum than would be the case otherwise.

VII Workshop It is essentially a long meeting from one day to several weeks, involving all the delegates in which the problems being discussed are considered by delegates in small private groups. There must be a planning session where all are involved in the beginning. There must be considerable time for work sessions. There must be a summarizing and evaluation sessions at the close. In the workshop method, the participants share their ideas, experiences and skills and on this basis produce something in the end a report or a programme for future action, a publication, a visual or any other material objects.

VIII Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a specialised form of discussion method that can be used in a training situation. It is potentially an active teaching mode but its efficiency depends on what we do and skill of the participants in arranging and conducting it. Brainstorming refers to the rapid generation of ideas, initially not critical and evaluated about a topic or concern in a given period. The poured in information is later sorted, synthesised and discussed. It helps to identify problems.

Brain storming is a type of small group interaction designed to encourage the free introduction of ideas on an unrestricted basis and without any limitations to feasibility. It is a form of thinking in which judicious reasoning gives way to creative initiative. Participants are encouraged to list for a period of time all the ideas that come to their minds regarding some problem and are asked not to judge the outcome. At a later period all the contributions will be sorted out, evaluated and perhaps later adopted.

Many trainers believe that brainstorming means a random and unstructured way of generating ideas and solutions. This is far from the truth. Brainstorming is certainly not a straightforward method of decision - making or problem solving. At the heart of this method is the principle that as ideas or solutions are proposed, comments and evaluation are suspended until the time this step is completed and the group is ready to move on to the next step of analysis. It is also based on the premise that it is not good to shoot down an idea or proposal without properly considering its merits and demerits in an unbiased manner. Another posit on which this method is based is the principle of synergy. It is possible to

generate more ideas collectively than the sum of the ideas that would be produced individually

i) Objectives of the method

In the context of a training programme, this method may have any of the following objectives:

- 1) Generating a wide range of solutions or options in solving a problem, addressing an issue/situation or in taking a decision, thus stimulating creativity in the group.
- 2) Developing a positive attitude among the participants by encouraging them to listen carefully to others, suspend judgement and outright rejection of their ideas, and refrain from negative comments without going into their merits and demerits.
- 3) Encouraging shy and reluctant participants to share their ideas and views without the fear of getting an immediate negative reaction from other colleagues. The members can become open about their thoughts and viewpoints.
- 4) Promoting attitudes that will help the participants work more effectively in groups.

ii) Steps in Organising a Brainstorming Session

Learning in this exercise occurs because participants discipline their inputs to the discussion. Control occurs through instructions and through the discussion leader. The following are the steps in organising the session:

a) Generation of ideas

The starting point is to generate a large number of ideas within a short span of time. Thus, there is a comparatively greater emphasis on quantity and encouraging members to think and be creative in generating new ideas, proposals or options. Quality or merit is assessed later lest it should inhibit or even stifle the process of generation of ideas. It is the task of the discussion leader to ensure that this basic principle is not violated. No discussion should be permitted, except to clarify a thought or statement. It is likely that some of the ideas put forward by the members may be totally outlandish. However, sometimes a sound solution may emerge from proposals that, at the outset, may appear to be impractical or inappropriate. These ideas may be further worked upon by the group and refined to make them more relevant, in line with the criteria set out by the group and acceptable to it.

b) Amending ideas

The discussion leader can intervene if the ideas expressed need to be amended through elaboration, editing or consolidation. He / She also has the task to assist those who are not in a position to appropriately articulate their views. If certain ideas are repeated, the discussion leader can bring this to the attention of the participant and ask for another option. The leader should, however, avoid any analysis at this stage. The leader should also ensure that ideas expressed earlier should not be opposed or repudiated.

c) Posting all the ideas on a Flip chart

It will be helpful to post all the ideas generated through this exercise on a flip chart. This will reinforce the contributions of those that have contributed earlier and serve as a point of reference and an encouragement for those who follow.

d) Analysing ideas

Once all the ideas are posted, the discussion leader should proceed to analyse them, going in chronological order. It is necessary that until this step, the discussion leader should make it clear that judgement is suspended and the merits and demerits are not expressed. The analysis takes place in light of the objectives of the exercise and the criteria set by the group. All factors, which could have any bearing on the final decision of the group, should be duly considered.

e) Action Planning

The group is now ready to plan action on the basis of the decision arrived at through consensus and at this stage it outlines steps to implement the decision.

VII Seminar It is one of the most important forms of group discussion and is more formal in nature. The seminar enables a study in depth to be made in specific areas under the guidance of experts. The discussion leader introduces the topic to be discussed. In seminar, the discussion papers prepared by the participants on the basis of their study and research are presented. Members of the audience discuss the subject to which ready answers are not available. A seminar may have two or more plenary sessions. This method has the advantage of pooling together the opinions of a large number of persons. At the end some conclusions and recommendations are arrived at, for future action.

VIII Conference Pooling of experiences and opinions among a group of people who have special qualifications in an area.

IX Dialogue

Dialogue is a discussion carried on in front of a group by two knowledgeable persons capable of thoughtful communicative discourse on specific subjects.

It is less formal than lecture or panel discussion and has many unique dynamics or advantages of its own.

Dynamic characteristics of dialogue:

1. It can be very informal and conversational.

2. It allows direct and easy communication of information and points of view.
3. It allows for mutual support and sharing of responsibility between two persons.
4. It allows for interpersonal stimulation.
5. It aids unskilled speakers in presenting their ideas.
6. It usually create great interest among other persons in the group.
7. It is simple in form and easy to plan and carry out.
8. It allows for clarification, logic validation and consistency as the discussion develops and permits expression of two points of views.

Purposes: This method may be chosen -

1. To present facts, opinions, views in an informal conversational manner.
2. To create interest in a subject.
3. To focus attention on an issue or problem.
4. To explore in detail different points of view or obtain agreement on different points of view.
5. To create a desire and motivation for reflective thinking.
6. To rapidly set a frame works for thought and discussion and give basic facts preparatory to general group discussion.

How to use this method

Select a timely and significant topic with which at least two group members are familiar.

1. Select dialogue team members. They should be able to work in team, share leadership, guide conversation, interact, summarise and provide needed transition.
2. Decide on the person to introduce the dialogue and to take responsibility for answering questions after the dialogue and to lead the discussion.

Responsibilities of the participants in a dialogue

The participants should

1. Arrange a meeting before the presentation at which an agreement should be reached on
2. The frame work for discussion
3. How the subject will be introduced and how the framework for discussion is set.
4. Tentative timing for major points
5. Responsibilities for summarising and integrating the points.
6. Arrange the physical setting so that all members can see, hear and feel the dialogue situation.
7. Fulfill the designated roles objectively and without over emotional involvement
- 8.
9. Assist the chairman in clarifying questions and summarisation.

Cautions

1. The topic should be one in which the group is interested.
2. Keep the discussion at a level that can be understood by the group.
3. Do not develop the discussion too rapidly.
4. Avoid making speeches; and reading written materials.
5. Share the responsibility; if not the dialogue may end up as interview or a series of lengthy speeches.
6. Although the major interaction is between the dialogue participants, they should not get so enamoured with each other and their ideas that they may forget they must communicate to the other group members.

Role play

Learner involvement is a critical factor in successful teaching. People learn more effectively not by being taught in conventional way but a in participating mode. Role-play encourages active involvement of learners. It combines effective learning with an enjoyable experience.

Basic descriptions

1. Participants act out a situation involving human interaction
2. Participants act freely rather than from a script.
3. There will be observers who do not portray any roles.
4. Feedback is provided through follow - up discussion.

Steps in conducting role play

1. Prepare the class/settings for the experience by familiarising them with a problem situation they can relate to.
2. Discuss the situation and help the class to see the nature of the problem.
3. Orient the class on role playing technique and define their roles.
4. Request for voluntary participation and select persons for the roles.
5. Give the participants a short preparation time.
6. Prepare the observers to the subject area, nature of problem/issue and the current happenings.
7. Execute the role play in the identified place
8. Conduct a follow up discussion involving both participants and observers.
9. Repeat the role-play if class is still interesting.

Outcomes of role-play

1. It provides opportunity to examine various roles in situations that speaks of reality
2. It gives insight into the roles a person who plays in real life and how effectively one play those roles.

3. It illustrates principles related to the subject matter.
4. It expands participants empathy
5. It demonstrates in advance how students trainees would probably react under some real situations.