



Deliberation

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What is it?

There are multiple, overlapping conceptions of deliberation. Some focus on rational discourse working toward consensus; others broadly incorporate other forms of communication such as rhetoric, storytelling, and humor. Gastil and Black provide a broad conception of deliberation that can be used to understand a wide variety of contexts—small group discussion, public legislatures, juries, media, and international organizations. Deliberation occurs when people carefully examine a problem and arrive at a reasoned solution through inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view. This understanding of deliberation highlights its analytic dimensions (create an information base, prioritize key values, identify and weigh solutions, make the best decision) and social dimensions (equal speaking opportunities, mutual comprehension and consideration, respect).

Who uses the concept?

In the early 1990s, there was a deliberative turn in political theory. This spurred normative political theory, empirical research on deliberative practice, and practitioners who design and run deliberative forums. Academic work on deliberation spans disciplinary boundaries; deliberative scholarship appears in political science, communication, public policy, sociology, public administration, agricultural extension, community development, environmental studies, and planning and design. Prominent practitioner organizations include the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, America Speaks, and Everyday Democracy.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Deliberation is closely related to intercultural dialogue in two respects. First, dialogue and deliberation are close cousins, wherein deliberation can be seen as dialogue with a focus on making decisions about a public issue. Second, inclusion is a fundamental value of deliberative democracy. Deliberation requires reciprocity between diverse perspectives, identities, and social groups. In practice, this means that deliberation is frequently intercultural and intergroup, and deliberative practitioners must be skilled in cultivating intercultural interactions.

What work remains?

Early research on deliberation focused on indirect measures. Scholars recently have called for close analysis of actual interaction during deliberation to understand the discourse practices that comprise deliberation. Scholars are developing more nuanced approaches to evaluating deliberative interventions and improving deliberative designs.

Resources

- Black, L. W. (2008). Deliberation, storytelling, and dialogic moments. *Communication Theory*, 18, 93-116.
- Gastil, J., & Black, L. W. (2008). [Public deliberation as the organizing principle for political communication research](#). *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 4(3).