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Debate, Discussion, Deliberative Dialogue

Deliberation is a particular kind of talk. It is the kind of talking that people do when they realize that they are responsible for making decisions and choices—or giving guidance to others who will make those decisions—that will not only affect them but will affect others and will also have costs and consequences along with the good things that may happen. Deliberation is hard work. People work at looking at the pros and cons of each approach, or perspective. That means making a real effort to find out how other people see the issue and, more importantly, *why* they see it the way they do. In deliberation, this means listening to the people you don't agree with as carefully as to the people you do agree with.

It is, of course, possible to have a great discussion about issues and problems; sharing opinions, personal experiences, and favorite solutions. And that's a fine, and often satisfying, thing to do. Or it is possible to debate an issue; presenting evidence supporting your chosen view, countering and undercutting the arguments that others present for their chosen views, persuading, and trying to win by presenting the best and most eloquent argument. But with deliberation, talk goes beyond just discussion or debate to trying to understand the problem together and to finding solutions that will be best for everyone. Deliberation happens when a group of people work on a problem as if solving it is up to them and no one else, and when they recognize that they and others will be living with the consequences, both good and bad, of the choices they make.

Debate

- Winners and losers
- Search for glaring differences
- Search for weaknesses in others' positions
- Counter another's position at the expense of the relationship
- Invest wholeheartedly in your beliefs
- Listen to find flaws and counterarguments
- Is oppositional and seeks to prove the other wrong
- The goal is winning
- Defends assumptions as truth

Most useful when: A position or course of action is being advocated and winning is the goal

Discussion

- Back and forth exchange of information, stories, experiences, viewpoints,...
- May focus on a topic, theme, idea, problems, issues, etc., may be broad or focused
- A generic term meaning talking together
- Focuses on the experience of talking without any particular goal or desired outcomes
- May be between two people or among many
- May mean many kinds of talking together (such as a deliberative discussion, informative discussion, debate, dialogue, etc.)
- Usually implies participants are not adversarial or competing as in debate

Most useful when: People want to talk together about something without desiring any particular outcome from the conversation.

Deliberative Dialogue

- Goal is shared understanding of the issue/problem
- Examining costs and consequences of even most favored approaches
- Assumes that many people have pieces of an answer and a workable solution
- Listening to understand and find meaning
- Presents assumptions for re-evaluation
- Opens possibilities for new solutions
- Leads to mutual understanding of differences and ways to act even with those differences
- People explore what's important to them and others by asking questions

Most useful when: A decision or criteria for a decision, about the best way(s) to approach an issue or problem is needed.