

# Dialogue vs. Debate: Causes and Consequences of Two Approaches to Disagreement

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## Abstract

- We study two modes of discussing disagreement:
  - Dialogue = goal of understanding each other's opinions
  - Debate = goal of convincing the other person
- People are spontaneously more likely to engage in a dialogue (vs. debate) when they perceive shared goals and values with the other person
- People reach better-quality decisions when instructed to engage in a dialogue (vs. debate), through greater sharing of information

## Studies 1-5 – Antecedents

### Method

- Participants were asked to imagine discussing disagreement OR were asked to recall a specific disagreement
- We varied numerous features of the disagreement (e.g. about the other person, topic, etc.) and measured whether people indicated they would approach the conversation in a more dialogue-like way or a more debate-like way

### Findings

Features that differentially influenced people's approach are listed below (**blue = more dialogue**; **red = more debate**):

- Level of disagreement (**a little** vs. **a lot**)
- Certainty about one's opinion (**not certain** vs. **very certain**)
- Topic type (**not moral** vs. **moral**)
- Personal relevance of topic (**low** vs. **high**)
- Other's goal (**to learn** vs. **to convince**)
- Cares about the other's impression of oneself (**yes** vs. **no**)
- Shared group membership (**yes** vs. **no**)

Perceiving shared goals and values with the disagreeing counterpart mediates the effect on dialogue (not debate)

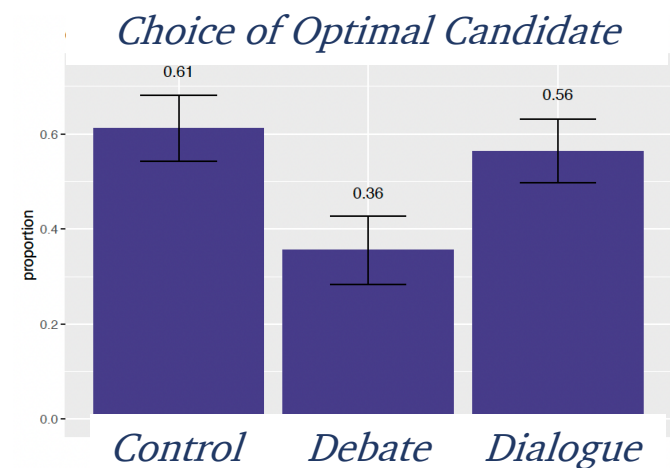
## Study 6 – Consequences

### Method

- Pairs of participants were asked to jointly make a hiring decision, and were (unknowingly) given somewhat different information (hidden profile task)
- Some pairs of participants were instructed to approach the discussion with the goal of understanding each other's opinions (dialogue), others with the goal of convincing the other person (debate), and others no instructions (control)

### Findings

- Participants shared more information, and made better hiring decisions, in the dialogue condition than the debate condition



## Discussion

Leading people to perceive greater shared goals and values with their disagreeing counterpart may help them focus on understanding each other (dialogue) rather than convincing each other (debate), which in turn may lead them to make better-quality decisions