

Conversational Receptiveness: Improving engagement with opposing views

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We examine “conversational receptiveness” – the use of language to communicate one’s willingness to thoughtfully engage with opposing views. We develop an algorithm to identify the linguistic profile of receptiveness (Studies 1A-B). We then show that in contentious policy discussions, government executives who were rated as more receptive - according to our algorithm and their partners, but not their own self- evaluations - were considered better teammates, advisors, and workplace representatives (Study 2). We also show that conversational receptiveness is reciprocated in kind, and extend this result to two field settings where conflict is endemic to productivity. In discussion forums for online courses on political topics, receptive posts receive more receptive replies (Study 3A). Furthermore, wikipedia editors who are more receptive are less prone to receive personal attacks (Study 3B). Overall, we find that conversational receptiveness is reliably measurable, has meaningful relational consequences, and can be misunderstood by people in conflict.