

The Knowledge-Based Decision Making (KBDM) process was used by the Hope for Today AFG group in reaching a group conscience decision. A handout that was provided at an Area 61 Assembly, as well as the overview given at that same time by Carol V., were invaluable in providing the foundation to build from in our attempt to apply the process within our group. For those that are not particularly familiar with the process, perhaps a limited summary would be helpful.

KDBM: "It's about knowing what you need to know to make a decision. You must be informed because your primary role is to bring your expertise to the Conference [i.e. meeting], come to an understanding of the information being provided, and then be able to articulate it. It is important that Conference members [i.e. meeting members] use each other as a resource. It's about trust." (From 2006 Conference Summary, pg 6, as cited in the *Knowledge-Based Decision Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience: Brief History* handout provided at an Area 61 Assembly.)

There are 5 essential elements of the KBDM process: 1) Open communication between leadership and membership 2) Dialogue before decision making 3) Common access to full information for all decision-makers 4) Confidence in the competency and good will of all involved in the process 5) Trust in the process and with each other.

Five group conscience questions promote reaching an informed decision: 1) What do we know about our members' or prospective members' wants, needs, or preferences that are relevant to this discussion? 2) What do we know about the capacity and strategic position of the organization relative to this issue? 3) What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics that are relevant to this discussion? 4) What are the ethical implications of our choices (pros and cons)? 5) What do we wish we knew, but don't?

Given this background, let me add that this was the first attempt by our group at the KBDM process and that we may not necessarily have followed the process perfectly. However, it did give our discussion a structure and resulted in an informed group conscience harmoniously. Everyone was invited to participate and the voice of each member was respected. We did not rush the process. Initially I asked that our group consider the issue, do any necessary research on our own, and share information that would be helpful to the discussion. Then we set some preliminary parameters: setting a length of time for topic discussion at each meeting so that we could still have our regular meeting time though we could use as many meetings as necessary to reach a decision; deciding whether the final decision would be based on a majority or unanimity vote; encouraging the use of not only our own experiences but also any pertinent information from our CAL and the Service Manual.

Our Hope for Today AFG, in re-organizing our tape lending library and setting up a CD lending library, discovered that over the years some AA tapes had found their way into our lending library. Most of our members had not really recognized the 'infiltration' of AA tapes. The question came up in trying to compose a CD lending library, "Should AA talks also be available as they already are in the tape lending library?" This begged the questions, "Should AA talks be available in our tape lending library?" Some members felt that, since this was an Al-Anon meeting and only CAL/materials should be used during the meeting, the use of AA materials was inappropriate since it might be interpreted as affiliation and turn some people, particularly newcomers, away from our meeting. Another concern was if we permitted AA tapes/CD's we might set a precedent opening the door for other 12 Step group materials to show up. Other members felt that hearing AA talks contributed to Al-Anon members being better able to understand the disease aspect of alcoholism, promoted more compassion for the alcoholic, and enriched their own recovery. It seemed like a good time to attempt our first exposure to the KBDM process in reaching a group conscience. So the issue was "Should AA audio materials be made available for check out at our Al-Anon meeting?"

The 5 essential group conscience questions were not handed out but they did come out quite naturally in the discussions that occurred over the next number of weeks. Previously the KBDM handout had been summarized in reporting back to the group following the Assembly so there had been some exposure for all in the group via that. Members talked about how meaningful the AA tapes were to them and whether they saw providing audio materials from AA as an asset or detriment. (Question 1 *members wants, needs or preferences*) Our discussion incorporated perspectives from not only individuals but also with consideration of us as a group and what would be appropriate to Al-Anon principles as a whole. (Question 2 *what was best for us and aligned with Al-Anon*) Discussion of the issue in light of the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts was helpful. Traditions 1, 4 and 6 offered relevant insights as well as personal experiences of members and their interpretations of all three of our legacies as they related to the use of AA materials being provided by our group. (Question 3 *current realities* and Question 4 *ethical implications to drive a decision for or against the use of AA materials*). Finally we listened to members share their experience in visiting other groups that had lending libraries and what they found there as well as suggested that members ask around to see what other groups were doing in providing materials. (Question 5 *what do we wish we knew*) The process actually went smoothly without the script of the KBDM questions being provided for the members and perhaps more people felt comfortable sharing their opinions/perspectives as things evolved in the communication without the structure being driven by a paper in front of them. Personally having background knowledge about the process not only was essential but it definitely made it easier to serve as a facilitator for the discussions.

Rather than calling a special meeting to discuss the issue of whether AA materials should be available at our meetings for check out, we spent about 10-15 minutes of regular meeting times with the hope more members would participate and, therefore, more people would have the chance to present their point of view. All comments were welcomed and respected. Everyone in the group attending the first session contributed to determining that 1) the vote would not be taken until everyone who wanted to had a chance to share their perspective even if that process took a number of meetings and 2) the decision would be made by a majority vote rather than a unanimous vote. The conversations about this issue continued about four weeks.

There was a consensus, shared by everyone, that AA talks were indeed valuable to our own recoveries and listening to them helped us to see alcoholics not as 'bad people' but rather as 'good people with a bad disease'. AA talks provided greater understanding of the disease aspect as well as the opportunity to break isolation for us since we could see that we weren't the only ones dealing with a disease of perception. The majority of the meeting members had listened to AA talks either in person or recorded ones and viewed that opportunity in a very positive way. However, the issue was not whether or not AA talks were valuable but rather whether they should be provided at our meeting. The outcome of the process and resulting vote was that most of the members felt AA materials could be borrowed from others without the necessity of having them available at our meetings. It was not a unanimous decision but there was enough opportunity for everyone to share their thoughts and feelings so that even the minority voice seemed to have felt heard and were accepting of the outcome. As it says on page 140 in Paths to Recovery, "During our group conscience meetings, I actually saw people disagree without getting angry. After we voted and made a decision, we held hands and said the Serenity Prayer. Even the people in the minority were pleasant because they had had their say. In the end everyone accepted the group's decision." I believe that the process of KBDM and the luxury of giving time to everyone for self-expression promoted a heightened spiritual connection among members in respect for and unity with each other...regardless of our individual points of view!

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