

Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) to reach an Informed Group Conscience

From the Service Manual page 52 - Group Conscience

In order to make an informed group conscience decision, members need access to all the information about the issue they are being asked to discuss, they need clarity on what their discussions hope to accomplish, and they trust each other's motives and capabilities. The guiding principles for the group conscience are always the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts of Service. It may be helpful for the group to review these principles prior to group conscience discussions. Some simple group decisions may be decided quickly; others may take time, but it is by taking the time necessary to hear from all members who want to participate that a group conscience evolves. Each group sets its own guidelines for how they will reach group conscience (time to allow for discussion, when they will vote, what percentage will reflect unanimity and a majority, etc.). By sharing information as equals and taking time for discussion, groups are often able to reach unanimity in their decisions. Once a group conscience decision is made, the entire group agrees to support the decision.

History of using KBDM

At the 2006 World Service Conference (WSC), the concept of using Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) was introduced. The Board of Trustees shared their experience of how the knowledge-based decision-making process had worked for them and their vision of how it could work at the Conference. The Chairperson of the Board remarked that "Everything old is new again," because she believed that making decisions this way was not something new. It was always around, but Al-Anon joined the rest of the world in getting hung up on Robert's Rules of Order and Parliamentary Procedure. The Board chose to adopt the knowledge-based process in its decision making because it realigns the Conference with its original purpose and process.

The Conference Consultant remarked that in her study of the Concepts of Service, she found that this process was returning Al-Anon to its roots. At the early Conferences, it was understood that everyone's input was important and that everyone had something to offer. The Board believes that each Conference member is a valuable resource for the good of Al-Anon as a whole. The Board invites everyone to be a part of big thinking, to collaborate with confidence and to help clarify the spiritual purpose of Al-Anon.

KBDM is 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, come to an understanding of the information being provided, and then be able to articulate it. It is important that Conference members use each other as a resource. It's about trust."

Background information

In a Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) culture, full discussion of an idea takes place (with background information introduced to frame the topic) before a motion is presented. Sometimes these discussions go on over long periods of time (several Conferences) before any decision for a

motion or action is made. KBDM requires a lot of research and information gathering before and possibly even during the discussion. At the end of a discussion, further information and knowledge may be necessary to come to an informed group conscience. A motion need not be made after every discussion. Premature action (e.g., making or amending motions early in the discussion or hastily calling the question) can divert attention from the subject at hand, thus confusing and/or delaying Conference business. With KBDM, the decision reached is usually one that most Conference members can support. *(From the 2015 Conference Procedures Booklet)*

There are five key elements to the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making process to reach an informed group conscience.

1. Open communication between leadership and membership

Which is simply talking to each other and reasoning things out. Leadership is not making decisions for the fellowship as the membership is part of the conversation. KBDM is a process that keeps communication alive.

2. Dialogue before deliberation

Without being bound by a motion first, all concerns are addressed, questions asked, usually without a time limit. This gives everyone (who has voice) who wants to be heard, the opportunity to speak.

This includes positive, negative and minority opinions. Sometimes, after hearing all sides of an issue, no motion is required; all we really needed was the information and the discussion.

*The principle that is important for me to remember is that the God of each of
Our understanding is present for all dialogue, deliberation and decision and that I
Accept the outcome of the group conscience whether I agree or not. I have the
Right to my point of view, but I don't have the right to be right. (R. Buchanan)*

3. All decision-makers have common access to full information

All those involved in the decision will have full access to all information. Concept Four tells us that "Participation is the key to harmony", but it does not say that everyone is invited to participate. We are invited to participate if it is in our role as part of the decision-making body (for example, GRs at the Assembly or District meetings). With that comes trust that the information will be used to prepare us for dialogue. When a decision is made, it is important that we recognize and support the group conscience whether we agree with it or not. This also means that the discussion isn't carried on without everyone being present (so that everyone is party to the same factual information.)

4. We exist in a culture of trust

Trust is a spiritual principle that comes with recovery. As Al-Anon members, we place great value on trust. We learn to have a firm belief that none of us would ever knowingly do anything to hurt Al-Anon. Many times, we simply need more information for the understanding that lets us lighten our load, let go of fear, and experience trust. Our love of the program is exemplified by acting in the best interest of Al-Anon without personal agenda.

5. We have confidence in the competency of our partners

We have to remember everyone in service is a member of Al-Anon, and none of us would ever do anything to hurt Al-Anon. We have learned to presume goodwill.

It is when we understand how our spiritual principles are applied to the decision-making process, that we experience the element of trust in the concept of substantial unanimity or “choosing from the hat.” We presume goodwill. It is based on the following:

- Mutual trust
- Participation
- The Right of Decision
- Designated authority—traditional and legal
- Leadership
- Our spiritual foundation

With this process, it is not necessary to choose sides or develop evidence with an end in mind. Rather, it provides for open dialogue, so everyone’s needs are heard, expectations and preferences are acknowledged, and ethical dimensions are considered, being ever aware of the likely evolution of the environment in which members live. The benefits of this process are great:

- Group members are more likely to support the decision made
- Group effort is more likely to yield better results
- Participants become part of the process, more voices are heard, more solutions generated
- Recognition that responsibility for action rests on everyone
- Actions tend to lean toward the greater good for the organization
- Negativity is diffused

A member is assigned to write down and bullet the items that evolve from the discussion and, at the end of the discussion, the ideas are reviewed. If clarification is needed on anything, members are encouraged to ask questions or share their interpretation of the discussion.

Warranty Three: “that all decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible by unanimity;”

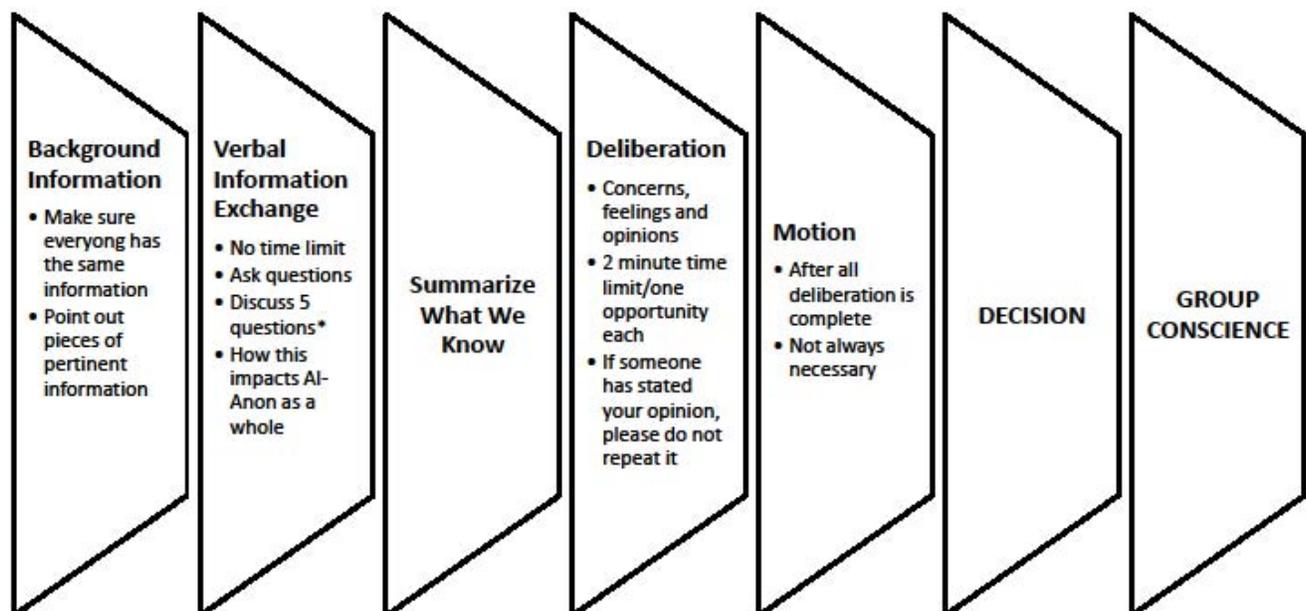
- The idea that everyone participates is a spiritual principle. Our knowledge-based decision-making process models this principle. The minority opinion is respected and there is ample opportunity for sharing. It is the right of every group to determine what unanimity is for their group. The common goal of everyone is to do what is best for Al-Anon.
- If there is not enough information on an issue, keep talking until there is enough to make an informed decision. Appreciate the dissenting opinion but when a group conscience is taken, support it fully. The group conscience is what is best for the majority. Everyone is heard so that we can support the decisions whether we agree or not.
- The knowledge-based decision-making process gives us the freedom to make decisions easier. The outcome is not as important as the way we got there (discussion and an environment that encourages healthy thinking). With enough discussion, a member can accept the group conscience even if it is not what the member thought.
- Informed group conscience is the spirituality of the program. Whether we agree with the group conscience or not, God is in the group conscience. The need for substantial unanimity keeps us talking longer. Everyone can feel that they have been heard. We learn the importance of speaking up and feel safe in doing it. Our votes count, and we take time to hear and respect the minority viewpoint. When we are more informed, we can make a better decision.

The background information used to frame a topic is usually in part the result of answering the 5 KBDM questions.

1. What do we know about our membership's needs, wants and preferences that are relevant to this topic?
2. What do we know about our resources (finances, membership participation, etc.) that is relevant to this topic?
3. What do we know about the current realities (membership, culture, etc.) and our fellowship's environment (technology, spiritual principles, our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts) that is relevant to this topic?
4. What are the ethical implications of our choices (pros and cons)? In other words, will our decision be consistent with our spiritual principles.
5. What do we wish we knew but don't?

THE STEPS OF KNOWLEDGE BASED DECISION MAKING

(Making an informed decision)



***5 Questions for information gathering:**

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