

purpose and process.” To illustrate this, portions of the first *Conference Summary* were read, revealing similarities between the Conference then and now.

The Conference Consultant was introduced and she clarified her role at this Conference. She 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. This Board believes that each Conference member is a valuable resource for the good of Al-Anon as a whole. The Board is inviting everyone to be a part of the big thinking, to collaborate with confidence and to help clarify the vision and mission of Al-Anon. The Al-Anon communication process is clearly circular within the organization, as described in the *Service Manual*. (See diagram on page 7.) It’s how leaders make their decisions. 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, 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.” In closing she quoted the last paragraph from Bill W.’s essay on leadership in Concept Nine: “Thank God that so many of our service leaders at all levels of operation are blessed with the attributes of tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision.”

Knowledge-Based Decision Making: The Process

Members of the Executive Committee who had each been a part of the knowledge-based decision-making process from the beginning of its use by the Board defined the process as looking at a topic through certain agreed-upon criteria to see if it is something that the group wants to pursue. The idea is talked about first to see if the group agrees with all or part of it. If so, pertinent background information is gathered and shared with those responsible for making the decision. Then, if it is decided that the idea is something that is worthwhile, a decision can be made through motion and vote.

Knowledge-based decision-making has four essential elements based on a philosophy of: open communication between leadership and membership; dialogue before deliberation; all decision makers having common access to full information; and it exists in a culture of trust.

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How does this relate to the Twelve Concepts of Service?

It is based on the following:

- mutual trust
- designated authority—traditional and legal
- participation
- leadership
- The Right of Decision
- our spiritual foundation

Why is it a good model?

- It allows thorough examination of mega issues without an end in mind.
- It allows those who make the decision to become far less important than the fact that a good decision is made.
- It is a process for ongoing strategic thinking and strategy development.
- It allows us to develop a reputation for value and nimbleness in carrying the message.

What does this mean for Al-Anon as a whole?

It provides Al-Anon with:

- Recognition as a credible organization
- A reputation for value
- A culture built on trust and communication

The Board has used this process in its meetings since members were first introduced to it by the Chairperson of the Board. There were some members who were unclear as to how it was different from the way decisions had been made in the past. The chart on page 7 shows some comparisons between the traditional value and the knowledge-based value.

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

After the presentation, Conference members shared their thoughts, experiences, and ideas for using this process. Some of their experience follows:

At one Area’s World Service Committee meetings, a District Representative 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 clarifi-

	TRADITIONAL VALUE	KNOWLEDGE-BASED VALUE
LEADERSHIP	Take pride in making good decisions	Take pride in seeing good decisions being made
RESOURCE ALLOCATION	Better to miss an opportunity than make a mistake	Doing what's right doesn't necessarily require great resources. It's not prudent to wait when dealing with strategically important issues
WHAT WE DO	Lots of activities; reward loyalty and hard work	Think critically and analytically to achieve agreed-upon results
COMMUNICATION	Leaders are responsible for influencing the beliefs and behaviors of others; we avoid mistakes	Make effective use of information and engage in open dialogue before deliberating or decision-making

cation is needed on anything, members are encouraged to ask questions or share their interpretation of the discussion. One Delegate announced that her Area was using this process and didn't realize it! Another Delegate shared that "this is really an informed group conscience." One more said, "This can be used in my personal life. It's about opening our minds and being willing to learn new things."

Shared Leadership Presentation

"All Conference members are leaders and trusted servants and they are at the Conference for one primary purpose—the good of the whole of AI-Anon." A circular schematic was projected on the screen showing how communication flows from the groups to the Conference through the Area Delegates and how the Conference decisions are communicated through the Delegates to the groups through their trusted servants, the District Representatives, and Group Representatives. A second circle illustrated the communication necessary among the four groups that comprise the Conference—Area Delegates, Board of Trustees, Executive Committee members, and members of the WSO Administrative staff.

The Consultant remarked, "This is an incredible mosaic of a Conference. You're here to continue the work of the many Conferences that came before you and you're also here to safeguard the continuance of AI-Anon Family Groups. You're part of a long conversation. Your inheritance is as rich as rich can be. The

Nancy Ackermann Cole
Consultant to the Conference

Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service all work together. They're one integrated piece that can't be pulled apart." Since people are their most creative when they are clear about their roles, the Consultant asked members of each group, the World Service Office Administrative staff, the Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees, and the Delegates to give examples of their role.

WSO Administrative Staff members:

- Act as a clearing house, listening and communicating with the Areas, districts, and groups
- Do public outreach at the national level
- Serve as a liaison and bring the international voice of AI-Anon members not linked to a structure to the Conference
- Serve as a communication link between Conference members
- Function as the hub—a center of information for the fellowship
- Provide the continuity with our history
- Implement plans and report trends
- Provide support in the development of literature and service tools
- Carry out the will of the Conference



"A circular flow of communication"