

## **Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience Brief History**

**From the 2010-2013 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27), page 50, 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.”

At the 2006 WSC, the concept of using Knowledge-Based-Decision-Making 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, “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.” (From 2006 Conference Summary, Page 6)

### **The Process**

The value of framing is that it brings clarity to the discussion, helps move the dialogue into new territory by outlining key facts, helps to keep everyone focused, and puts the discussion into perspective. When developing a frame, consider using one or more of these tools:  
*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, CAL, Conference Summary, WSO Archives, WSO staff, and anecdotes from members.*

Create the contents of a frame by filling in information regarding background, relevance, context, and conclusion. The relevant background and history imparts knowledge about what happened in the past and how we arrived at the present moment.

After reviewing the 2008 and 2009 issues of the *Conference Summary*, the Thought Force concluded that three key issues pertain to the Conference structure at both the World Service Conference (WSC) and Area levels: **communication, participation, and representation.** 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.

#### **Five Essential Elements of the KBDM Process:**

- Open communication between leadership and membership:  
“Talk to each other, and reason things out.” In Al-Anon we emphasize the flow of two-way communication between our membership and leadership. KBDM is a process that keeps communication alive.
- Dialogue before deliberation:  
This element allows us to discuss the information, ask questions, and express concerns before we construct the motion. The discussion is held with background information being introduced to frame the topic. All points of view are considered at each stage of the decision. Often the discussion reveals that we really don’t need a motion; all we need is to have the discussion.
- All decision-makers will have common access to full information:  
This is often one of the most confusing elements. Sometimes, members think they should have access to all information, whether they are part of the decision-making body or not. Concept Four tells us, “Participation is the key to harmony.” The Concept does not say everyone is invited to participate. We are invited to participate if it is in our role as part of the decision-making body.  
Following the full discussions we have here at Conference and when a decision has been made, it is important that we all recognize and support the group conscience, whatever it is, whether we agree with it or not.
- We have confidence in the competency of our partners – “presume goodwill”  
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.
- We exist in a culture of trust:  
Before coming into Al-Anon, we often learned not to trust others around us. We didn't talk about things that were not comfortable for fear of retaliation. We couldn't depend on anyone else in what they did or what they said. The culture of trust is a principle and value we learn in recovery. It is important to remember to take our principles and values along with us in service.

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
- 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 important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial 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.