

## Summary of seven propositions for fruitful directive control

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Directive control, reflected in policies such as consumer directed control and self direction, has been implemented across the world, with varying results. Having directive control is having the degree of authority over things that matter to the person and to the degree that the person can commit to, in order to have a rich and meaningful life. The following propositions are put forward as key elements that would equip a service to advance directive control most beneficially. More details are available from the author.

### **Summary of the propositions:**

1. *Directive control for what? Lives of richness and meaning: a policy of directive control should lead to service users being able to create a typical and meaningful lifestyle for themselves that includes valued roles, friendships and belonging in community life.*

Directive control is a means to an end. It is not an end in itself: having authority over one's support arrangements in itself is not the goal. The goal is to enable service users to craft better lives and reduce dependency on services.

2. *The democratic paradigm is critical because it is consistent with ideas and practices that enable self agency, efficacy and justice: any policy about directive control is best understood in a democratic paradigm, not market or medical paradigms.*

How we think about a concept is an important underpinning to its implementation. A policy of directive control could be understood through a number of paradigms. The limit of a market paradigm is that while people get to 'choose' their service, history shows that many service users with low expectations are vulnerable to purchasing 'blindly'. As a consequence, little is changed in the status quo: vulnerable people continue to be a marginalised group. One limit of the medical paradigm is that it coopts social issues as problems to be fixed.

It is proposed that a democratic paradigm is more likely to bring greater benefits to service users, families and society. A key feature of the democratic paradigm is that it requires agencies to work such that the capacities of service users are fostered so that they can exercise responsibility for the issue at hand as well as the solution (self agency) and to work towards their desired outcomes (efficacy). A democratic paradigm therefore results in people not only having authority over the support matters that are significant to them, but that they are also equipped to make good decisions.

3. *Relationships are key: it is possible for professionals to engage in equal and ethical partnering, such that service users can have directive control and such that the power issue is neutralised.*

The power that naturally resides in professionals and in the agency is acknowledged as a potential impediment to service users envisioning, co-designing and co-delivering the support arrangements. This power imbalance can lead to both short term and long term disempowerment. It is possible to

establish relationships that reflect a 'power-with' relationship where the power issue is neutralised, and where a professional and the client share knowledge, experiences and skills. Such a relationship of equal and ethical partnering helps to build the capacity and resilience of service users and/or families.

4. ***Directive control exists on a continuum:*** a policy of directive control should lead to service users enacting directive control over a range of matters to the level that they can commit to.

Directive control is not an all-or-none experience. Degrees of control exist on a continuum from having no say through to having high levels of authority over the things that matter to them. In terms of what matters to service users, these include (but are not limited to) the time and location of support, the identity of the person providing support, the type of support, goals of support, how the funds are used, and how the support goals contribute to the hoped-for future for the person.

5. ***Negotiations are key:*** service users can negotiate the appropriate level of authority and control that they can commit to and so are involved in the co-design and co-delivery of support responses.

Service users vary in terms of what level of directive control they can commit to, and over which service elements they want directive control. The key point is the preparedness of a service to articulate which service elements are negotiable and to then engage in negotiation.

6. ***Everyone can learn and develop:*** the capacity of service users can be strengthened; the capacity of services and service workers can be strengthened.

It is highly likely that both parties can strengthen their capacities in order for directive control to work optimally. Helpful supports can be provided to service users to enable them to assume directive control well. For example, the starting point is to have a positive vision for the future, so that this vision is the 'filter' for all future decision-making. Assisting service users to have people around them who share a commitment to a better life, to make the most of educational opportunities about 'better lives' and directive control, and to be connected to forward thinking service users are positive forms of support.

For professionals, understanding how power is transacted through the relationship, the power of the 'expert', how to assist service users to 'dream bigger' and to have high expectations are excellent starting points. What is also important is for managers and supervisors to attend to any structural enablers and barriers to professionals working in right relationship, such as policies, KPIs, and supervisory practices.

7. ***Service leaders are responsible for structural change:*** working contrary to the dominant ways that relationships and power are typically enacted in human services requires the commitment of service leaders.

The implementation of a policy of directive control presents many leadership challenges in terms of the values of the agency, priorities, direction, and structure. Coordinators and front line workers can do much on the ground to foster the dreams, expectations and capacities of service users, however their work will be more potent and more enduring if the leaders of the agency enacts inspirational, collective and practical leadership.