

Balance of Power

In giving attention to this area of the five dimensions the most important thing for the manager to remember is that they, like the staff, have to model power with, rather than power over, people.

Power sharing is often fragile, it is easy to talk about, but in reality many people who use services have little opportunity to exercise power in their own lives and some staff see tentative steps towards power by services users as threatening.

The ability of staff members to share power will be influenced, in part, by the attitude of the agency and how much it demonstrates right relationship.

Issues of power can be very difficult to disentangle and team members who may have little power or status in their working lives or even in their home lives may be very reluctant to actually give up power over service users. People in this position may need assisted to understand what is happening. Managers will have to try not to achieve this only by exerting their own power and status, if they do it is likely that staff members may operate in more subversive ways to retain power.

Bearing this in mind there are still many practical steps that can make explicit the need to power share, some examples of those are given in block one text. The more explicit agencies can be in modelling power sharing, the clearer it is to individual staff members and service users that this is an expectation. Options, a supported living organisation in Wisconsin, has a single page questionnaire which support staff are required to answer about each person they support on a regular basis. This form asks explicit questions about power and control issues. Workers are asked what steps they have taken to move control towards the person, what they are going to do next and why progress has or hasn't been made. This makes the agency values of power sharing explicit and shows that change must happen which gives more control to the person and, because it is the only form used, the importance of shifting the balance of power is emphasised.