

Leadership and Representation

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I would like to acknowledge:

- Traditional custodians of the land
- Consumers past and present who have done incredible work and have often paid the ultimate price. I want to also thank them for the contributions – we all build on the work of others.
- The PAT group and members of that group for running with the topic of representation when I raised it, for encouraging and supporting me to write it up as a discussion paper; for their thoughts and knowledge and for the co-writers of the paper. It wasn't a solo piece of work or thinking



Note on language: I realise the term consumer is highly contested in some circles and fought for by others. I am using it today, but don't want that to detract from the topic.

We will be looking at the topics of consumer leadership and the topic of representation. We will also touch on perspective.

An emphasis will be on representation at the end and I will be exploring with you why I chose the topic of representation and highlighting what I believe to be some of the many questions it raises in my mind regarding the whole notion of consumers being asked to be reps.

I will probably raise more questions than I answer for some people, but I am hoping this will be more like the start of more in-depth reflection by you all that you will take back to your own spaces afterwards. I hope it ignites some further development in thinking and critique of this concept.

Who is in the room today?

Please say:

- Your name
- A couple of consumer things you have been involved in
- What you are hoping to get out of the session

Perspective

- Whose perspective anyway?
- How do we know and find other perspectives?

Consumer Leadership

What does this mean to you?

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Representation:

1. Has been asked or just expected to represent other or all consumers at some point in time? E.g. Have you heard the question - What do consumers think?
2. When asked, did you think about this issue or not pay it much thought?
3. Who has felt uncomfortable when asked to represent consumers? Why did you feel uncomfortable?
4. Who has changed the way they work because they have been expected to be representative?
5. Who has challenged a request to be representative?
6. Were you then challenged by services about this? What happened?
7. Who has been able to truly work in a representative way when it has been the best way to work? What allowed that to happen? Who has tried to work on a truly rep way, but found it problematic? – Why?
8. Who has been shut down because your view is not seen to be representative of all consumers?
9. Who has been in a position of offering something great to the service that services have found challenging only to be told “Yeah, but you’re not like our consumers”?
10. Who has been frustrated that consumers are expected to be representative when they speak, but other disciplines have not had that same expectation?



"I've been instructed to represent you in court. But just so we're clear, I'm really an interior decorator."

The beginning of all this: it started quite early in my CC work when services would ask me – What do consumers think? I would often retort – What do nurses think or what do psychiatrists think?

There was a lot of discomfort when I realised that services sometimes wanted me to speak on behalf of 'all' consumers - the pressure was there – you are the consumer worker, you are the one we pay, therefore you are the one to provide the consumer perspective at every turn. I didn't want to speak for others and I certainly didn't want others to speak on my behalf; and I certainly didn't have every experience in my own lived experience to be able to do it either. (My 1st opportunity at DHHS – D&A).

There was also much frustration - The mindless requests for reps, that I was expected to be a rep, that there seemed to be little or no thought about what it meant to ask for or to be a rep and I often felt like I would be selling my soul or compromising my values in order to comply with requests from services. Or worse still, compromising for consumers.

I slowly started to unpack what that discomfort was about. Through PAT group, I started to write it down with the support and knowledge and wisdom of the group.

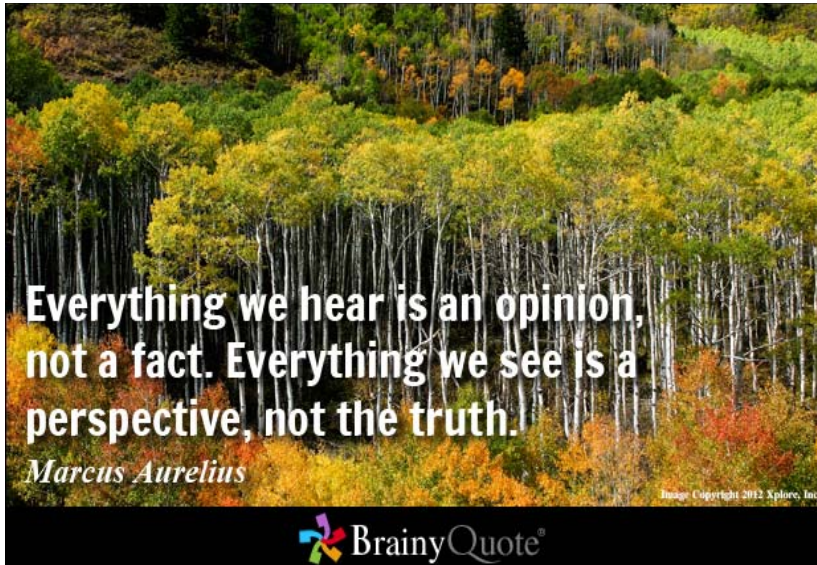


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Complex issue

- Definitional
- Attitudinal
- Ethical
- Practical
- Other

Defining Representation



First of all, I realised that people were using the words without any thought to what it meant. A consumer rep stood for anything a service wanted a consumer to do.

A couple of definitions I found were:

Collins dictionary – a person or thing that represents another or others

- A person who represents and tries to sell the products or services of a firm, especially a travelling salesman

- A typical a example

- A person representing a constituency in a deliberative, legislative or executive body.

Edmund Burke – that allows you to keep in mind your own view – in fact encourages it....

I personally like using the term 'presents' someone else's views rather than represents. I believe it makes it clearer that the person is actually bringing the views of others and representing to me allows for a degree of interpretation – it is less messy for me to think of it as representing the views.

- So, when asked for reps, how is it being defined? Does that definition meet the need or request? i.e. sometimes really what people are wanting is some expertise or knowledge of a particular experience.

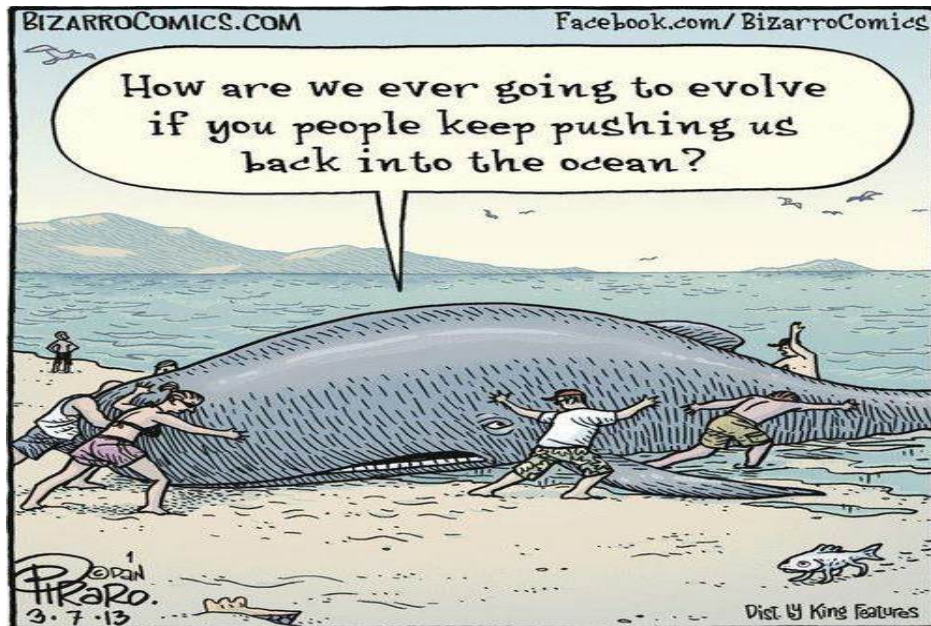
- What is needed or missing? Where does expertise fit?

Ethical Issues



1. Do consumers even know I am supposed to representing them? (e.g. A CC by default)
2. Did they vote for the person to be their representative?
3. Do they want another person representing their views or do they want the opportunity to speak for themselves?
4. Are we asking for a representative view from everyone else or only from consumers?
5. Should things be condensed to a single or homogenous view?
6. How are other views that are not considered to be representative views handled –are they ignored or silenced?
7. Where is the power – where does it sit? Is it named or acknowledged? How is power handled?
8. Is a representative approach the best one? – If so, how was that decided? How do I give respect to those I am representing and do justice to the role of being a rep?

Attitudinal Issues



I think we have all face attitudinal barriers when we are doing our work and know that they can often be the biggest barriers of all.

With respect to this topic, the biggest attitudinal barrier I noticed was when services didn't really want the views of consumers or at times, were just ticking the box, so they are not interested in the evolving ideas.

I have experienced the request for representative views as a way of silencing – silencing a view they do not want to hear or...

Have you ever felt that asking for representative view is a way of silencing?

Practical issues

This can be extremely challenging or even impossible to navigate. If you do consider all the other issues, you define that rep is what you want, you work through the ethical issues etc. then the practical issues need to be tackled if they are wanting to pursue it further.

The questions that are raised here can include: (and can overlap with ethical issues)

1. Who are the consumers I am representing?
2. How many are there?
3. What are their views – how do I find them out?
4. Do I have access to the list of people who use the services and if I do, have the ethical issues been addressed by me having that access? (e.g. Permission form people to access their contact details etc.)
5. How many people's views are seen to be representative – every consumer of the service? A proportion of them? How is that proportion/sample identified? Who decided?
6. Have I been given the time to seek the rep views?
7. Am I being paid to do the work? (or just to sit on a committee for 2 hours a month?)





"Let's tell the folks in the Garlic Belt there's no budget for steps 2 and 3."

And then there is the situation where in theory, everyone is on board, but in reality, they haven't thought it through or are not committed when it actually comes to properly resourcing us.

If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own.

Henry Ford

QuotePixel.com

Other issues:

Ask if you want a rep or if you really want expertise and what is gained or potentially lost by inviting people for their expertise instead.

Consider organisational readiness at all layers and levels - Is the organisation ready for thinking about this differently and what needs to happen if they are not?

One way to approach maybe through LEWC if your organisation is up for it.

But we all need to build on the work of the people who have gone before us and support each other.

Thank you
Comments or questions?
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