

The Controlling Voices: Strengths and Dangers

	The danger, when under-used:	The strength, when well-used:	The danger, when over-used:
CHALLENGE	You may be reluctant to put relationships at risk by voicing a challenge, but failing to do so is a form of 'missing the moment.' The effect is to contribute to under-performance by permitting poor thinking or unproductive behaviour to pass without comment. You may be missing important opportunities to make a positive difference, as well as earning a personal reputation for being timid and easily dominated.	You are prepared to interrupt in order to point out an assumption or limitation in what others are saying or doing. By promptly calling attention to such matters, you can improve the quality of interaction and dialogue by inviting others to re-think and to be more aware of what and how they are contributing.	Poorly timed, clumsily done or simply done too often, challenging can sound like an attempt to seize control rather than to re-focus or improve. It can easily feel like a personal attack, damaging and inhibiting relationships. Persistent challenging may be perceived as an indirect undermining strategy, designed to dominate or subjugate others. Leaders have to challenge but need to take care not to abuse their power in this way.
DIRECT	Shying away from the directive voice, even when it is appropriate, is common if one is uncomfortable with hierarchy, or is reluctant either to endanger a relationship or to risk escalating inter-personal tension. However, failing to provide clear direction or explicit correction when necessary results in uncertainty, unnecessary ambiguity and an absence or breakdown of clear and consistent standards.	You make sure people understand what is required of them by telling them, and by correcting them when they fail to meet these expectations. By stating specific requirements and boundaries and insisting on adherence to them, you can ensure that individuals and teams operate in accordance with the standards that you represent and uphold.	It is sometimes necessary and often helpful to set clear expectations and boundaries for people. But it is unhelpful to micro-manage or be forever correcting them. If the directive voice becomes charged with emotion, becoming a vehicle for your own frustration, anger or inflexibility, you will sound like a dictator and create feelings of unfairness and resentment. Clarity, focus and a matter-of-fact tone are important ingredients in being effectively direct.

EVALUATE	Under-use of this voice may spring from many sources: impatience and a preference for action, poorly developed reasoning skills or reluctance to appear critical and negative. However, permitting situations to develop or proposals to proceed without sufficiently rigorous evaluation of the options and implications allows narrow, superficial and hazy thinking to prevail, reflects a lack of judgement and produces poor decision-making.	You evaluate ideas, proposals and problems in a direct, balanced and objective way. You highlight potential shortcomings and weaknesses, but you also take care to consider and to weigh up both the pros and the cons. By providing impartial, analytical rigour, you contribute to the thoroughness and quality of thinking, discussion and decision-making.	Logical, ‘data rational’ types can fall into the trap of assuming that logic will speak for itself, underestimating the importance of involving others in order to persuade them and secure agreement and commitment. Continuing focus on objections and shortcomings can easily come across as an indirect way of criticising others, and will produce embarrassment, a sense of humiliation and a corresponding animosity, especially if it happens publicly.
-----------------	--	--	---