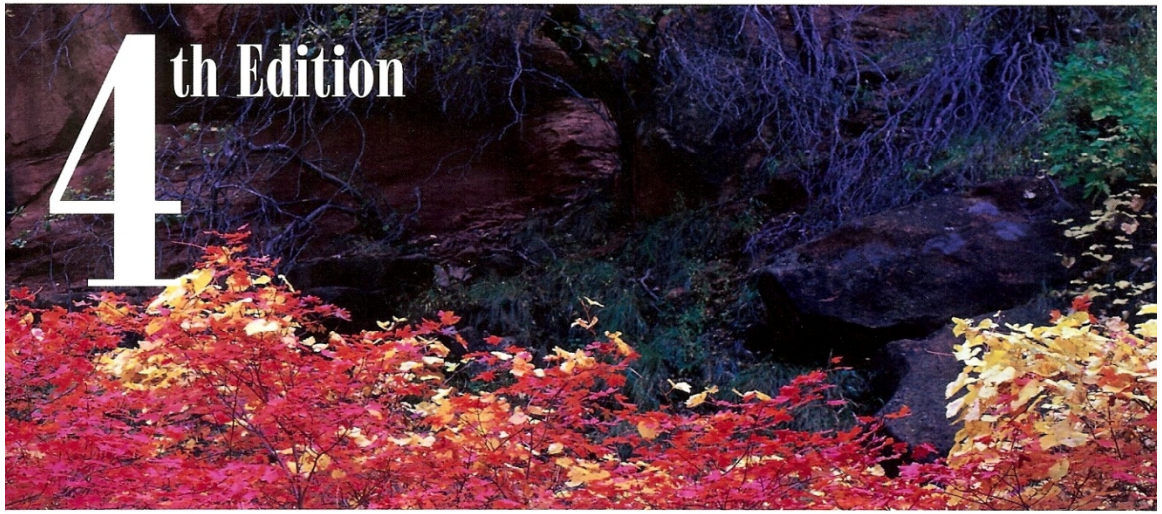
Major Directions, Issues, and Trends in Evaluation

with

Michael Quinn Patton

June 16, 2009

Utilization-Focused Evaluation



Michael Quinn Patton

SAGE

1st ed. 1978

2nd ed.1986

3rd ed.1997

10. Evaluation as an International and Cross-Cultural Transdiscipline and Profession

- National/regional associations and societies (70+)
- **IOCE** and **IDEAs**
- Toronto, *3rd International Evaluation Conference*, 2005: General Romeo Dallaire's "Speaking truth to Power" Award from AEA & CES
- Evaluators' *cultural competence* and evaluation relevance as issues
- International adoption of standards

Evaluation Standards

- **Utility** – ensure relevance & use
- **Feasibility** – realistic, prudent, diplomatic & frugal
- **Propriety** – ethical, legal, respectful
- **Accuracy** – technically adequate to determine merit or worth

For the full list of Standards:

www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/standardschecklist.htm

9. **Utilization focus:**

Intended Use by Intended Users

From…

Audiences to…

Stakeholders to…

Primary Intended Users

Connotative differences?

Evaluators' Views on Practice

- As part of a review of developments over the first ten years of the American Evaluation Association (AEA), Preskill and Caracelli (1997) conducted a survey of members of AEA's Topical Interest Group on Use. They found that 85% rated as extremely or greatly important "identifying and prioritizing intended users of the evaluation" (p. 216). The only item eliciting higher agreement (90%) was the importance of "planning for use at the beginning of the evaluation." Preskill and Caracelli also found that 80% of survey respondents agreed that *evaluators should take responsibility for involving stakeholders in the evaluation processes.*

Evaluators' Views Cont.

- Fleischer (2007) asked the same question on a replication survey of American Evaluation Association members in 2006 and found that *98% supported the importance of focusing on intended use by intended users*. In rating the importance of eight different evaluation approaches, "user-focused" evaluation was rated highest.

- Recently, Cousins and Shulha (2006) reviewed a great volume of research on utilization of evaluation and knowledge found that "both social scientists and evaluators are learning that attention to the characteristics of knowledge users is a potent way to stimulate the utilization of findings" (p. 273).

Taking user *cognitive style* into account

- Lawrence Lynn of Harvard argues in his authoritative and still-relevant case book on policy analysis that a major craft skill needed by policy and evaluation analysts is the ability to understand and make accommodations for specific decision maker's cognitive style and other personal characteristics.

Style difference examples

- Jerry Brown, former Governor of California, liked policy analyses framed as a debate—thesis, antithesis—because he had been trained in the Jesuitical style of argument.
- President Ronald Reagan liked *Reader's Digest* style stories and anecdotes.
- President Jimmy Carter wanted details (engineering mind)
- Former Secretary of Defense and World Bank President Robert MacNamara was a systems analysis and demanded at least five alternatives for any problem.

8. Increased political attention to accountability:

Evaluation language as political rhetoric

- Targets, benchmarks, and milestones, e.g., MDGs, Kyoto Agreement
- *Evidence-based* practice, *Evidence-based* programs, *Evidence-based* interventions, *Evidence-based* strategies…,management
- Best practices, Promising practices
- Results-based management, Results-based decision-making, Results-based mandates
- Accountability
- GPRA, PART, NCLB
- Chief Performance Officer, White House

Challenges of Misuse and Abuse:
Speaking Truth to Power

Eleanor Chelimsky:

"**Telling the truth to people who may not want to hear it is, after all, the chief purpose of evaluation**"

(Chelimsky, 1995: 54)

7. Long-time tensions endure

- *Competing purposes*: accountability, learning, management, improvement (formative), knowledge generation, summative judgment, validating models
- *Relationship and role issues:* independence, mutual understanding, trust, respect
- *Credible data*: Quantitative vs qualitative data, mixed methods
- *Priority primary intended users*: Policy makers, administrators, program staff, beneficiaries, interest groups, advocates, general public

6. *Evaluation capacity-building:* Attention to the capacities and essential skills needed to conduct and use evaluations

- Evaluation and Organizational Development connecting & cross-fertilizing
- Changes in the evaluation unit of analysis:

  Strategies, Policies, Initiatives, Organizations, Collaborations

5. *Process use:*

Beyond findings use

Key distinction:

Process Evaluation

versus

Process Use

Process Use Defined

Process use refers to and is indicated by individual changes in thinking and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process. Evidence of process use is represented by the following kind of statement after an evaluation: "The impact on our program came not just from the findings, but from going through the thinking process that the evaluation required."

Examples of Process Uses

- Enhancing shared understandings, e.g., logic model development
- Focusing programs: What gets measured gets done
- Effects on organizational culture: accountability culture, results-orientation
- Capacity-building for those involved, deepening evaluative thinking
- Program and organizational development, e.g., evaluability assessments

Culture of Accountability Effects

"Western aid workers seem to spend most of their time drawing up flow charts for each other. They're so worried about their inspectors general that they can't really immerse themselves in the messy world of local reality."

- David Brooks, *NY Times*, March 27, 2009

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/opinion/27brooks.html?_r=1

4. From Studies to Streams:
Real time evaluation

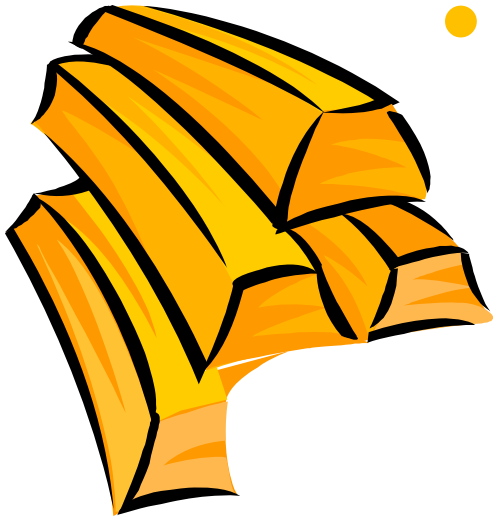
- Rapid feedback
- Timeliness
- Ongoing assessments
- Continuous information flows, updates
- Use of the Internet and new technologies

Ray C. Rist and Nicoletta Stame (eds.), *From Studies to Streams: Managing Evaluative Systems.*Transaction Books.

3. **Challenges in establishing attribution**

- Gold Standard debate and confusion

The Attribution Debate:



- **The Gold Standard Question**

GOLD STANDARD:

METHODOLOGICAL APPROPRIATENESS

not

Methodological orthodoxy or rigidity

Photo by Lynsey

Attribution approaches

- Mixed methods: triangulation
- Methodological appropriateness
- *General elimination* method
- Preponderance of evidence criterion

See appendix for more details

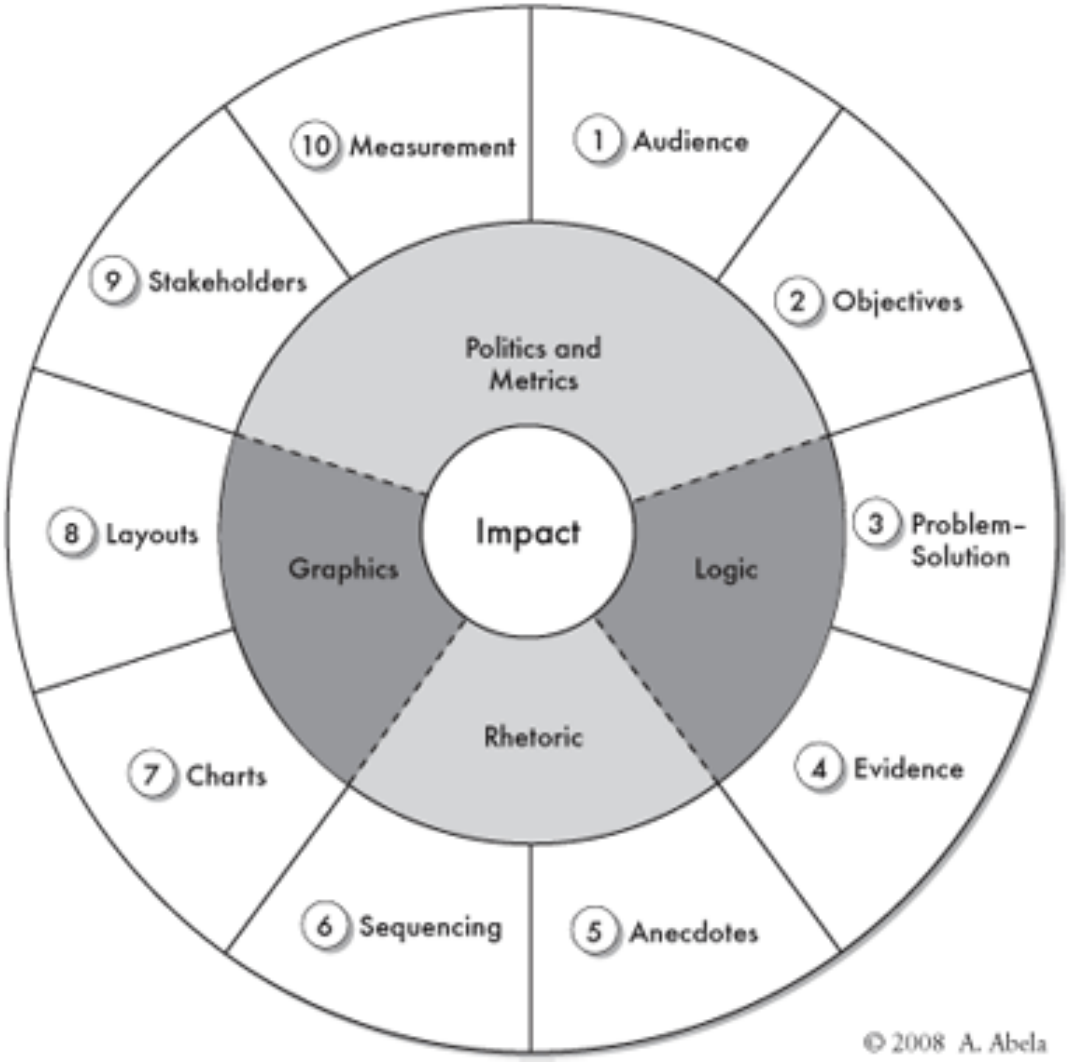
2. More sophisticated recommendations, reports and graphics

Reports: Ever greater attention to Executive Summaries and Briefings

Importance of focusing on intended use by intended users

The Extreme Presentation™ Method

Ten Steps to Presentation Impact



Powerful Graphics: Visual Thinking

- Mike Hendricks regularly trains evaluators on reporting and he asserts emphatically: “Evaluators have got to learn graphics. I’m amazed at how bad the charts and graphics are that I see in reports. You can’t emphasize it too much. Reporting means GRAPHICS! GRAPHICS! GRAPHICS!” This involves "visible thinking" which includes causal mapping and other data displays (Bryson, Ackermann, Eden and Finn 2004).

Significance

Fred Mosteller, the great applied statistician, was fond of saying that he did not care much for statistically significant differences. He was more interested in ***interocular differences*** -- the differences that hit us between the eyes.

Otherwise, we risk ***transauditory impacts***….

Historical example:

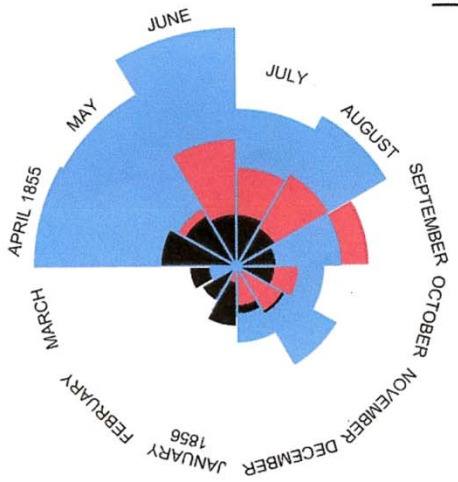
Through her work as a nurse in the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale was a pioneer in establishing the importance of sanitation in hospitals. She meticulously gathered data on relating death tolls in hospitals to cleanliness, and, because of her novel methods of communicating this data, she was also a pioneer in applied statistics.

Table showing the Estimated Average Monthly Strength of the Army; and the deaths and Annual Rate of Mortality per 1000 in each month, from April 1854, to March 1856 (inclusive), in the Hospitals of the Army in the East

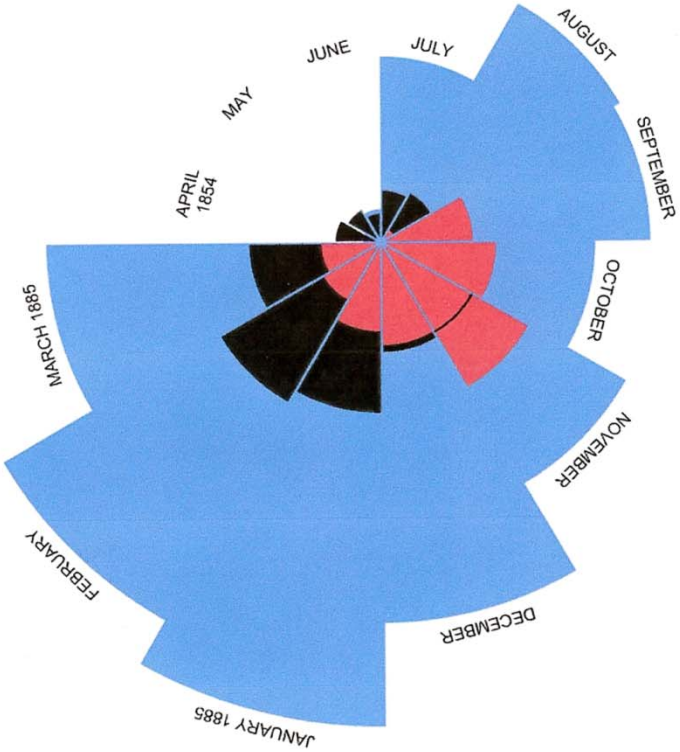
		Deaths			Annual rate of morality per 1000		
Month	Average size of army	Zymotic diseases	Wounds & injuries	All other causes	Zymotic diseases	Wounds & injuries	All other causes
Apr 1854	8571	1	0	5	1.4	0	7.0
May 1854	23333	12	0	9	6.2	0	4.6
Jun 1854	28333	11	0	6	4.7	0	2.5
Jul 1854	28722	359	0	23	150.0	0	9.6
Aug 1854	30246	828	1	30	328.5	0.4	11.9
Sep 1854	30290	788	81	70	312.2	32.1	27.7
Oct 1854	30643	503	132	128	197.0	51.7	50.1
Nov 1854	29736	844	287	106	340.6	115.8	42.8
Dec 1854	32779	1725	114	131	631.5	41.7	48.0
Jan 1855	32393	2761	83	324	1022.8	30.7	120.0
Feb 1855	30919	2120	42	361	822.8	16.3	140.1
Mar 1855	30107	1205	32	172	480.3	12.8	68.6
Apr 1855	32252	477	48	57	177.5	17.9	21.2
May 1855	35473	508	49	37	171.8	16.6	12.5
Jun 1855	38863	802	209	31	247.6	64.5	9.6
Jul 1855	42647	382	134	33	107.5	37.7	9.3
Aug_1855	44614	483	164	25	129.9	44.1	6.7
Sep 1855	47751	189	276	20	47.5	69.4	5.0
Oct 1855	46852	128	53	18	32.8	13.6	4.6
Nov 1855	37853	178	33	32	56.4	10.5	10.1
Dec 1855	43217	91	18	28	25.3	5.0	7.8

DIAGRAM OF THE CAUSES OF MORTALITY
IN THE ARMY IN THE EAST

2.
APRIL 1855 TO MARCH 1856



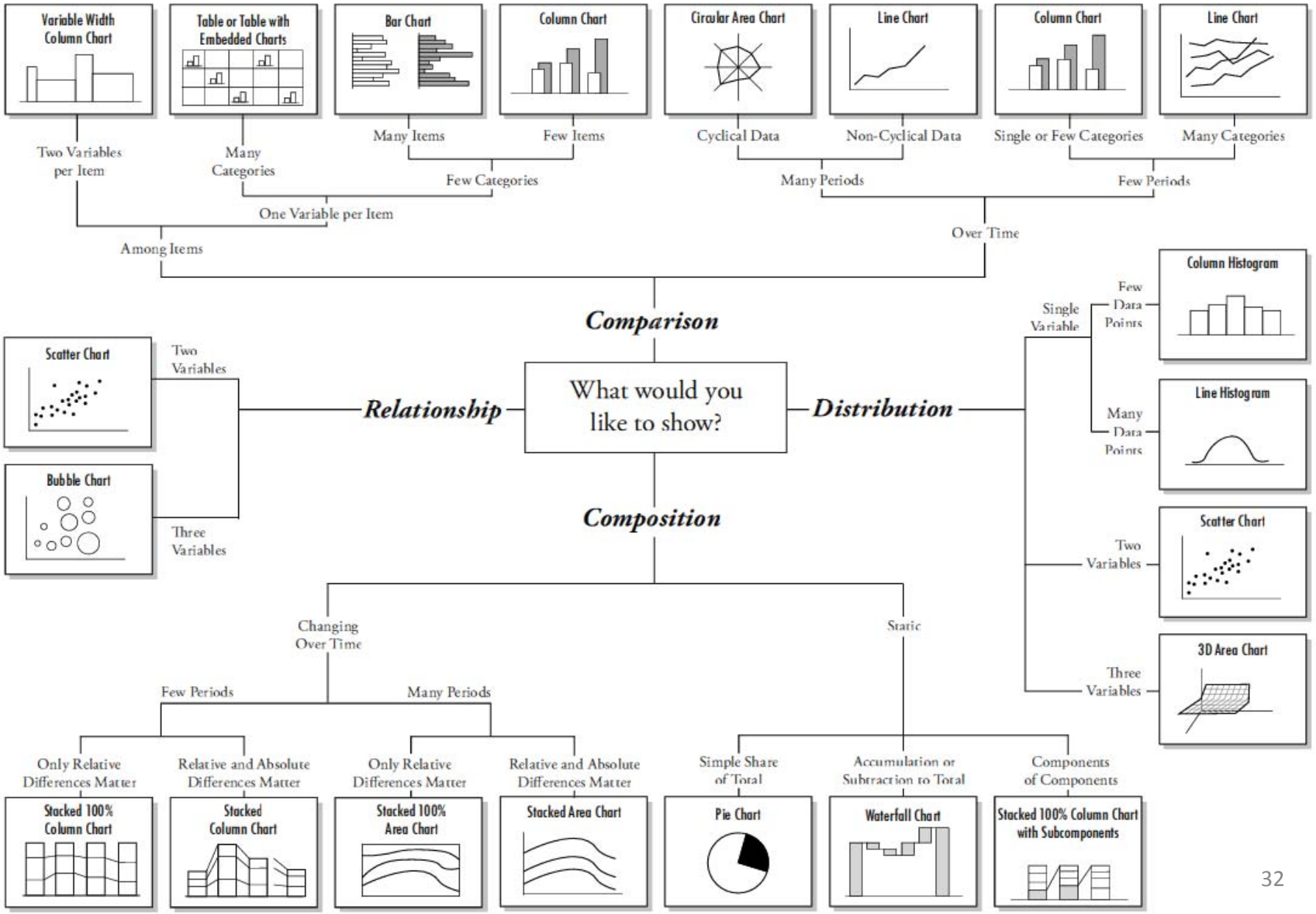
1.
APRIL 1854 TO MARCH 1855



The Areas of the blue, red, & black wedges are each measured from the centre as the common vertex.
The blue wedges measured from the centre of the circle represent area for area the deaths from Preventable or Mitigable Zymotic diseases, the red wedges measured from the centre the deaths from wounds, & the black wedges measured from the centre the deaths from all other causes
The black line across the red triangle in Nov' 1854 marks the boundary of the deaths from all other causes during the month
In October 1854, & April 1855, the black area coincides with the red, in January & February 1856 the blue coincides with the black
The entire areas may be compared by following the blue, the red & the black enclosing lines.

- ☑ Preventable or mitigable zymotic diseases
- ☑ Wounds
- ☑ Other causes

Chart Suggestions—A Thought-Starter



Fine-tuning Recommendations

- Controversy
- Data-based
- Futuring perspective
- Understanding the situation:

  Situationally appropriate recommendations

The nature of

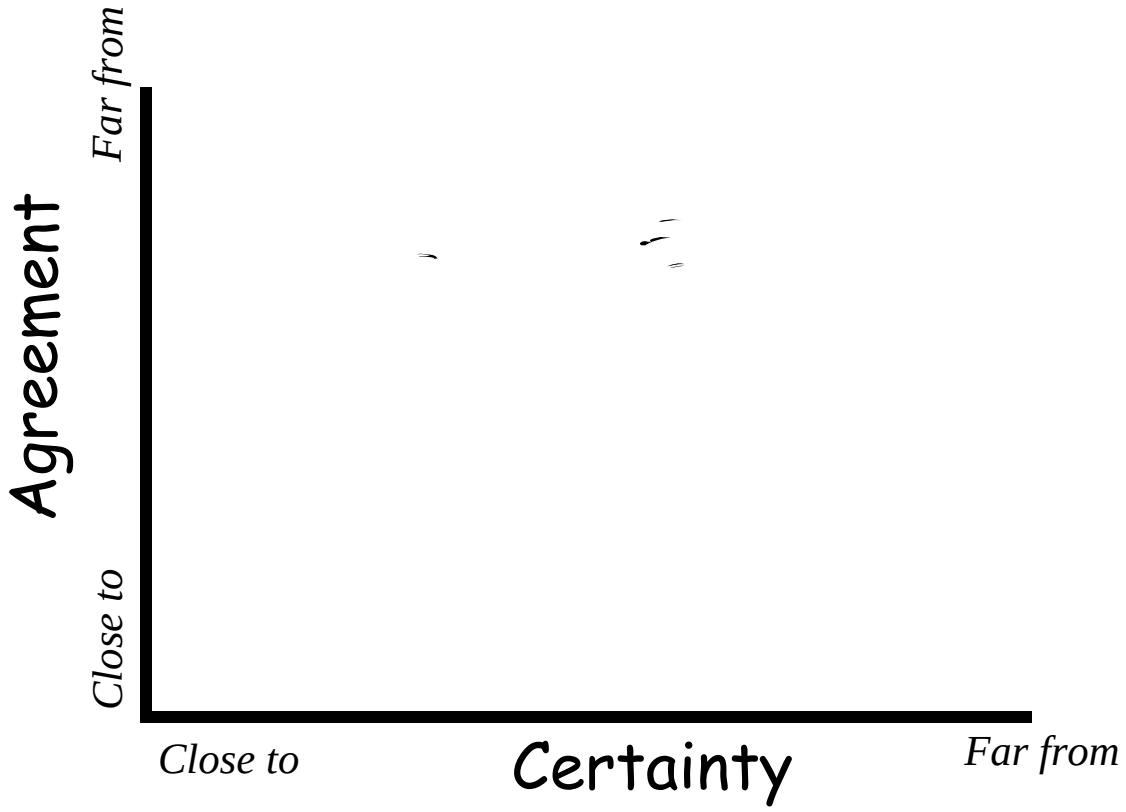
EXPERTISE

Conceptual Options

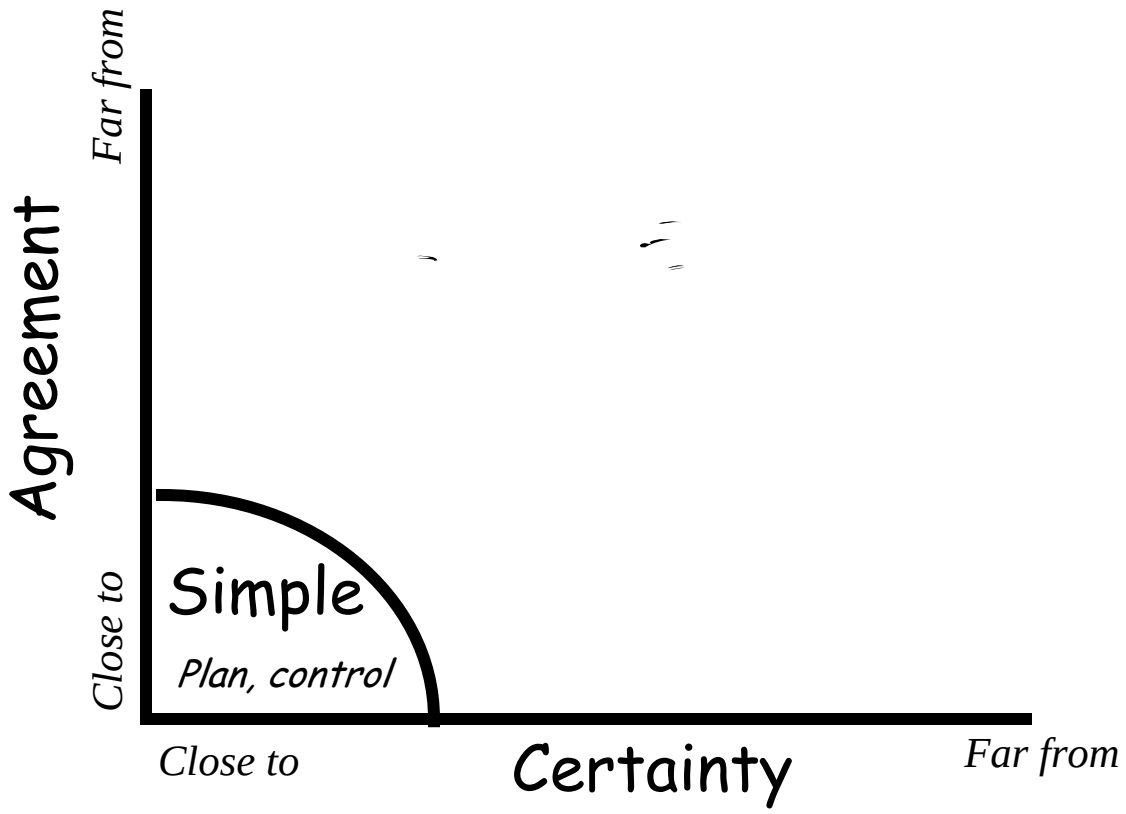
- **Simple**
- **Complicated**
- **Complex**

Types of Community Issues

The Certainty/Agreement Matrix



Simple situations



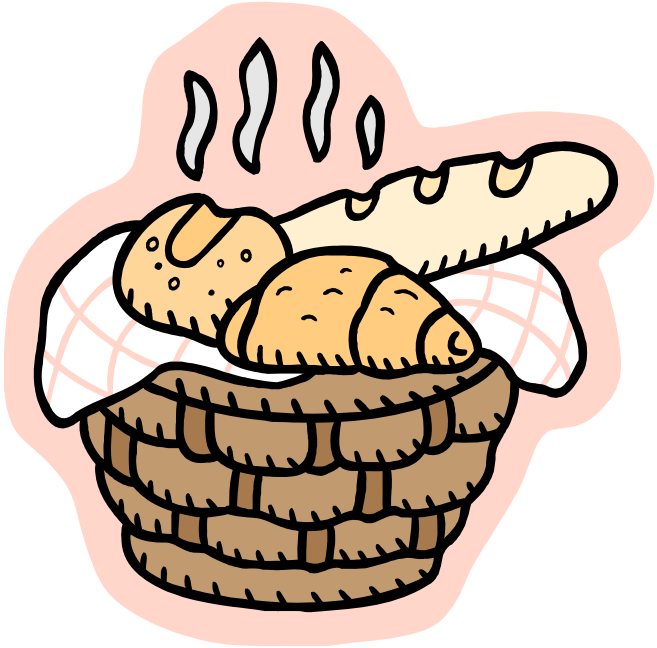
Simple (Known arena of action)

- Tight, centralized connections.
- Can identify and make sense of patterns.
- Linear cause and effect.
- Best practices identifiable within the current context (which of course may not be self-evident or known to others – hence importance of context).

Simple Complicated Complex

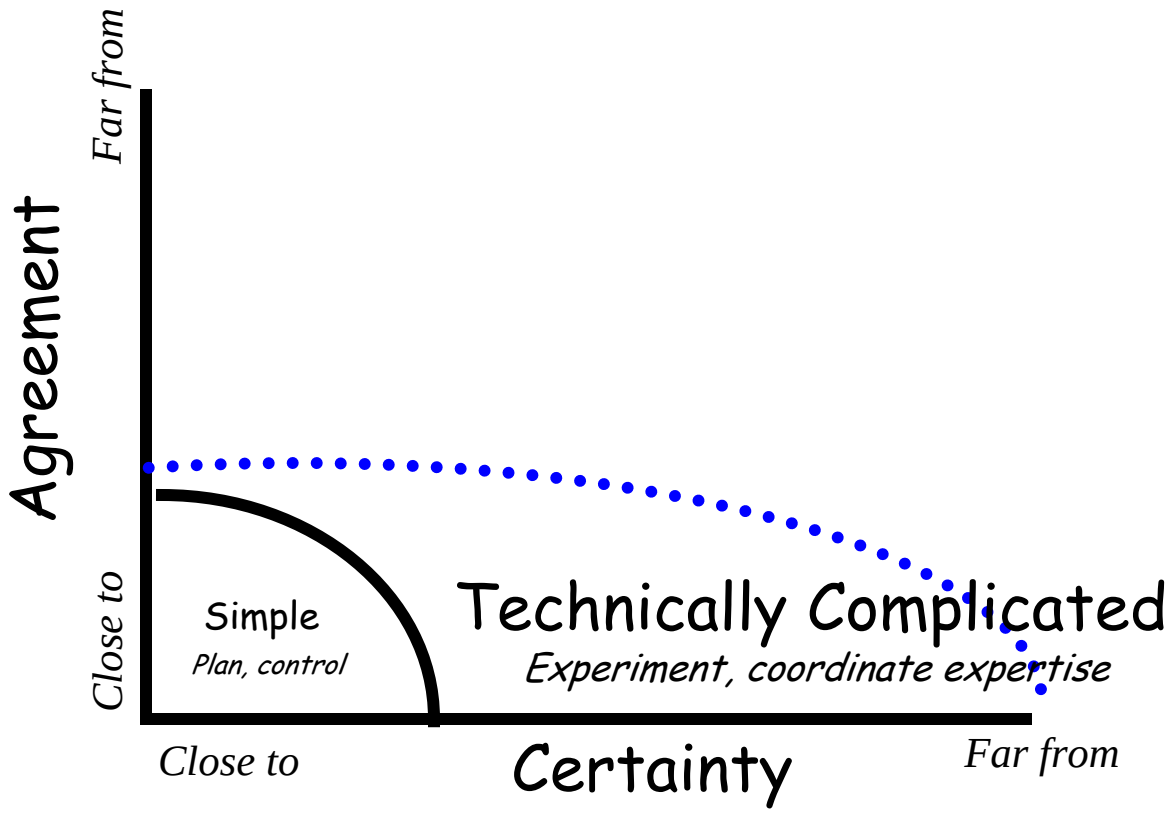
Following a Recipe A Rocket to the Moon Raising a Child

- **The recipe is essential**
- **Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts**
- **No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success**
- **Recipes produce standard products**
- **Certainty of same results every time**



Recommendations in simple space: substantive, action-focused recommendations

Technically Complicated



Complicated (Knowable arena)

- Relationships are looser but still clustered around a central core.
- Cause and effect is dynamic, multi-dimensional, and enmeshed in system relationships.
- System relationships can be modelled and understood.
- Expertise and coordination needed.

Simple
Following a Recipe

- The recipe is essential
- Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts
- No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success
- Recipes produce standard products
- Certainty of same results every time

Complicated
A Rocket to the Moon

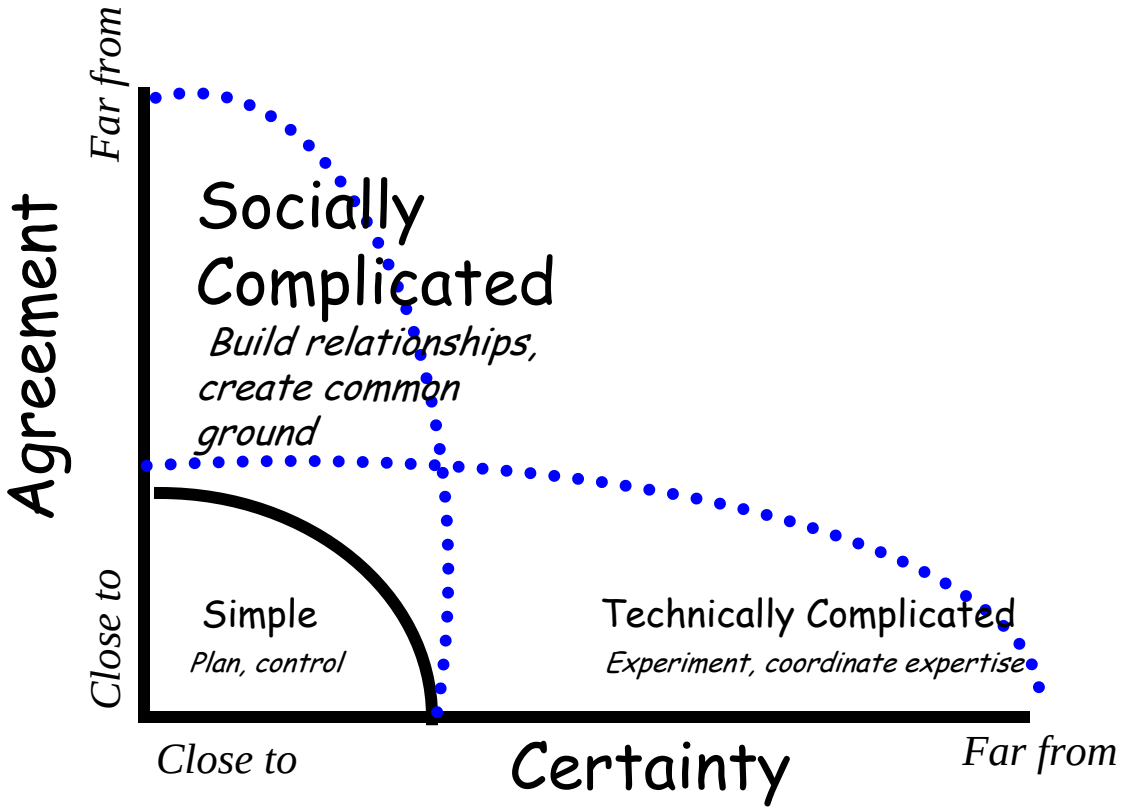
- **Formulae are critical and necessary**
- **Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok**
- **High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination**
- **Rockets similar in critical ways**
- **High degree of certainty of outcome**

Complex
Raising a Child

Recommendations in technically complicated space

- Improving system coordination
- Understanding system elements and their functions
- Ways of dealing with complications

Socially Complicated



Socially complicated

Implementing human rights agreements, like gender equity or outlawing child labor

Environmental Initiatives

- **Many different and competing stakeholders**
- **Diverse vested interests**
- **High stakes**

Socially complicated

situations

pose the challenge

of coordinating and

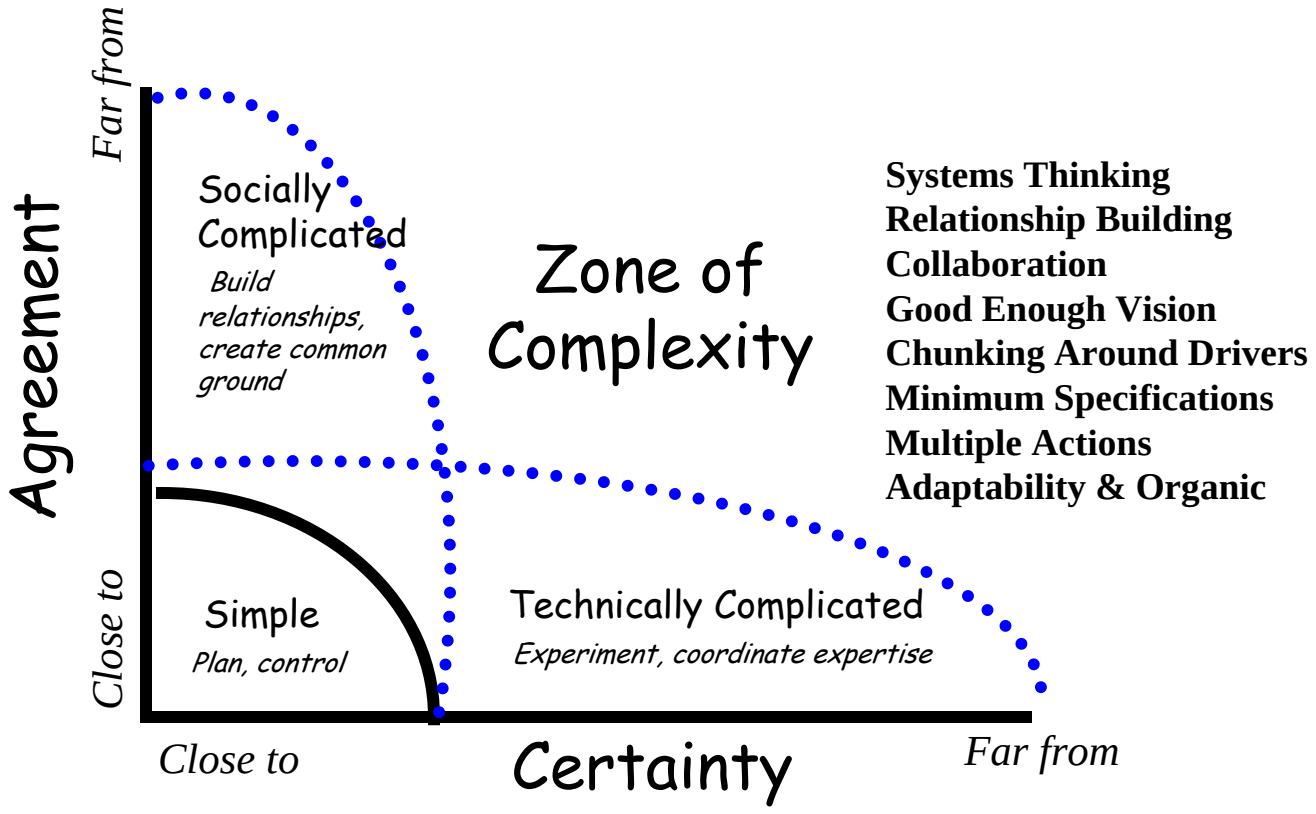
integrating

many players

Recommendations in socially complicated space

- Improving system coordination
- Understanding key participants and their roles
- Ways of dealing with relationships
- Improving collaboration

Know When Your Challenges Are In the Zone of Complexity



Complex

- Centre is loosely connected to network.
- Cause effect difficult to track; nonlinear, interdependent relationships
- Highly context dependent.
- Outcomes emergent, not predictable.

Simple
Following a Recipe

- The recipe is essential
- Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts
- No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success
- Recipes produce standard products
- Certainty of same results every time

Complicated
A Rocket to the Moon

Sending one rocket increases assurance [illegible] will be o[illegible]

[illegible] expertise [illegible]pecialized

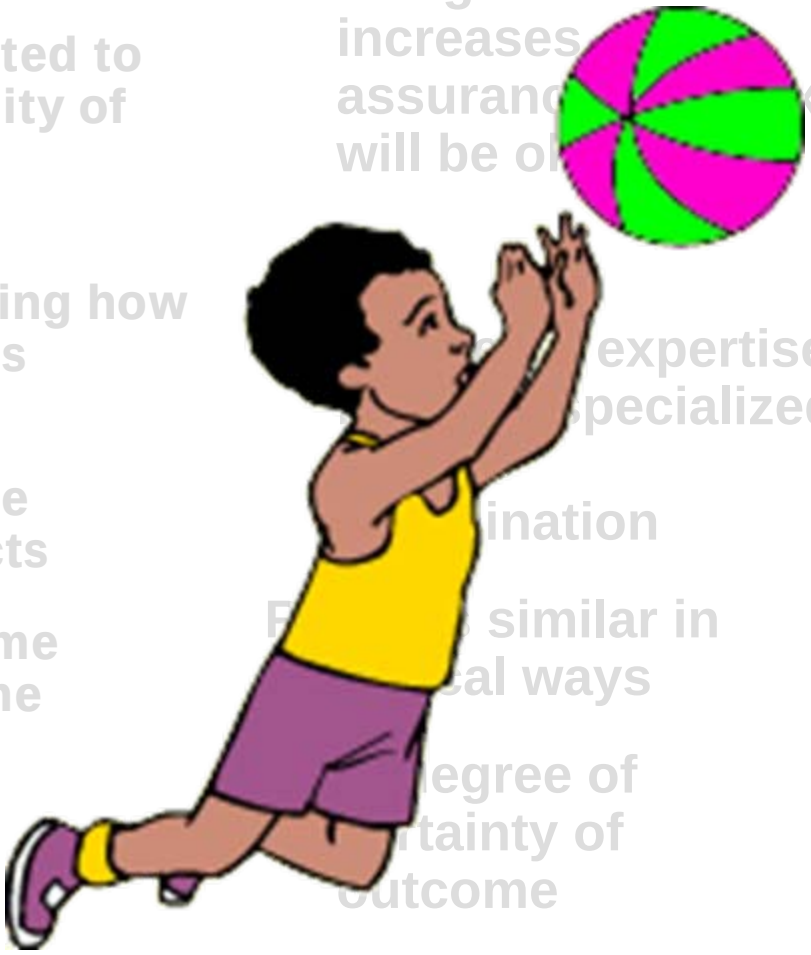
[illegible]ination

[illegible] similar in [illegible]al ways

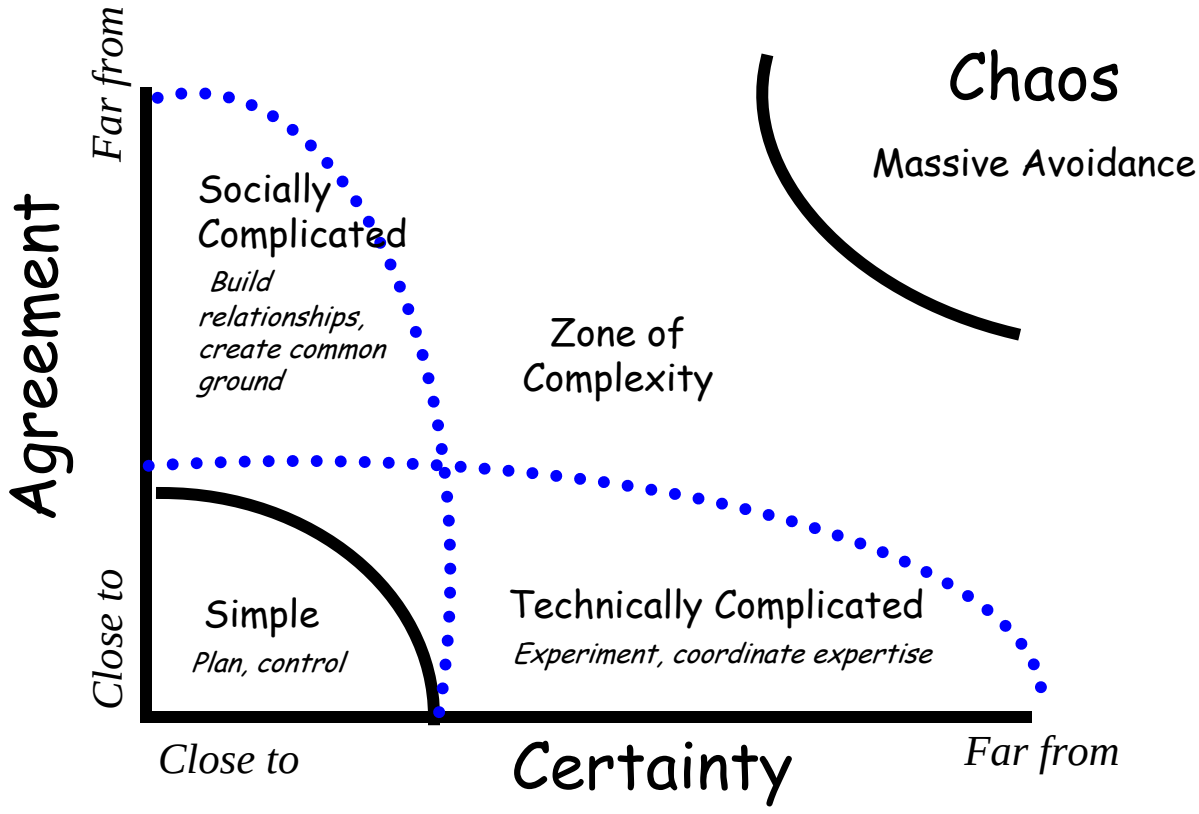
[illegible]egree of [illegible]rtainty of outcome

Complex
Raising a Child

- **Formulae have only a limited application**
- **Raising one child gives no assurance of success with the next**
- **Expertise can help but is not sufficient; relationships are key**
- **Every child is unique**
- **Uncertainty of outcome remains**



Know When Your Challenges Are In the Zone of Complexity



Complex Nonlinear Dynamics

- Nonlinear: Small actions can have large reactions. "*The Butterfly Wings Metaphor*"
- Emergent: Self-organizing, Attractors
- Dynamic: Interactions within, between, and among subsystems and parts within systems can volatile, changing
- Getting to Maybe: Uncertainty, unpredictable, uncontrollable

Recommendations under conditions of complexity

- Key factors to monitor
- What to pay attention to
- Alert to unanticipated consequences, side effects, and emergence
- Rapid responses
- Flexibility

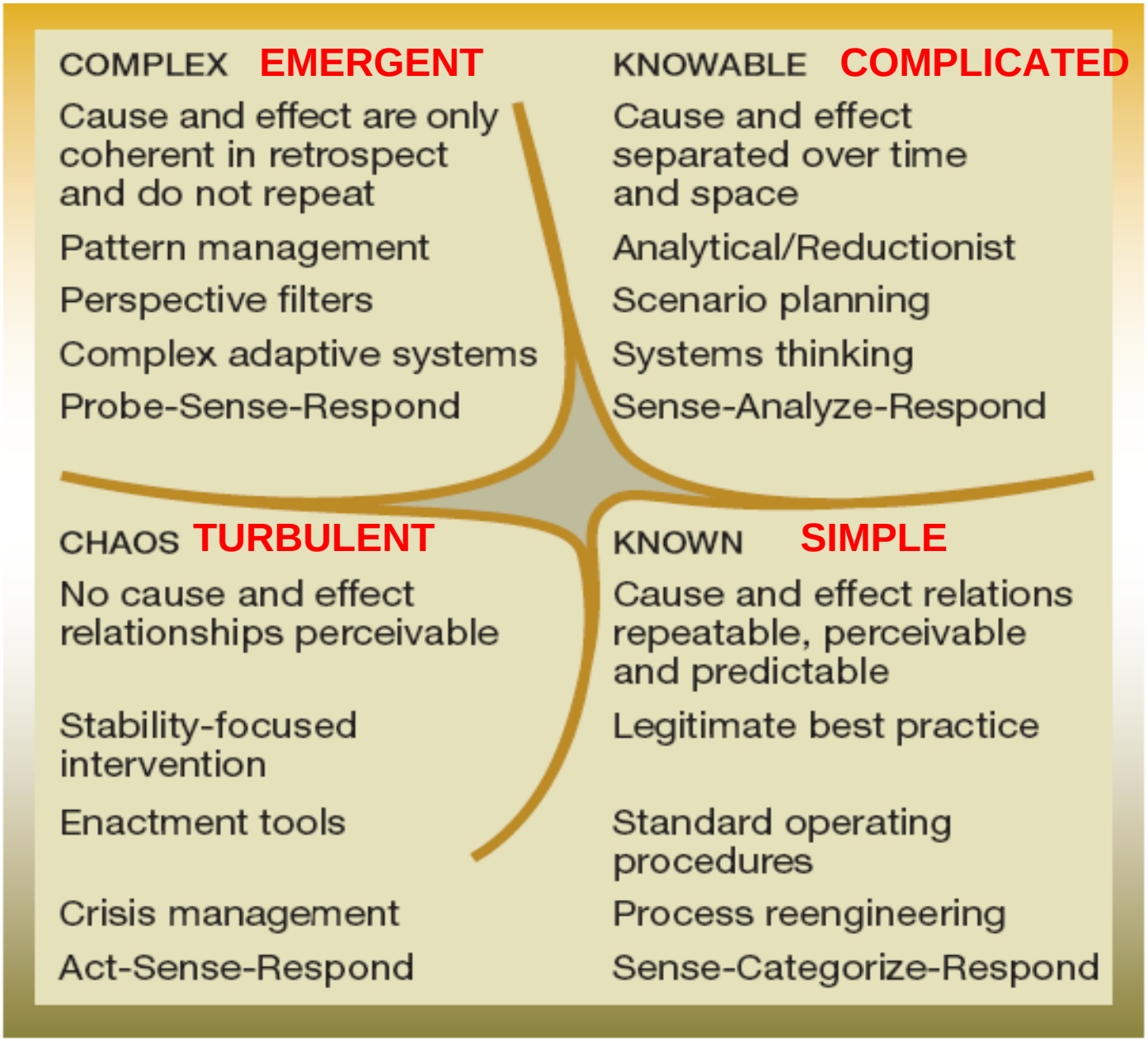
Classic mistake

- Recommending treating the complex as simple

“A Leader's Framework for Decision Making” by David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, *Harvard Business Review,*

November, 2007:

Wise executives tailor their approach to fit the complexity of the circumstances they face.


COMPLEX
EMERGENT
Cause and effect are only coherent in retrospect and do not repeat
Pattern management
Perspective filters
Complex adaptive systems
Probe-Sense-Respond
KNOWABLE
COMPLICATED
Cause and effect separated over time and space
Analytical/Reductionist
Scenario planning
Systems thinking
Sense-Analyze-Respond
CHAOS
TURBULENT
No cause and effect relationships perceivable
Stability-focused intervention
Enactment tools
Crisis management
Act-Sense-Respond
KNOWN
SIMPLE
Cause and effect relations repeatable, perceivable and predictable
Legitimate best practice
Standard operating procedures
Process reengineering
Sense-Categorize-Respond

1. Systems Thinking and Complexity Frameworks

- **Parts are interdependent such a change in one part changes all parts**
- **The whole is greater than the sum of the parts**
- **Focus on interconnected relationships**
- **Systems are made up of sub-systems and function within larger systems**

Systems Concepts in Evaluation – *An Expert Anthology*. 2006.

Bob Williams and Iraj Imam

AEA Monograph,

EdgePress/AEA Point Reyes CA.

Understanding the Elephant from a Systems Perspective

The relationship between what goes in and what comes out

What conceptual framework informs front-end evaluation work?

Teen Pregnancy Program Example

Logic Model for Pregnant Teens Program

1. Program reaches out to pregnant teens

2. **Pregnant teens enter and attend the program** (participation)

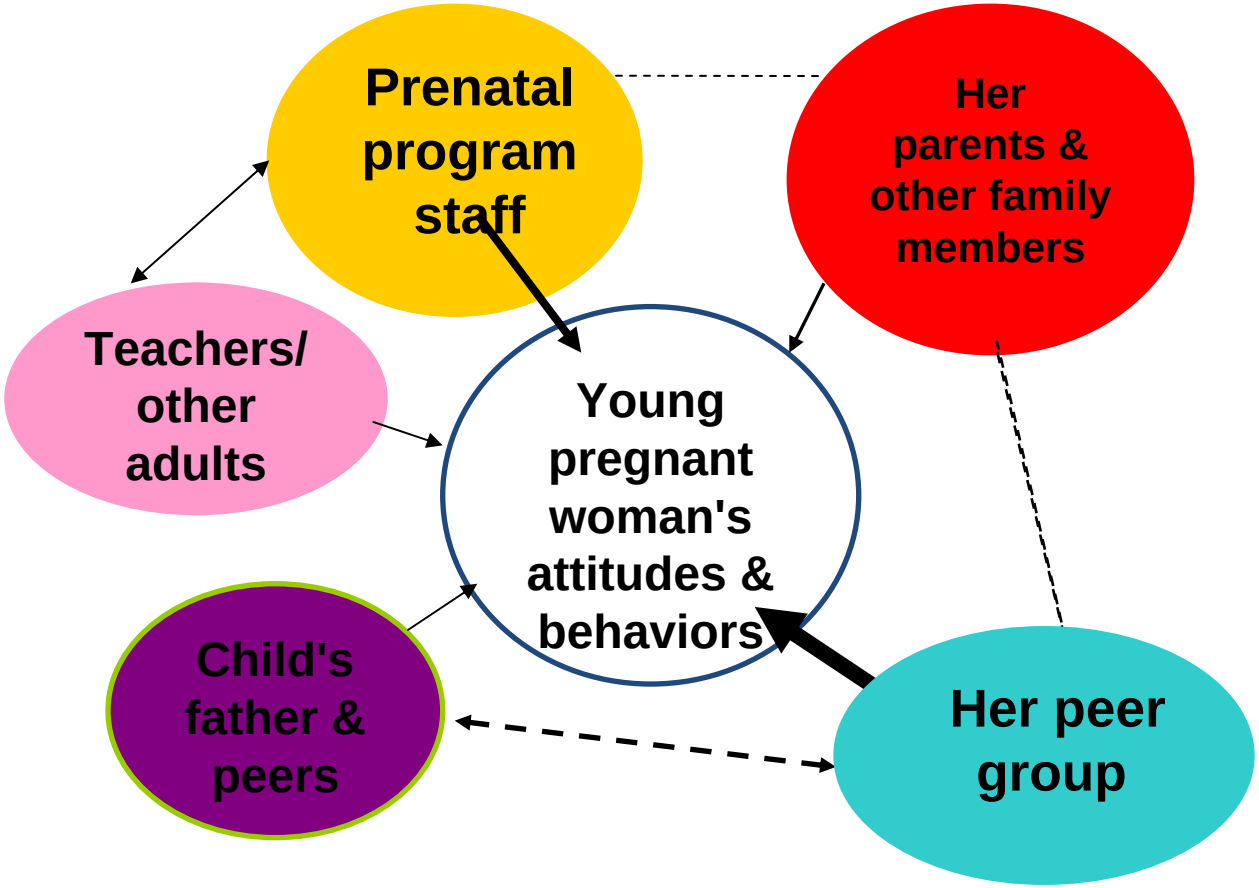
3. **Teens learn prenatal nutrition and self-care** (increased knowledge)

4. **Teens develop commitment to take care of themselves and their babies** (attitude change)

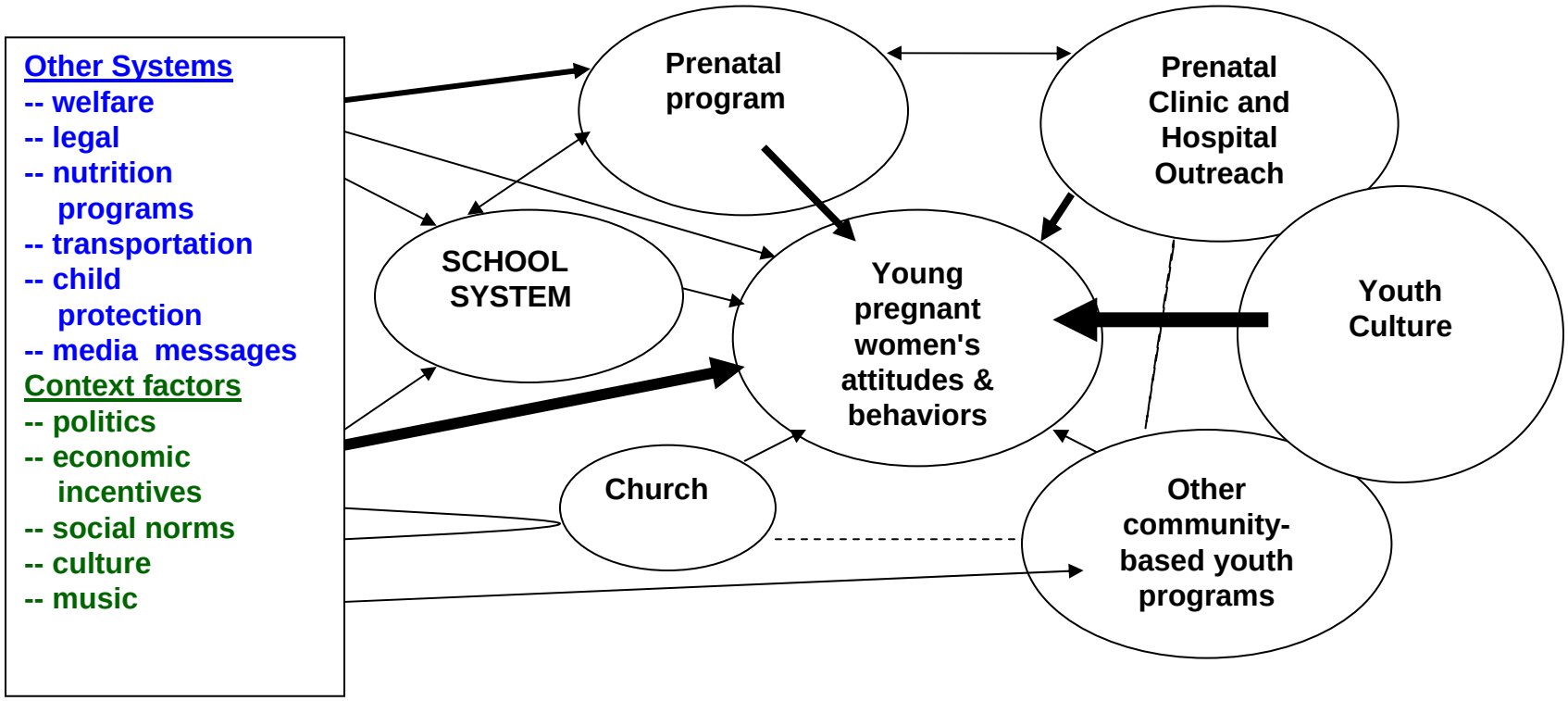
5. **Teens adopt healthy behaviors: no smoking, no drinking, attend prenatal clinic, eat properly** (behavior change)

6. **Teens have healthy babies** (desired outcome)

Systems web showing possible influence linkages to a pregnant teenager



Program systems web showing possible institutional influences affecting pregnant teenagers:



Using Different System Lenses to Understand a "*particular*" System

Biologic System
- Emergence
- Coordination/synergy
- Structure, Process, Pattern
- Vitality

Economic System
- Inputs/Outputs
- Cost/Waste/Value/Benefits
- Customers/Suppliers

Political System
- Power
- Governance
- Citizenship
- Equity

Sociologic System
- Relationships
- Conversations
- Interdependence
- Loose-tight coupling
- Meaning/sense

SYSTEM DIMENSIONS

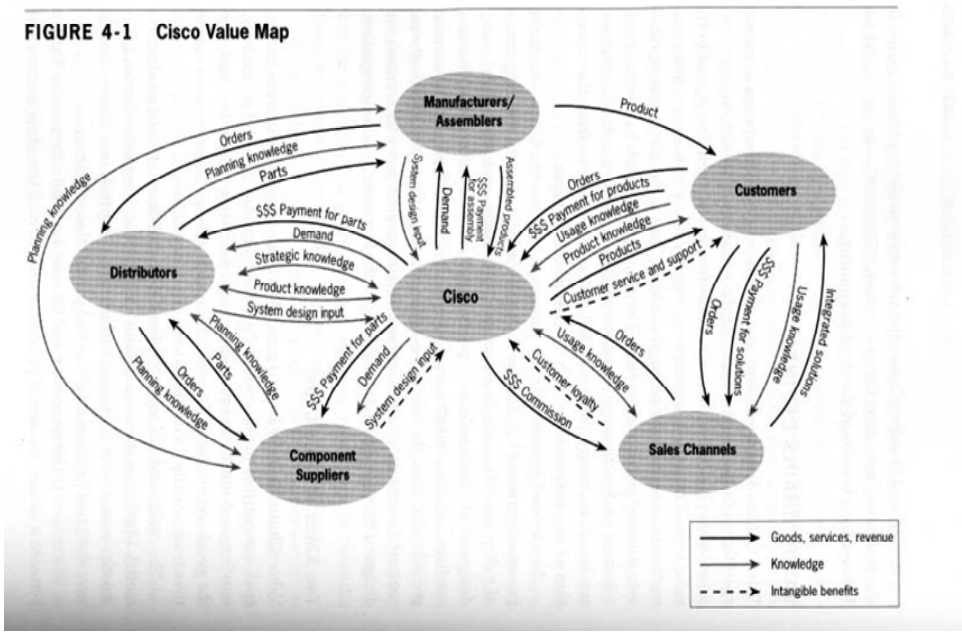
Anthropologic System
- Values
- Culture/Milieu

Information System
- Access
- Speed
- Fidelity/utility
- Privacy/security
- Storage

Mechanical / Physical System
- Flow
- Temporal Sequencing
- Spatial Proximities
- Logistics
- Information

Psychological System
- Organizing
- Forces Field
- Ecological/Behaviour Settings

Map Systems as Webs



Source: Digital Capital: Harnessing the Power of Business Webs,
By Don Tapscott, David Ticoll and Alex Lowy

Evaluation as an evolving field

From the beginning…

to the present…

and into the future…

Table discussion questions

1. What challenges do you face internally in your I&E unit?
    a. How do you deal with those challenges?
2. What challenges do you face interacting with key external stakeholders?
    a. How do you deal with those challenges?
3. What are your lessons learned about recommendations that you have made?

Resources:
(1) Chart alternatives graphic
www.ExtremePresentation.com

(2) *Florence Nightingale examples:*
http://understandinguncertainty.org/node/214

Reference:

Patton, Michael Quinn. *Utilization-Focused Evaaluation,* 4th edition, 2008, Sage Publications