

Agreement and Certainty Matrix

What is the Agreement and Certainty Matrix, and how can it help you?

The *Agreement and Certainty Matrix* is a visual tool you can use to identify challenges as technical or adaptive.¹

Technical challenges have clear, identifiable, agreed-upon solutions, even if those solutions are difficult to design and implement. **Adaptive** challenges are complex and lack agreement and/or certainty about the causes of the problem or the solutions. This tool can help you to better understand the type of problem you are facing and to explore appropriate solutions.

The Agreement and Certainty Matrix:

- Helps identify the technical and adaptive elements of a problem.
- Guides discussions about how to address adaptive problems.
- Helps ensure that chosen solutions and strategies will be effective based on whether the problem is technical or adaptive.
- Can reduce time and resources spent on ineffective solutions.

How to use this tool: *(refer to worksheets on pages 5–6)*

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Flip chart paper



Adhesive sticky notes



Markers



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This tool should be used after you have already identified a problem and its root causes. Use the [Cause and Effect Diagram](#) or the [Five Whys Worksheet](#) to determine the root causes of a problem.

Example: Your team has established that family planning counseling is not included in all appropriate primary care encounters. Your team has identified workload burden on providers, high staff turnover, and knowledge of family planning as root causes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Draw the Agreement and Certainty Matrix on a flip chart.

- **Pass out the handout:** *Agreement and Certainty Matrix Worksheet*.
- **For the identified problem, write each of the root causes on sticky notes.** Write one root cause per sticky note.

2. Familiarize your team with the Agreement and Certainty Matrix (as drawn on the flip chart, also found on the handout).

References:

1. Adapted from Zimmerman (2001) based on concepts from Stacey (1996) and application of the matrix by Dr. Stephen Larned.

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This matrix will be used to plot the root causes of the identified problem.

- The **left** side of the box represents a lot of certainty that this is the root cause of the problem and that addressing it will solve the problem; to the **right**, that there is not a lot of certainty.
- The **bottom** indicates that there is agreement about the root cause of the problem; at the **top**, there is not a lot of agreement.

When there is **high agreement** and **high certainty** about the root causes of a problem, the problem falls in the **lower left corner** on the matrix. In this case, the problem is well understood and there are known solutions to the problem; this would be considered a technical problem.

When there is **less certainty** and **less agreement** about the root causes of the problem, the problem is adaptive and falls in the **complex area** of the matrix. The solutions to complex, adaptive problems may not be known and may require innovation or experimentation to see what works.

3. As a team, answer these questions for each root cause:

1. What is your **level of agreement** (vertical axis) about the root cause?
2. What is your **level of certainty** (horizontal axis) that addressing this root cause will solve the problem?

Based on the level of agreement and certainty in the group, put your sticky note on the Agreement and Certainty Matrix to show where that root cause falls. Repeat for each root cause. This step will help you identify whether the root causes of the problem are simple (technical), complicated (technical), or complex (adaptive).

Example: The team decides to focus first on the root cause of workload burden. Team members determine they mostly agree that workload burden is a root cause, but there is not a lot of certainty that family planning counseling will be integrated into all appropriate primary care encounters by addressing workload burden. The team decides their level of agreement is fairly high, but their degree of certainty is low. The workload burden falls in the complex (adaptive) area of the matrix.

4. Fill in the Agreement and Certainty Matrix Worksheet based on the information plotted on the Agreement and Certainty Matrix.

5. Next, identify potential approaches for developing solutions. Using the figure on the next page, find where you placed your root cause on the matrix. Then see the approaches for developing solutions, labeled 1 through 7 in Table 1 (see page 3).

Example: The workload burden root cause falls in the complex (adaptive) area of the matrix, so appropriate solutions could be to convene and/or intervene (4, 5) or examine and describe patterns (6).

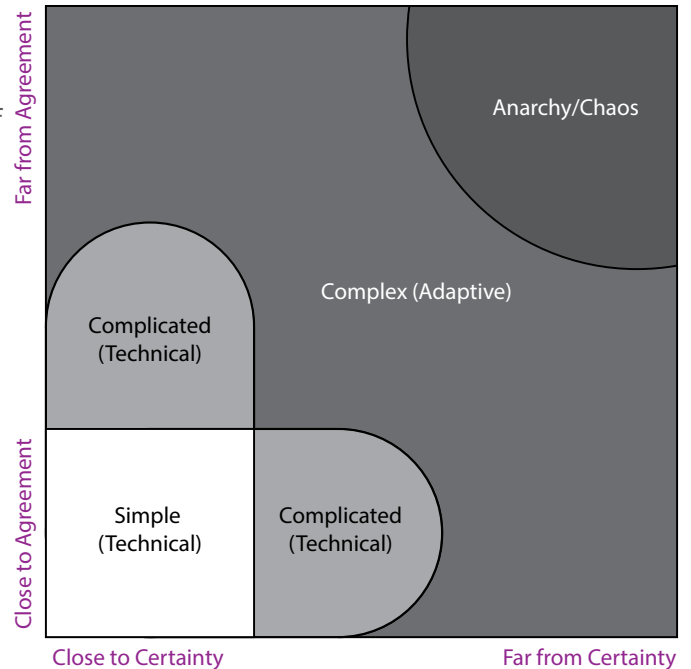
6. For each root cause, add the potential approach to developing solutions to your team's Agreement and Certainty Matrix Worksheet.

As solutions are brainstormed by the group, note them in the Solutions column.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Work as a team to prioritize potential solutions using the [Prioritization Matrix](#).

FIGURE 1. AGREEMENT AND CERTAINTY MATRIX



Using the Agreement and Certainty Matrix

FIGURE 2. APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

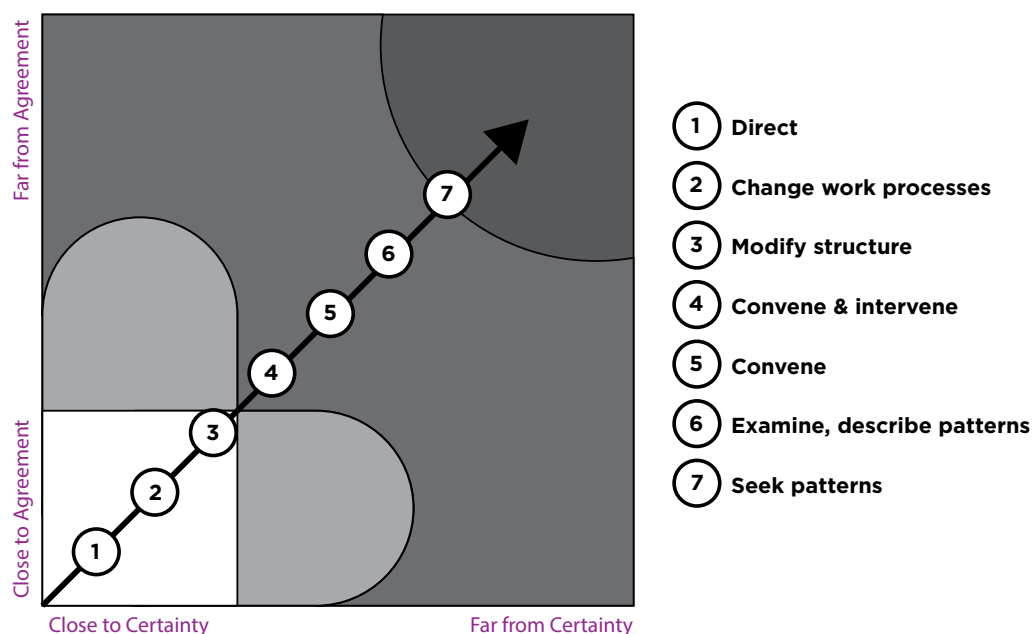


TABLE 1. APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS^{2,3}

Approaches	Description
1. Direct	Assign individuals to complete a straightforward task or tasks.
2. Change processes	Revise work practices and procedures to address a problem where there is sufficient control of variables to allow planned change in systems, organization, or information flow.
3. Modify structure	Similar to "change processes" above. Adapt or revise existing systems, such as work group composition, meeting structures, and organizational reporting relationships, to address a problem.
4. Convene and intervene	Gather representatives involved in a complex adaptive problem to achieve agreement and/or certainty about the problem or appropriate solutions and subsequently to test or implement a potential solution.
5. Convene	Gather representatives involved in a complex problem to achieve agreement and/or certainty about the problem or appropriate potential solutions.
6. Examine, describe patterns	Identify information and analyze trends in order to better understand the nature of the problem or solutions that may have been used previously.
7. Seek patterns	Continuously scan the context of the problem for emerging trends and/or patterns.

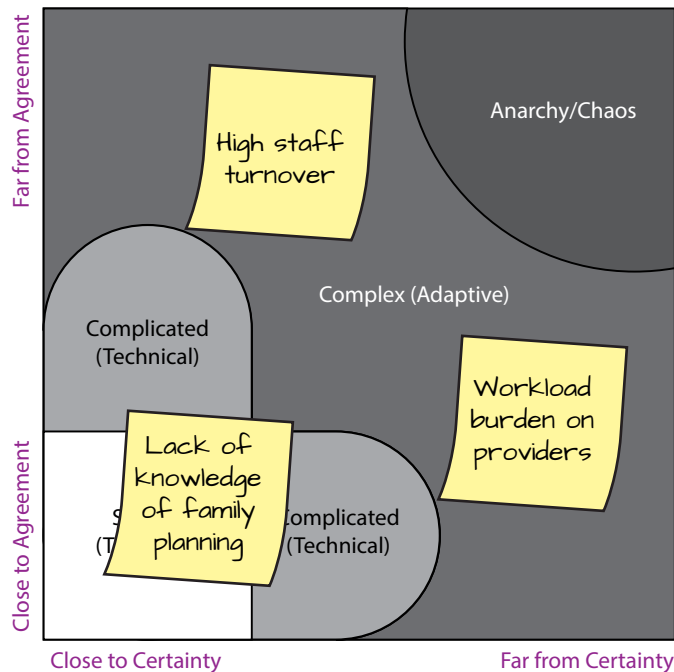
2. Zimmerman, B (2001). "Ralph Stacey's Agreement & Certainty Matrix | Better Evaluation." Betterevaluation.Org. Accessed April 16, 2019.

https://betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/ralph_staceys_agreement_and_certainty_matrix.

3. Stacey, Ralph D. 1996. Complexity And Creativity In Organizations. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

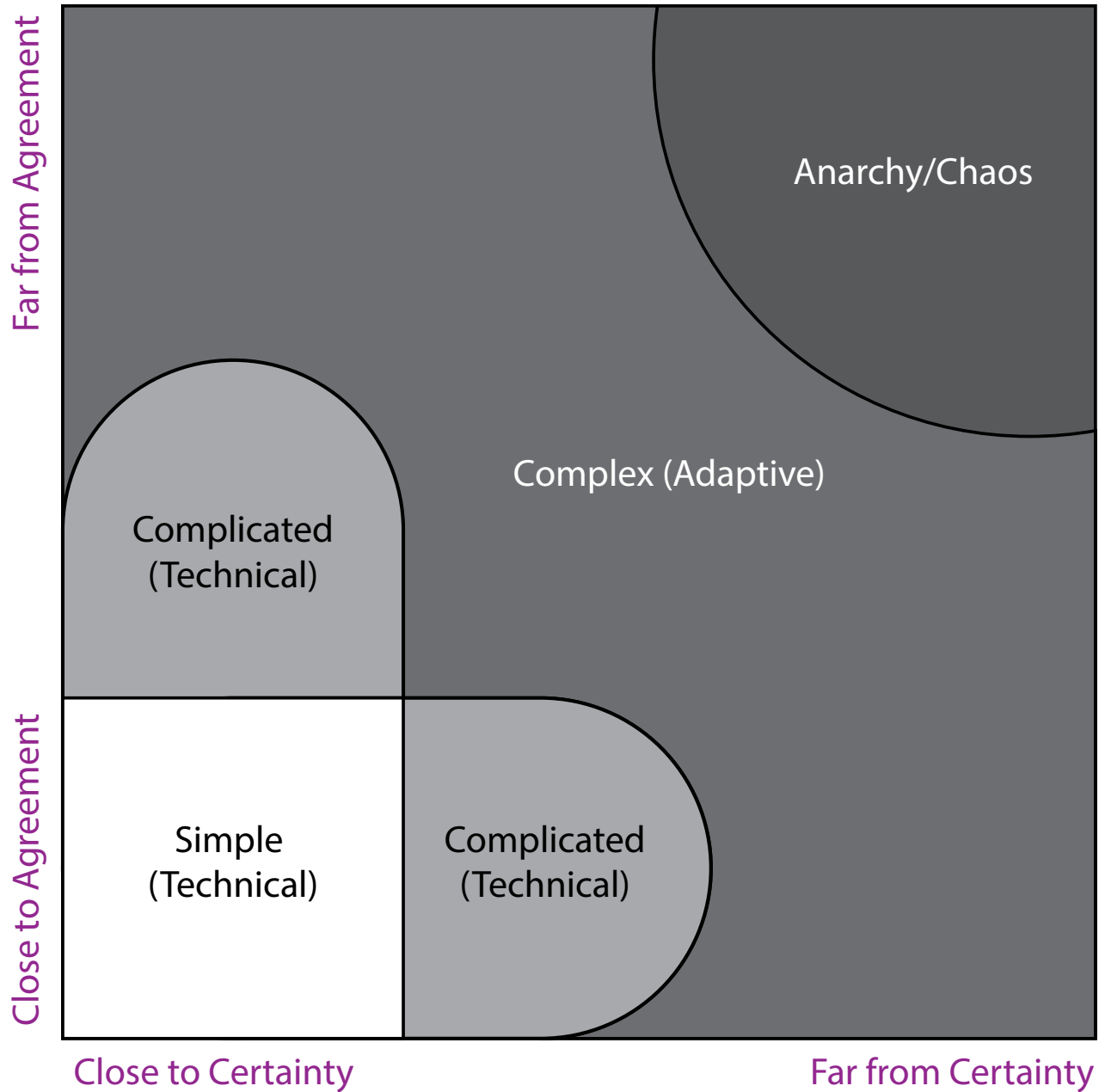
Example of a Completed Agreement and Certainty Matrix Worksheet

Problem: Family planning counseling is not included in all appropriate primary care encounters.



Root Cause of Problem	Level of Agreement	Degree of Certainty	Technical or Adaptive	Approach to Developing Solutions	Solutions
Workload burden	Close to agreement	Far from certainty	Adaptive	Examine and describe patterns	Gather providers and administrative staff to discuss roles and responsibilities. Identify tasks that providers do, that support staff could do to free up more time for family planning counseling.
High staff turnover	Far from agreement	Close to certainty	Adaptive	Modify Structure	Assign mentor to new staff and provide scheduled administrative time during which staff can meet with their mentors.
Lack of knowledge about quality family planning services	Close to agreement	Close to certainty	Technical	Direct	Assign relevant courses using the FPNTC Training Tracking System to staff.

Agreement and Certainty Matrix Worksheet



Problem:

Root Cause of Problem	Level of Agreement	Degree of Certainty	Technical or Adaptive	Approach to Developing Solutions	Solutions