Stacey’s Agreement-Certainty Matrix


This is a method to select the appropriate management actions in a complex adaptive system based on the degree of certainty and level of agreement on the issue in question.

Potential contexts for use include:

- Choosing between management or leadership approaches for a specific issue or decision
- Making sense of an array of decisions (or agenda for a group)
- Communicating with others why a particular approach is appropriate
- When innovations and creative alternatives are needed, the matrix can be used to deliberately try to increase uncertainty and disagreement. This nudges the system to the edge of chaos - thus disrupting the status quo in the desire to find alternative solutions.

The ability to manage and lead includes having an array of approaches and being aware of when to use which approach. The certainty-agreement matrix to help with this process by identifying management decisions on two dimensions: the degree of certainty and the level of agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Close to Agreement</th>
<th>Far from Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to Certainty</td>
<td>Far from Certainty</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Close to certainty**
When underlying cause and effect relationships are clear, the leverage points for change are well known, the interventions well tested, and the outcomes predictable.

**Far from certainty**
When underlying cause and effect relationships and the “leverage points” for change are unknown, the intervention untested, and the outcomes unpredictable.

**Close to agreement**
When the values, interests, perspectives and positions of stakeholders involved in an issue or decision are aligned and/or are sufficiently close to find common ground to move forward.

**Far from agreement**
When the values, interests, perspectives and positions of stakeholders involved in an issue or decision are in conflict and/or are sufficiently far apart that it is difficult to find common ground to move forward.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Challenges</th>
<th>Characteristics &amp; Decision Making</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Possible Actions</th>
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</table>
| Simple              | The cause-and-effect relationships are clear  
The solution already exists and/or can be easily developed  
The outcomes of the intervention are relatively predictable  
Stakeholders agree on how to frame the issue and move it forward | Making a cake using a recipe  
Implementing inoculation against the flu  
Administrating a scholarship program  
Payroll system | Choose and follow the right recipe  
Just do it, take action; execute a standard process  
Take advantage of best practice, use well tested formulas or blueprints  
Gather enough data on the problem, correctly diagnose the problem and know you have the right solution |
| Complicated         | Stakeholders are close to agreement but the cause-and-effect relationships and solutions, while discoverable, are not immediately evident  
There are several workable answers available  
The outcomes of the intervention are relatively predictable | Fixing a watch  
Sending a rocket to the moon  
Management information system | Discover solutions by doing your homework  
Generate more expert analysis & agreement  
Decision makers rely on experts to resolve the issues |
| Complex             | The cause and effect relationships underlying the issues are fuzzy or unclear  
The solutions are imperfect and not known in advance, are context specific, incomplete and time limited  
Stakeholders are far from agreement | Revitalizing commerce on a downtown street  
Raising a child  
Improving the academic performance of students at a struggling school | Learn by doing  
Launch multiple experiments to discover solutions  
Stakeholder agreement critical because of the need for sustained action.  
Stakeholders are the ones to experiment to uncover underlying cause and effect patterns of the problem.  
Point towards promising, innovative answers. |