

Data and Information – Related...but not the same

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Data vs Information?

- We have seen a shift in the last few years to a technocratic idea of data as a solution to the challenges of society
- Data is often seen as raw and unprocessed harvested from a system, computer or informant/research subject
- This is then processed ('data cleansing') to provide information about an issue about which someone wants to understand, decide on or measure in some way
- For data to do the work it is claimed it can do we rely on scale and/or the efficacy of the production process
- However, the production of the data (and the inherent assumptions of production) can obscure the tension between the relational contexts in which data are produced *from* information
- It also can also assume the relational context in which data and information are *consumed* and **interpreted**

Let take the way that 'data' and 'information' is used in performance management systems as an example

- The emphasis on collection of outcome in our public services denatures the information that arises from a conversation between a practitioner and client rendering it data for the purpose of judgement or evaluation of a practitioner, programme, organisational or service performance rather than informing the relationship where it was generated.
- This effect has been described as generating a 'view from nowhere' where the answer to a given problem or success of an intervention can be measured objectively (Porter 1995)

Quadrant 1: High cost/uncertain impact

High Cost

Quadrant 2: High cost/certain impact

From Lowe and Wilson (2018)

Uncertain Effect on Results Data

Improve programme to meet service user needs

Teach to the Test

Certain Effect on Results Data

Cherry Pick & Park

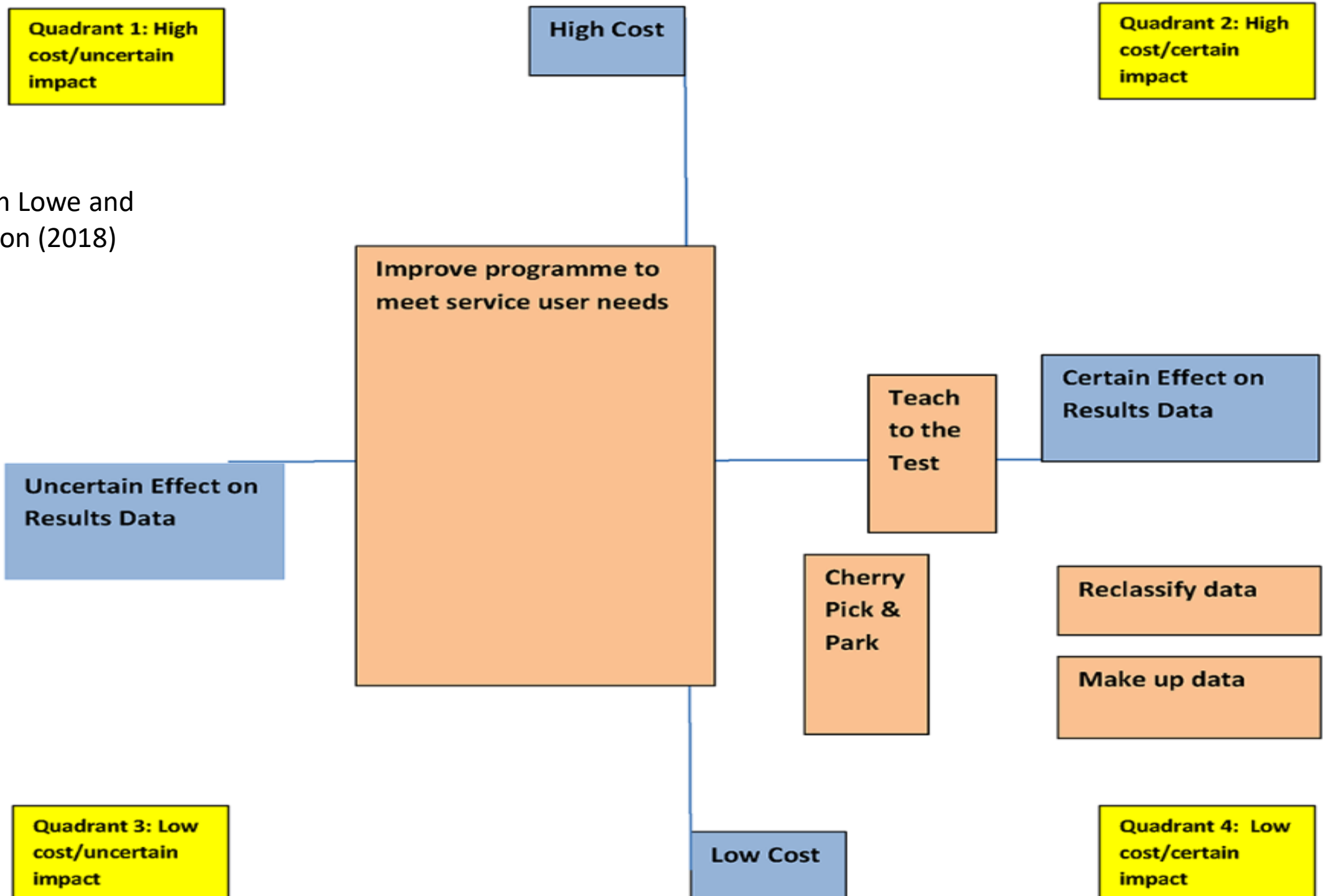
Reclassify data

Make up data

Quadrant 3: Low cost/uncertain impact

Low Cost

Quadrant 4: Low cost/certain impact



Yes Rob that all very nice but...



- “And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” (Genesis 11:1-2).
- “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech” (Genesis 11:7).

Perhaps...

- But the differences between us and the communities we are part of and work with actually generate meaning
- Research on 'Interdisciplinarity' (Academic for working together from different 'silos') tells us that new knowledge and insight is generated from community interpretation of data (Academic for 'conversations') rather than data in and of itself.
- So neither data or information is the solution it is the questions that matter
- Key for our future how we work together around these challenges and strike the balance for a more appropriate relationship between data and information and ourselves to create 'views from somewhere'

Thank you!



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