

# Nuts and Bolts: Part 1

## Asking Questions about Child and Family Outcomes

Jennifer Miller Haight  
Daniel Webster  
Lily Alpert

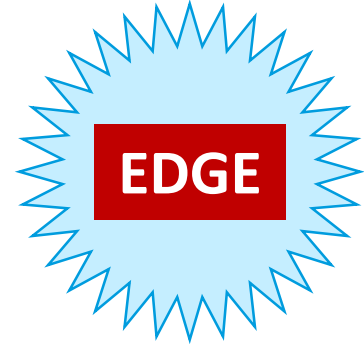
CQI Statewide Conference for Child Welfare and Probation  
March 27, 2018

# Today's session

- The process of improvement starts with a **question**.
- The goal of child welfare systems is to improve **outcomes** for children and families. We do that by way of changing the **process**, **quality**, and **capacity** of care.
- Ask a question about an outcome you can change:
  - **Likelihood**: What are the odds that a child will \_\_\_\_\_?
  - **Speed**: How long does it typically take for a child to \_\_\_\_\_?
- Observe **variation** to identify opportunities for improvement.

# Today's session

- Today's materials are taken from *EDGE: Evidence-Driven Growth and Excellence*
- Eight month, cohort-based evidence use training program for child welfare managers.
- Three sessions in Tennessee
- Finishing first session in Oklahoma



# The process of improvement starts with a question.

Becoming systematic in your use of evidence starts with **curiosity** and taking **ownership** over the inquiry.

Access to reports is critical, but the process of improvement doesn't start there. Reports are only helpful if they contain the **answer to the right question**.

Whether you **acquire** evidence from some pre-existing place or **generate** it yourself—your engagement must start with you **articulating your own question**.

## Reactive/Passive

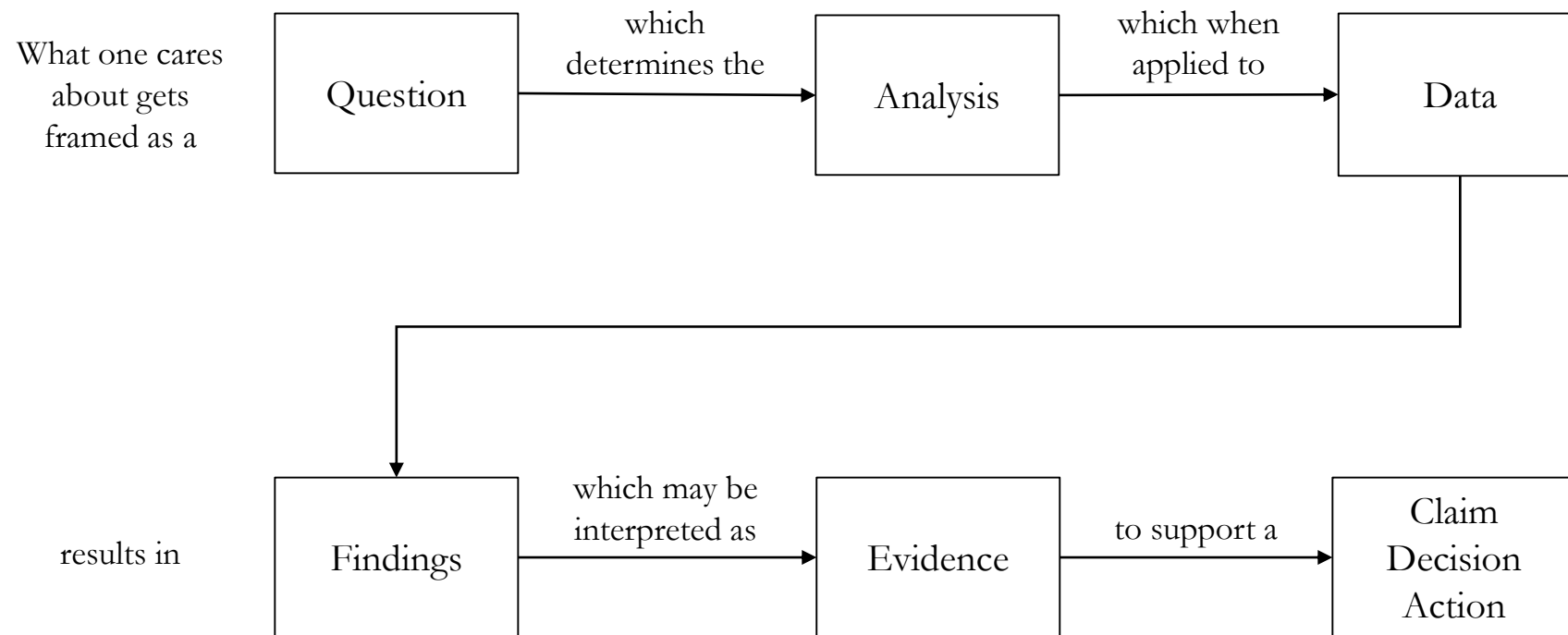
“Let's see what the data are telling us.”

## Active/Empowered

“Let's answer this question so we get the information we know we need.”

# Why spend so much time on developing questions?

A mismatched question can set off an unfortunate domino effect...

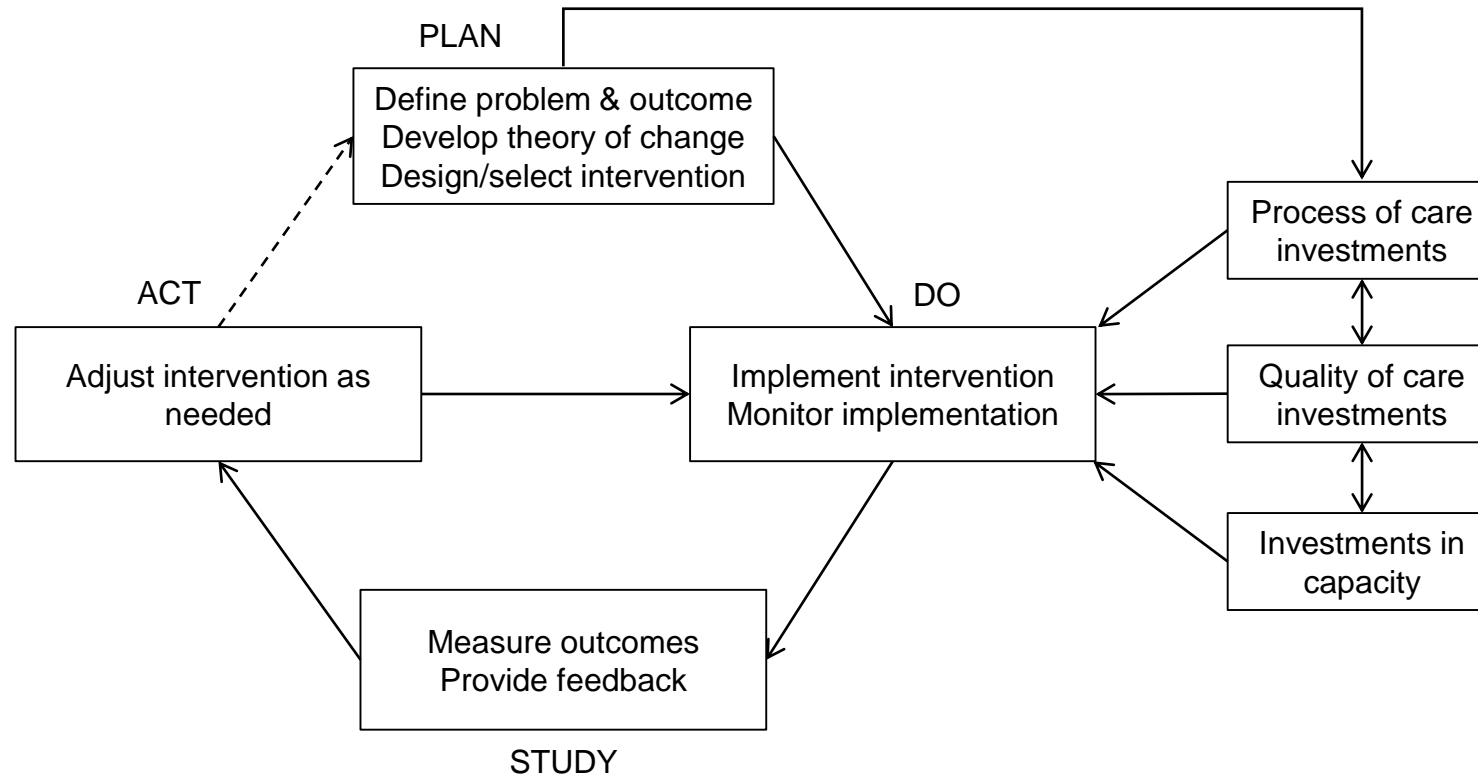


# The process of improvement starts with a question.

## What do you want to know?

- What questions do you have about system performance, either statewide or in your county?
- Example: How long do children in my county typically spend in foster care?
- Write down three questions. (A question ends in a question mark.)

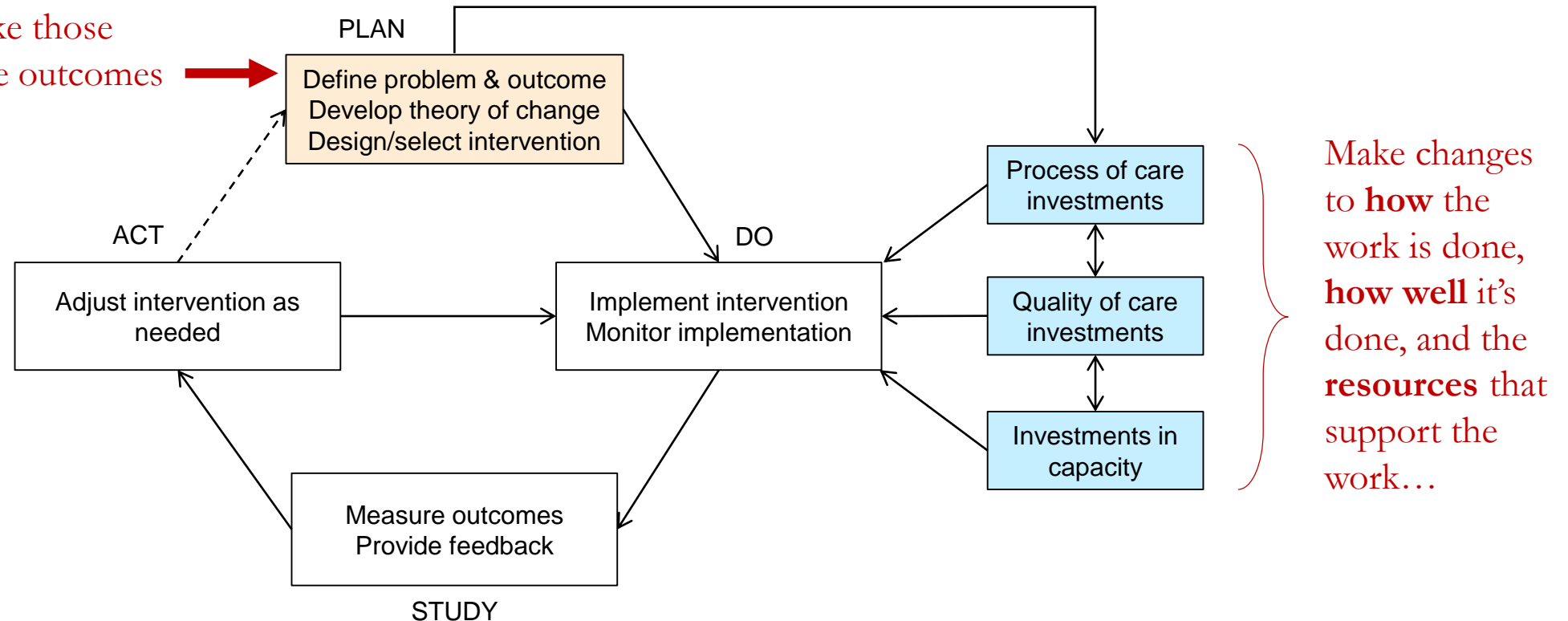
# The CQI cycle: Plan-Do-Study-Act



© The Center for State Child Welfare Data

# Outcomes, process, quality, and capacity

...because when we make those changes, we will improve outcomes for children and families

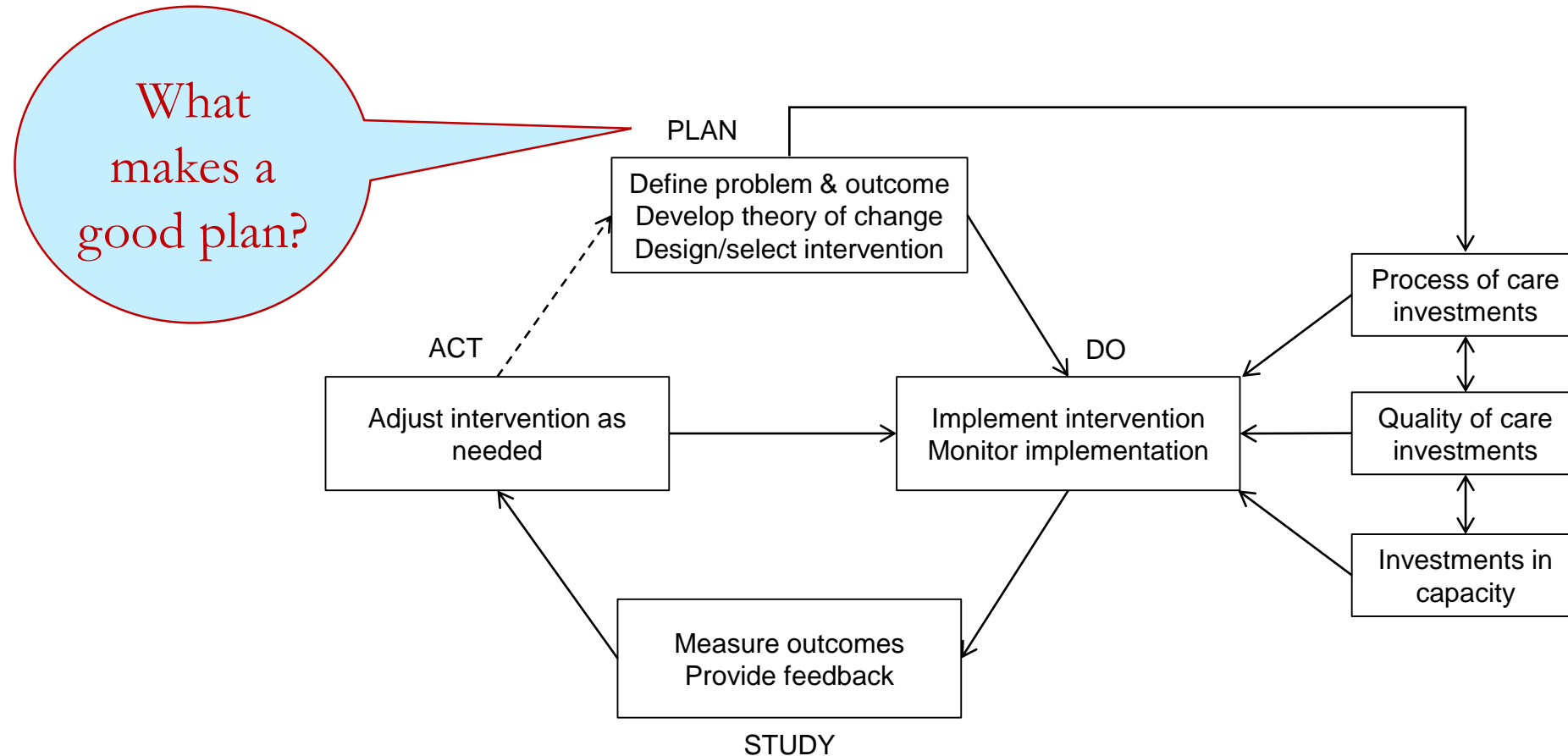




# So, we have questions about...

Outcomes	Processes, Quality, Capacity

# The CQI cycle: Plan-Do-Study-Act



# Theory of change: Four statements

I observe [**some outcome that I want to improve**].

I think it's because [**of this reason**].

So I plan to [**implement this intervention**],

which I think will result in [**an improved outcome**].

# I observe that... but is it a problem?

How do you know that the thing you observe is a problem that needs to be solved?

Nothing happens without variation. If everyone achieved the same outcomes, there would be nothing to change. **Variation is the signal that there is room somewhere in the system for improvement.**

Variation exists on four dimensions:

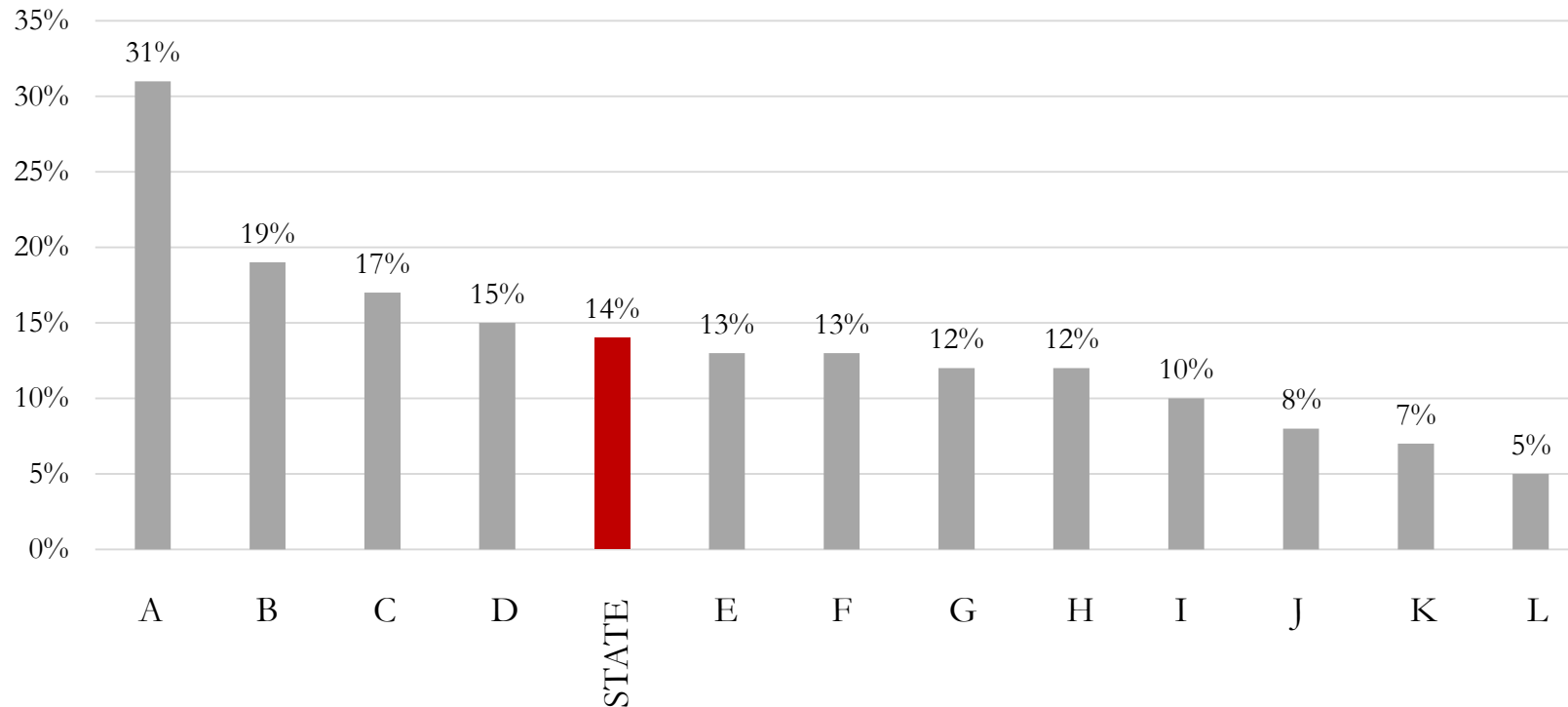
- **Person:** child to child, family to family
- **Place:** county to county, provider to provider, etc.
- **Service:** congregate care vs. foster families vs. kinship care, etc...
- **Time:** cohort to cohort

We want to understand how outcomes vary at the person, place, and service level so that we can do something to improve outcomes over time.

# Variation signals the need for improvement.

What percent of children entering out of home care in 2015 entered directly to a kinship foster home?

Proportion of all FY15 admissions entering foster care directly to a kinship placement, by county



# Variation signals the need for improvement.

Take the questions about **outcomes** you crafted earlier– Can you express the question so that it asks about variation? (Keyword: “than”)

No variation	Variation
At what rate do children age out of foster care?	Do more children age out of care in my region <b>than</b> in the rest of the state?
What percent of children reunify with their parents?	Are older children more likely to reunify <b>than</b> younger children?
What percent of children are placed with kin?	Are we any better at placing children with kin today <b>than</b> we were five years ago?

# Summary: The goal of CQI is to improve outcomes.

- Begin the process of improvement by asking **questions about outcomes**. Ask about how outcomes vary.
- Observe **variation** to determine that you have an **outcome** that needs improvement. (“I observe that...”)
- Make changes to **process**, **quality**, or **capacity** that are designed to improve those outcomes (“I think it’s because... so I plan to...”)

# CQI and the demand for evidence at every stage

## Plan-Do-Study-Act: Evidence supports your PLAN.

I observe [ <b>some <u>outcome</u> that I want to improve</b> ].	<i>How do you know?</i>	<b>Evidence.</b>
--	-------------------------	------------------

I think it's because [ <b>of this reason</b> ].	<i>How do you know?</i>	<b>Evidence.</b>
---	-------------------------	------------------

So I plan to [ <b>implement this intervention</b> ],	<i>How do you know?</i>	<b>Evidence.</b>
--	-------------------------	------------------

which I think will result in [ <b>an improved outcome</b> ].	<i>How do you know?</i>	<b>Evidence.</b>
--	-------------------------	------------------



# Where else does evidence come in?

## Evidence supports your **PLAN**:

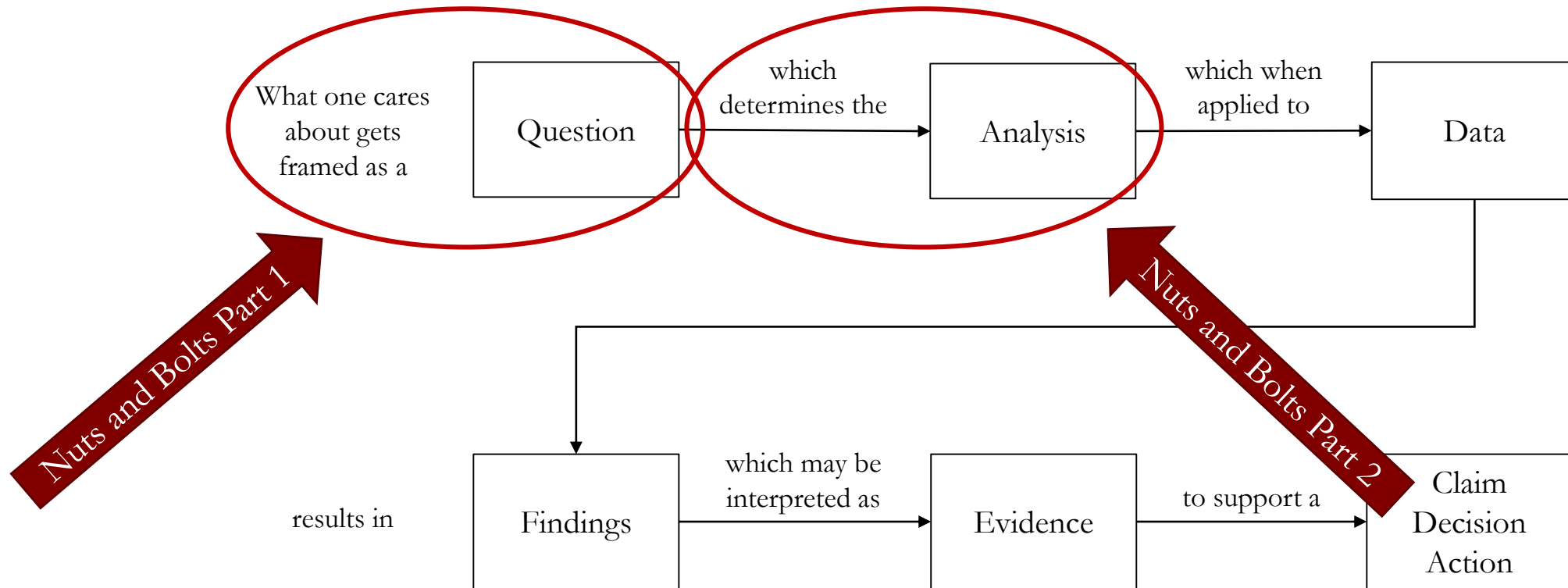
- points to the outcomes that need improvement (**I observe that...**)
- supports (or refutes) your hypothesis about what's driving the outcome (**I think it's because...**)
- informs the selection of matched interventions (**So I plan to...which I think will result in...**)

## Later on in the cycle of **CQI**, evidence:

- gives you information about whether you're implementing your intervention according to plan (**DO**)
- tells you whether your intervention was effective (**STUDY**)
- informs your decisions about what to do in light of those results (**ACT**).

# Recall this...

A mismatched question can set off an unfortunate domino effect...



# Preview: Nuts and Bolts Part 2

**Plan-Do-Study-Act: Evidence supports your PLAN.**

I observe [**some outcome that I want to improve**].

*How do you know?*

**Evidence.**

**The discipline of converting data into evidence:**

- Ask a question about something you can change.
- How do you answer a question about likelihood?
  - e.g., What percent of children entering foster care exit to permanency?
- How do you answer a question about speed?
  - e.g., How long do children typically spend in foster care?

