



# CAUSAL MAPPING IS GOOD AT COPING WITH MESSINESS AND COMPLEXITY

From (Powell et al., 2024)

... recognising head-on the ambiguity of much narrative causal data, particularly when confronted with large bodies of data collected in disparate ways. Evaluators must contend with messiness: imprecise system boundaries, differing specification of claimed causal influences and lack of clear or consistent information about what case or group of cases claims refer to. Causal mapping can contend with all this ambiguity rather than shying away from it. It can make use of messy operational data, treating urgent, unexpected and unstructured information at face value. This is made possible by distinguishing clearly between two analytical steps in evaluation: The first is to gather, understand and assemble causal evidence from different sources (those in a position to have useful evidence about relevant causal links and chains) to construct, compare and contrast the evidence for and against different possible causal pathways. By focusing on this task, causal mapping lays a more reliable foundation for the second, often critical, task of using the assembled data to make judgements about what is in fact really happening. This avoids the confusion and ambiguity that often arises when evaluators seek to address both steps simultaneously by constraining what data are collected to fit a prior view of reality which other stakeholders may or may not share.

## References

Powell, Copestake, & Remnant (2024). *Causal Mapping for Evaluators*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13563890231196601>.