



CONTEXT IS CRITICAL TO THE LOGIC OF EVIDENCE

These questions may depend on a somewhat hidden assumption: that all the causal claims (the links) come from a single context. Such as, in most cases, when all the claims are all agreed on by a group as in participatory systems mapping (PSM). For example, when we wrote "which factors are reported as being causally central?", can we really answer that by simply checking the network? From:

Factor X is central within these claims

Can we deduce:

Factor X is claimed to be central

Or, can we go from:

There are two relatively separate groups of causal claims?

Can we deduce:

It is claimed that there are two relatively separate groups of causal claims?

In general, no. It is easy to think of counter-examples. If we ask a parents and children about the causal network surrounding family disputes, we might get two relatively separate causal networks with only a little overlap. From this we cannot conclude that these respondents taken together claim that there are two relatively separate systems. It might be that the parents and children indeed are giving information about relatively separate systems about which they each have the best information, or it might be that the two groups are telling conflicting and perhaps incompatible stories.

We could express this as, say, the first axiom of causal mapping:

If a network of causal evidence from context C has property P, we can conclude that there is evidence that the corresponding causal network has property P, but again only in context C.

$P(E(N)) \rightarrow E(P(N))$

We often assume that contexts are sources and sources are contexts. But this is not always the case. For example one respondent might give two sets of information, one from before losing their job and one set from afterwards, without trying to encode the job loss as a causal factor within the network of claims.

In a PSM workshop, there may be multiple respondents but, as long as they construct a consensus map, these are all treated as one source. Part of the job of the moderator is also to ensure that the claims (evidence) all come from one context, which is the same as saying: we can validly make inferences like those above. I don't know whether PSM moderators actually do this.

You might say "this is all pointless because it depends what you mean by context", and that is exactly true. All we have done is