



# CAUSAL MAPPING FOR OUTSIDERS

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## 📖 What is Causal Mapping?

Causal mapping is a technique to **visualise what people believe causes what** within a complex system. It creates a "mental map" of the cause-and-effect relationships perceived by an individual or a group.

The process starts with **narratives**—such as interview transcripts, reports, or open-ended survey responses. Causal claims within these texts are systematically identified and structured into a network diagram:

- **Nodes (Boxes)** represent the *factors* or *concepts* (e.g., "Better Training").
- **Links (Arrows)** show the *direction of influence* between them.

## 🧭 Why Use It and Who is it For?

Causal mapping is a powerful tool for analysing **qualitative data** at scale, helping to understand complex, real-world situations.

## Who Uses Causal Mapping?

This technique is primarily used by professionals who need to understand complex social systems and justify their decisions:

- **Evaluators:** To empirically verify whether a planned programme works as intended (Theory of Change) and trace its actual influence pathways.
- **Policymakers & Strategists:** To gain a clearer picture of stakeholder perceptions, anticipate risks, and identify effective intervention points (leverage points).
- **Researchers:** To systematically process large volumes of interview data, often across different groups (e.g., comparing views by location), while keeping data transparent.

## Why is it useful

The key benefit is turning massive amounts of qualitative input into a structured visual database which is query-able: you can ask it questions.

- **Understand Stakeholder Views:** It reveals how different people believe a system or problem works.
- **Manage Complexity:** It structures messy, interconnected information into a query-able map.
- **Validate Arguments:** It allows quantifying the robustness of evidence for any causal path reported by stakeholders.

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## The Causal Map App

The specialised **Causal Map app** provides a convenient way to do causal mapping. Users can import interviews or reports and "code" them: highlighting causal claims and adding them to the database. Much of this process can optionally be automated using AI, enabling rigorous analysis of larger datasets.

- **Transparency:** Every link in the map is transparently tied back to the **original source quote**. This ensures that outputs are verifiable and avoids acting as a "black box," maintaining the rigour essential for qualitative work.
- **Querying the Map:** The final map is a dynamic model of **causal evidence** that can be actively explored to answer sophisticated questions, such as tracing all direct and indirect links from a single input to a defined outcome.
- **AI as an Assistant:** Generative AI is optionally used as a **tireless, low-level coding assistant** to quickly extract explicit causal claims from text.

## Related

- [chapter intro](#)