



TASK 1 – GATHERING NARRATIVE DATA

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From (Powell et al. 2024)

How to collect causal claims from which to draw causal maps?

(There is also a whole chapter about this task: [Task 1 – Introduction](#))

There are a wide variety of options, including in-depth individual interviews (Ackermann et al. 2004), reuse of open-ended questions in structured surveys (Jackson & Trochim 2002), literature reviews (in which ‘sources’ can be documents rather than individuals) and archival or secondary material within which pre-existing causal claims are already made (Copestake, 2020). Other approaches aim to build consensus by using structured collaborative processes, including Delphi studies and PSM (Penn & Barbrook-Johnson 2019). Guidelines for causal mapping may include procedures for collecting primary data, with forms of elicitation including back-chaining (‘what influenced what?’) and forward-chaining (what resulted, or could result, from this?)

With primary data collection, we can distinguish between relatively closed and open approaches and whether respondents are forced to choose between pre-selected optional answers or can formulate their own (see Table 2). Interviewers may also be guided by a chaining algorithm; for example, they may be instructed to iteratively ask questions like ‘You mentioned X, please could you tell me what were the main factors that influenced X or led to it happening.’

Table 2. Different approaches within primary data collection for causal mapping, with example questions.

Admissible answers / Scope of questions	Explicit: factors are explicitly identified	Implicit: factors are not explicitly named
Closed: questions with a predetermined focus	Which factors in this list influenced this particular event?	What influenced this particular event?
Open: a freer discussion	Identify the biggest change you experienced in relation to X, and list three factors that influenced it	Tell me what has changed for you in the last x years

References

Ackermann, Eden, & Cropper (2004). *Getting Started with Cognitive Mapping*.

Jackson, & Trochim (2002). *Concept Mapping as an Alternative Approach for the Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Responses*.

Penn, & Barbrook-Johnson (2019). *Participatory Systems Mapping: A Practical Guide*.
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