

From Chapter 4:

TIPS FOR CREATING CAUSAL KNOWLEDGE MAPS FROM YOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS



1. *Phrase concepts as nouns or gerunds* (“-ing” words used as nouns), such as “job growth,” “collaboration,” or “protecting the environment.”
2. Don’t diagram “*no relationship*,” such as “money does not cause happiness.”
3. *Place a question mark on arrows to show uncertain relationships* and areas where people disagree about whether one thing causes more (or less) of another thing or not.
4. *“Merge” concepts that are saying the same thing*, such as when you’re creating a map from statements by many people who used different words to mean the same thing, such as “evaluation” and “assessment.”
5. *“More A causes less B = More ‘opposite of A’ causes more B.”* When you have two causal relationships such as “more education causes better job opportunities” and “lack of education is a barrier to job opportunities,” these can be combined into one concept because they are stating the same causal relationship in different ways.
6. *Diagram only what the data show.* Don’t map connections that are based on “reading between the lines.” You can add your interpretations later as “recommendations for future research.”
7. *Use their wording.* Label the circles on your map using wording that is close to what your research participants said. This makes it easier to show what data support the concepts and causal relationships on your map. Some amount of wordsmithing is acceptable, such as rephrasing concepts as nouns (tip 1) or making them less wordy (tip 8).
8. *Keep concepts succinct.* You can add details in explanatory text that goes with your map.

Note: This handout was originally prepared as a handout for the authors’ workshop at the American Evaluation Association Summer Evaluation Institute in Atlanta, Georgia, June 2018.

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