



CAUSAL
PATHWAYS

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM 2023

DISCOVERING HOW, WHY, AND
WHEN OUR STRATEGIES MATTER



VIRTUAL
SYMPOSIUM
2023

Causal Pathways: Redefining Rigor

Presented by Jewlya Lynn and Abdoul Karim Coulibaly

Presenters



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Causal Pathways
Initiative



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Independent
Consultant

A causal pathway is the complex, potentially non-linear, multi-faceted way in which change is or has happened. It may include many different causes and multiple effects and chains of cause and effect.

A causal link refers to a specific relationship between cause and effect and is NOT limited to one cause related to one effect (multiple causes, multiple effects, circular cause and effect, etc.)

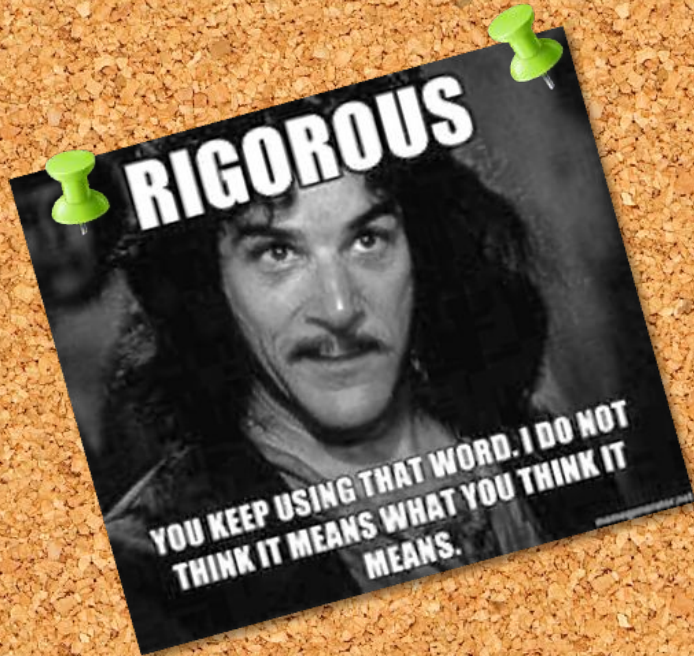


Rigor often
means ideas
such as...

Integrity; competence;
a way of demonstrating
legitimacy of the
process; the quality of
scientific method – the
precision.

RIGOR TORTOISE





Post in chat one example of a setting where a rigorous, experimental or quasi-experimental design can (or did) result in an incomplete or even inaccurate understanding of how change happened.



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Redefining rigor

New Definitions of Rigor:



From: Hallie
Preskill &
Jewlya Lynn

- Quality of the Thinking
- Credibility and Legitimacy of the Claims
- Cultural Responsiveness and Context
- Quality and Value of the Learning Process

Rigor that pays attention to...

From: Tom
Aston & Marina
Apgar



- A combination of causes are leading to an outcome: the interactions explain the change




- There are many types of bias to attend to (not eliminate) including intervention, selection, courtesy, evaluator, respondent, confirmation, unconscious, etc.

Redefining rigor specific to causal pathways




The CLARISSA Project's Rubrics



*Causal
Links*


1. Plausibility
2. Representativeness
3. Triangulation
4. Transparency
5. Uniqueness



This set of rubrics was adapted by the CLARISSA project, building on the prior work of Tom Aston and Marina Apgar

Aston, T. (2020) Quality of Evidence Rubrics.

1. Plausibility



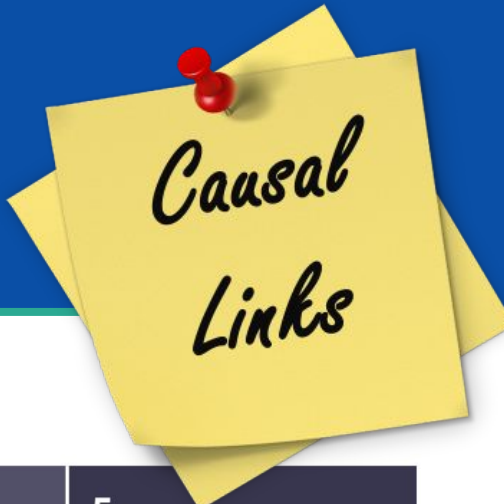
Causal Links

Table 1.1 Plausibility rubric (by performance level)

1	2	3	4	5
Unclear, illogical, or contradictory explanation connecting intervention to outcome.	Explanation indicates a possible connection between intervention and outcome.	Explanation is clear, logical and temporally consistent, and suggests a likely association between intervention and outcome.	Convincing explanation of how evidence connects intervention and outcome. Conclusions drawn tend to follow the data.	Highly convincing account, clearly and logically signposting key steps and specific data connecting intervention to outcome. Conclusions drawn unambiguously follow the data.

Source: Aston (2020)

2. Representativeness



Causal Links

Table 1.2 Representativeness rubric (by performance level)

1	2	3	4	5
Evidence does not include the views of children or business owners in CLARISSA.	Evidence about the views or experiences of some participants,* but they have not been involved or asked about this; for example, through indirect sources (e.g. another stakeholder talking about participants' experiences).	Evidence about the views or experiences of participants* where they have been directly asked, gathered through processes driven by CLARISSA staff and from CLARISSA staff observations. Participants are not involved in analysis.	Evidence comes directly from the participants, and they are involved in the analysis generated through processes initiated by CLARISSA staff. Viewpoints are more aggregated (combined), rather than unique.	Evidence directly from participants, with high levels of participants' agency in the research process, analysis and resulting actions. The evidence may contain contradictory views that represent unique viewpoints from different groups.

Source: authors' own

3. Triangulation

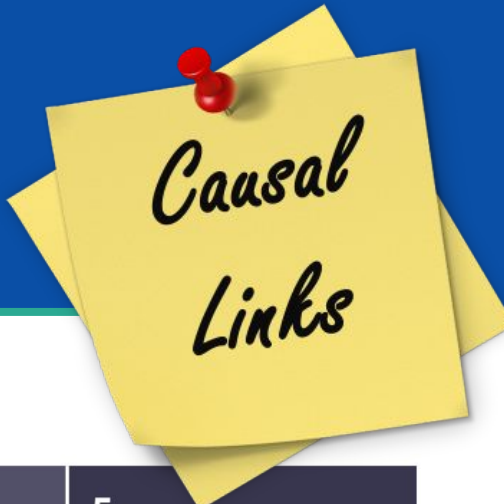


Table 1.3. Triangulation rubric (by performance level)

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence corroborates the connection between intervention and outcome. Other evidence contradicts the proposed connection.	A single line of evidence from a single source* supports the claim.	Multiple lines* of evidence from a single source corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.	Multiple lines of evidence from multiple sources corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.	Multiple lines of high-quality** evidence from multiple sources corroborate the connection between intervention and outcome.

Source: adapted from Aston (2020)

4. Transparency



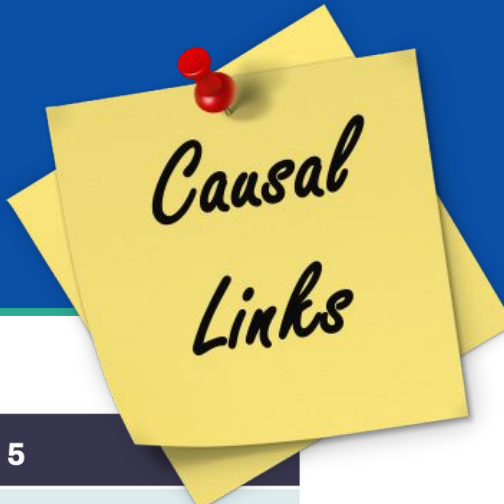
Causal Links

Table 1.4. Transparency rubric (by performance level)

1	2	3	4	5
It is unclear what evidence supports the claim.	Evidence has been identified, but not clearly explained.	Various sources of evidence are clearly identified and explained.	Sources of evidence and data collection methods are clearly explained. Data limitations and alternative interpretations are clearly discussed.	Sources of evidence and data collection methods are clearly explained. Data limitations and alternative interpretations, and the plausibility of alternative explanations, are clearly discussed. Data collection protocols are available.

Source: Aston (2020)

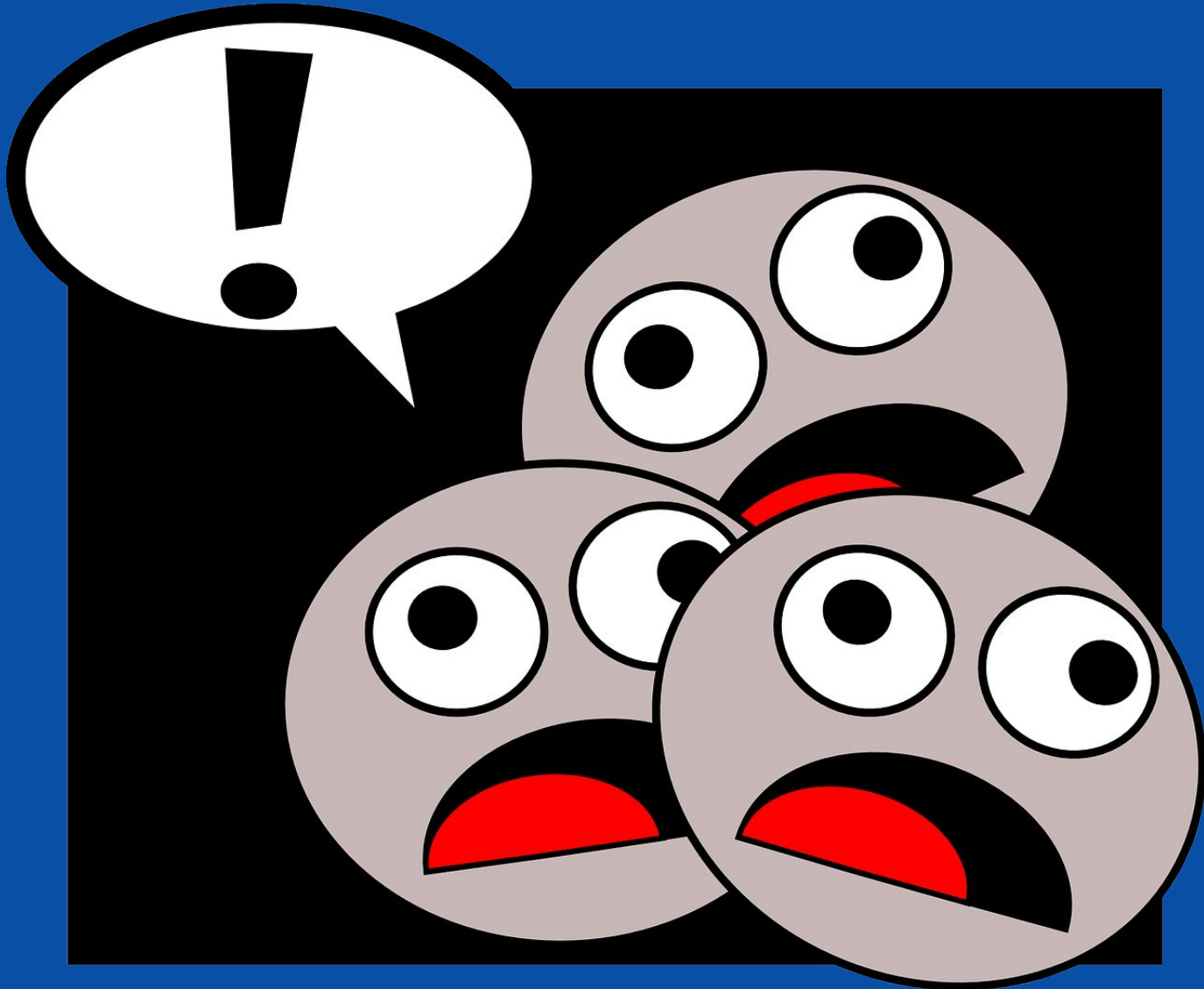
5. Uniqueness



Causal
Links

Table 1.5: Uniqueness rubric (by performance level)

1	2	3	4	5
Evidence is found that disproves the claim, demonstrating another intervention caused the outcome.	The evidence provides a weak connection between the intervention and the outcome. Various confounding factors are possible. Other evidence indicates possible alternative explanations.*	The evidence provides an ambivalent connection between the intervention and the outcome. It is equally possible that the claim is valid or invalid.	The evidence is specific to the intervention. The outcome demonstrates a distinctive effect pattern. It demonstrates a probable connection between intervention and outcome. Alternative explanations are unlikely.	The evidence is highly specific to the intervention. The outcome demonstrates a very distinctive effect pattern, clearly connected to the intervention. Alternative explanations are implausible.



Individual Reflection



Your
turn

Reflecting on your own work:

1. Head to the MIRO board
2. Pick either Plausibility or Triangulation and reflect on the questions posed
3. Put your answer into the sticky notes (double click to type into one)

Individual Reflection



Put into chat: What would it look like to strengthen the plausibility of causal claims in your own work? If you are a commissioner, what concerns do you have about whether evaluations are meeting this plausibility criteria?

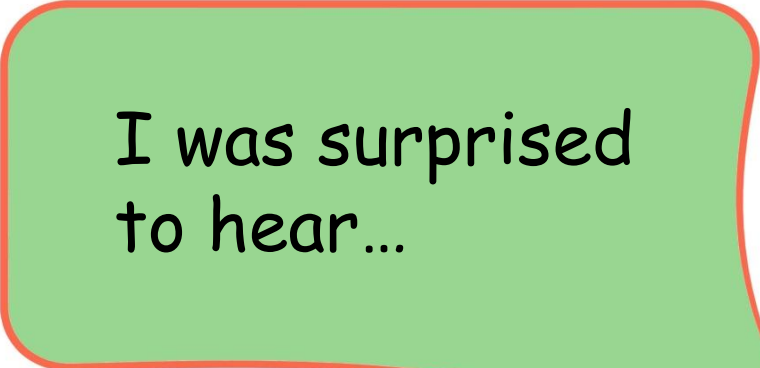
Table 1.1 Plausibility rubric (by performance level)

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Source: Aston (2020)



Our
turn



I was surprised
to hear...



I'm still
noodling...



A few resources to spark your thinking

Head to the
MIRO board for
the links!

[Design Note 2: CLARISSA's Quality of Evidence Rubrics](#)

- CLARISSA evaluation team (Marina Apgar, Mieke Snijder, and other team members)

[Quality of Evidence](#)

- Tom Aston

[Innovating for inclusive rigour in peacebuilding evaluation](#)

- Institute for Development Studies, Marina Apgar et al.

[Redefining Rigor: Describing Quality Evaluation in Complex, Adaptive Settings](#)

- Hallie Preskill and Jewlya Lynn

[Monitoring and evaluation for thinking and working politically](#)

- Tom Aston et al.

[Balancing biases in evaluation](#)

- Tom Aston

