

This strangeness is caused by rounding errors and is not a paradox at all. If we compute results with exact numbers instead of approximate ones, we see both of your definitions of $f(2)$ do indeed agree. I used Mathematica to compute these results.

As an example, let

$$f(1) = 4, f(n) = \frac{1}{nf(n+1) + 1}$$

$$g(n) = 1/(1 + 2/(1 + 3/...1/(1 + nf(n+1))))).$$

Observe $f(2) = g(n)$ for all values of n . Here we show this for $n = 5, 10, 20, 4000$:

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In[205]:= (* compute the first 4001 values of f *)
res = RecurrenceTable[{f[n] == 1 / (1 + n f[n + 1]), f[1] == 4}, f[n], {n, 4001}];

In[206]:= g[n_] := ContinuedFractionK[Piecewise[{{k f[k + 1], k == n}, {k, True}}], 1, {k, 1, n}]

In[207]:= g[5]
Out[207]= 
$$1 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{2}{1 + \frac{3}{1 + \frac{4}{1 + 5 f[6]}}}}$$


In[208]:= g[10]
Out[208]= 
$$1 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{2}{1 + \frac{3}{1 + \frac{4}{1 + \frac{5}{1 + \frac{6}{1 + \frac{7}{1 + \frac{8}{1 + \frac{9}{1 + 10 f[11]}}}}}}}}}}$$


In[209]:= res[[2]]
Out[209]=  $-\frac{3}{4}$ 

In[210]:= {g[5], g[10], g[20], g[4000]} /. f[n_] -> res[[n]]
Out[210]=  $\{-\frac{3}{4}, -\frac{3}{4}, -\frac{3}{4}, -\frac{3}{4}\}$ 
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Here, the variable res holds the first 4001 values of f and $g(n)$ computes the n -long expansion of $f(2)$. Note $f(2)$ equals all values of g .

Now the number $0.525135276\dots$ arises from rounding error. If we round values of f , we introduce error (call it ϵ) and get an expression of the form

$$g_\epsilon(5) = \frac{1}{1 + \frac{2}{1 + \frac{3}{1 + \frac{4}{1 + 5(f(6) + \epsilon)}}}}.$$

Now when we collapse this fraction, it turns out the coefficient in the numerator and denominator of ϵ match the numerator and denominator of the convergents of the continued fraction mentioned in the problem statement.

If we let $g(n) = (a_1 + a_2 f(n+1))/(b_1 + b_2 f(n+1))$, then g_ϵ is of the form

$$g_\epsilon(n) = \frac{a_1 + a_2 f(n+1)}{b_1 + b_2 f(n+1) + b_2 \epsilon} + \frac{a_2 \epsilon}{b_1 + b_2 f(n+1) + b_2 \epsilon},$$

where the coefficients are functions of n . The first term in the sum resembles $g(n)$, however the extra term in the denominator makes it tends to 0 as $n \rightarrow \infty$. Additionally, the second term tends to a_2/b_2 as $n \rightarrow \infty$, and a_2/b_2 tends to $0.525135276\dots$