So what: A new method for evaluating systems change and impacts

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I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and I extend that respect to other Indigenous people who are present.

Thanks to:
The Front Project
Paul Ramsay Foundation
Brian Keogh - Cobalt59
Matt Healey - FPC

Overview:

- Background
- Why did we do it?
- What did we do?
- What did we find?
- What does it mean???

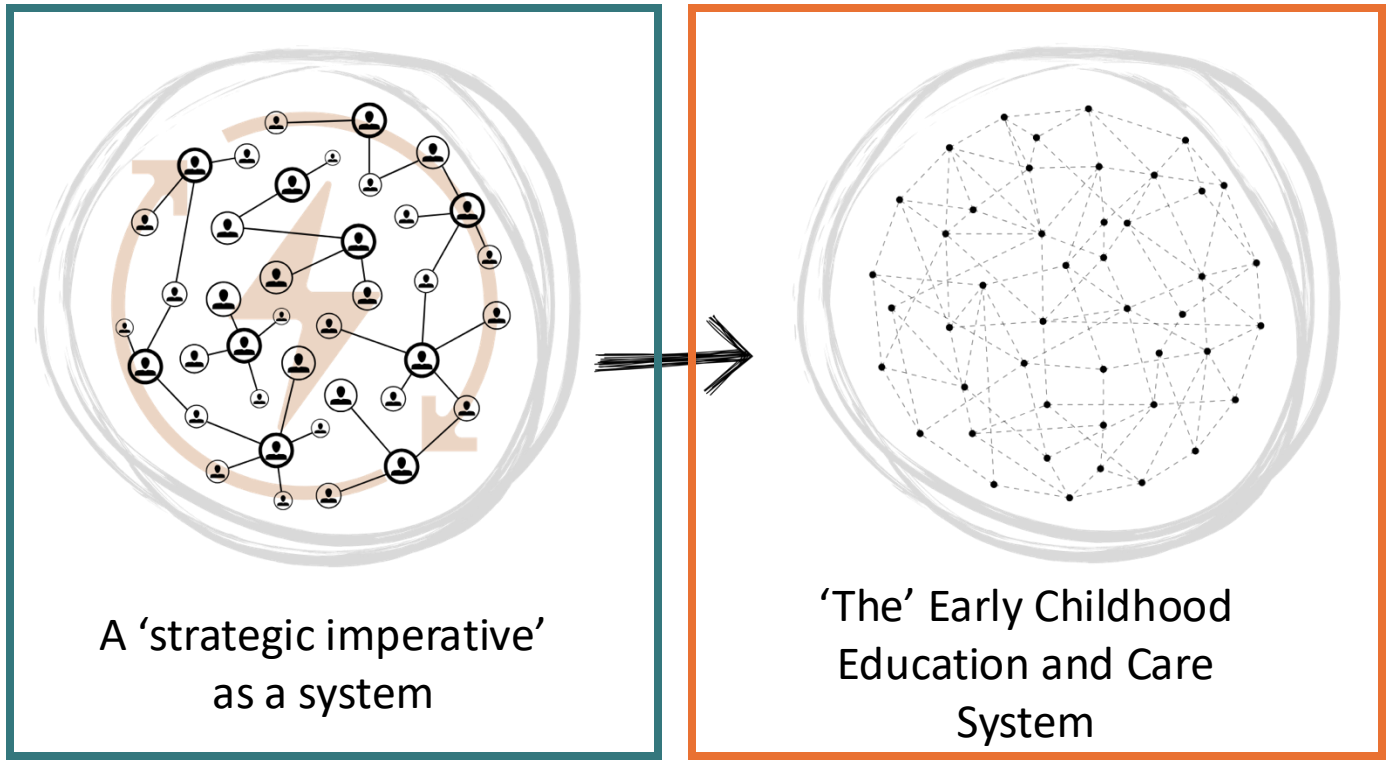
Background

- The Front Project (TFP) is a national not-for-profit that puts children and families at the centre:
  - works across the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system
  - connects with people who can potentially effect change and remove barriers which disadvantage children and families.
  - works with the early childhood sector, government and business leaders

Background

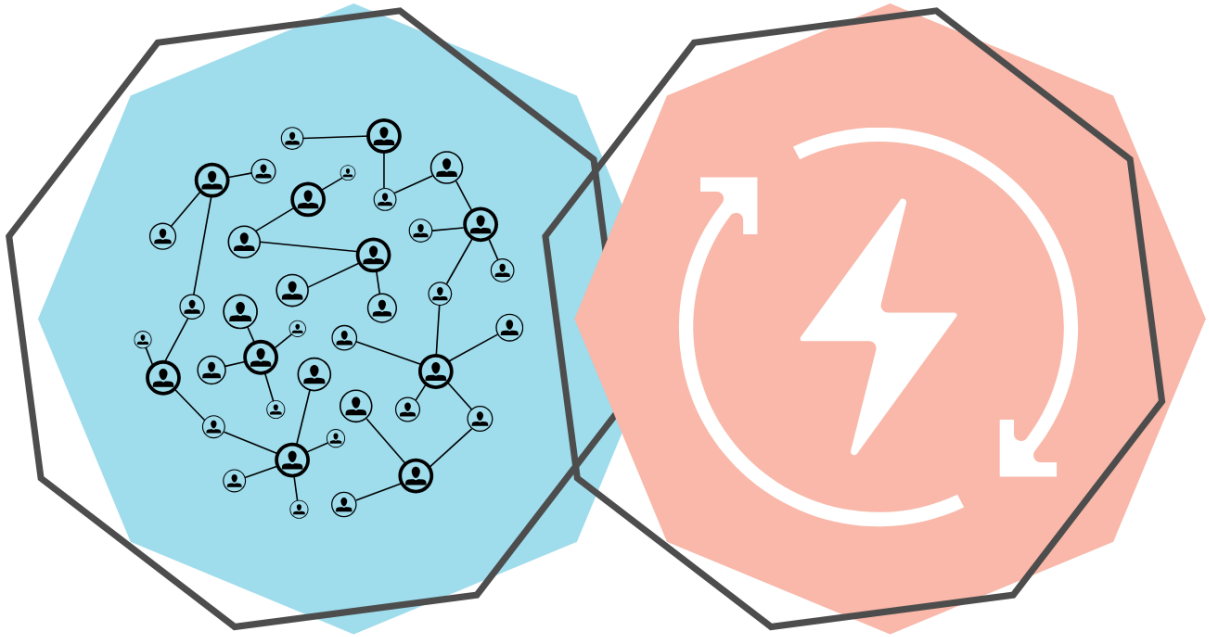
- The Front Project has an organisational M&E Strategy with a series of Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)
- One specific sub-question (3a) called out the need for a ‘power evaluation tool’ and ‘network evaluation tool’

3a) For **each of the strategic imperatives**, how are **relationships** and **power dynamics** **shifting within the system** and **what impact is this having on the system**?



There were some **constraints** / **considerations** to keep in mind:

- The tool is intended to be ‘owned’ by TFP – so the number of ‘tasks’ or steps to it need to be kept contained
- Relatedly, the tool addresses one **sub-KEQ** amongst many
- It will be applied to multiple ‘strategic imperatives’
- We want this to be something that can be used beyond the current M&E Strategy / for future work

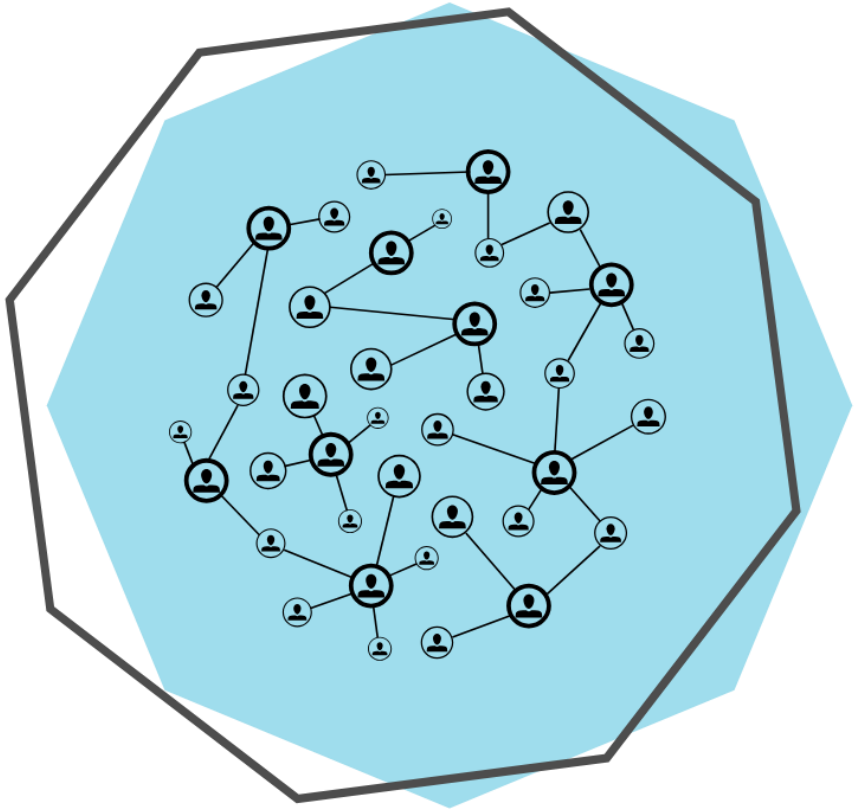


Where to start…?

- Develop and trial an approach with one area of work first

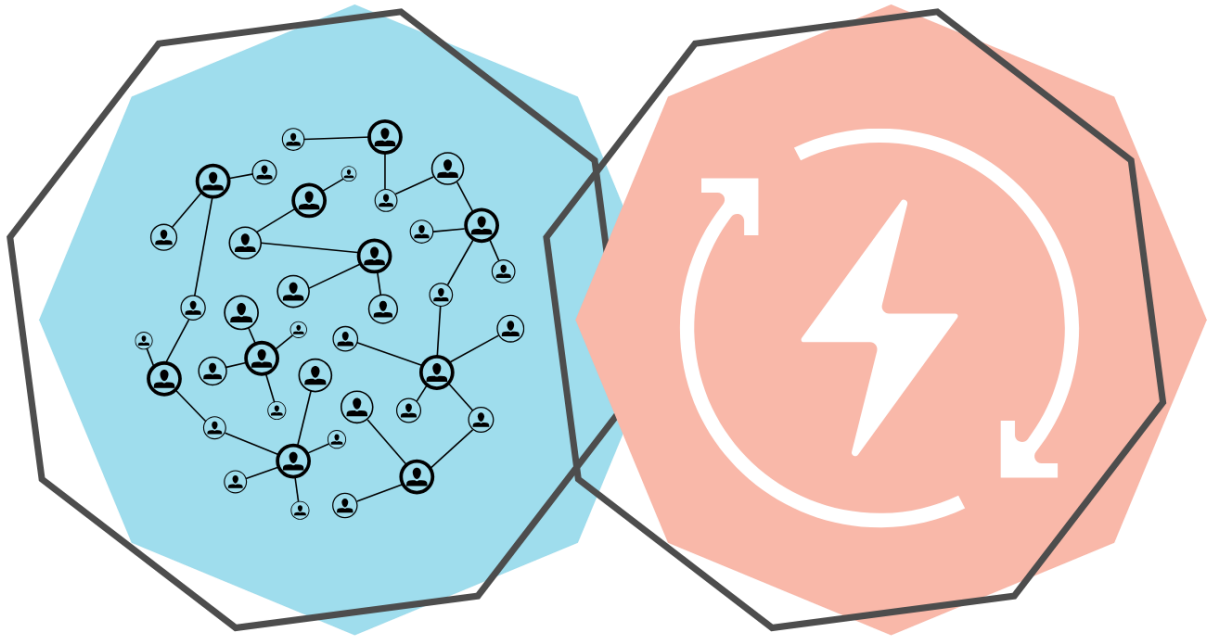
The Apiary Fellowship

- A leadership program that brings together early childhood development professionals passionate about transforming the sector.
- Occurring over multiple years, providing a chance to explore changes over time.
- Takes a systems change focus
- Knowledge & skill development
- Action Learning Groups (ALG) to focus on a project as a small group for 1 year



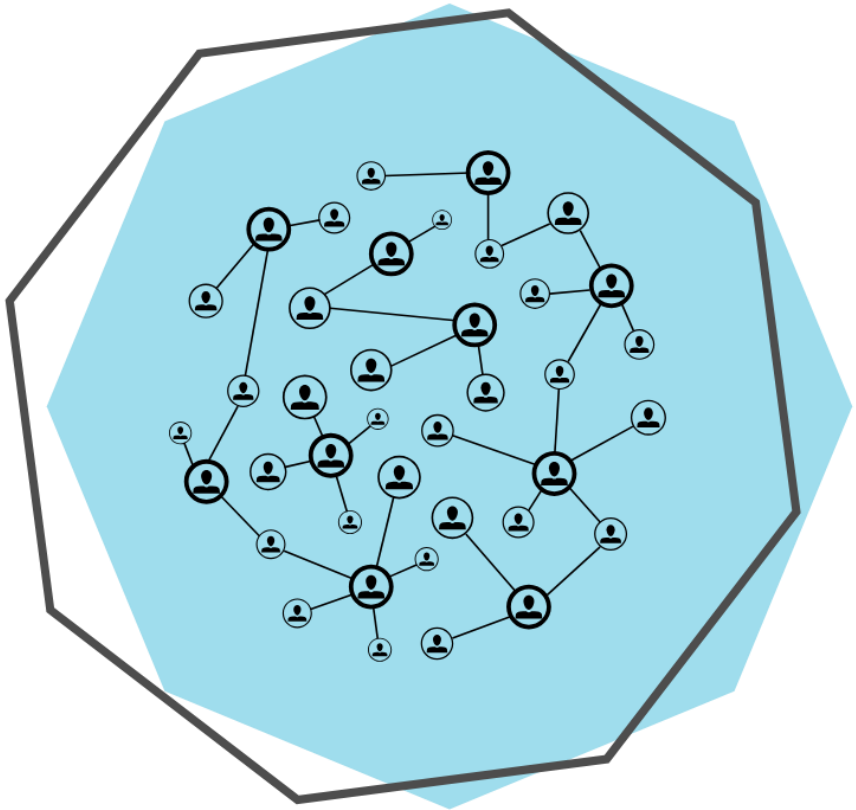
The SNA and Power process

1. Conceptualise and visualise the strategic imperative (The Apiary) as a system
2. Undertake network analysis of the visualised system and produce network metrics
3. Hold a ‘So What Workshop’ to:
    a) Discuss what the results might mean through the definitions and forms of ‘**power**’
    b) Discuss the ‘so what’ of this in terms of influencing the ECEC system.



The SNA process

- SNA requires the identification of **elements** (dots) and **connections** (lines)
- We need to **define** these to align with the nature of the strategic imperative
- Working with TFP, we gathered data on The Apiary consisting of:
  - Participating fellows (de-identified)
  - Their employer (incl. tracking over time)
  - Their Action Learning Group / non-organisational affiliations within the Apiary
- These are then analysed to identify **who / what is most central in a given year**



The SNA process

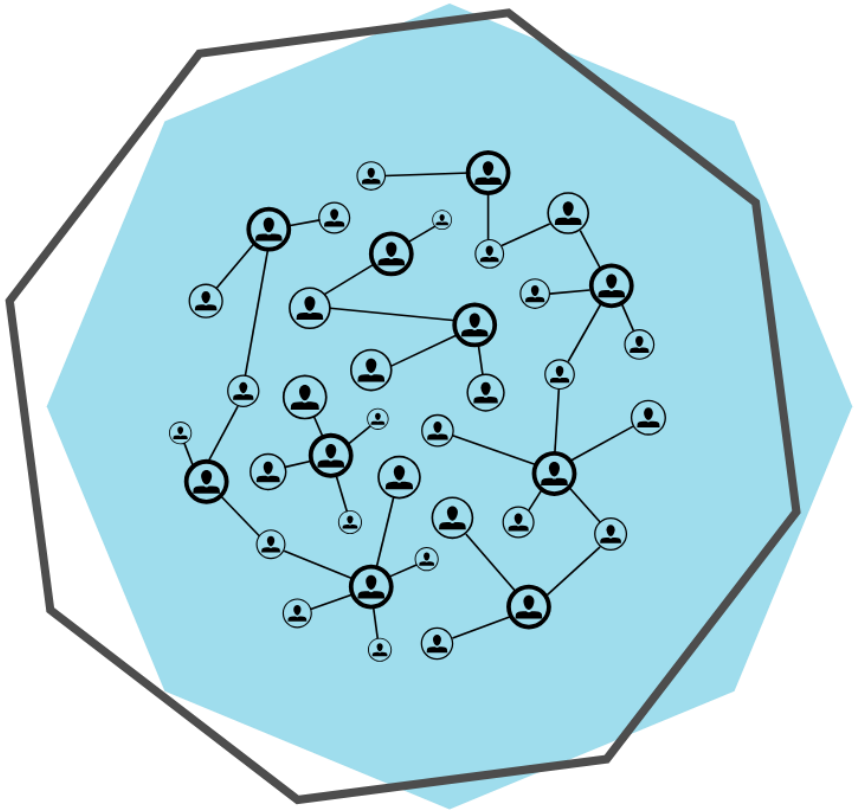
- Data collection / contortion:
  - TFP had records of participants, year and their organisations
  - Maintained and updated over the 6~ years of the program

	A	B	C	D	E
1	From	To	OrgType	Role(s)	YearConn
2	A1	Quality ECEC ALG	ALG		2019
3	A2	Policy Working ALG	ALG		2019
4	A2	Quality ECEC ALG	ALG		2019
5	A3	Policy Working ALG	ALG		2019
6	A3	Children's Voices (TEL) ALG	ALG		2019
7	A4	Policy Working ALG	ALG		2019
8	A4	Futures ALG	ALG		2019
9	A4	Cultural Journey ALG	ALG		2019
10	A5	Futures ALG	ALG		2019
11	B1	Children's Voices (TEL) ALG	ALG		2020
12	B1	Cultural Journey ALG	ALG		2020
13	B10	Children's Voices (TEL) ALG	ALG		2020
14	B10	Cultural Journey ALG	ALG		2020
15	B2	Policy Working ALG	ALG		2020
16	B2	Quality ECEC ALG	ALG		2020
17	B2	Apiary Steering Group	ALG		2020

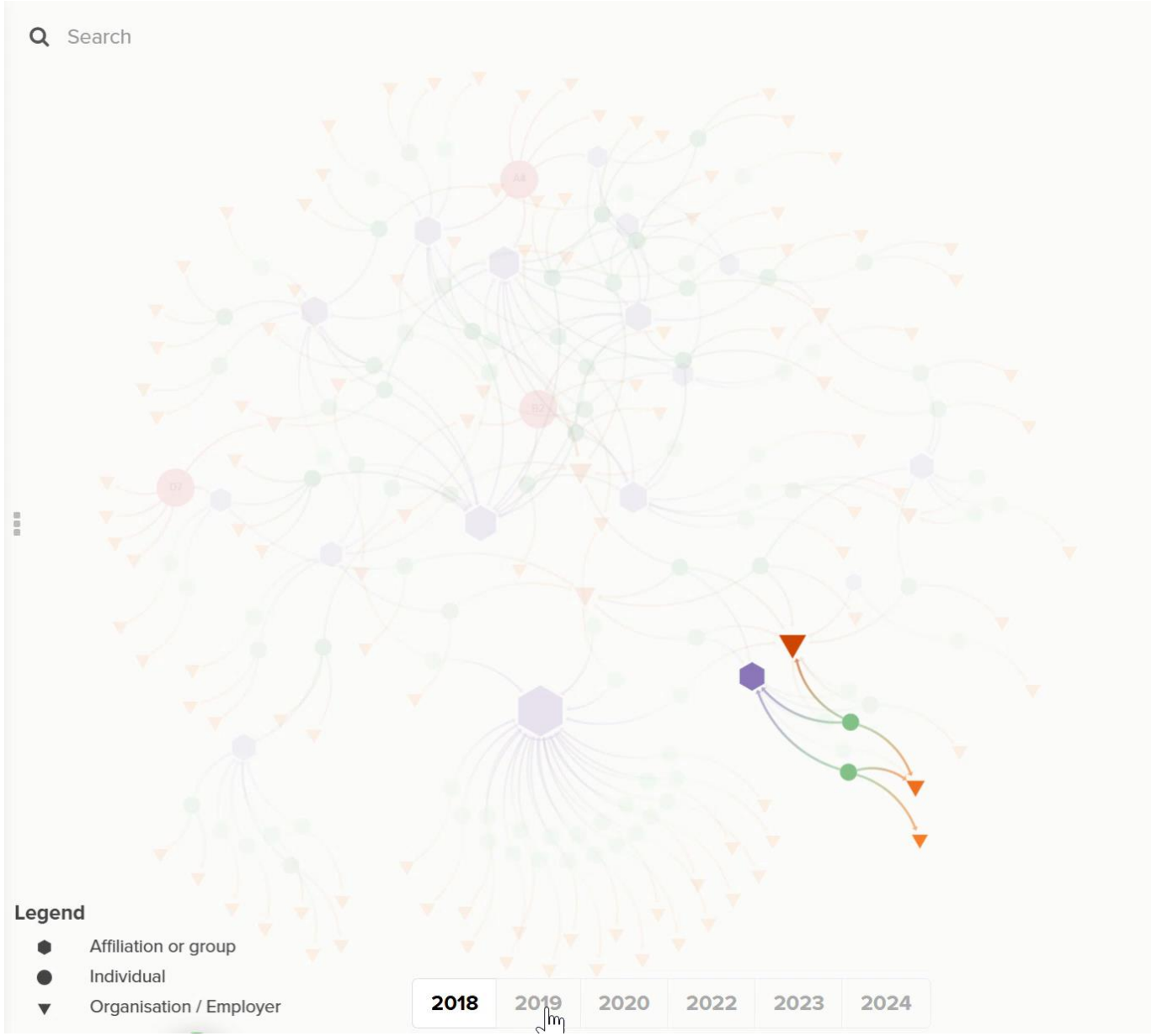
The SNA process

There are several types of SNA metrics produced, but for this purpose we have focused on:

- Degree – the number of connections coming in (in-degree) or out (out-degree)
- Closeness – measures how efficiently one element can reach all other elements in the network



Results

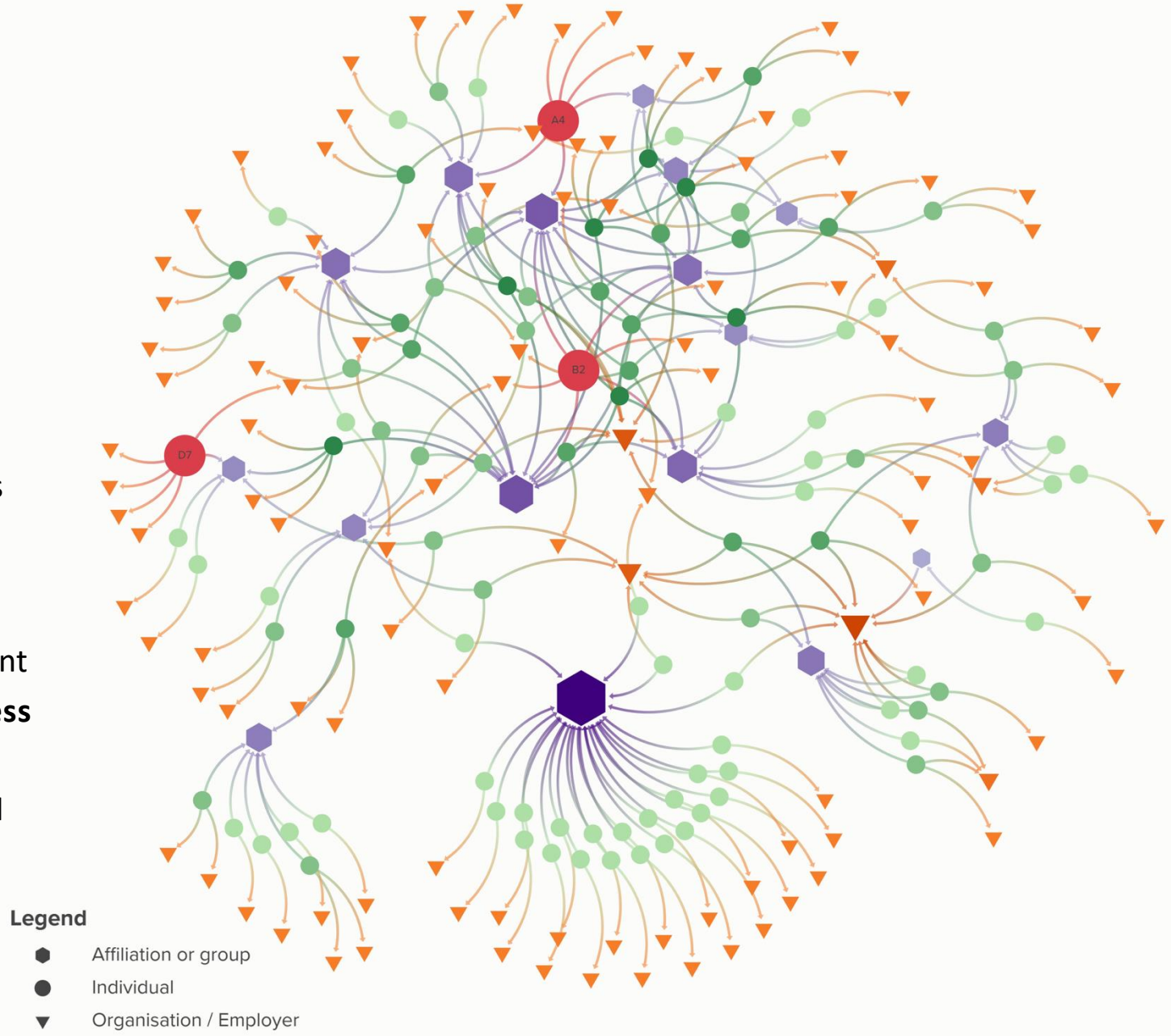

Search
Legend
Affiliation or group
Individual
Organisation / Employer
2018
2019
2020
2022
2023
2024

The key features of this map, which consists of 230 elements (dots) and 289 connections (the lines) are:

- **100 individuals** – consisting of a mixture of Fellows and Alumni, critical friends, and other key individuals
- **113 organisations** – either those that employed Fellows at the time, or are employers of Alumni
- **17 'affiliations'** – which are the Action Learning Groups and other bodies that link together individuals to The Apiary.

Identify individuals most central across the network:

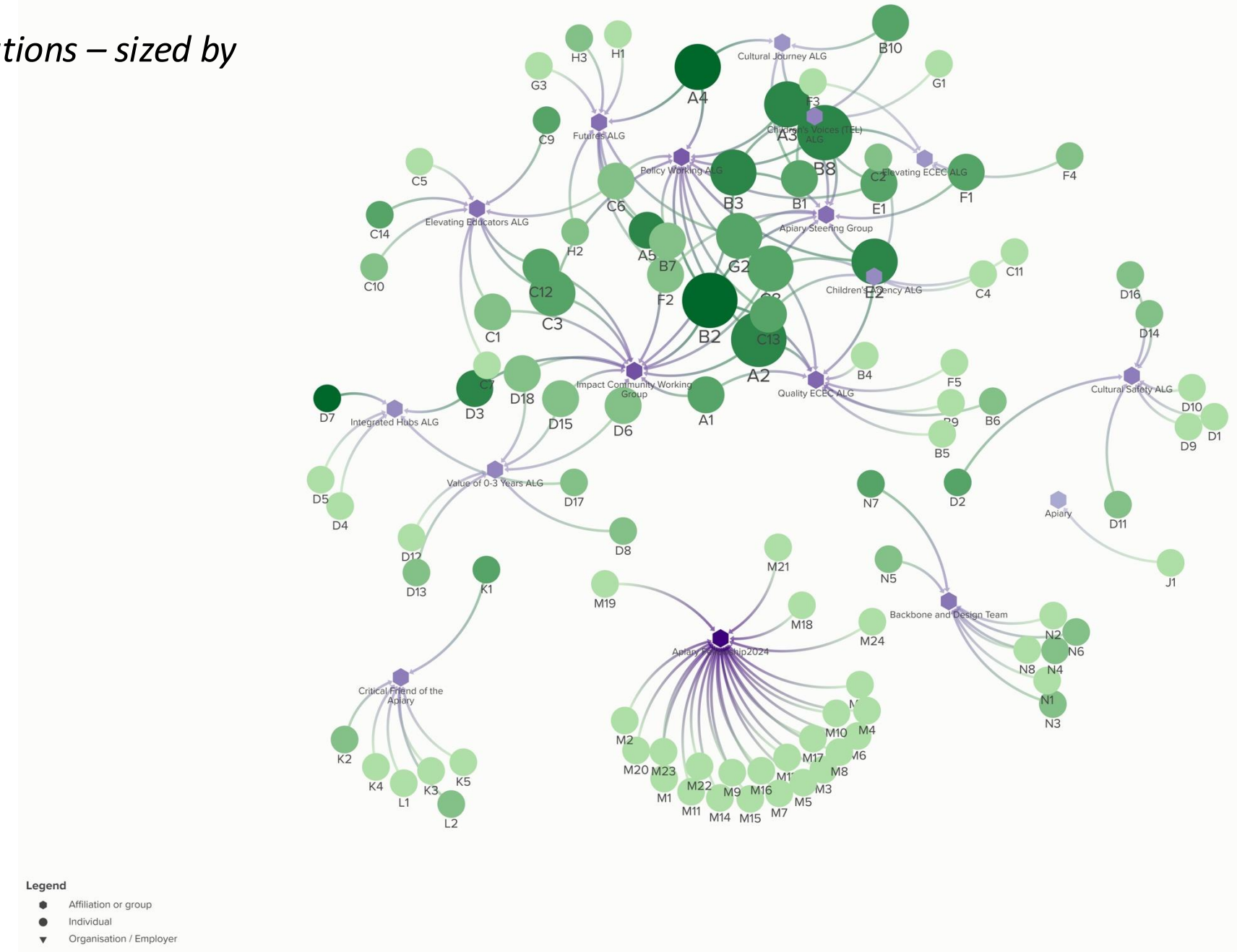
- B2, D7 and A4 are the **closest** to every other element in the map. Closeness is determined by the **closeness centrality metric** which calculates the average number of steps (lines) between each element, and every other element in the map. Figure 2 sizes the elements by their closeness score.
- Organisations with the most individuals connected (i.e. employed).



Individuals and Affiliations – sized by closeness centrality

When removing organisations, fellows **B8, B2 and A2 are the most central**.

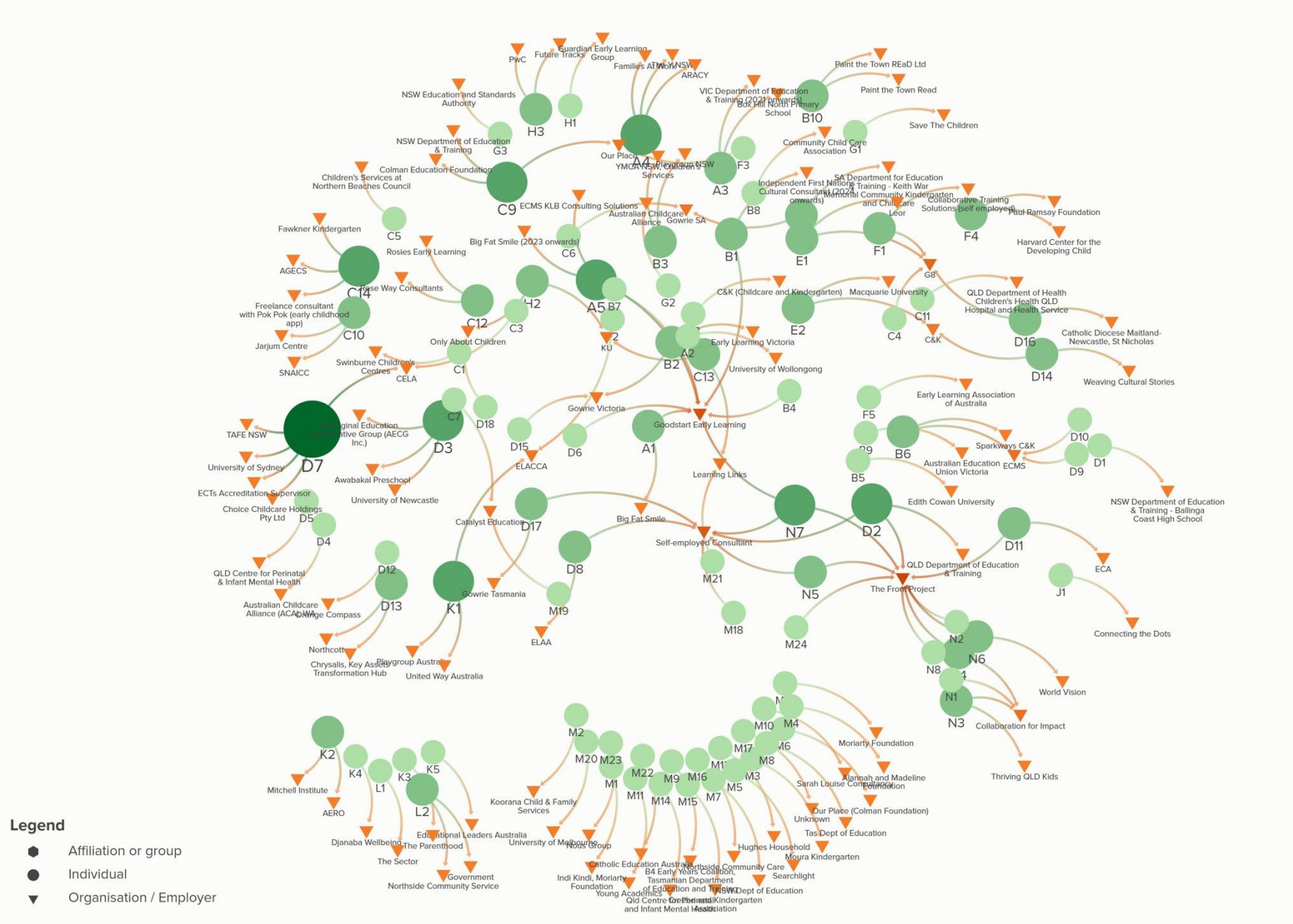
These individuals have also been involved in The Apiary for several years – suggesting that they are highly interconnected with its functioning.



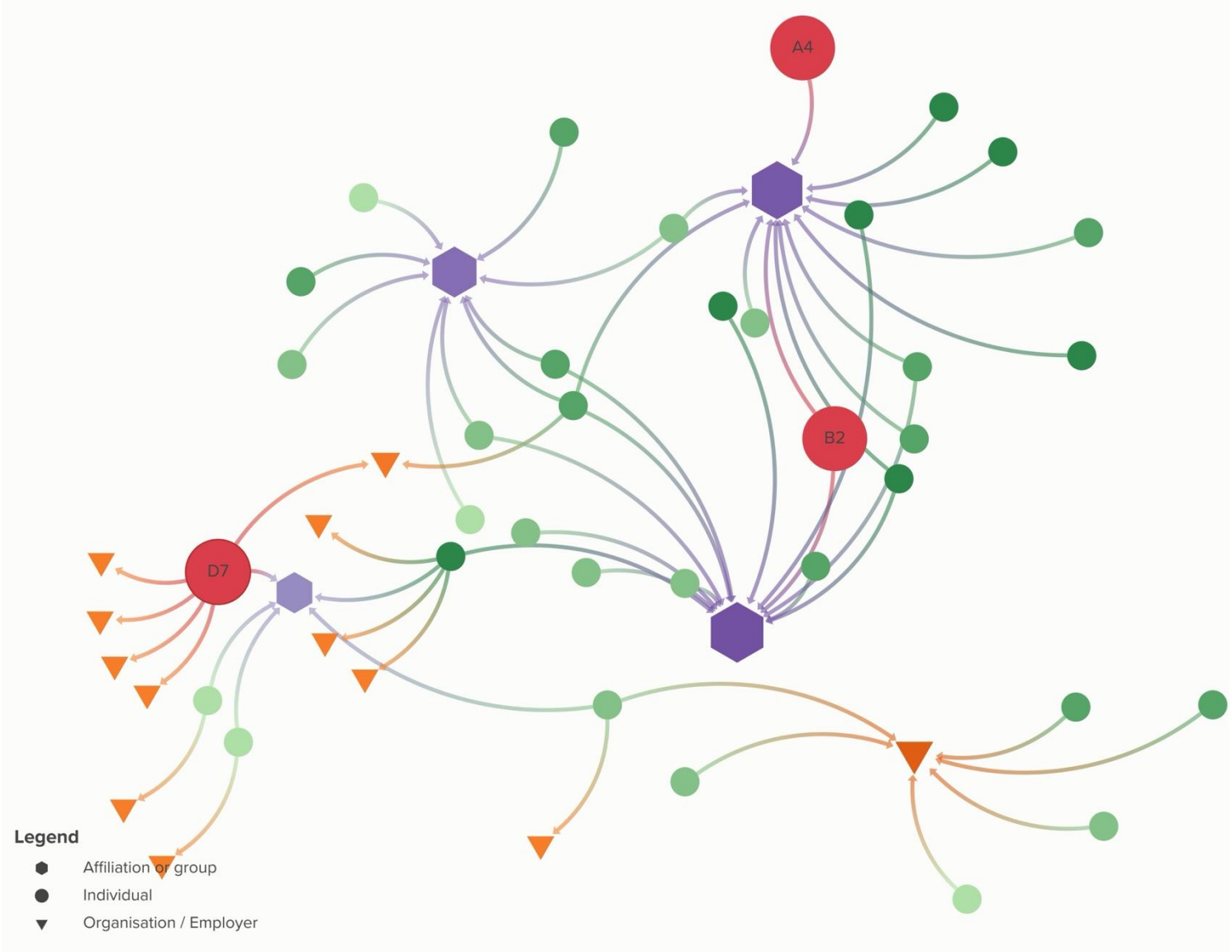
Closeness Individuals + organisation

When removing affiliations and **retaining organisations** (employers), **D7 is now the most central**, followed by A5, N7, C9, D2, K1, C14, D3, A4.

D7 is much more central in this view of the network. They have also only been involved for two years, but their multiple connections to organisations is what increases their closeness.



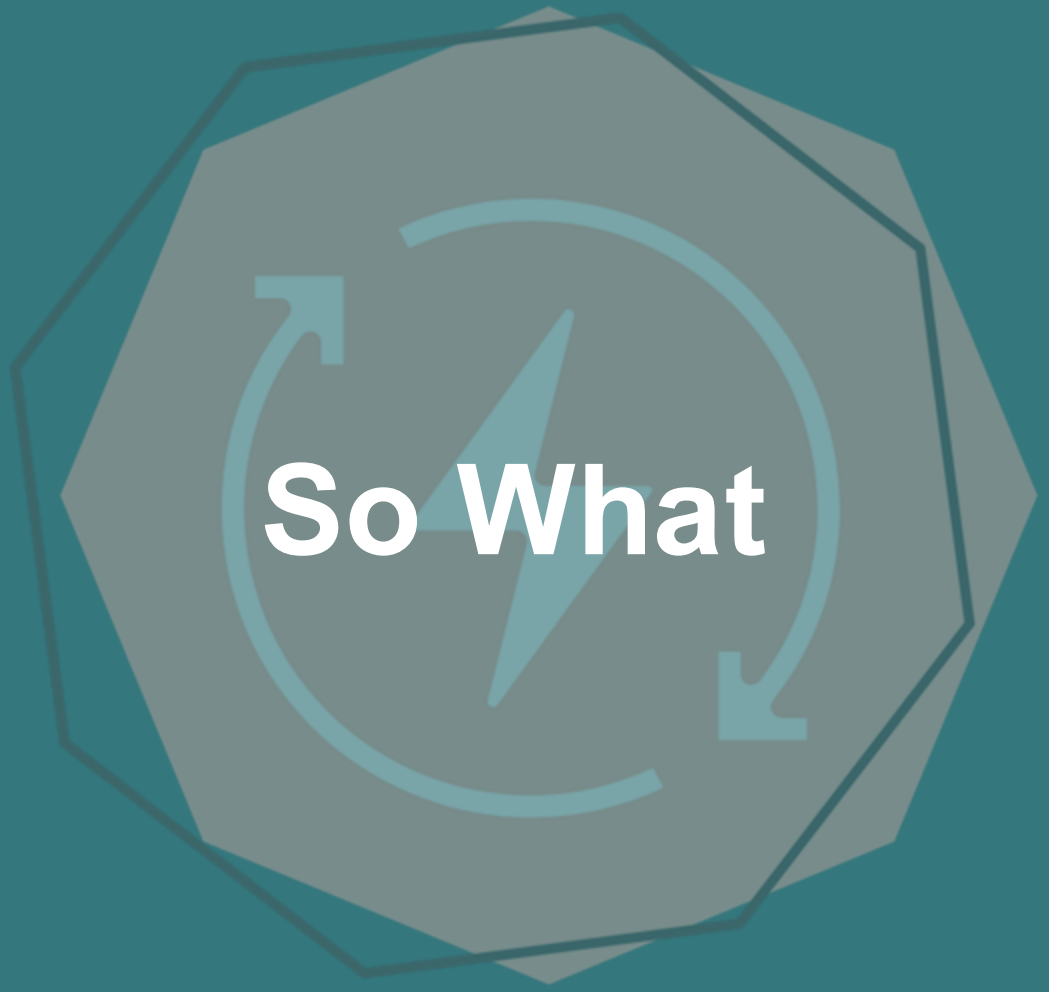
Fellow D7:
Connects groups across the network (regardless of which map)



Interpretation

- It depends on what is important and what you look for:
  - Internal (affiliations) vs
  - External (organisations)

  - Broad reach across this network vs
  - Access to other networks (e.g. via key individuals)



So What

The “So What” Workshop

The workshop was 90-minutes and held virtually :

- Run-through of the SNA maps (as above) for the Apiary
- Sense-making of what was presented:
    - What participants can see / don’t see
    - What participants want to know more about.
- Discussion of forms of power in the network

Types of Power

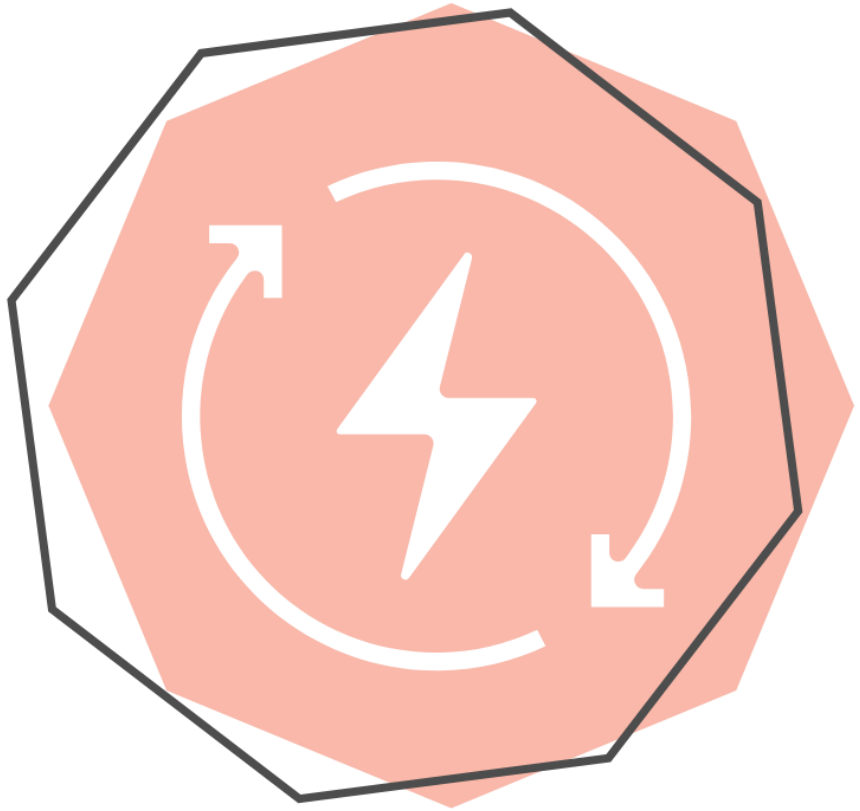
Our higher-level definition is:

Power is defined as the ability to act or influence others to act.

While we had started with **6 forms of power** from the literature, from this context, the ideas of **affiliation and dispersal** emerged as most relevant:

Affiliation –the organisations that Fellows are connected to and where they are using their new systems leadership capabilities.

Dispersal – which is the nature of the groups and organisations reached by the different Fellows. Are Fellows all coming from the same types of organisations / settings, or is there a variety represented?



Feedback on the pilot

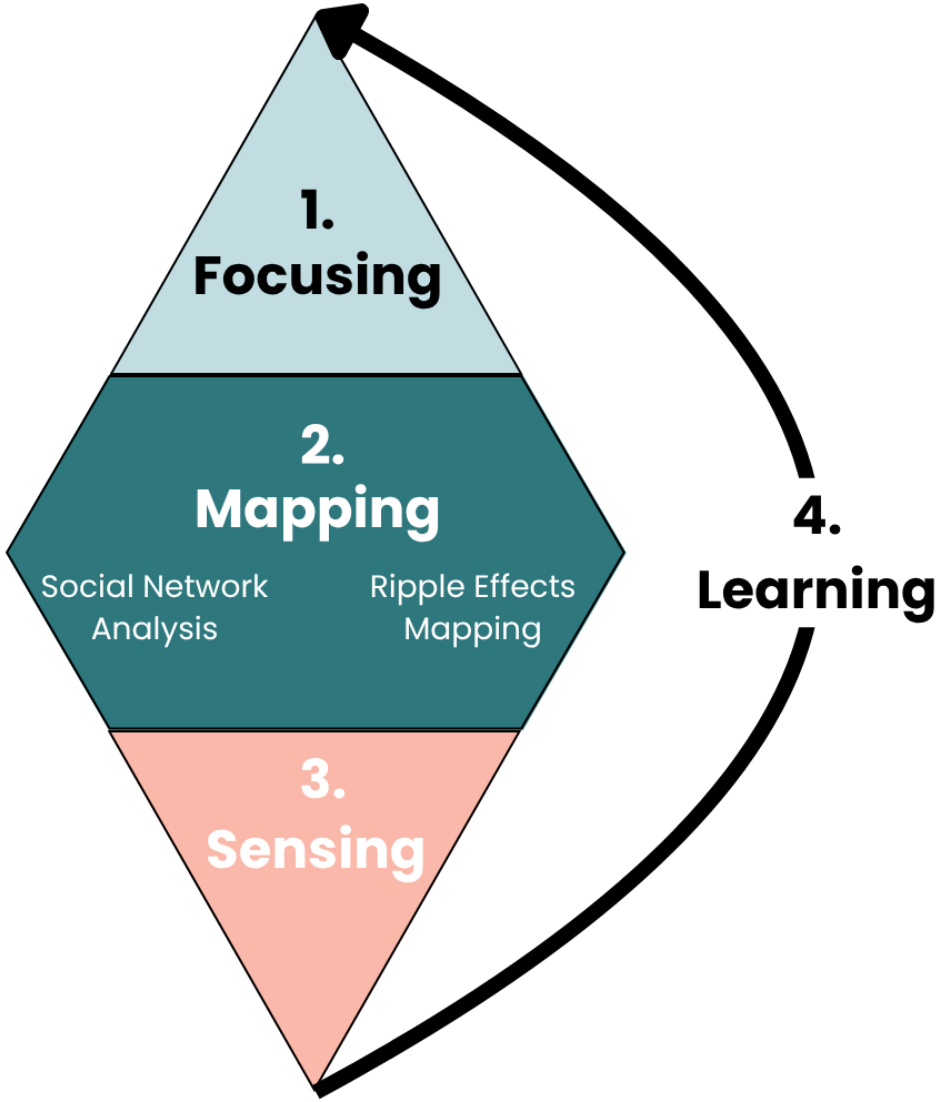
- **It works:** the combination of mapping networks and discussing the meaning & power overlay
- **Visualising the connections was crucial**. Participants found significant value in the visual mapping – particularly as it could allow for movements between employers to be reflected over-time.
- The **process** – developing the network map and then interpreting it via a group discussion worked well. Ensuring sufficient time for discussion is key – thus a 'paper' or similar in advance would be worth adding.
- Opening up the discussion as to 'how power is deployed or used' was very valuable. This is where the reference to **affiliation** and **dispersal** emerged.

The method: LOCUS

Learning through Observing Connections and Understanding Systems

- LOCUS is both a tool and process that recognises the mapping of a network or system is not just a technical task, but rather a process of discovery and reflection.

LOCUS



Steps for implementation

1. **Focusing.** Clarify the focus for LOCUS and where it is being applied.
2. **Mapping.** One of two mapping techniques depending on what the focus is:
   a. **Social Network Analysis** –map the networks that exist between individuals, organisations and groups.
   b. Ripple Effects Mapping
3. **Sensing.** Collaborative interpretation through workshops. Centred on the question: ‘so what?’
4. **Learning.** Documenting insights for use.

Key Learnings

Several key insights emerged from across the three cases:

- **Visual mapping proved universally valuable:** the outputs reflected implicit relationships, the creation of shared clarity, and richer conversations.
- **Power manifests differently across contexts.** It confirmed for TFP that while a general definition of power is useful, case-specific conceptualisation are important.
- **The tool is not just evaluative.** It should also actively support strategic planning, as well as point-in-time demonstrations of impact.
- **Data quality and maintenance are foundational.** The mapping process relies on the quality of data, but also capturing evidence to underpin any claims of *impact*.

Thank you

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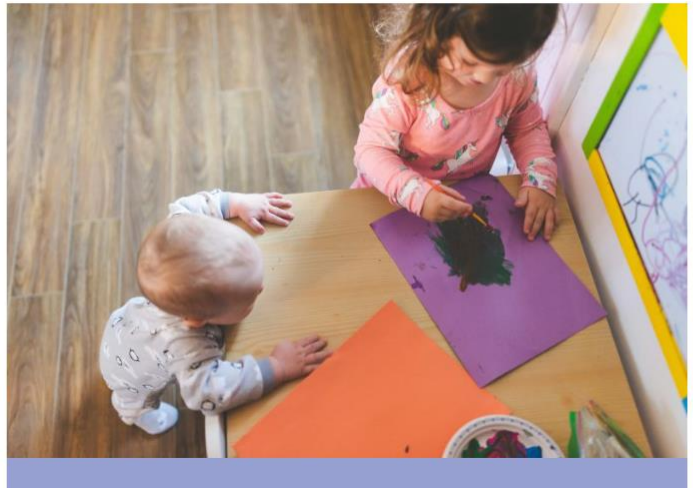
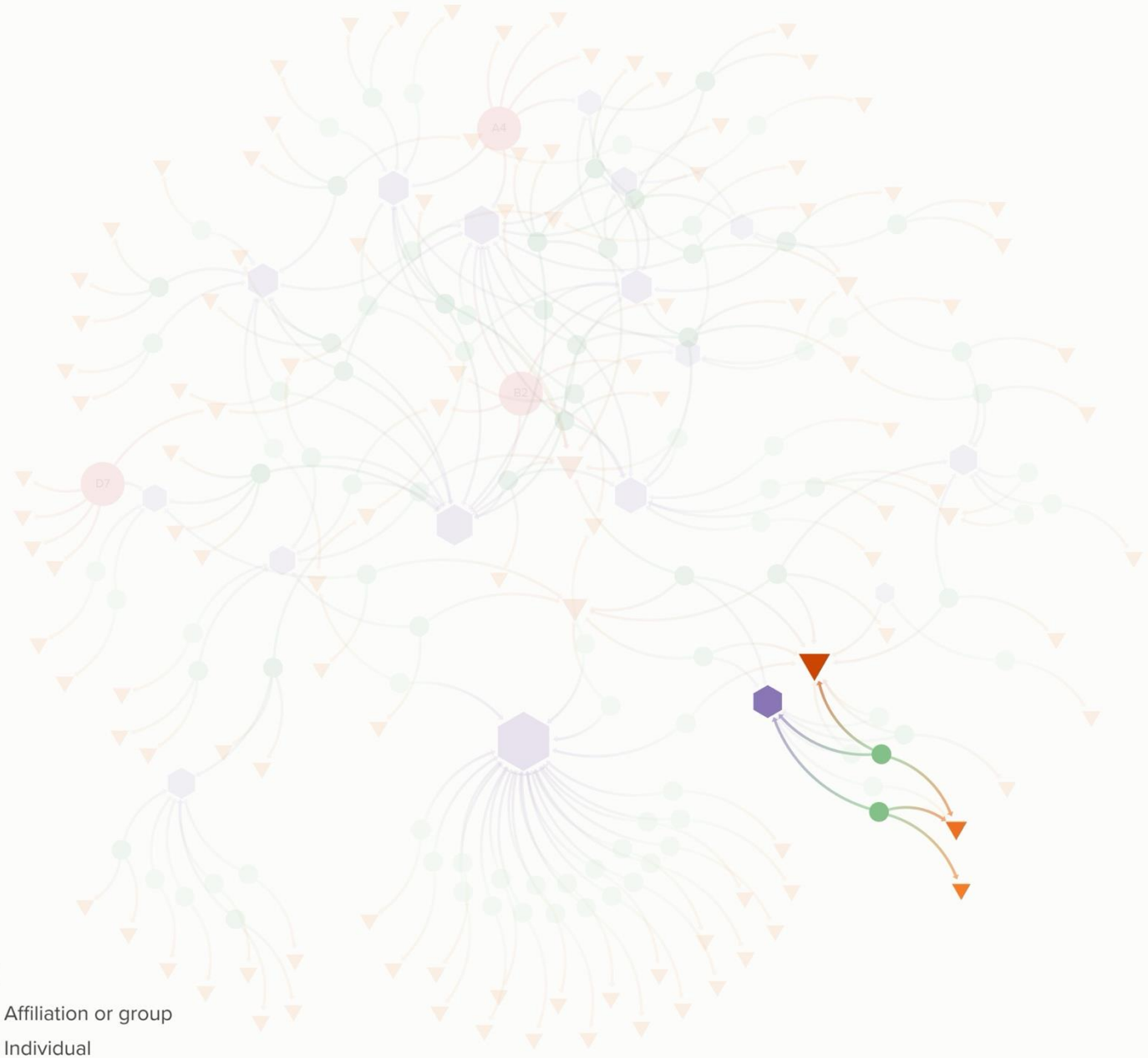
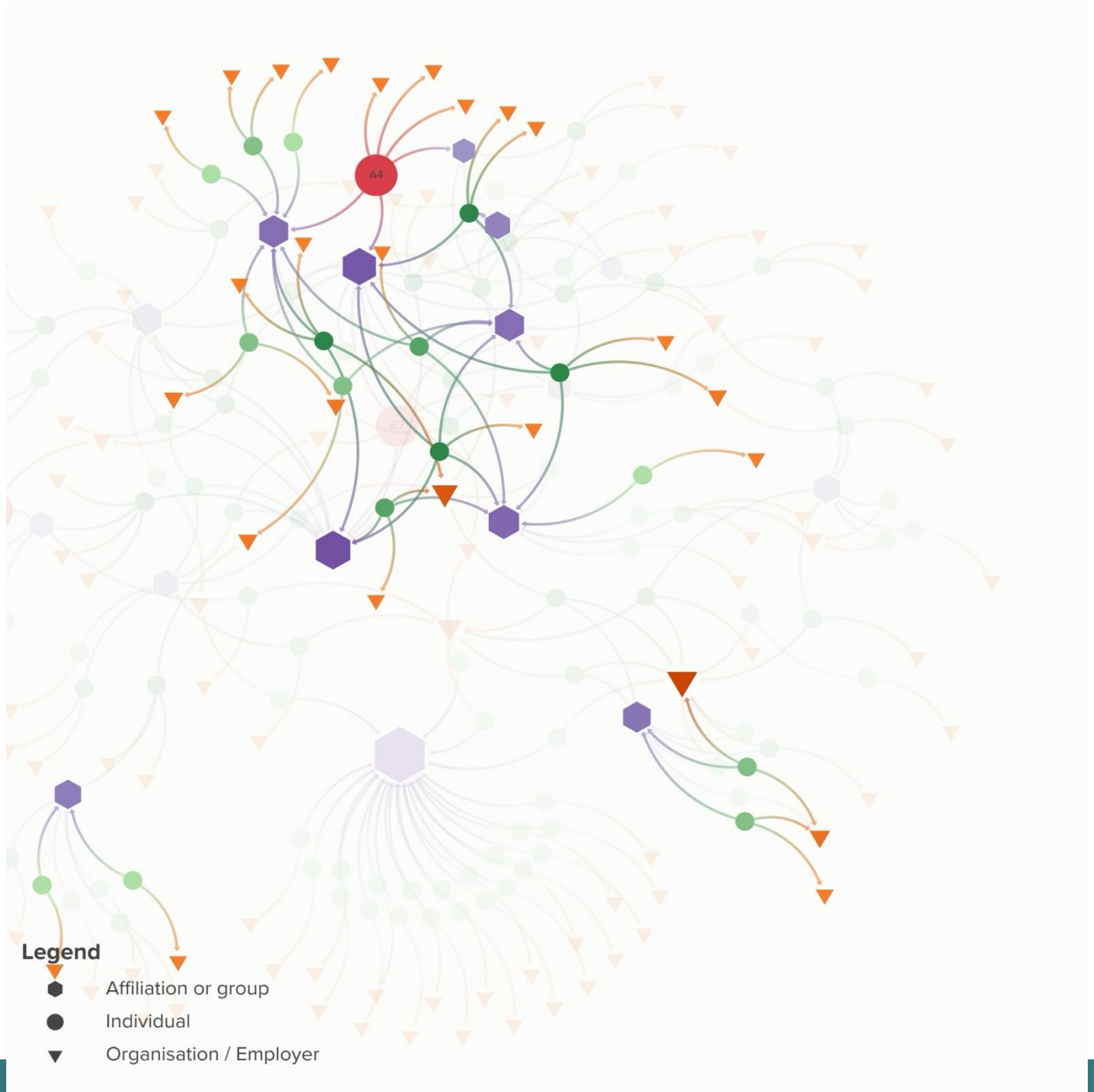




Legend

- Affiliation or group
- Individual
- Organisation / Employer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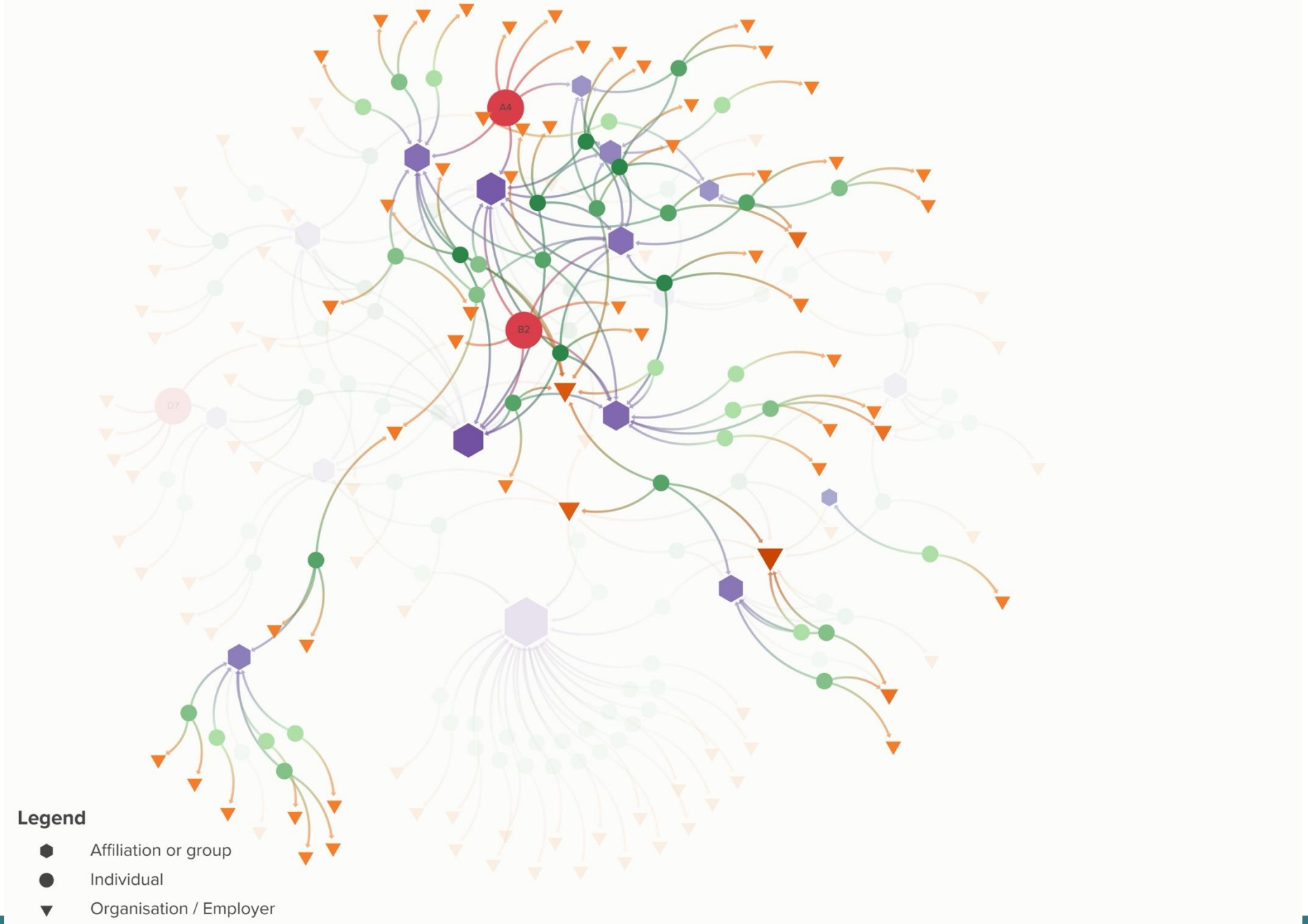
A4
B2
D7
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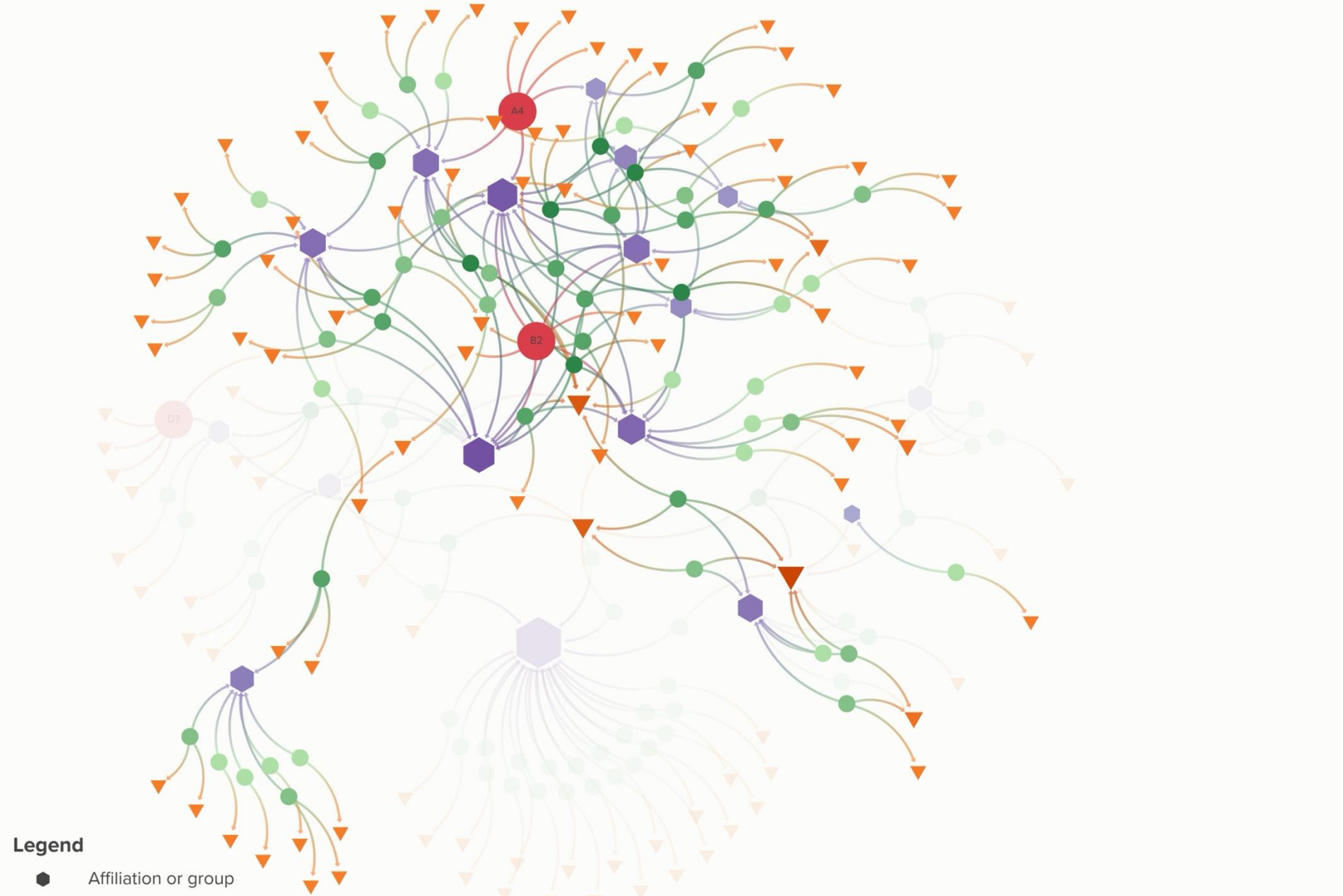
Organisation / Employer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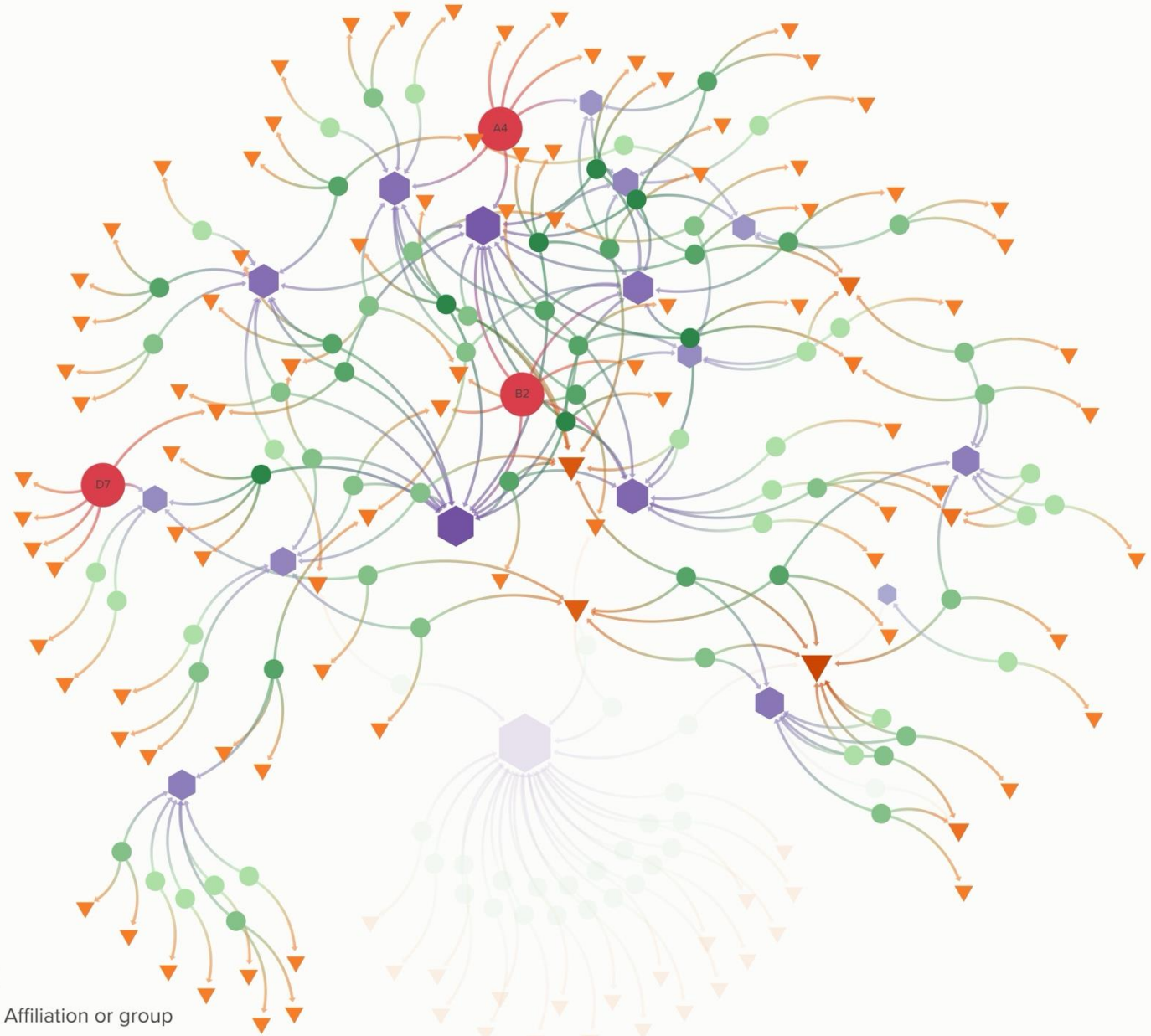
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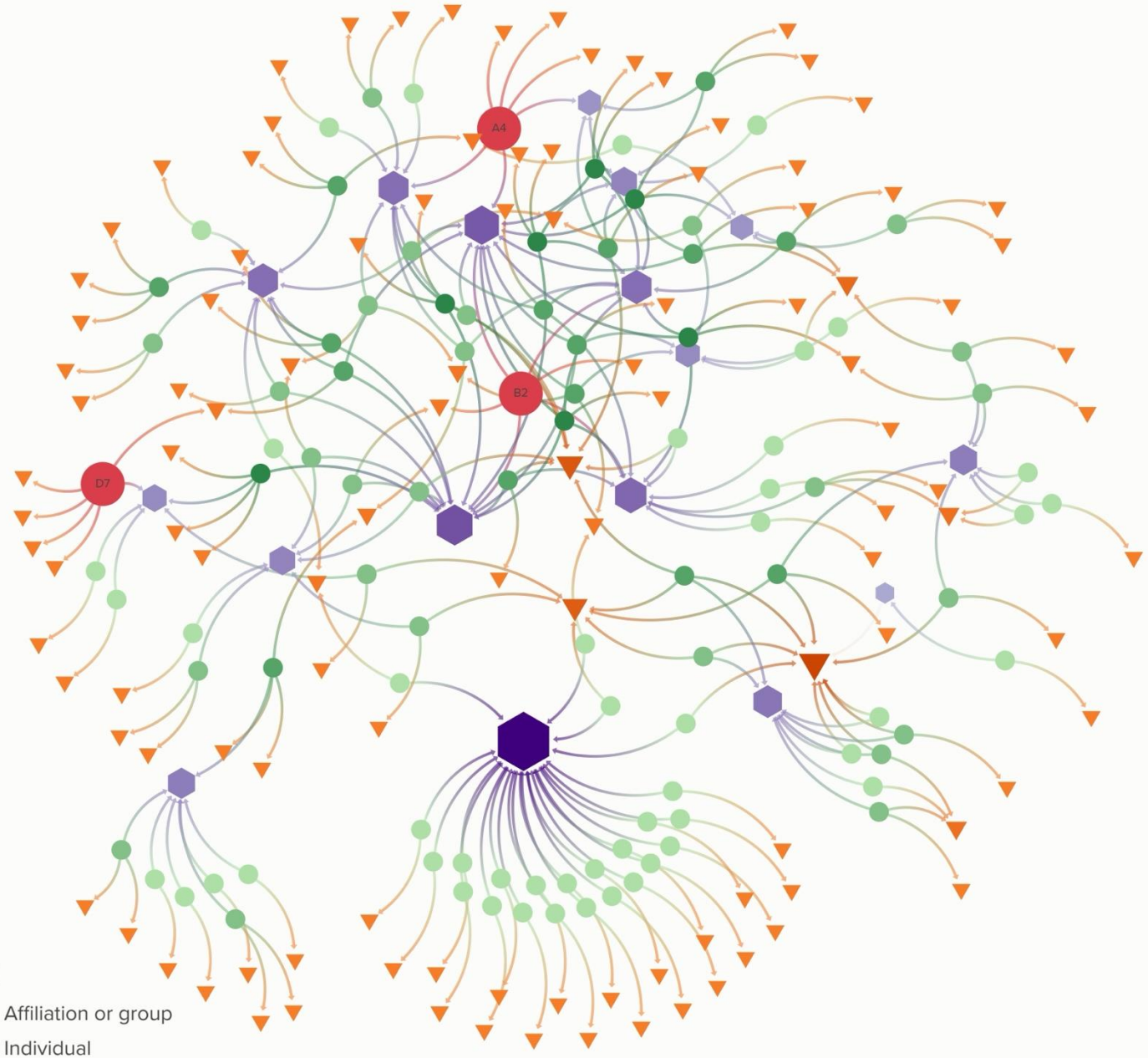
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