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Strengthening systems change practices with AI

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Entry points to working on AI

What is your AI focus?

The Implementors

Focused on how to best use AI, including identifying use cases, hands on experiences, prompt engineering, tool selection, and workflow integration. Often, though not always, focused on efficiency.

The Solution Architects

Designs AI tools that target specific gaps related to systemic change problems. Often focused on augmentation – going beyond what humans could previously accomplish.

The Systems Visionaries

Exploring the “what if” scenarios for entire systems, reflecting on what becomes possible as AI disrupts the system and creates new fragilities to change.

The Impact Guardians

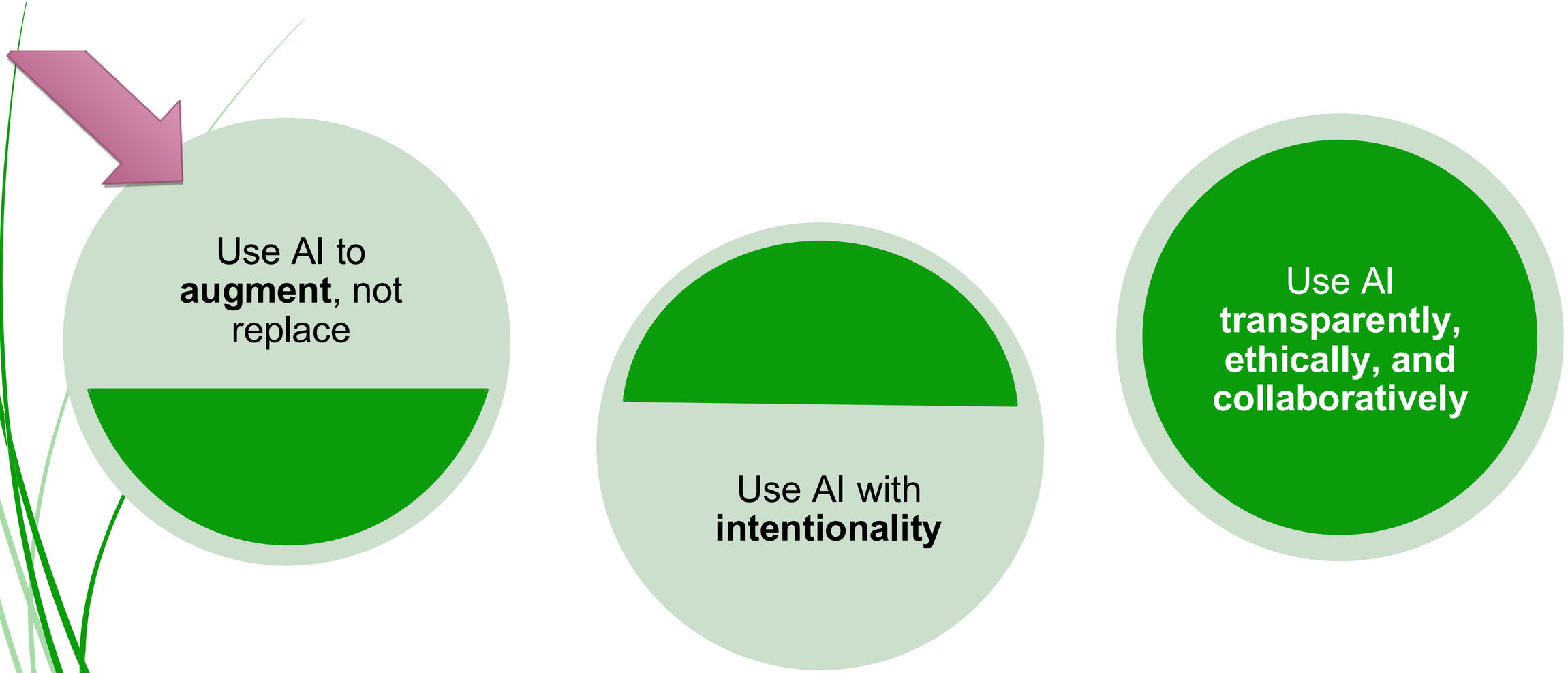
Navigating the “techno-cautious” path, focusing on governance, civil rights by design, mitigating algorithmic bias, and ensuring AI is safe and fair.

Introducing the Learning Group Series

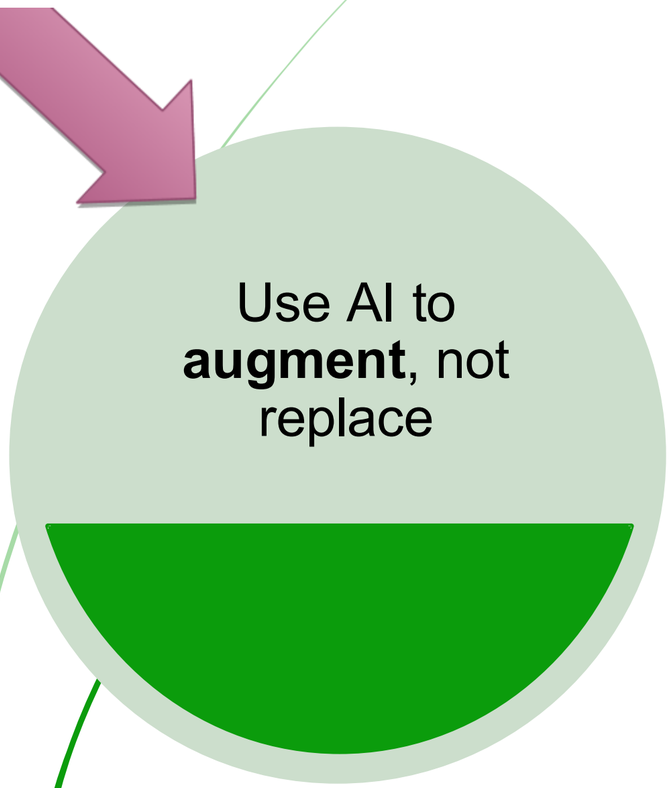
Three Learning Sessions on AI and Systems Change

Topic	Activities with AI
1 Initial understanding of systems & complexity	We will practice deepening learning about a complex, dynamic system
2 Developing, refining, and adapting strategies	We will practice expanding thinking and pressure testing strategic choices
3 Ongoing learning, sensemaking, and evaluating	We will practice deepening our complexity lens in our learning practice and pattern finding

Three guardrails for integrating AI into a systems change practice



Our focus here: Augmentation

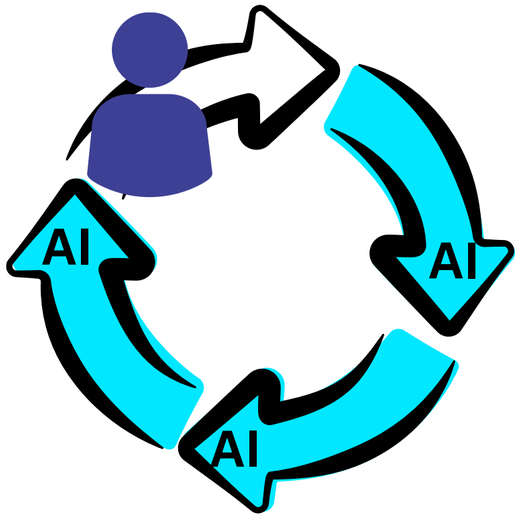


- Very rapid inputs on unexpected topics
- Interrogating patterns, assumptions, biases, leverage points, experiment designs, etc.
- Understanding how and why change is occurring
- Integrating diverse knowledge and making knowledge accessible
- Engaging systems actors

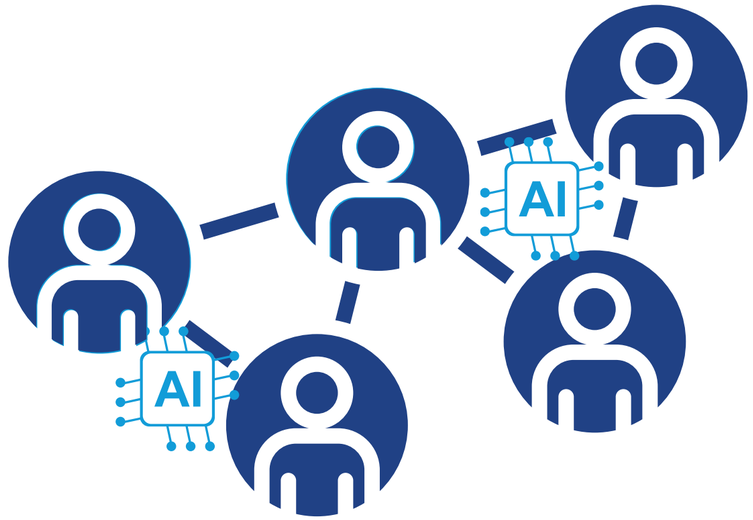
…beyond human scale or capability

Humans first: Our collective insights and thinking are centered, and AI augments

Moving away from "human in the loop"



Toward "AI in the mix"



Using AI to Make Systems Dynamics Visible

Initial understanding of systems & complexity

At the beginning of a new strategy, we seek to understand….

1. The forces, patterns, features, themes, upstream drivers, downstream effects, virtuous and vicious loops, etc. of the system
2. How and why the system has changed over time
3. Where the system hasn't changed, and why (or how the status quo protects itself)
4. The actors in the system, the power dynamics, how power functions within the system
5. Potential points of leverage or places of fragility to change in the system

Any system we choose to work in already has a base of knowledge. We are not the beginning. Rather, we are stepping into the messy middle.

Using AI to dig into the uncertainty and complexity

- Articulating and organizing the non-contested information
- Identifying the range of people, perspectives, and values to engage
- Helping you see your own biases and assumptions from the beginning

A few notes about the how…

Use within your systems change practice (not alone, at your desk)

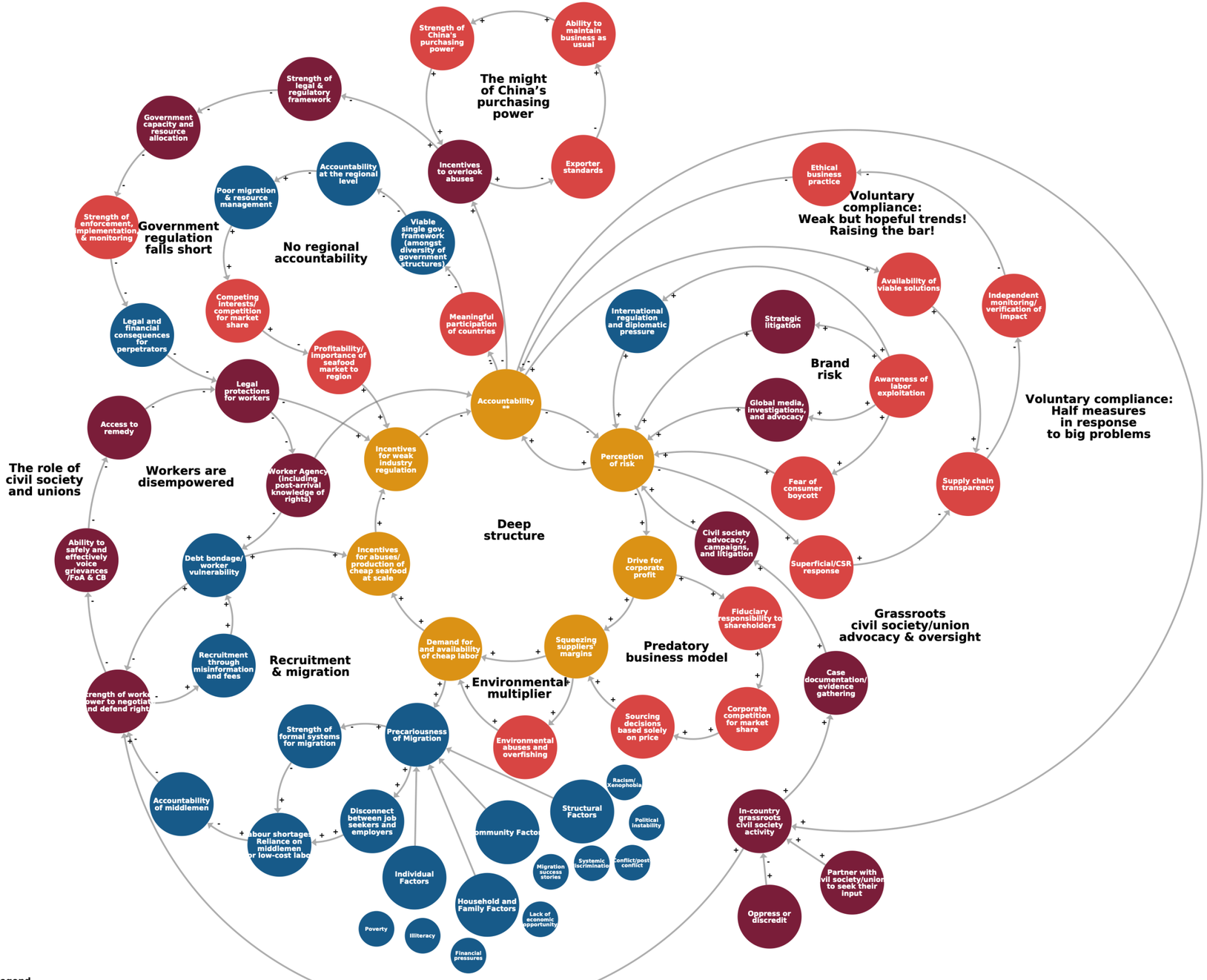
Prepare the platform for the conversation you want to have and its role

Use multiple AI platforms

Verify before believing

Our test case: Seafood industry in Asia: forced labor and human trafficking

2020 map



The Seafood Map/LLM Conversation

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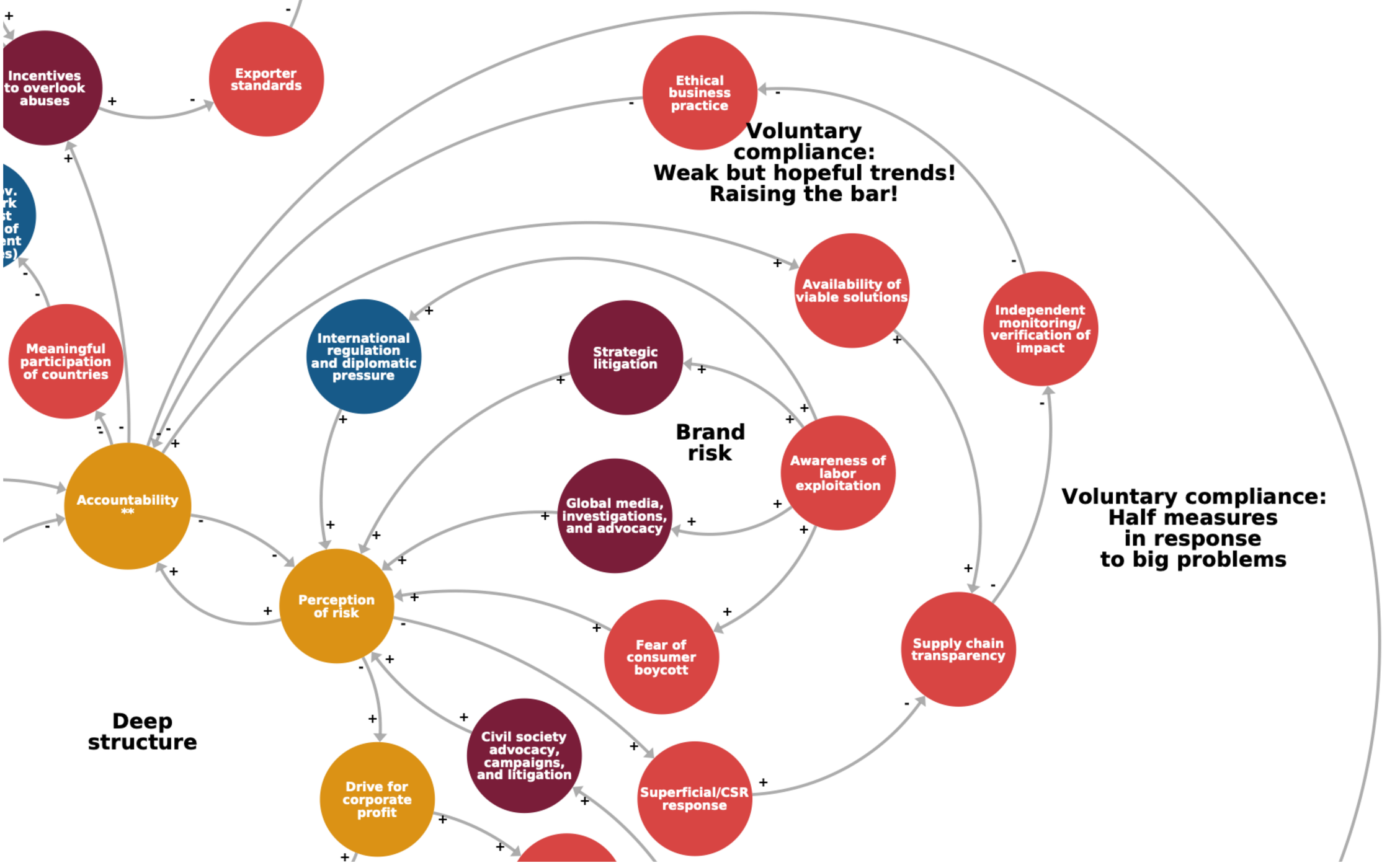
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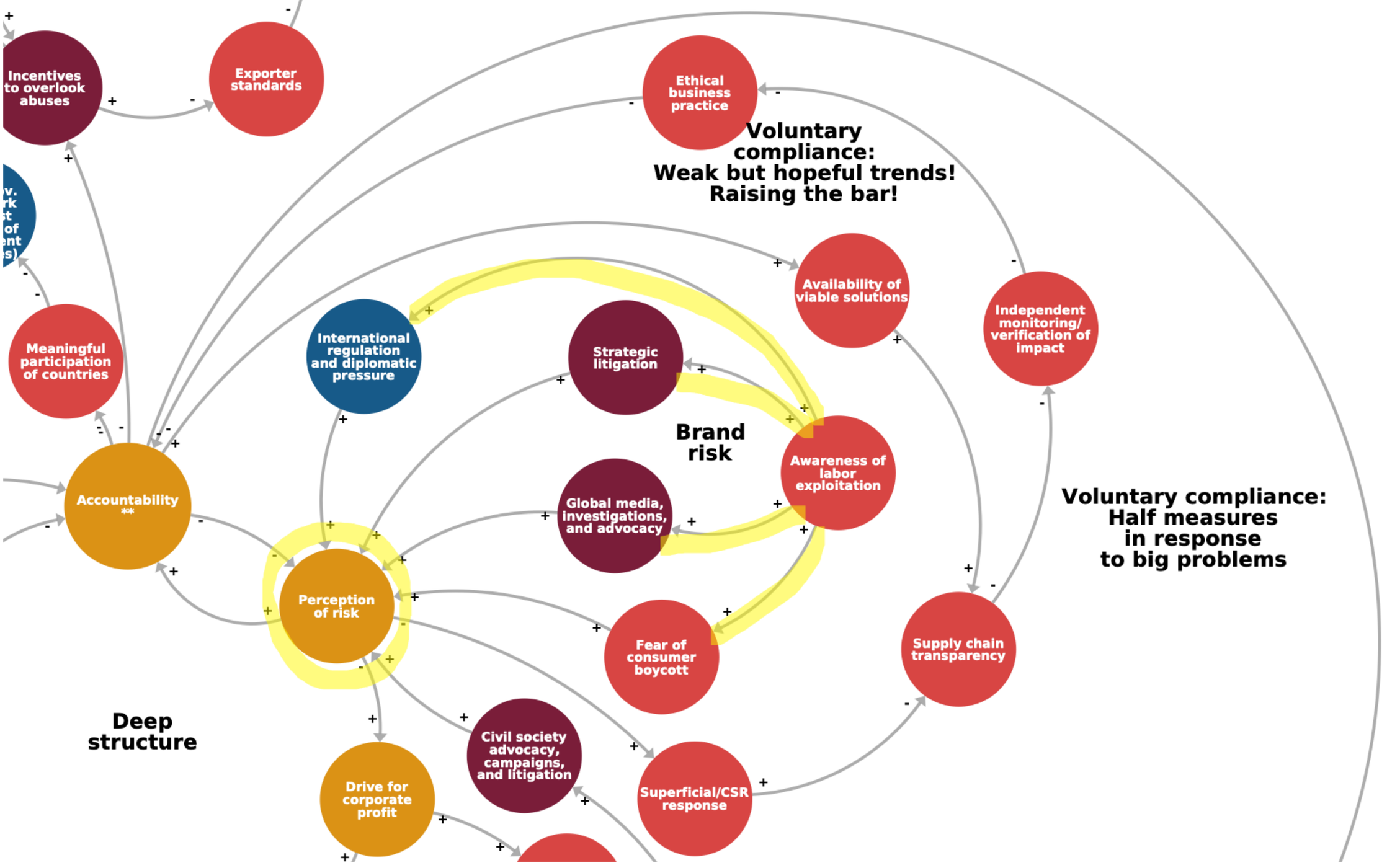
Exporter standards
Ethical business practice
Voluntary compliance: Weak but hopeful trends! Raising the bar!
Availability of viable solutions
Independent monitoring/ verification of impact
Meaningful participation of countries
International regulation and diplomatic pressure
Strategic litigation
Brand risk
Awareness of labor exploitation
Accountability **
Global media, investigations, and advocacy
Voluntary compliance: Half measures in response to big problems
Perception of risk
Fear of consumer boycott
Supply chain transparency
Deep structure
Civil society advocacy, campaigns, and litigation
Drive for corporate profit
Superficial/CSR response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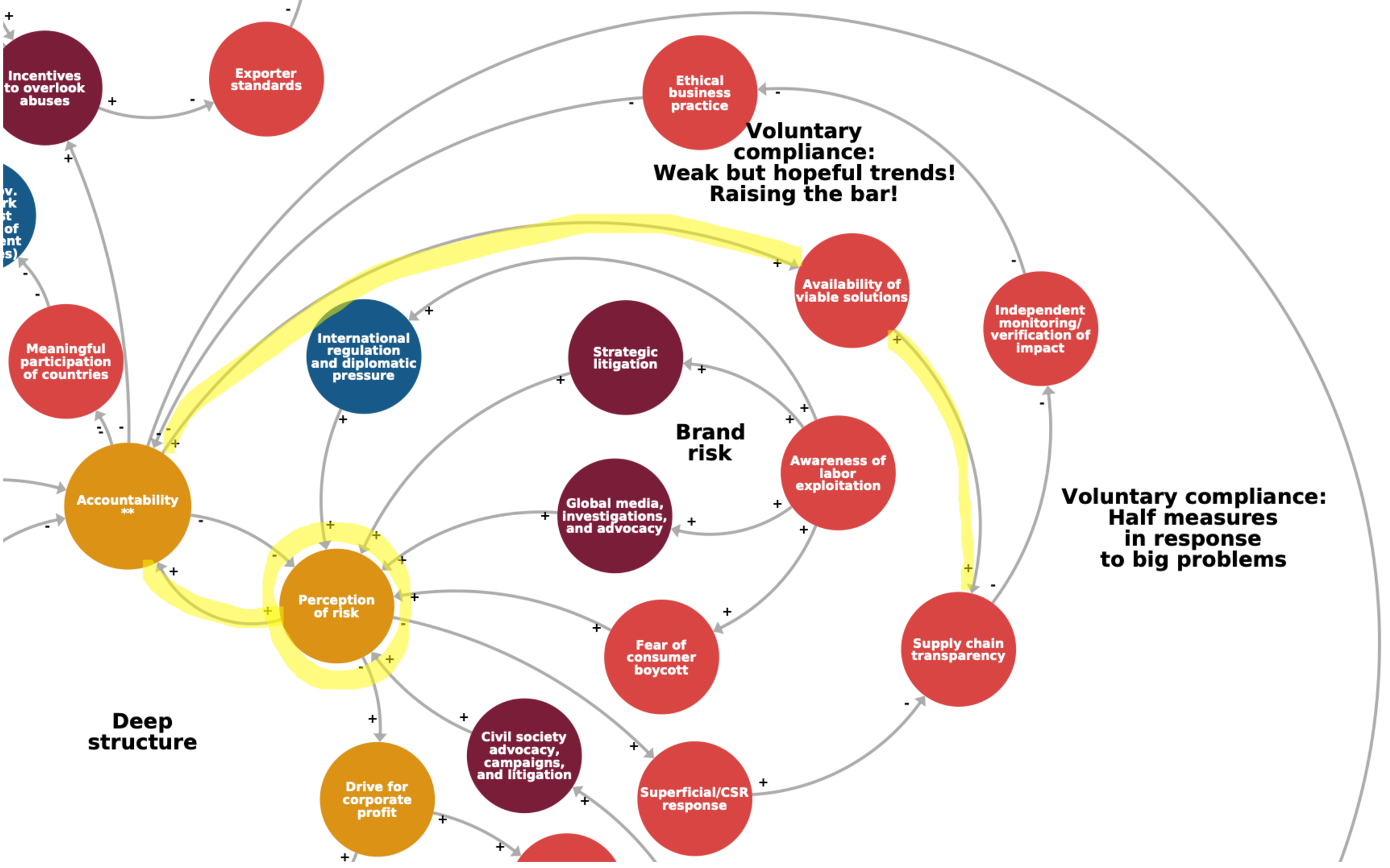
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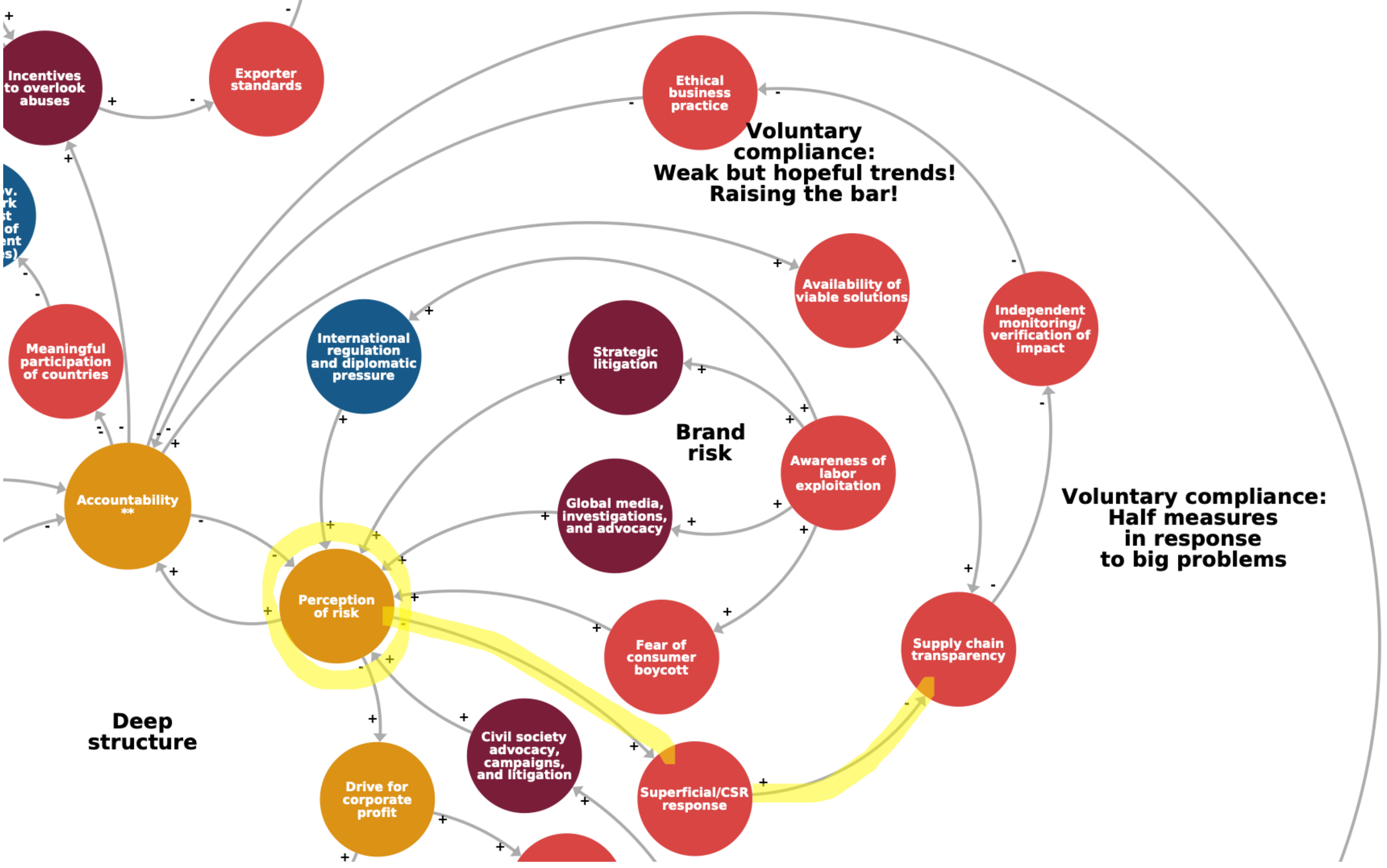
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2. Exploring the map – bringing it into the current day, investigating forces, upstream drivers, and downstream effects

3. Exploring the biases in the map and the conversation, finding new perspectives

Surfacing assumptions and biases: What is in the map, and in the LLM's interpretation of the map

- Linear legality: regulation leads to legal and financial consequences for perpetrators (ignoring **implementation dynamics and low institutional power to act on consequences**)
- Market fix fallacy: brand risk, consumer boycotts **assumes high awareness** (and typically Western) markets
- Dominant perspective is that of **a liberal reformist**, that the market can be fixed without fundamentally dismantling the economic engine.
- Firms and their buyers are the **main agents of change** (responding to regulation). It privileges corporate, NGO, and media actions, rather than worker power.
- **Western consumer as savior** assumption
- Technocratic compliance bias (**ignoring power struggles to be won and lost**)

What are other ways of understanding the system?

The LLMs shared that the map might look quite different from the perspective of:

- Global south industry groups
- Source country governments
- Worker driven (power redistribution lens)
- Environmentalists
- Feminists/gender analysts

And also…

- Geopolitical and national security, how supply chains are weapons in the context of geopolitical influence (not just markets)
- Political economists (compliance theater)

"From a **worker-centered perspective**, the "Voluntary Compliance" section of the map transforms from a diagram of **risk management** into a diagram of **power asymmetry**."

"The map was made for people who want to influence the system from outside it—not by **those who live within it**."

"A political economy lens would ask: **Why do states tolerate labor regimes that produce cheap seafood?** What class interests are served?"

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4. Applying a distinct point of view/framework: how systems infrastructure functions as a form of power

Infrastructure as power: hard, soft, and digital

Physical, tangible

Roads, bridges, power plants, buildings, pipes, boats, etc.

Hard

Intangible

Laws, regulations, procedures, human institutions, workflows, etc.

Soft

Information/Tech

The “new” infrastructure of 5G networks, data centers, smart grids, sensors, internet, etc.

Digital

Infrastructure as power: hard, soft, and digital

Then and now analysis of digital infrastructure

- **Then:** Digital traceability existed but was fragmented
- **Now:** There is clearer “plumbing” for interoperability and digitization (standards, formats for interoperability, paperless workflow, etc.)
- This strengthens the map’s **“transparency” and “independent monitoring/verification”** pathways—but also creates new single points of failure (systems, servers, data formats).

Power dynamics as a result of who designs, controls, and adapts the digital infrastructure:

- **Power to Design:** European Commission + member-state authorities; customs and fisheries agencies.
- **Power to Adapt:** Large importers, tech vendors, and dominant buyers.
- **Power in Edge Workarounds:** When systems are brittle (server errors, missing fields), actors route around constraints (temporary flexibilities, partial data, parallel paper processes)

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Areas of leverage

Independent monitoring/ verification of impact

- The map treats monitoring as a technical solution. Updated analysis shows **who can activate the system** matters more than how much or where data exists.
- Shift emphasis from “more verification” to **worker-accessible, retaliation-safe complaint and remedy pathways** embedded in monitoring infrastructure.

Digital infrastructure design as governance

- *Then:* Fragmented, semi-voluntary data systems; paper + digital coexistence.
- *Now:* Digitized, mandatory systems (e.g., traceability, certification platforms) that **constrain action by design**.
- Treat infrastructure governance as a core intervention site and attend to: **who designs it, who can adapt it, and who is excluded when it fails**.

The Seafood Map/LLM Conversation: Questions?

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Your turn: Investigate a map and discover new insights together

- Introductions – to each other, to the map (5 minutes)
- Explore what the prompts and what they generated (25 minutes)
- Pause to reflect on what you experienced (5 minutes)

https://www.policysolve.com/ai/tog-systemsmaps

When might you use AI to understand a system?

- As an additional input during a real time discussions
- Creating a spaghetti on the wall starter map
- Seeking examples from related but different contexts
- Sourcing insights about the state of the system through alternative AI approaches:
  - Apruva: shared sensemaking
  - Amoofy: storytelling to understand patterns
  - Causal Map: looks for causal pathways

What is one upcoming moment when you could use AI to better understand a system, go deeper into a detail of a system, or test your own biases and assumptions about a system? Who would you do this with?

Questions?

Follow-up resources available at:
https://www.policysolve.com/ai/tog