

From firefighting to firm foundations: sustainable practices in student support

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Outline



1 Research

Tell me how to be
you for a day...



2 Findings

What makes
student support
sustainable?



3 Connections

Towards more
sustainable
student support

Over to you (in the chat)

1 A word to describe student support in your institution (or institutions you know)

2 Finish this sentence:
At the moment, international students really need...



To: Everyone

Student support in higher ed is usually....



Research

Tell me how to be you
for a day...



Research background

Who: International student support professionals

- Australia, Vietnam, New Zealand, Malaysia, Canada
- Universities & Higher Ed providers, public & private
- Some had long history working with international, others were small/ growing international student provision

How:

- 20 x individual depth interviews, 30-60 mins
- Campus & team meeting observations

Roles and responsibilities

Senior leaders
(Director/ Head; multiple portfolios;
multiple teams)

Middle leaders
(Manager; student experience focus;
direct reports)

Operations/ delivery
(student services, advisor, counsellor)

Interview To The Double

“Tell me how to be you for the day”

- A simple interviewing technique
- Surfaces everyday practices
 - Work and education settings
 - Insights come from the ordinary and ‘mundane’
- Not about the individual, but the environments (‘ecosystems’) where practices take place
 - How work/ learning happens in context
 - Describing authentic practices, not sharing ‘best practice’



Analysing organisational practices, not individual 'heroes'

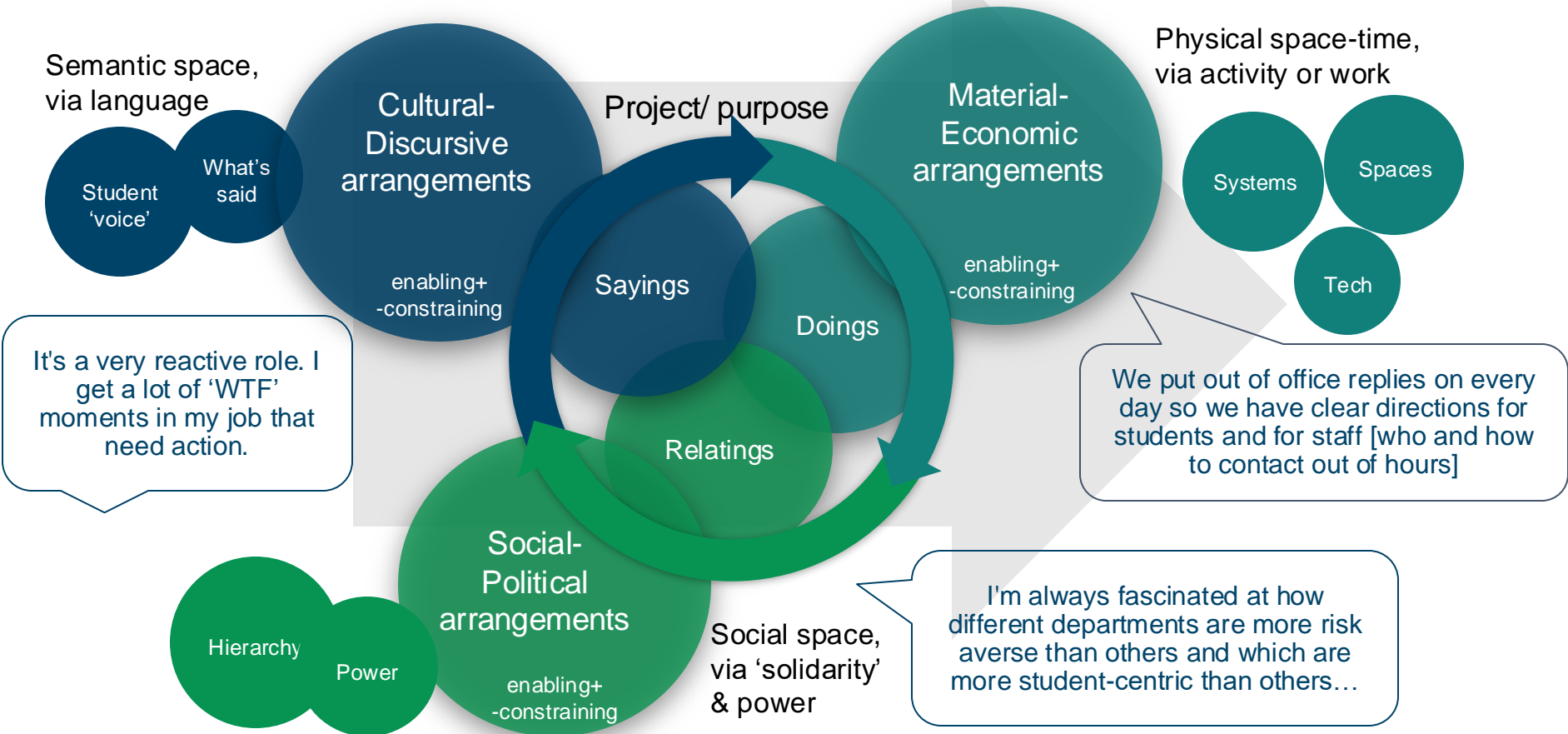
Using TPA (Theory of Practice Architectures) → Unit of analysis = practices

- **Sayings** language; what/ how things are talked (or not talked) about;
- **Doings** materials, time, physical & technology
- **Relatings** power, hierarchies, professional relationships



Helps us to see a broader picture of our context and situation,
and how everything combines to shape our practices.

Practice architectures 'hang together' → project/ purpose



Analysing the data - identifying practices

Summary **Transcript**

1 **Speaker 1** 33:17

I don't take it home or no. Okay. All right. I because I know what's in that notebook. Anyway, in my mind, I have that book in mind anyway, so I'm not going to get surprises in the morning. Now, don't take those home. I asked my staff not to do that as well. We're not emergency service. We need to have a break because the work we do can be emotional, exhausting, ongoing challenge challenging in many ways, but really fulfilling and really meaningful. But even so, we needed the time after work. You put your out of office, reply on even if you do look in your emails I don't want to see anybody respond on teams. And I don't want to see any emails going out to students, because we also want to educate and model for students. This is business time. And people have lives outside of that we have a process for emergency. And no, we're not an emergency service, but we will definitely respond to you between the hours of eight to five appropriately and take care of you in that way. But please understand that we're, you know, like our kids, you know, like, Oh my God, that's my teacher when they see them out of school in public. And they're like, work

0:00:00



1:03:22



Findings

What makes student support sustainable?



Four key areas of practice: diving deeper



Managing risk

- Reacting
- Triage
- Prioritising
- Troubleshooting



Managing people

- Managing workload
- Checking in
- Being present
- Helping out



Bridging & building relationships

- Bridging silos
- Advocacy
- Networking
- Internal/ external relationships



Planning & coordinating

- Managing time
- Coordinating tasks
- Managing systems & resources

Practice: Managing risk

Reacting; triage; prioritising; troubleshooting;



I have this internal triage system of “is this something I can deal with later or would this take a two second reply?”



We have a clear policy [...] we are expected to be autonomous in our working hours and to know when to turn off and when not to

There's a real need for internationalisation throughout the university. We have faculties making decisions that impact on student visas, but they don't think about that

Practice: Managing people

Managing workload; checking in; being present; helping out



Especially in high stress times, you think “Oh, I didn't eat, I haven't drunk any water today.” We remind and check in on each other.



It's important that we catch up. Even though we're in the same room, people are really, really busy.

What's making things run smoothly? A really capable, competent, culturally competent team

Practice: Bridging & building relationships



Bridging silos; advocacy; networking; internal/ external relationships

I use the term champions quite a bit with my team. Find your champions. [...] those titans of industry, or people you have worked with on different things.



It's important to have face-to-face engagement and campus engagement to see the relationships that have been built.

soft diplomacy is a huge part; the informal morning hellos and meeting people in the lift. Soft diplomacy being the primary way to get things done.

Practice: Planning & coordinating

Managing time; coordinating tasks; managing systems & resources



Not letting the 'urgent' get in the way of the important

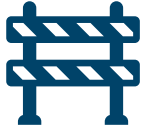


This is where it all becomes a bit manual...
[working between systems]

What gets measured gets done,
certainly in university settings.

The wins that we've had in student experience have been where we've gone in with a proposal and said really clearly, here's what we'd measure success to be and then actually follow up with it

Findings: What makes student support unsustainable?



Reactive focus & fire-fighting



Daily detail, no bigger picture



Always 'on' - lack of boundaries

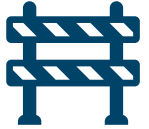


Disconnected, working solo

I'd be driving with my phone on my leg and if I'd see a Teams notification on a red light, I would respond. I felt like I just had to be present for everybody all the time.

The job can be as big as you want it to be... but there's not enough time. And there's only one of me, so I have to work with realistic management of my time

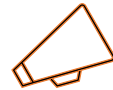
Findings: What makes student support unsustainable?



We don't have an international strategy, so [international students] are not very visible in that sense...



International students not well understood across community



Lack of advocacy and institutional support

We're using maybe three or four or even five different systems...



Clumsy systems and processes

What makes student support unsustainable in YOUR context (or contexts you know)?

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Reactive focus & fire-fighting



Daily detail, no bigger picture



Always 'on' - lack of boundaries



Disconnected, working solo



International students not well understood



Lack of advocacy/ institutional support



Clumsy systems and processes

Findings: What makes student support sustainable?



Long-term planning and strategy



Prioritising wellbeing



Setting and maintaining boundaries



Activating network and champions

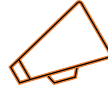
You know the quieter times when you can provide support and training to staff so that they're equipped to handle [crises]. It's understanding the ebbs and flows of our college

We need to have a break because the work we do can be emotional, exhausting, challenging in many ways, but really fulfilling and really meaningful.

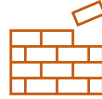
Findings: What makes student support sustainable?



It's very important to come to these meetings advocating for students - not everyone has the same agenda

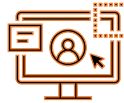


Ongoing education and advocacy, across institution and beyond



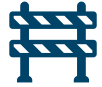
Building on foundations - not reinventing the wheel

Why reinvent the wheel when there's already great best practices out there, especially when you're working with international students?



Making systems and technology work for you and your team

What's familiar or surprising to you here? What's your experience?



Reactive focus & fire-fighting



Daily detail, no bigger picture



Always 'on' - lack of boundaries



Disconnected, working solo



International students not well understood across community



Lack of advocacy and institutional support



Clumsy systems and processes



Long-term planning and strategy



Prioritising wellbeing



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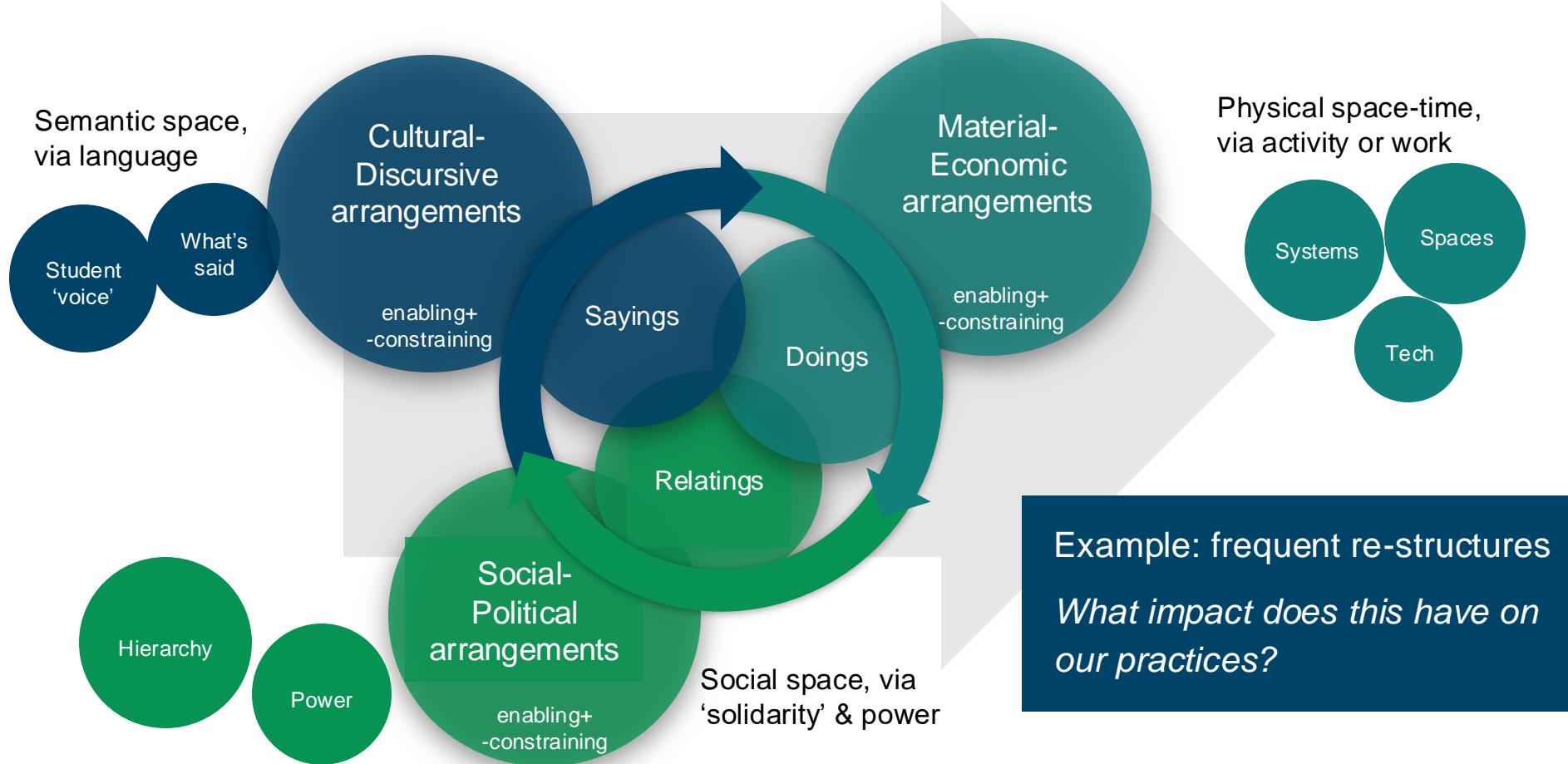
Making systems and technology work for you and your team

Connections

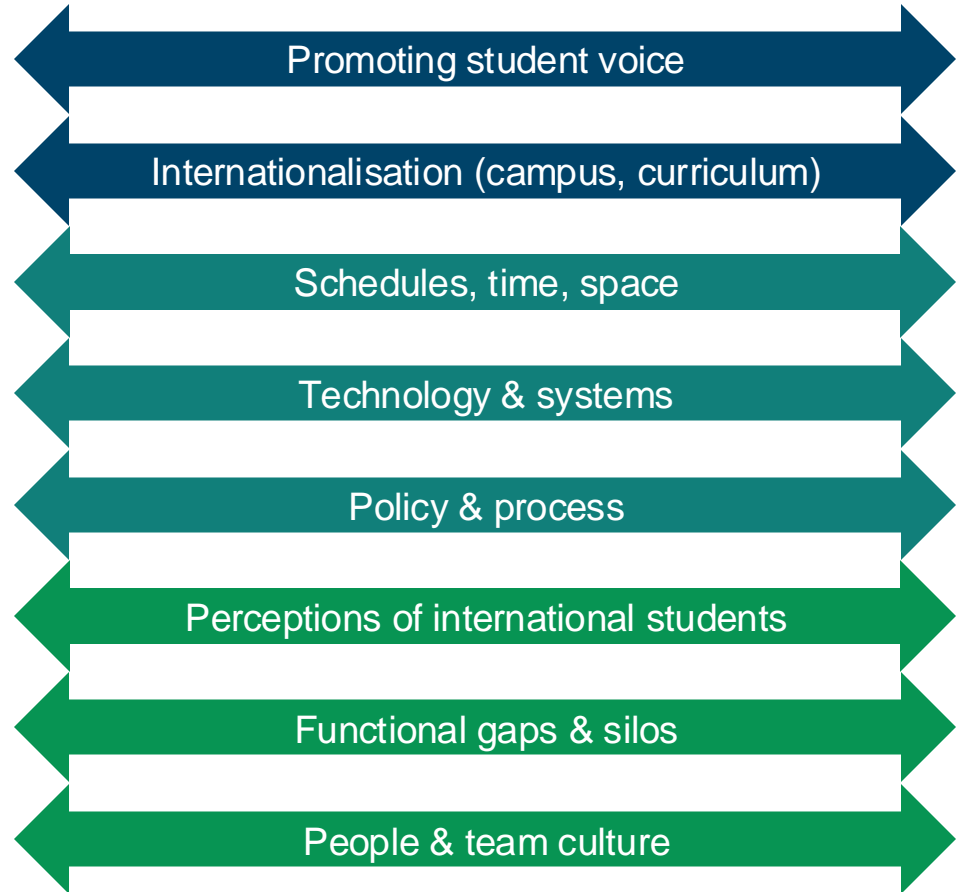
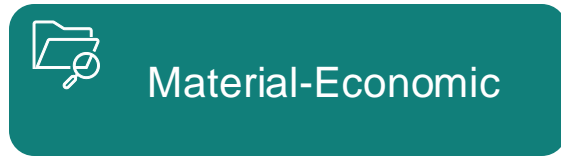
Towards more sustainable
student support



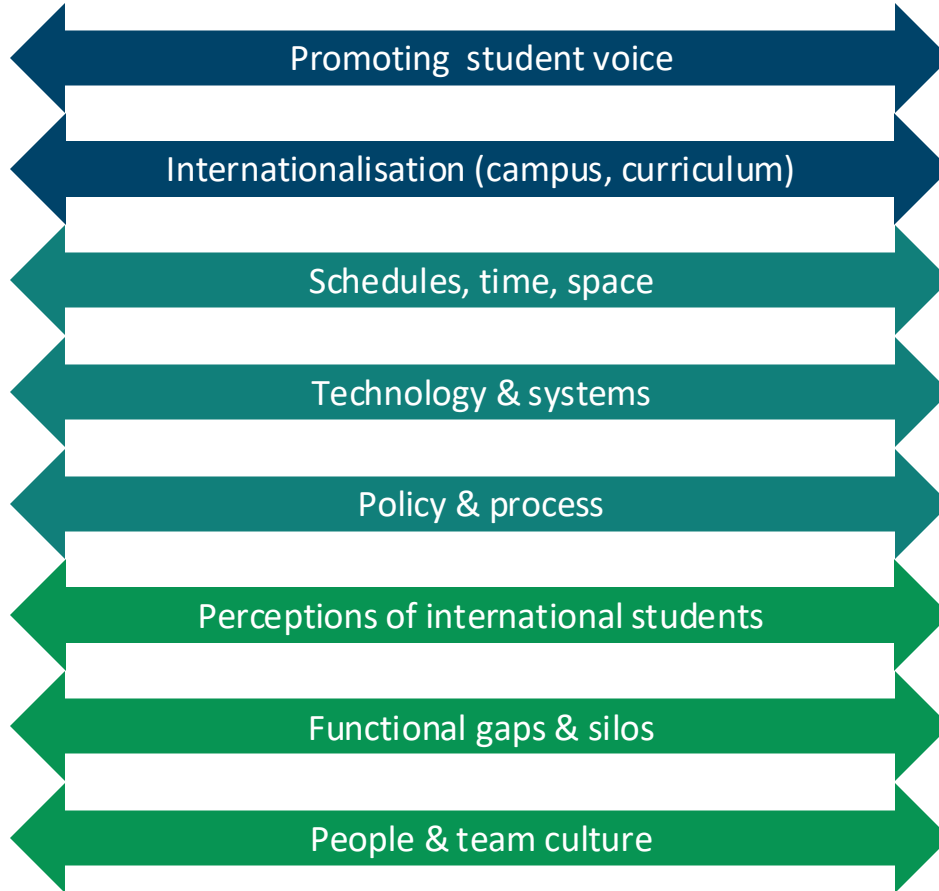
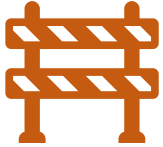
How do practices AND our environments work to support students?



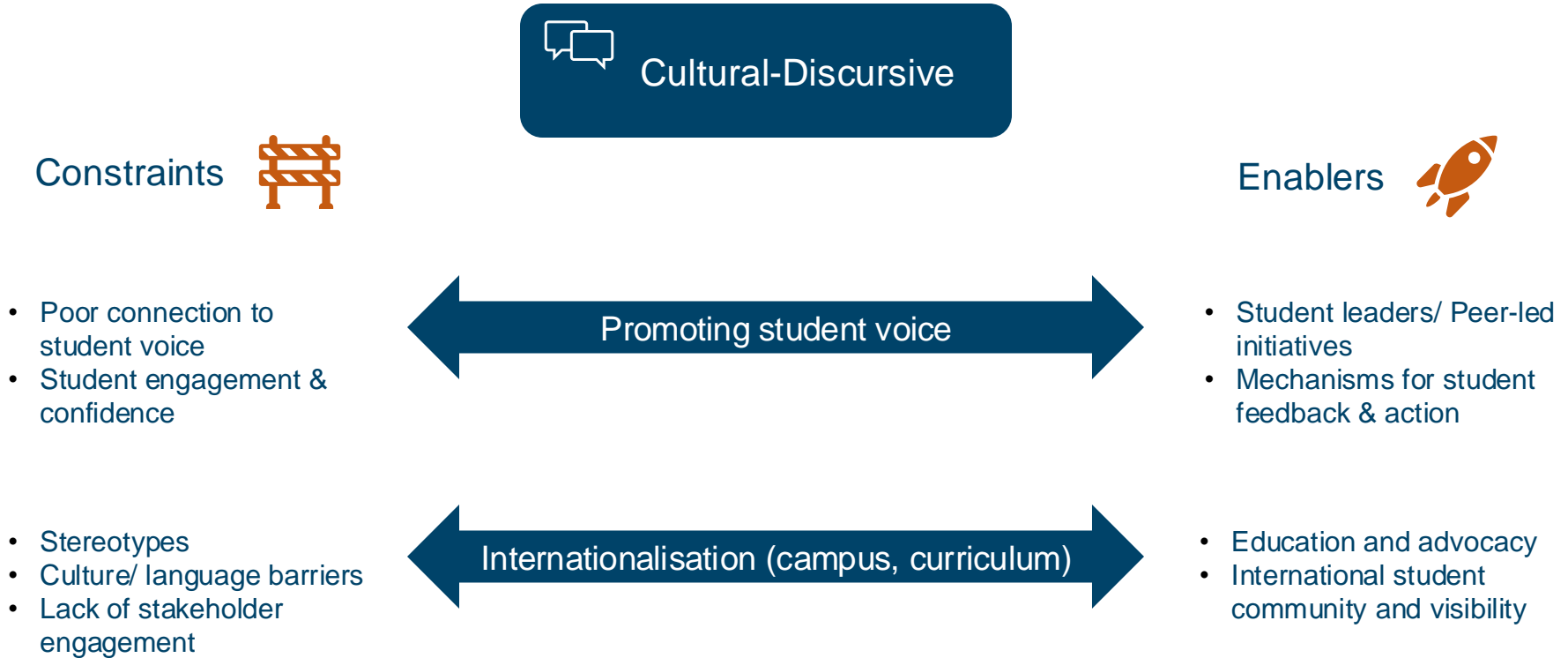
What enables and constrains our student support practices?



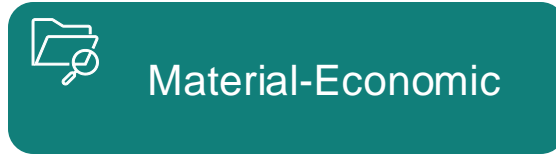
What enables and constrains student support practices in your institution?



What enables and constrains our student support practices?



What enables and constrains our student support practices?

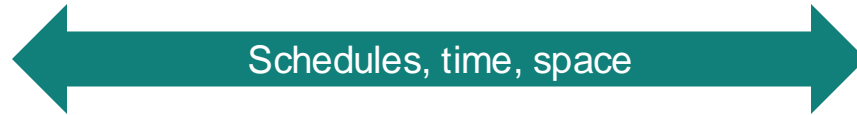


Constraints

- Expectations of availability
- Reactive as default mode

- Constant online contact/visibility
- Juggling multiple systems

- Bureaucracy and poor policy
- Disconnected org structure



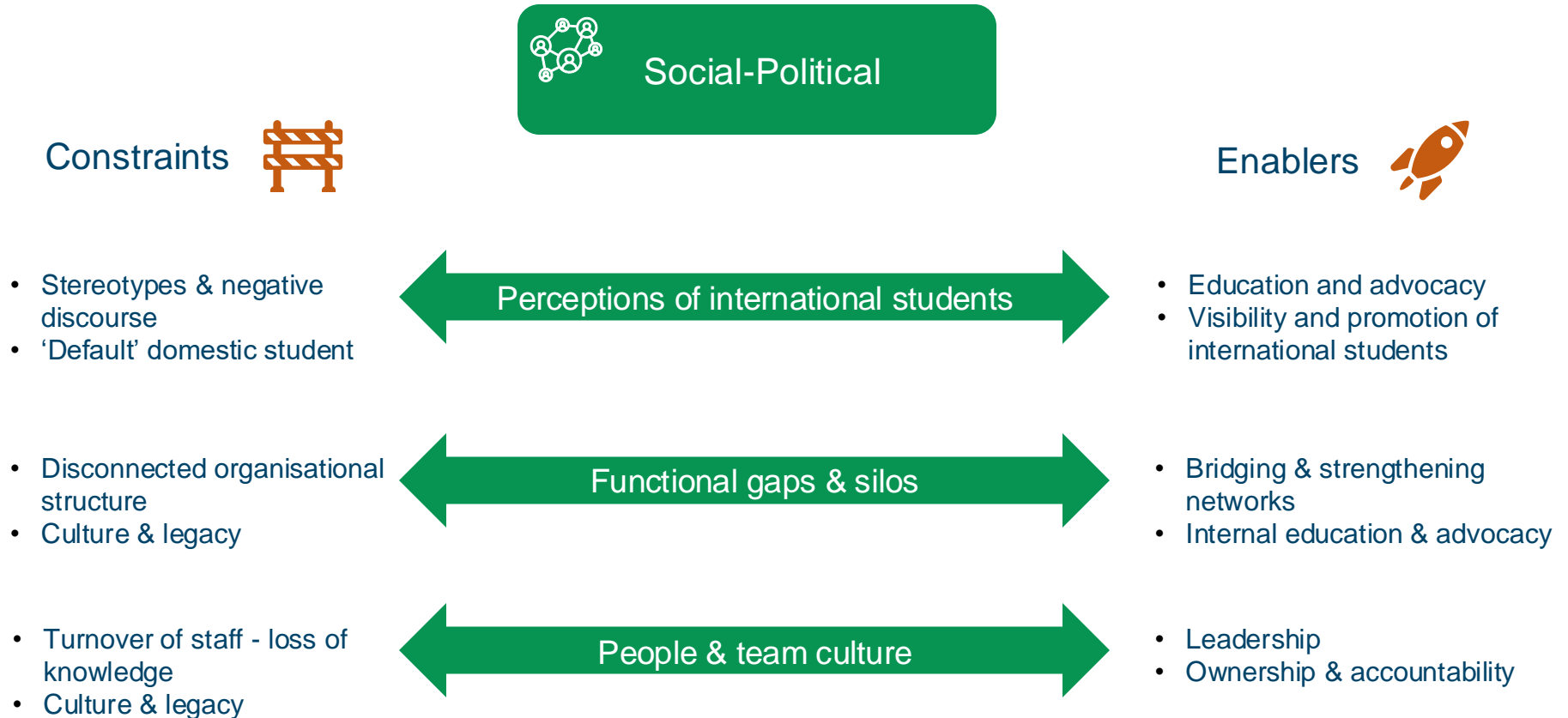
Enablers

- Boundaries (time and space)
- Permission to plan; 'thinking time'

- Integrated systems; IT access
- Effective automation; well-designed systems

- Shared policy & process
- Helpful templates and documentation

What enables and constrains our student support practices?



How can we...

... create new architectures for sustainable student support?



- Prioritise wellbeing - yourself, your staff, your students



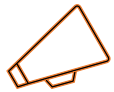
- Make the systems work for humans, not vice versa!



- Build on blueprints - don't re-invent the wheel



- Strengthen networks & engage champions



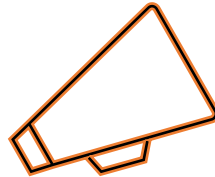
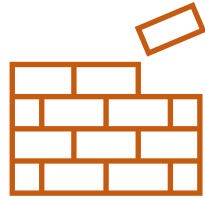
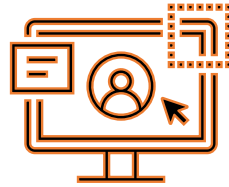
- Support international student visibility and reputation - educate and advocate

You don't have to be there for everybody all the time because then they are not learning to be autonomous. Try giving them distance a little.

Post-COVID people are very, very tired and there is a bit of a churn in the sector at the moment. So you probably do need to put in a bit of work [...] just to find your champions again.

The long-term goal would be to not have specific international student support but to have all the services capable of supporting international students.

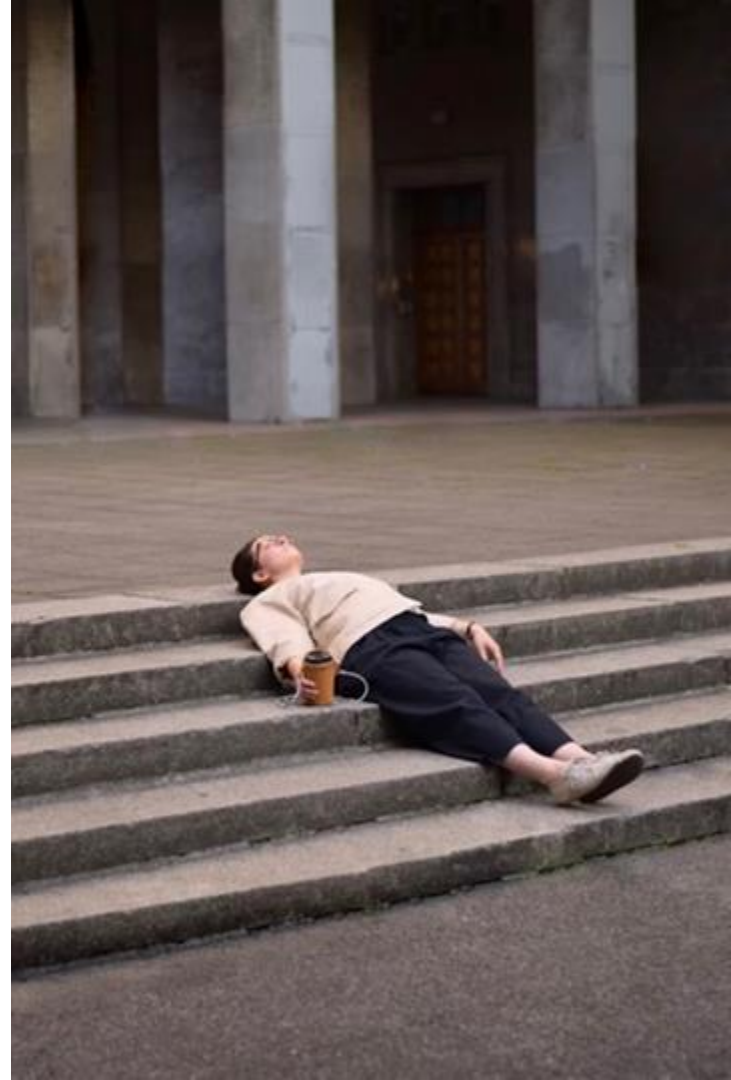
What would make a difference for you and your team?
How could your work be more sustainable?



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We need to have a break because the work we do can be emotional, exhausting, and challenging in many ways, but really fulfilling and really meaningful.



Practical tools

Things to try with your team



Interview To The Double

“Tell me how to be you for the day”



In pairs → 10 minutes total (take turns to interview)

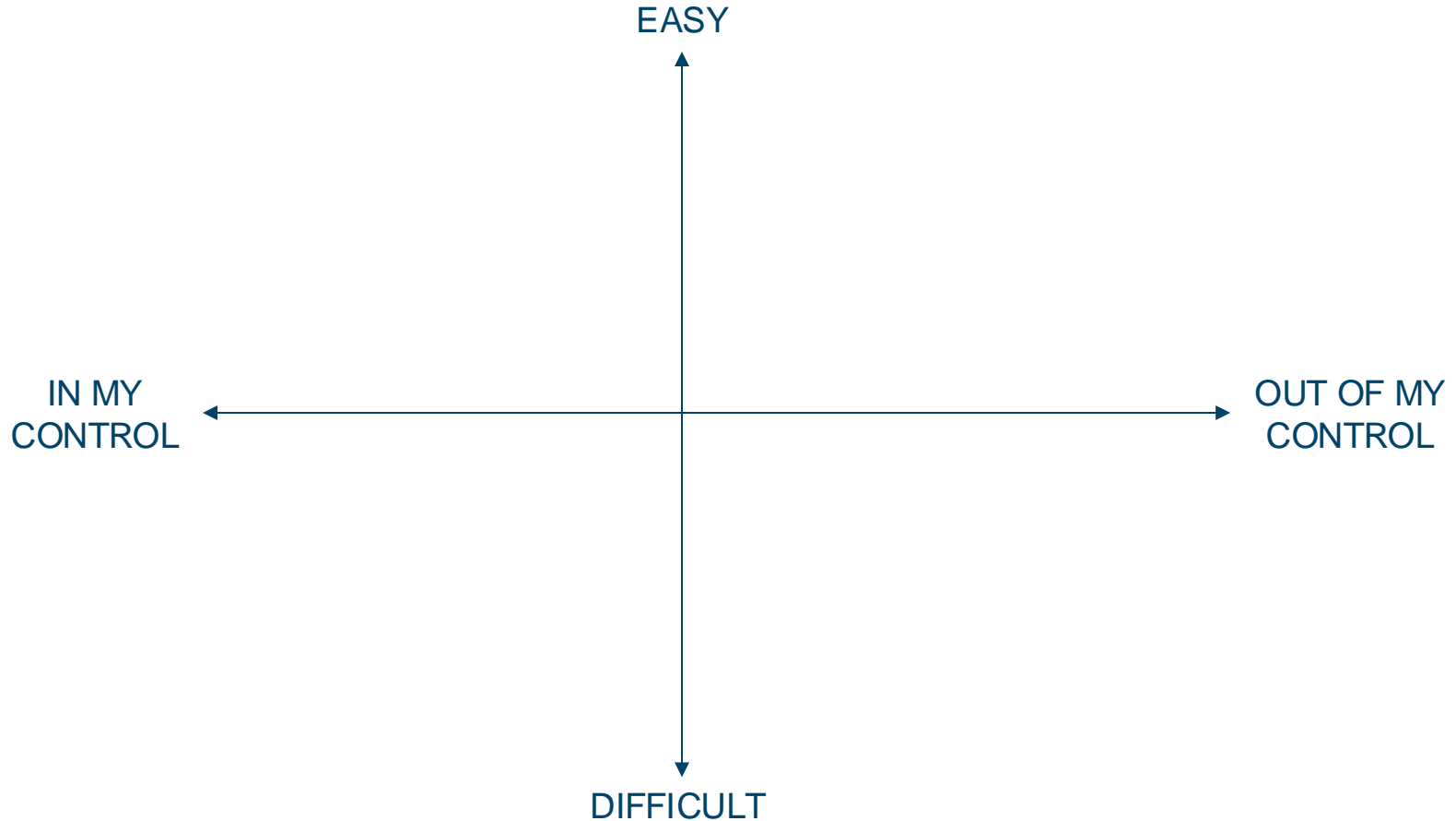
Interviewer (5 mins)

- Invite interviewee to ‘instruct’ you on how to be them for 1 day
- Don’t interrupt
- Ask for clarification only if necessary

Interviewee (5 mins)

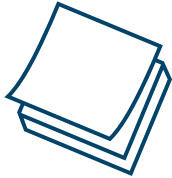
- Give as much detail as you can
- Think about a specific day
- Be instructive: “If you want you be me for the day, you’ll need to... then you should...”

Where to start? Prioritising student support plans and practices

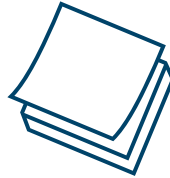


What do you want to stop, start, and continue from here?

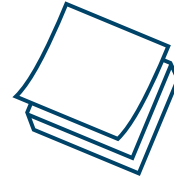
STOP



START



CONTINUE



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For further details, or to enquire about a workshop for your own institution, contact:

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