

Infrastructure with an Outside-In Compass

The distinctive role of an NREN between shared
foundations and institutional reality

A strategic perspective from management experience inside an
NREN and across universities

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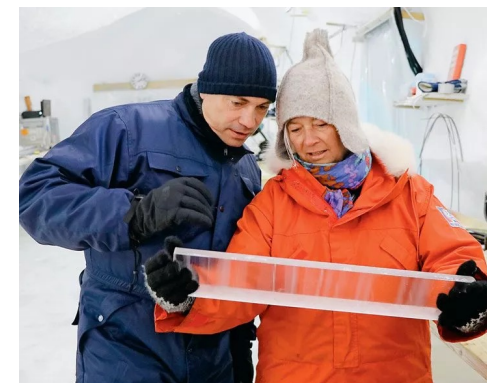
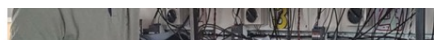


What is a University – where research are conducted

- ▶ Universities are **older than most European** states (Bologna 1088, Oxford 1096, Paris 1160, Copenhagen 1479)
- ▶ Collegiate – a peer society
- ▶ Informal global community
- ▶ Academic autonomy
- ▶ Master and servant (science vs administration)

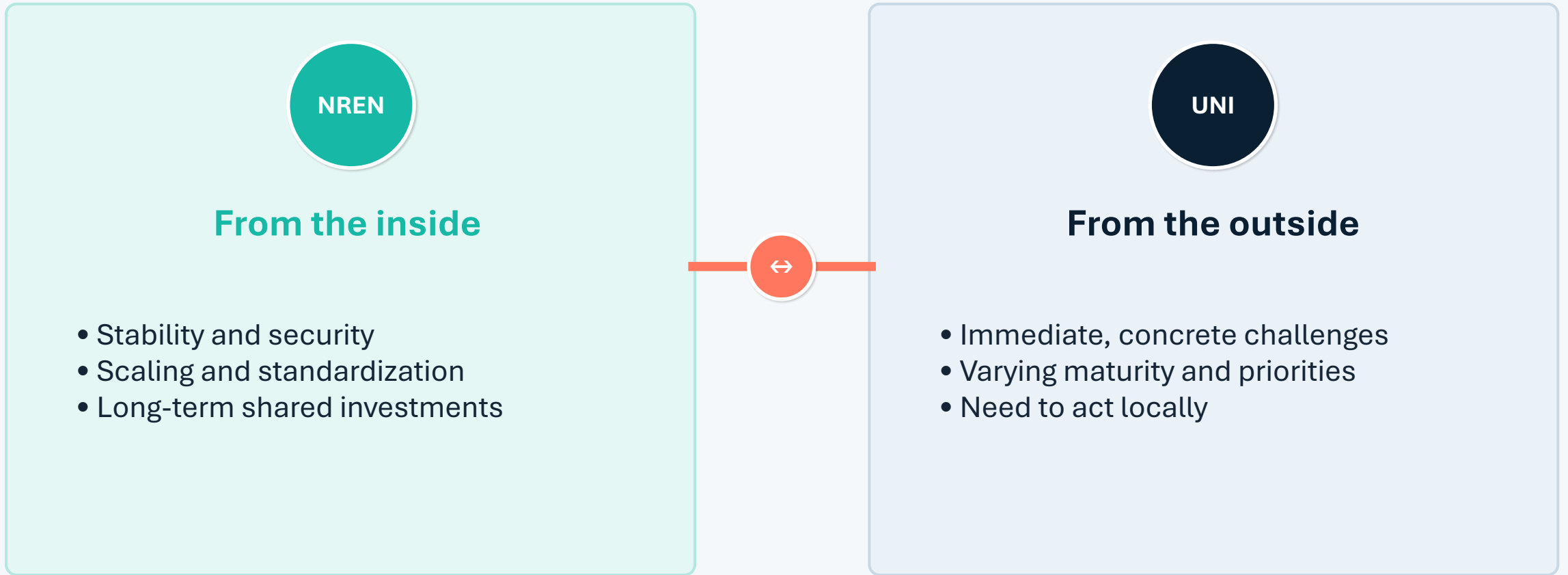
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- ▶ A university is **not** like other institutions, companies, or organisations.

What/who is it we're serving – The WHY



I have seen the tension from both sides

The same shared offering is perceived differently depending on where you stand.



Leadership's task: translate between the two logics — don't choose sides.

Two ways to lose the plot



INSIDE-OUT EXCELLENCE

Technically strong • weak fit • low adoption



UNFILTERED DEMAND

Fragmented portfolio • duplication • no shared horizon

NREN's Relevance fails at both extremes.

The strategic tension is the job

STEWARD

LISTEN

TRANSLATE

An NREN creates value by holding the two truths together:

- Build ahead of isolated demand
- Stay anchored in real institutional needs
- Convert diversity into shared capability—not uniformity

The balance is dynamic: priorities change; the purpose does not.



The NREN value stack – the logics are different

Institutional outcomes

Research velocity • secure collaboration • teaching continuity



Shared services

Identity • security capabilities • data and cloud enablement



Trust & interoperability

Federation • standards • governance • community agreements

Foundational infrastructure

Connectivity • resilience • operations • international reach



The lower the layer, the longer the horizon. The higher the layer, the closer the institutional dialogue.

Listen at three levels

Needs are not limited to what is said in strategic meetings.

STRATEGIC (Board)

Leadership, portfolio, risks,
investments

*What will matter in the
years ahead?*



TACTICAL (local decision-makers)

CIO/IT, security, data,
education

*Where do dependencies
and bottlenecks emerge?*



PRACTICE (end-user forums)

Researchers, educators,
support, operations

*Where does friction show
up in daily work?*



One point of contact is not enough. The insight lies in connecting the levels.

Leadership implications

01 Protect the long horizon

Make the case for foundations before demand becomes urgent.

02 Make trade-offs visible

State what is common, configurable, local—and why.

03 Measure realised value

Track adoption, integration and outcomes alongside uptime and delivery.

Trust is earned twice: through dependable operations and through relevant choices. This is where “license to operate” emerges.

An outside-in NREN still needs a backbone



One shared service can require several adoption paths



Ready to integrate

APIs, standards, automation, self-service

Needs guided adoption

Patterns, onboarding, migration support

Needs capability first

Skills, governance, local prerequisites

Same destination ≠ same journey

Engagement must change decisions—not decorate them



1

SENSE

Needs, constraints, maturity

2

SYNTHESISE

Common pattern and shared value

3

TEST

Co-design, pilot, adoption evidence

4

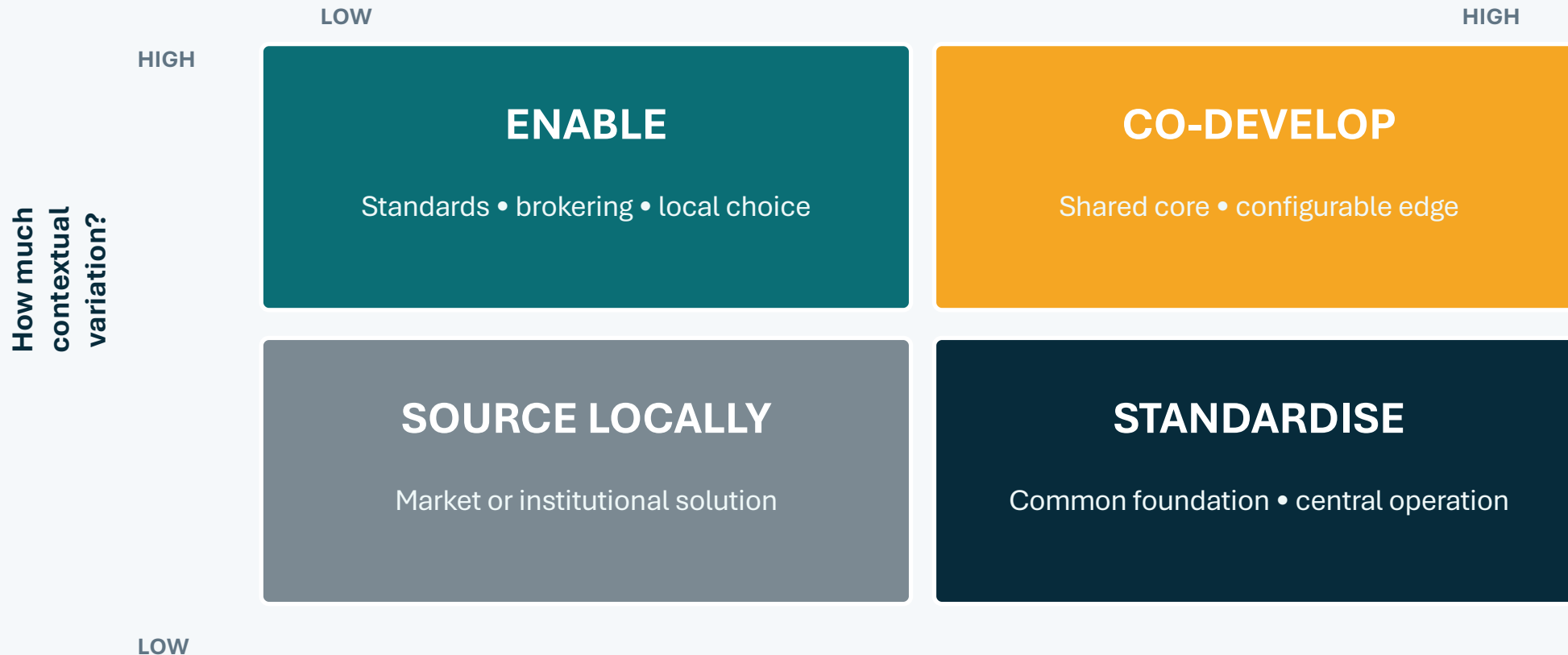
DECIDE

Scale, adapt, partner—or stop and restart

A listening mechanism without a portfolio consequence is theatre.

Decide with two questions – but involve involve involve

How strong is the collective value?



Then apply gates: mission fit • trust advantage • sustainability • adoption evidence • exit path

**The NREN should be
strong enough to lead—
and close enough to listen.
The NREN should SUPPORT Universities**

Standardise the foundations. Co-create the shared difference. Enable local choice.

Thank you