The Aftermath of #FeesMustFall:

An Activity Theoretical Analysis of Blended Learning at the UFS

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FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA

UFS
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OUTLINE

Background

Data Collection

Findings

Recommendations

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RESEARCH QUESTION

How did the teaching and learning strategies used in 2016 during the campus disruptions at the UFS affect the use of educational technology in 2017?

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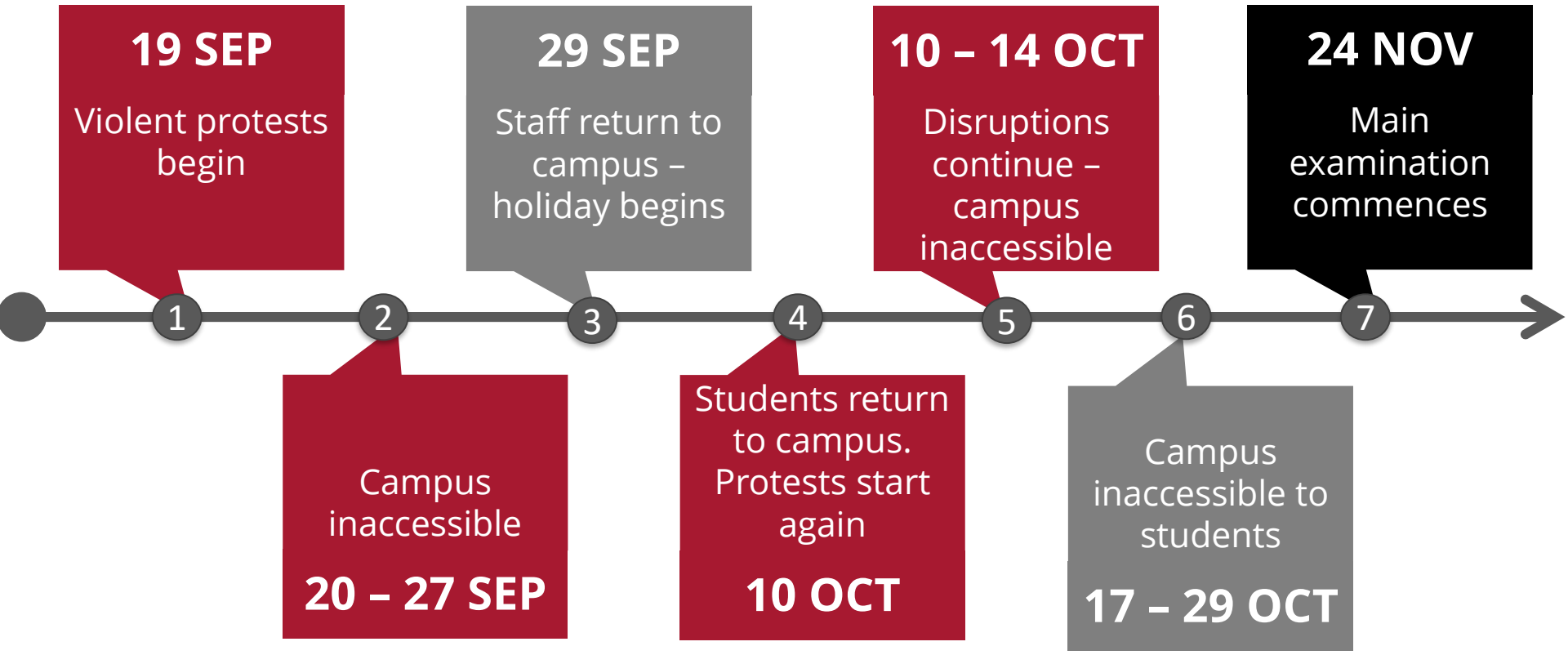
TIMELINE OF UFS CAMPUS DISRUPTIONS IN 2016



CAMPUS INACCESSIBLE TO STAFF AND STUDENTS

CAMPUS INACCESSIBLE TO STUDENTS ONLY

CAMPUS ACCESSIBLE

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FACULTY RESCUE STRATEGIES

Natural & Agricultural Sciences (NAS)

- All outstanding content must be covered
- Flexibility in content distribution
- Flexibility in how outstanding semester assessments are completed
- Some contact sessions
- Written examinations

Economic & Management Sciences (EMS)

- Module packs with outstanding content
- Online outstanding semester assessment
- Promotion system
- No contact sessions
- Mix of online & written examinations

Law

- All outstanding content via audio lectures & PowerPoints
- Feedback on completed semester tests no further semester tests
- All students have access to examinations
- No contact sessions
- All examinations online

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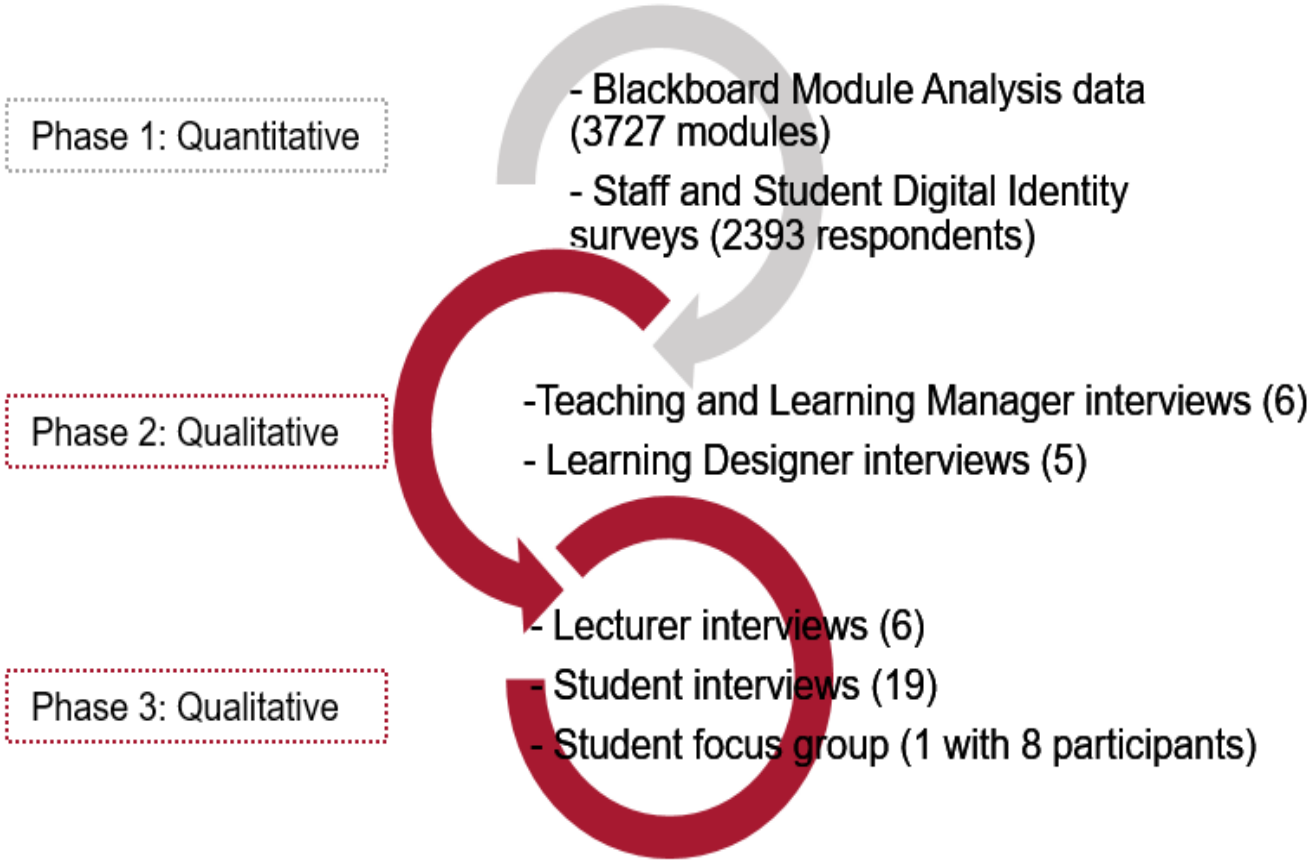
DATA COLLECTION



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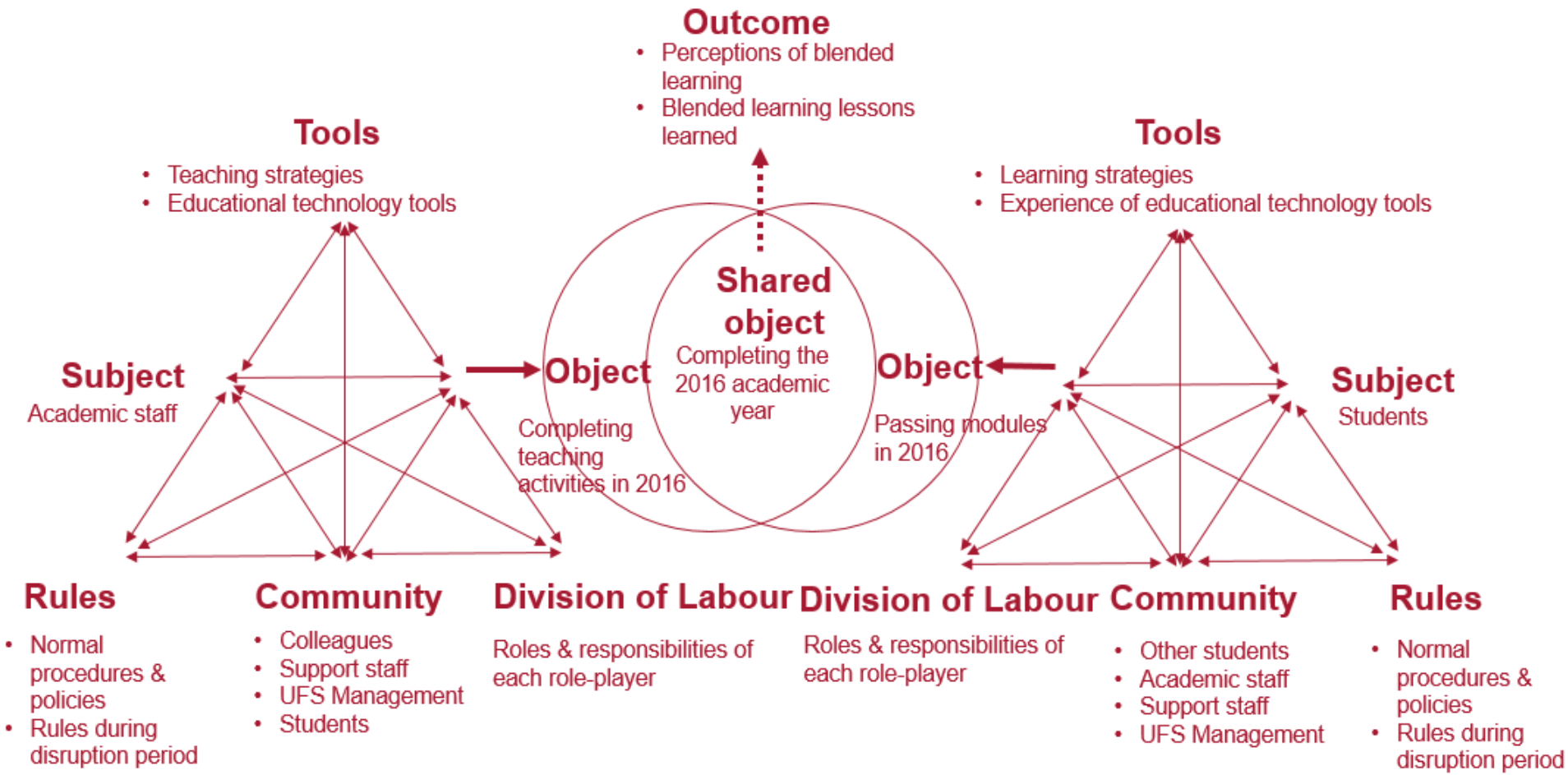
UFS ACTIVITY SYSTEMS



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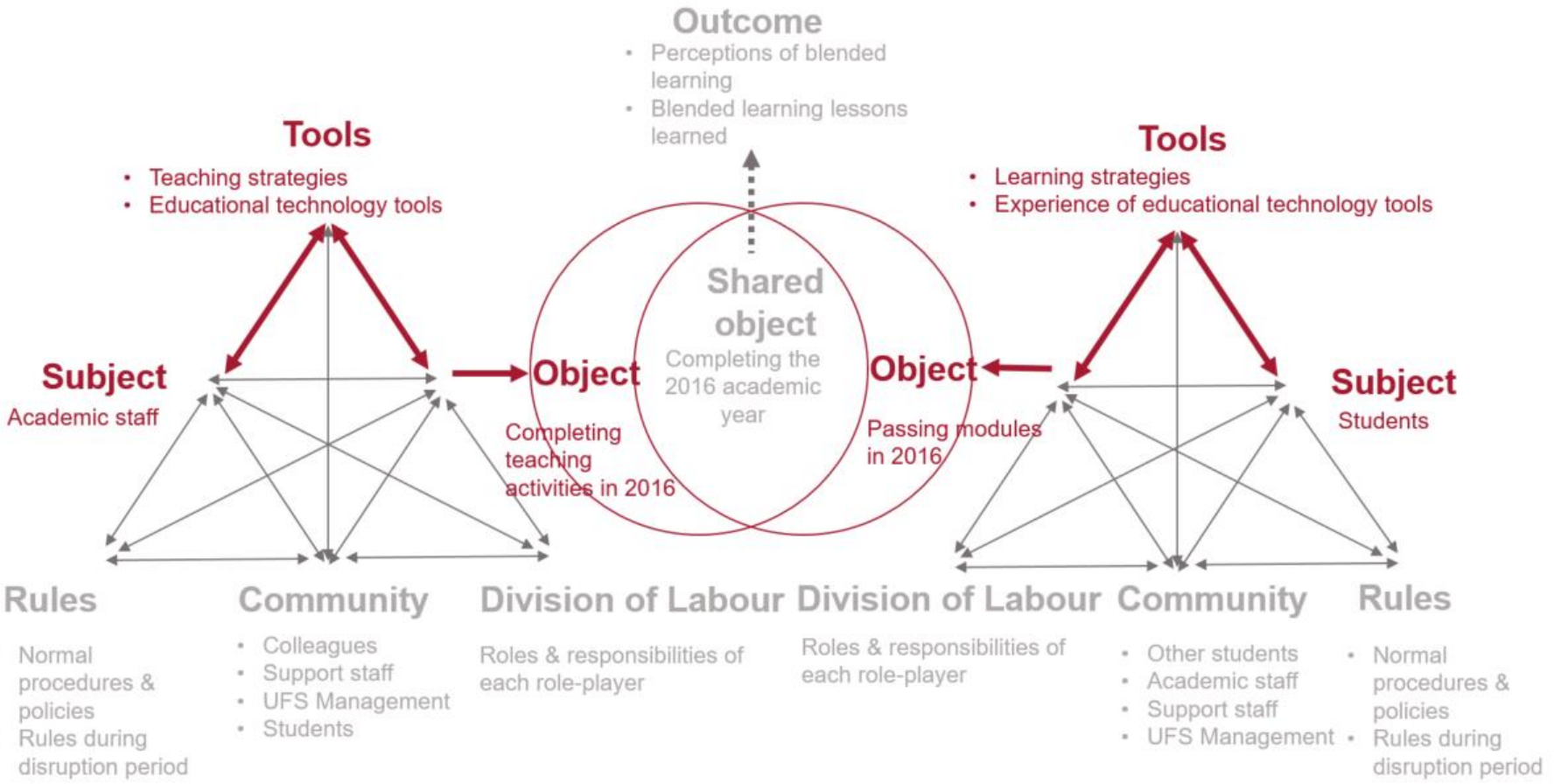
SUBJECT – TOOL – OBJECT INTERACTION



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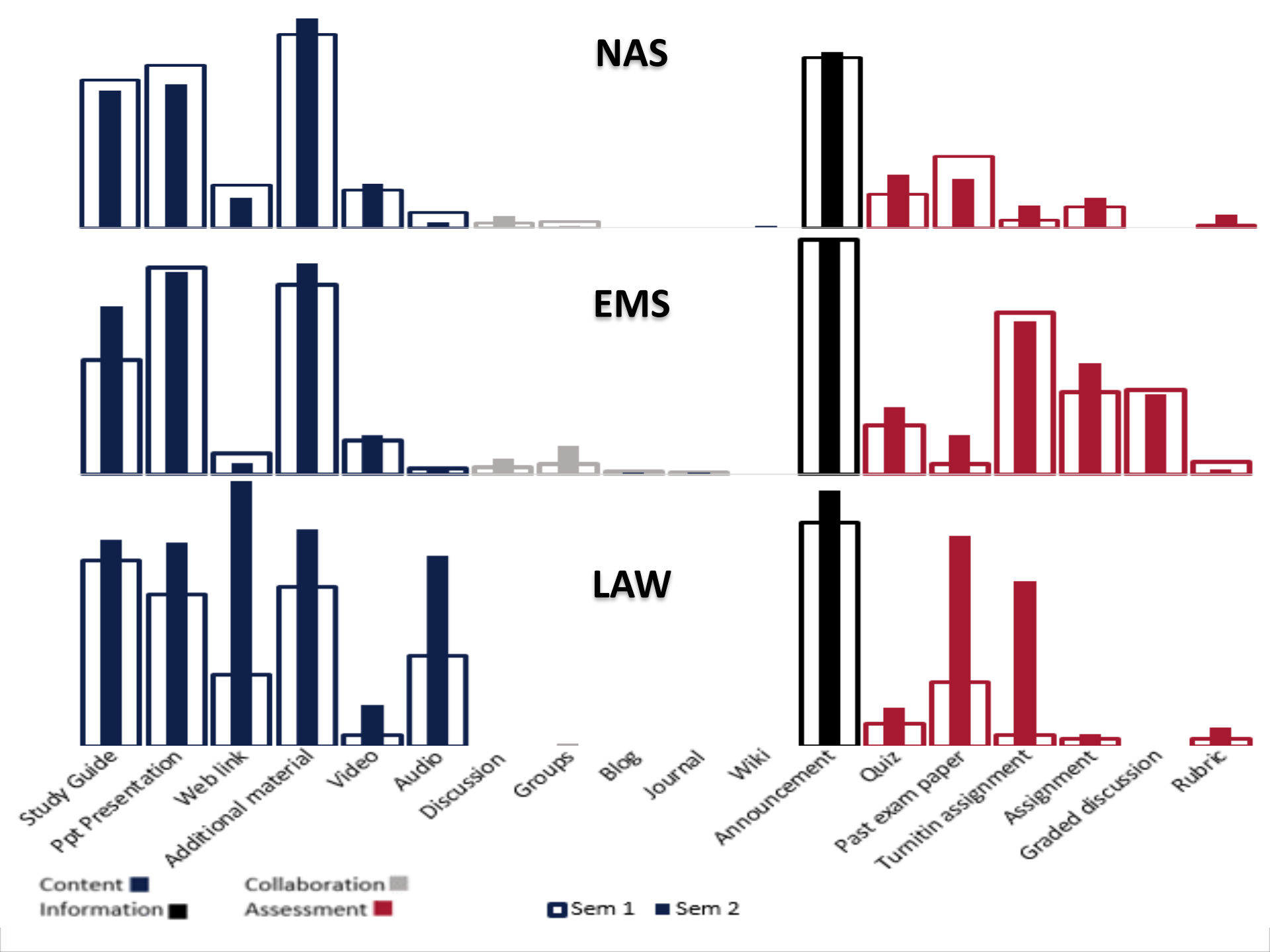
NAS
EMS
LAW
Study Guide
Ppt Presentation
Web link
Additional material
Video
Audio
Discussion
Groups
Blog
Journal
Wiki
Announcement
Quiz
Past exam paper
Turnitin assignment
Assignment
Graded discussion
Rubric
Content
Information
Collaboration
Assessment
Sem 1
Sem 2

STAFF PERSPECTIVES

"When I teach a student, I want him to understand the principles of a metal. To be able to do that, I need to be able to see the student right in front of me. I make use of the blackboard with coloured chalk".

Staff participant 16

"I had to change all my papers. It was an enormous effort for me and I had to change it to multiple choice questions. Now for a legal oke, this is a huge thing. Depending on the level that you lecture, you need to test the ability of students to argue. That was very difficult with multiple choice questions, and obviously if you know they have access to the material (in an open-book examination)... So, yes, it was really, it was a difficult time in my life. I can remember it very vividly".

Staff participant 13

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STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

"Certain things you cannot do on your own. Stats on its own in class with other students is tough. Now imagine you are on your own doing it at home. Because even after classes certain things you do not understand, even if you went to class. Now, imagine if you are alone"

Student participant 3 (NAS)

"I think our faculty, compared to other faculties, they use Blackboard more often. So, we were already, kind of, used to where you have to go (to access learning material). They (lecturers) would actually also tell us in class or give us a mini presentation on Blackboard, you know, how to access certain things. Considering the time we had to study and how we already knew how to use Blackboard, it was easy (switching to online learning)".

Student focus group participant 1 (Law)

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STAFF	STUDENTS
Easier to incorporate technology in certain types of modules	
Lack of resources is a challenge	
Adaptation of material = necessary but time consuming	Preparedness to switch online dependent on previous experience with educational technology
Lack of experience = lack of confidence	Positive experiences: Bb collaborate, audio lectures, videos, PowerPoints with voiceovers, some forms of online assessment
	Negative experiences: Overloaded with information, high stakes online assessment

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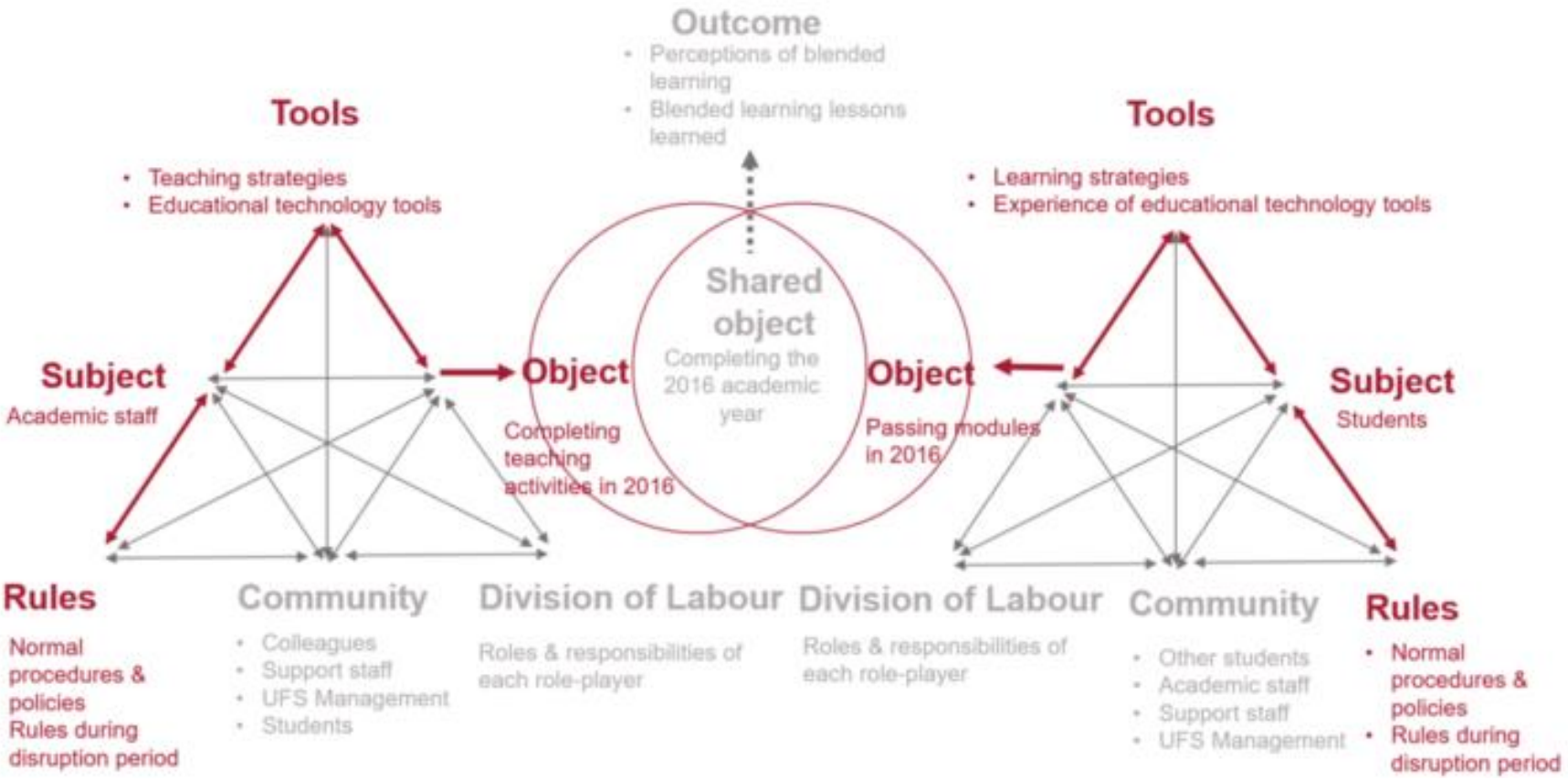
RULES – SUBJECT – TOOL – OBJECT INTERACTION



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STAFF PERSPECTIVES

"Everything was dealt with in the same manner across the faculty, which applied to every student and every member of staff. That was definitely positive, the fact that everyone wasn't just left to do as he or she pleases".

Staff Participant 11

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STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

"None of us knew what was going to happen after the strikes. I was afraid the whole university system and everything is going to change online. You can study from home. Then I just felt like I could have studied through Unisa, or I could have done an online course. The reason why I came to the University of the Free State is to have class, to have lectures, to have interaction with people and that's the important thing for me. I personally will not, like, I would not do anything just online"

Student participant 5 (EMS)

"I was angry to be honest because I remember the one exam I failed so bad. I failed it. And then the other people (students in other faculties) were so cheerful because they were doing it (completing examinations) in a group. It was really unfair...Other faculties just took the semester marks and then that was sort of converted into your final mark. Then this other faculty had that group exam thing".

Student participant 8 (NAS)

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STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

"At the time, yes, I was happy (to be able to promote) because it means I do not have to study for an exam, I only had one exam to study for. But, in the following year, which was 2017, my second year, it was very bad because of how the modules are intertwined. A lot of the work I missed out on, because we weren't really taught, like physically, I guess, through contact sessions. I did not write the exam, so, I never went through it (outstanding content) anyway."

Student participant 14 (EMS)

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STAFF	STUDENTS
Uncertainty caused stress	
Comfort in standardisation	Students who completed online examinations perceived to have had an advantage
Online examinations in an uncontrolled environment = challenge	NAS students experienced negative impact on their learning during the disruption period. EMS & Law more so in the following year

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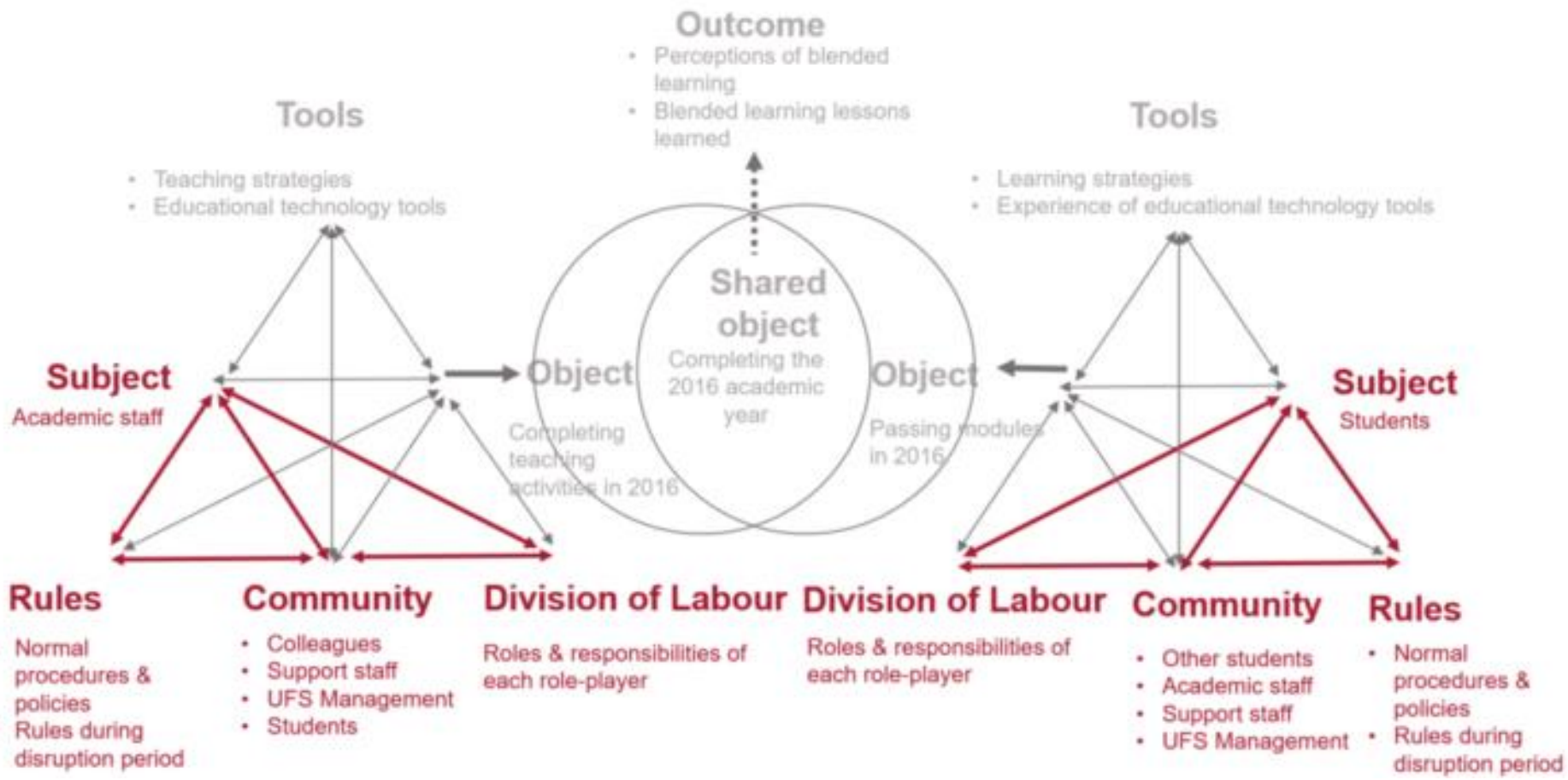
RULES – SUBJECT – COMMUNITY – DIVISION OF LABOUR INTERACTION



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STAFF PERSPECTIVES

"What was difficult for me was that I could not get feedback from students to know whether they received the information I posted on Blackboard. There was no two-way communication... Students also complained that they get information from us but they can't communicate with us. Yes, emails are an option, but emails are a slow way to communicate. Sometimes you can only reply a couple of hours later or even the next day".

Staff Participant 3

"The department and the faculty got a lot closer to one another during that time because we were all in this mess, kind of, and we had to sort it out... So, we would have our separate departmental meetings to say 'okay what are you going to do, can I also use it?' 'No, it's not a first year level, first years can use this method but on a third year level you will need to do something else'... and it helped a lot".

Staff participant 15

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STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

"I saw in myself that I have the discipline to carry out all the content that was relied on me and I couldn't just leave (university) at that point and blame it on whoever. I think that was strength. I saw a strength, my strength, in this process"

Student participant 2 (EMS)

"It helped so much because we were not just working by ourselves (in a study group of our peers), but we were working with senior students as well. So, they give a broader perspective to the module, because in our group, we did not really understand accounting because we did not do accounting in high school. So getting senior students to help us was positive. By ourselves we would have struggled".

Student participant 19 (Law)

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STAFF

Roles changed (TLMs & Lecturers)

Increased workload (TLMs , lecturers, learning designers)

Improved relationships between lecturers within a department, between TLM & learning designer, between lecturers & learning designers

STUDENTS

Learned to work more independently

Formed study groups with other students

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CONTRADICTIONS/ TENSIONS

Contradictions/ tensions are conflicts within a single element in the system or between two or more elements – they are a powerful driving force for transformation but if not acknowledged or resolved can stifle growth and development

Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2008)

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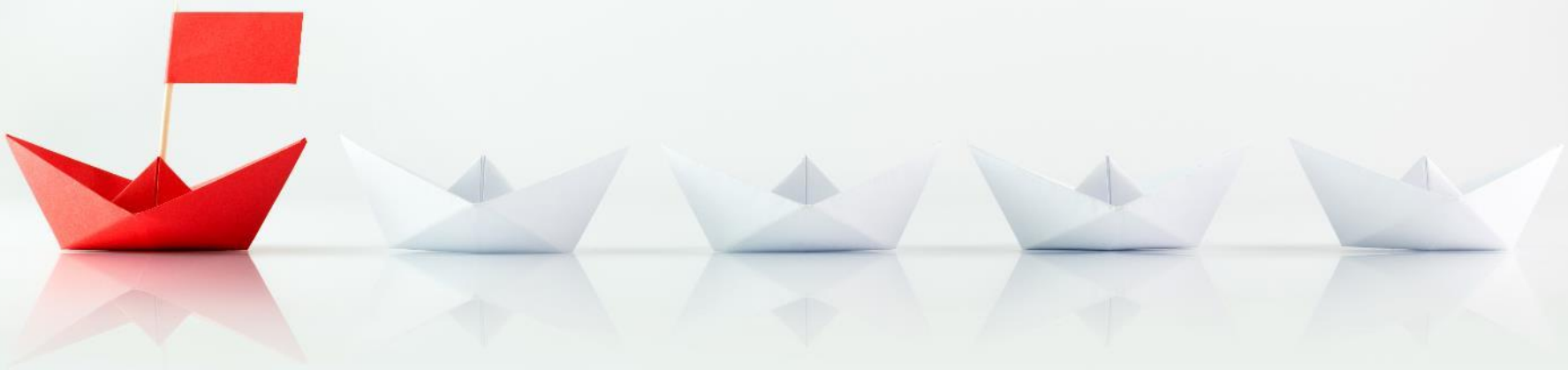
CONTRADICTION 1: TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

(LACK OF CONFIDENCE VS LACK OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS)

“People were forced, by a hell of a tsunami, to change practice”.

Staff participant 10



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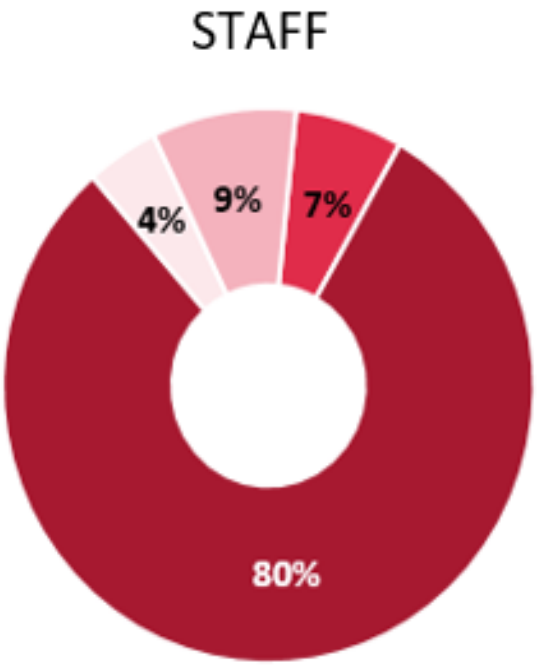
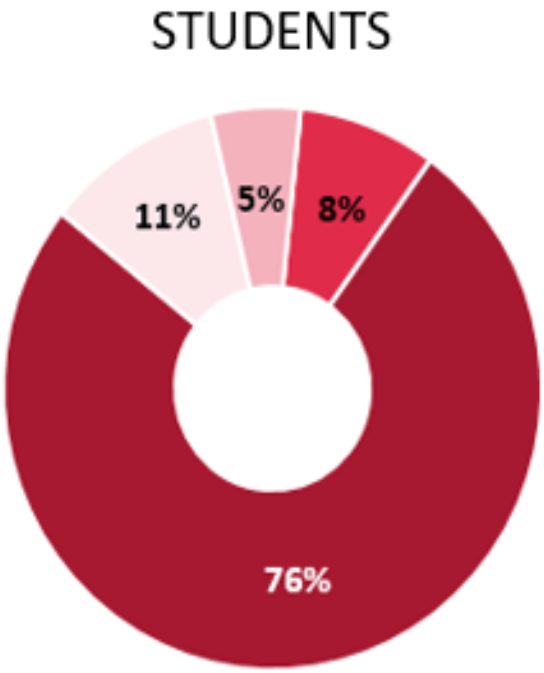
PREFERRED TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Modules with no online components
- Modules with some online components (blended modules)
- Modules that are completely online
- No preference





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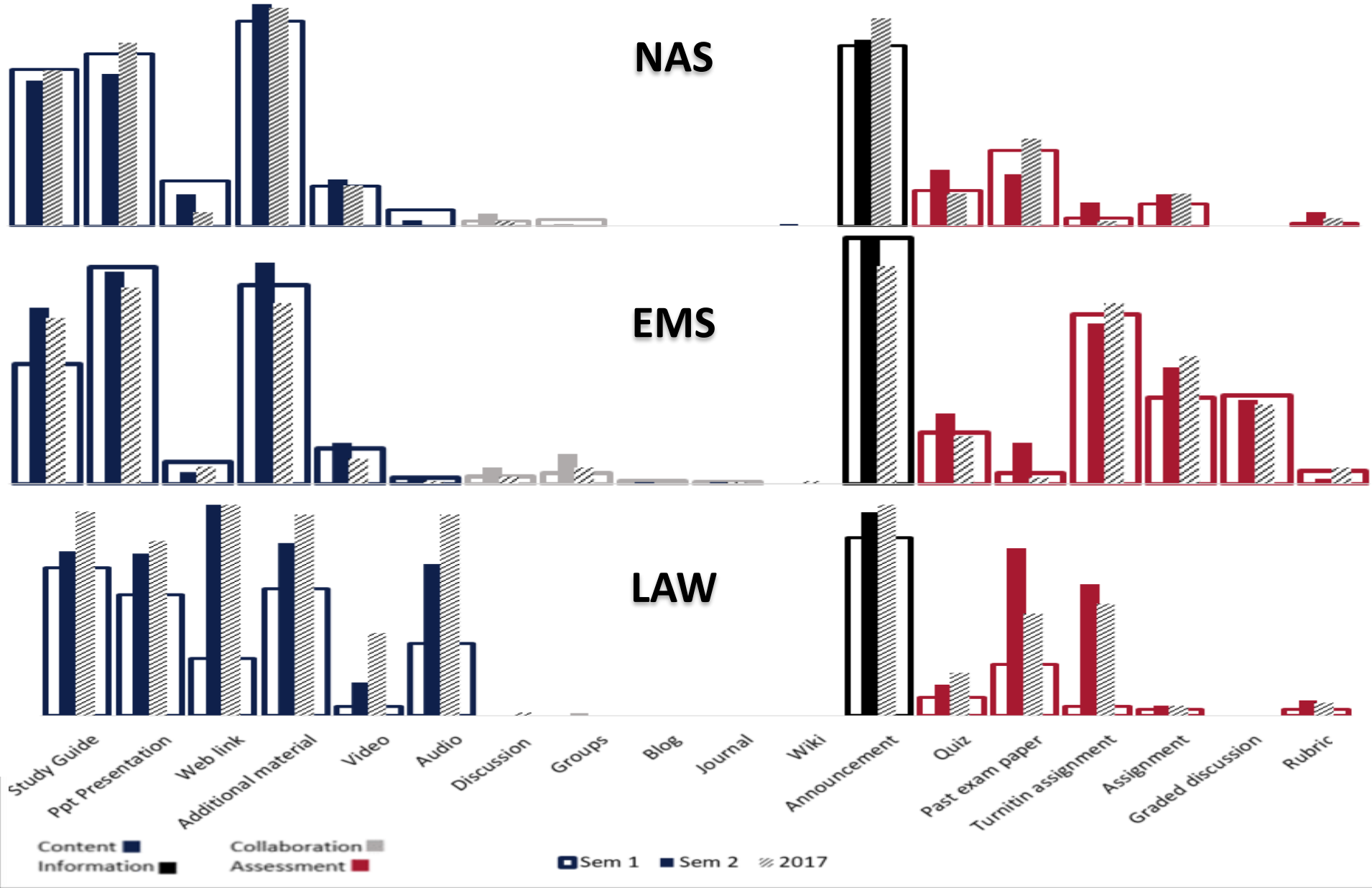
CONTRADICTION 1: TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING (LACK OF CONFIDENCE VS LACK OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS)



CONTRADICTION 2:

PREVENTION FROM FULFILLING PERCEIVED ROLE LEADING TO NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

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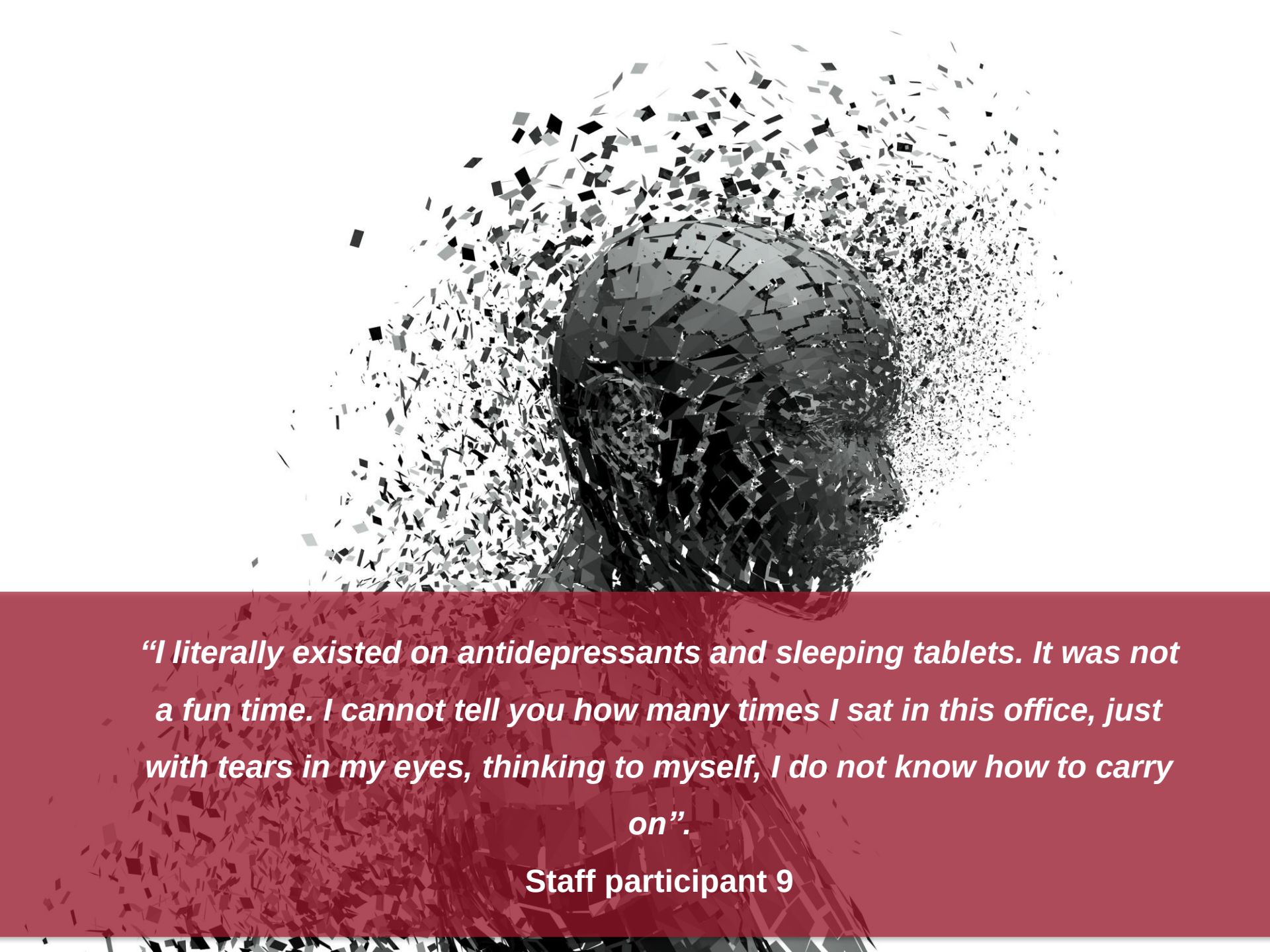

“I literally existed on antidepressants and sleeping tablets. It was not a fun time. I cannot tell you how many times I sat in this office, just with tears in my eyes, thinking to myself, I do not know how to carry on”.

Staff participant 9

"I was upset that students may disrupt things and then lecturers have to make plans and work extra and do more. And they (students) just get what they want, but there's nothing given to the lecturers or any other personnel from the campus who went out of their way to help and assist students. We do not get anything for that. Students can do as they please, we just have to bend over backwards to meet their needs".

Staff participant 12

"We started in 2017 with very tired, very negative lecturers. They felt that they had to just push, and push, and push to do more. It was a very negative experience for lecturers... I think we have learned in our faculty that you can push people to get quite a lot of things out of them but they need appreciation along the way, otherwise they will not do that again... I think the general feeling in 2016 was that top management was not dealing with the anxiety (of the lecturers) and that top management was just there to please the students"

Staff participant 10

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NOT MY STUDENTS

"And then you became a little bit negative to a point that you don't really want to assist (students) and I mean a big part of what we are is just assisting students. It is just being there for students and you did not want to do that then. So we had to remind ourselves that this is not all of our students – this is probably none of our students"

Staff participant 15

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“I personally feel like there are lecturers that walk around on campus just waiting for the next disruption. They see us as hooligans. ‘Hooligans’, I heard that word a lot in my first year”

Student participant 11

“I feel like after the protest our lecturers felt like we wanted everything done for us and that we were just making unreasonable demands. Because of how the timetable was structured and everything (the year after the disruptions), we found it very difficult to write those tests in that way, like so close to each other. And we failed, the majority of people failed our modules. I feel like some of our lecturers thought that we failed because actually, some of us should not be here because we wrote online tests the previous year”

Student participant 7

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CONTRADICTION 3: LACK OF EXISTING RULES GUIDING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Guidelines for the use of blended learning is important
- Guidance/ training in educational technology tools which also includes ‘why’ and ‘how’ certain tools can be beneficial in teaching and learning
- If blended learning is a priority, an investment must be made in physical, technical, and human resources on an institutional level
- Facilitating interaction between lecturers and students with educational technology should be encouraged
- Training and consultation in the design of online assessment should be a priority
- Ideas on how technology can be incorporated in different types of modules with different types of content and outcomes
- The emotional impact that the #FeesMustFall movement has had on staff and students must be acknowledged

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