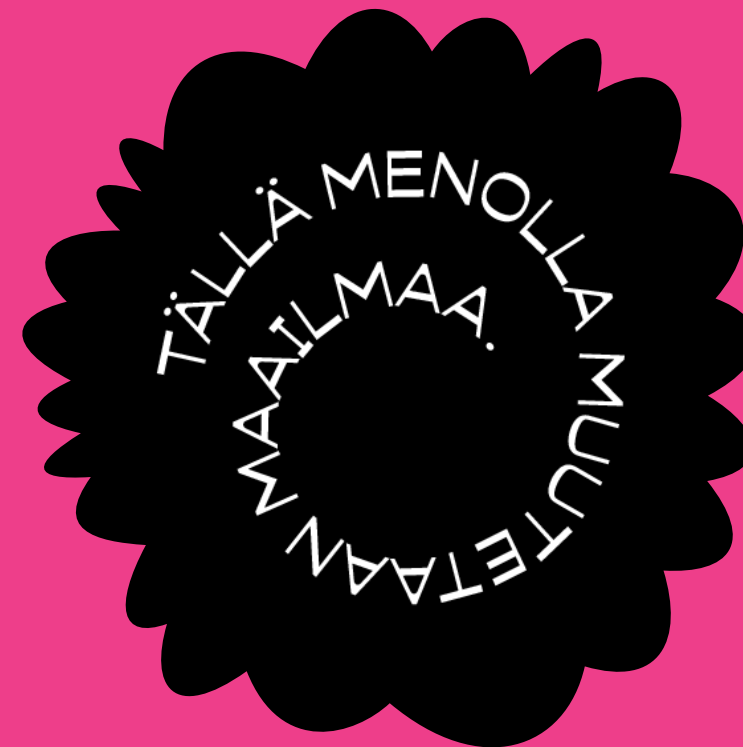


SAVONIA

**We all have a peacock's tail:
a systemic perspective on the
sense of belonging among
foreign students in Finland.**

Agnieszka Laherto,
Business Coach

Specialist in Future work ability -project, Savonia-UAS



Tulevaisuuden
työkyky

The flow of the presentation

- The meaning behind a peacock's tail
- Belonging – a greatest need of all of us
- Foreign students in Finland and their peacock's tails
- A joint reflection, what is next.



**We all have own
peacock's tail...**



It has been **shaped**
through all the
years of our
existence...



**Our meaning of self
is there ... with our
values, strengths,
believes, fears,
prejudices, skills,
coping mechanism,
culture, religion and
more...**



How it has been shaped?



We are all born into and **shaped by relationship systems**.

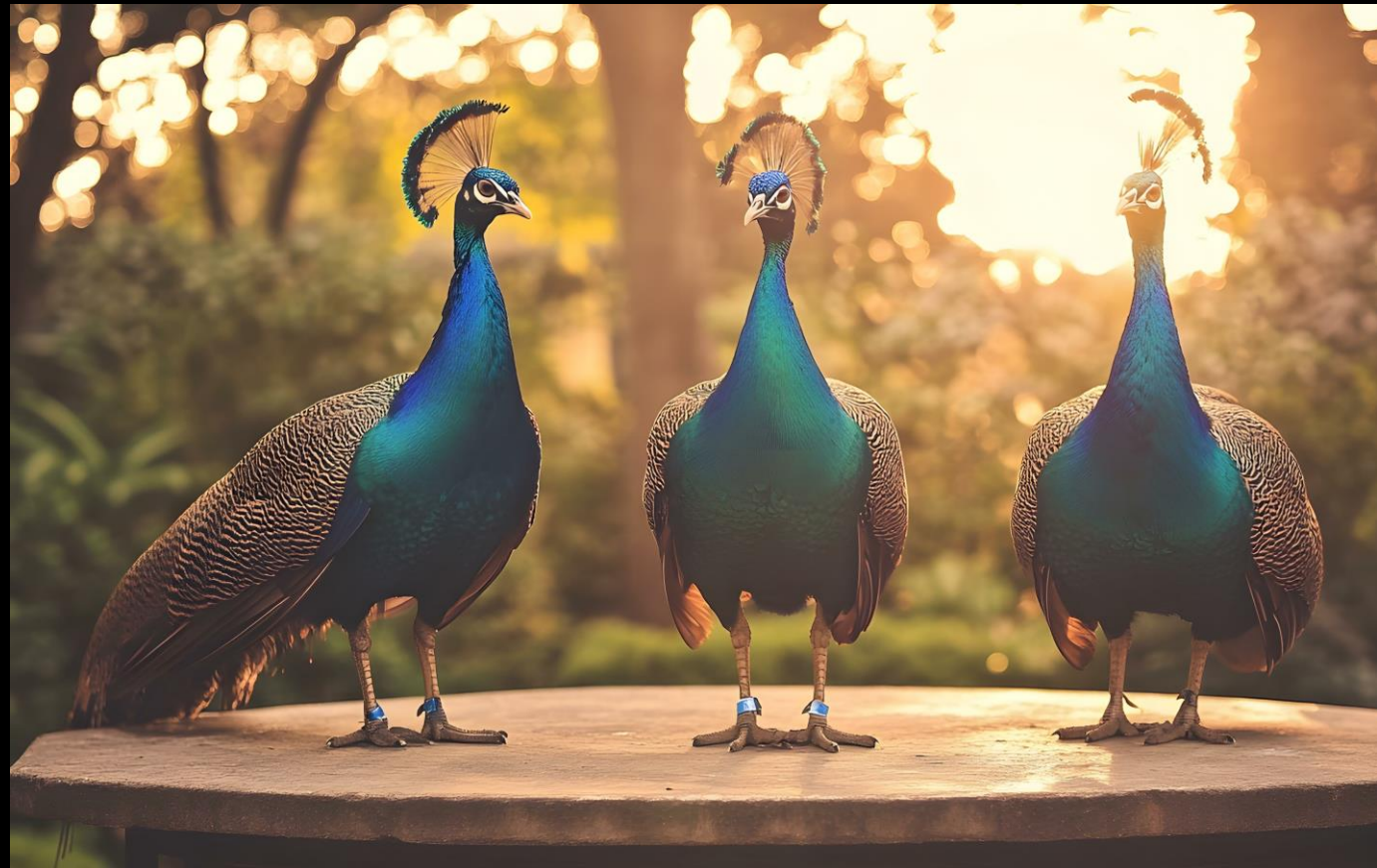
Our first system, **the family**, is where our **foundational patterns take root**, teaching us how to find our place and understand our significance within it.



As we grow, we become part of other systems - educational, social, and professional.

In each, **we learn to navigate and adapt to the unspoken rules** that secure our sense of belonging.

This feeling of belonging **shapes our identity** and influences how we find meaning in the world.



Each system offers us profound experiences, a blend of joy and pain, and we quickly learn what it feels like to be included or excluded.

In some systems, we flourish; in others, we merely get by.



**Where does culture
fit into all of this?**



Culture is a **larger system** that flows through the smaller ones we are part of. Through smaller systems we get deeper meaning of the dynamics within the culture we were born to. We learn how to adapt to the cultural norms and expectations we've been exposed to.



**For a moment, reflect
about your own
peacock's tail...**



How has your sense of belonging influenced your peacock's tail?



What is the colour scheme of your tail?

What has contributed to those shades?



How do your values, strengths, skills and beliefs come into play on your peacock's tail?

And how about your underdeveloped abilities...?



How proud are you of the
tail you are carrying?



How willing are you to reveal it to others in the systems you are a part of?



What do you need from the system, to feel safe enough, to reveal the full spectrum of your peacock's tail?



How about the Foreign Students in Finland...

How do their peacock's tails look like here?



They find themselves immersed in new cultural, social, and educational systems that are often **difficult to understand**, and surrounded by a language that is **challenging to learn**.



Far from the familiar systems of belonging they've built over a lifetime - **no family, no friends, and no culturally or socially familiar networks.**

They often lack any initial foundation of connection.



Their sense of **belonging** becomes deeply **compromised**, with their unique **peacock's tail** frequently dismissed as **irrelevant or not enough**.



They face cultural norms, rules, and expectations that are difficult to grasp, making them **feel like outsiders** in the wider society, student groups, and future professional environments.



This can be an **overwhelming** and **triggering** experience for many.



It takes years to adapt, requiring **immense energy, effort, flexibility** and a bit of luck in **meeting the right people** who can guide them on their journey **to find belonging** in tightly closed cultural and social systems they encounter.



**So where does it
lead?**



We do many different things, just to belong... they appear consciously and unconsciously



A painful experience of belonging and leaving can lead to an outward expression of **independence, a freelance,** as if there's **no need to belong.**

This often hides a deeper longing for a safe sense of belonging, mixed with a fear of it - **afraid that belonging might bring pain once again.**



A challenging experience of belonging might be shaped by an unconscious dynamic that drives us to either **overextend** **ourselves** or **shrink** within systems, all in a quest for inner safety and not to be outcasted from the system.



Another pattern you might recognize is seen in individuals who are so eager to **belong to multiple systems** that they struggle to be fully present in any of them. They seem to **belong everywhere and yet nowhere** at the same time.

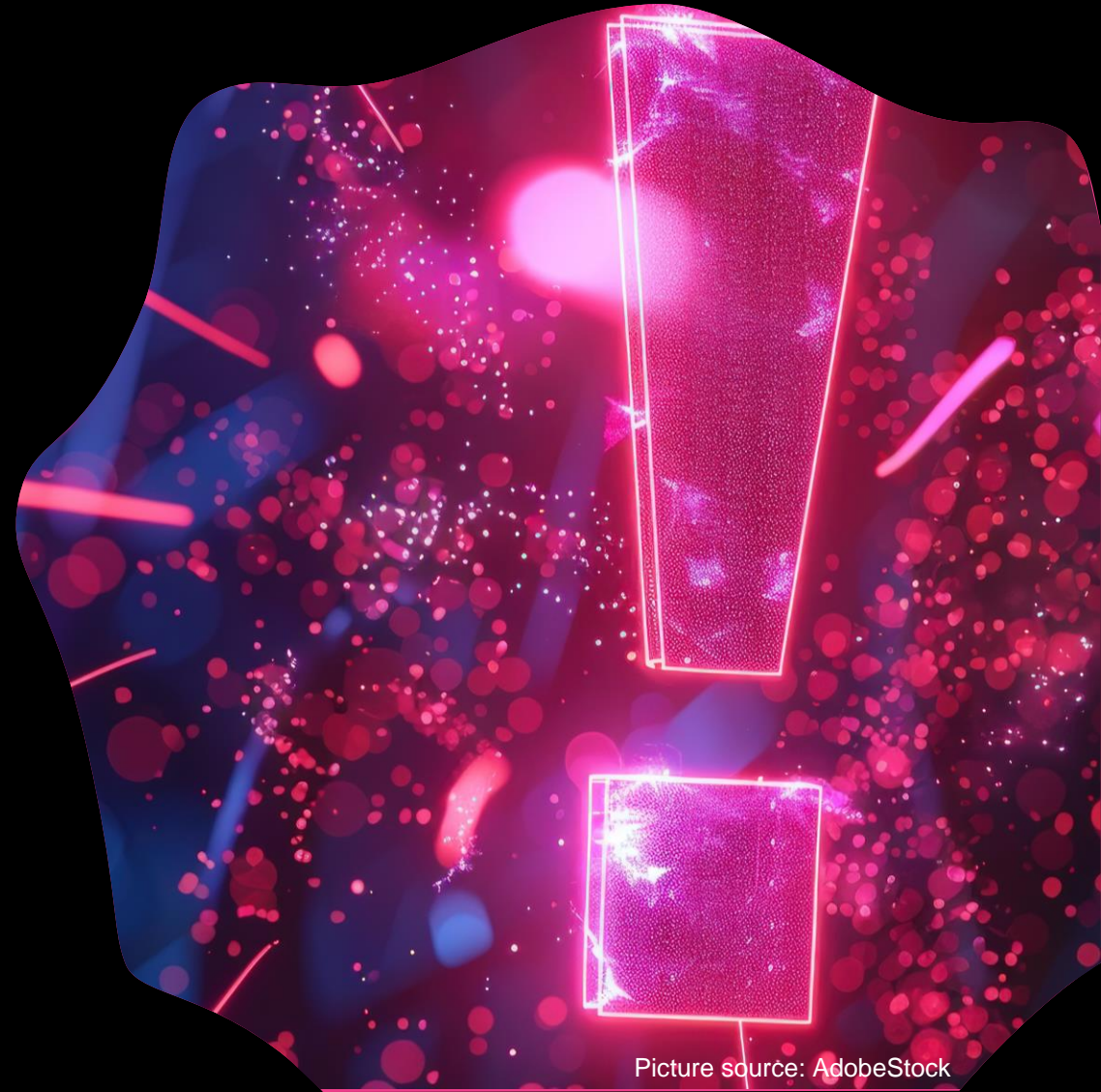


**These patterns, stem from our
deep-rooted need to belong.**

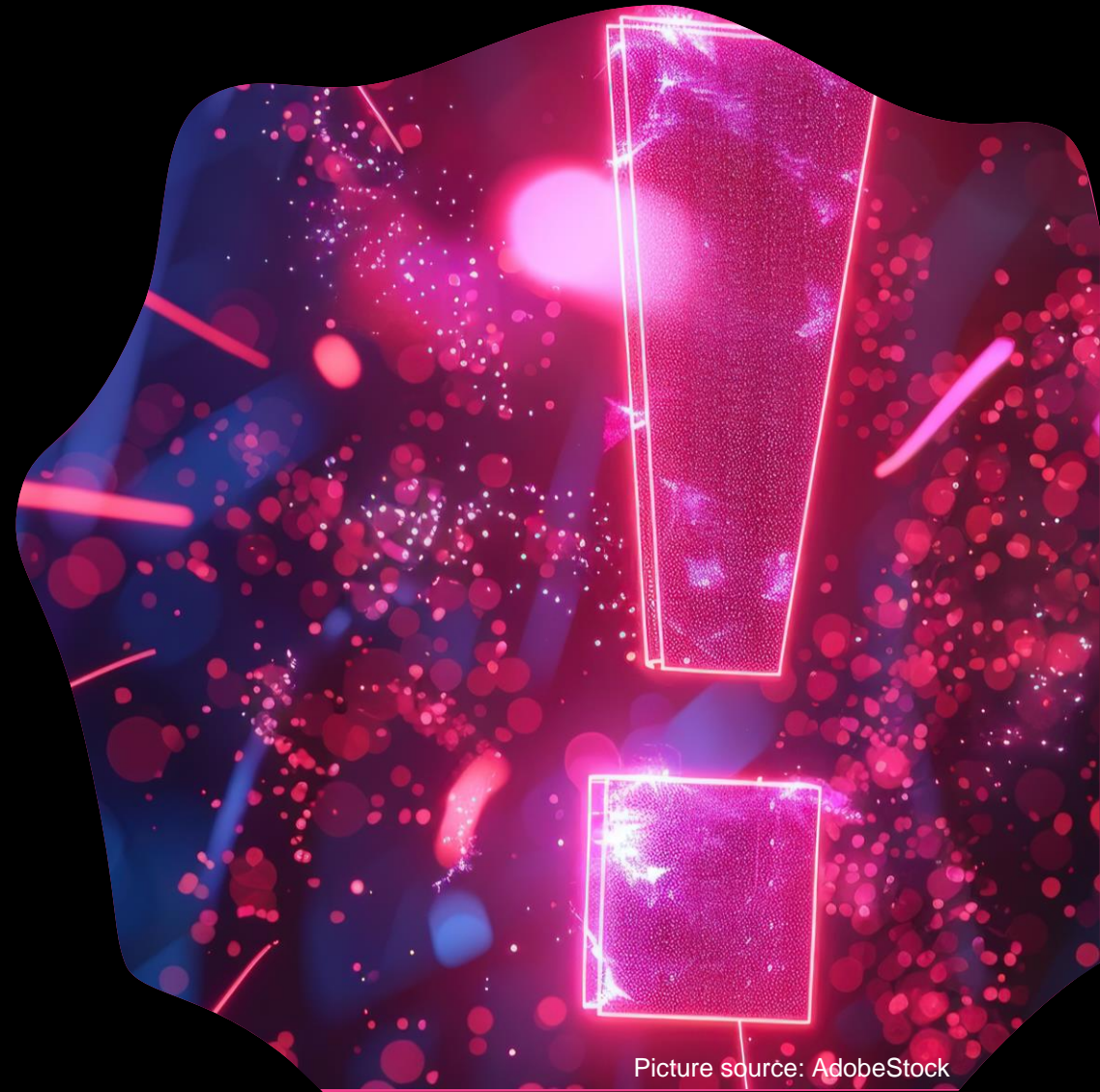
However, they can result in outcomes contrary to the unconscious desire for safe belonging, such as:

impostor syndrome, exhaustion, burnout, and feelings of exclusion from relational systems.

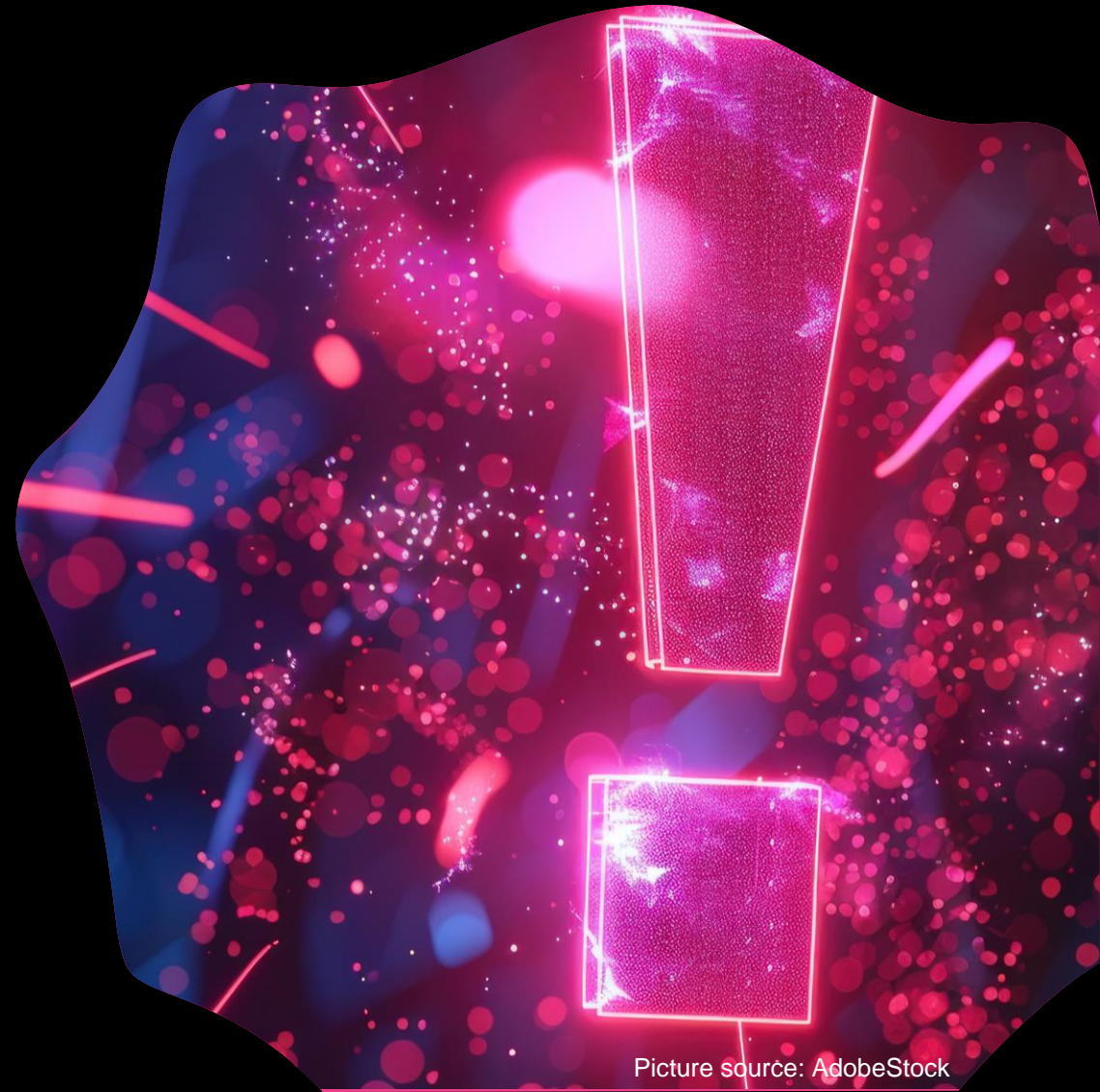
Despite their positive educational experiences, 47% of international students in Finland plan to leave after completing their studies.



Approximately 32% of them perceive their career advancement prospects in Finland as “limited.”



Around 30% of international students in Finland express the need for greater assistance in areas such as job search training, connecting with Finnish companies, networking, and language acquisition.



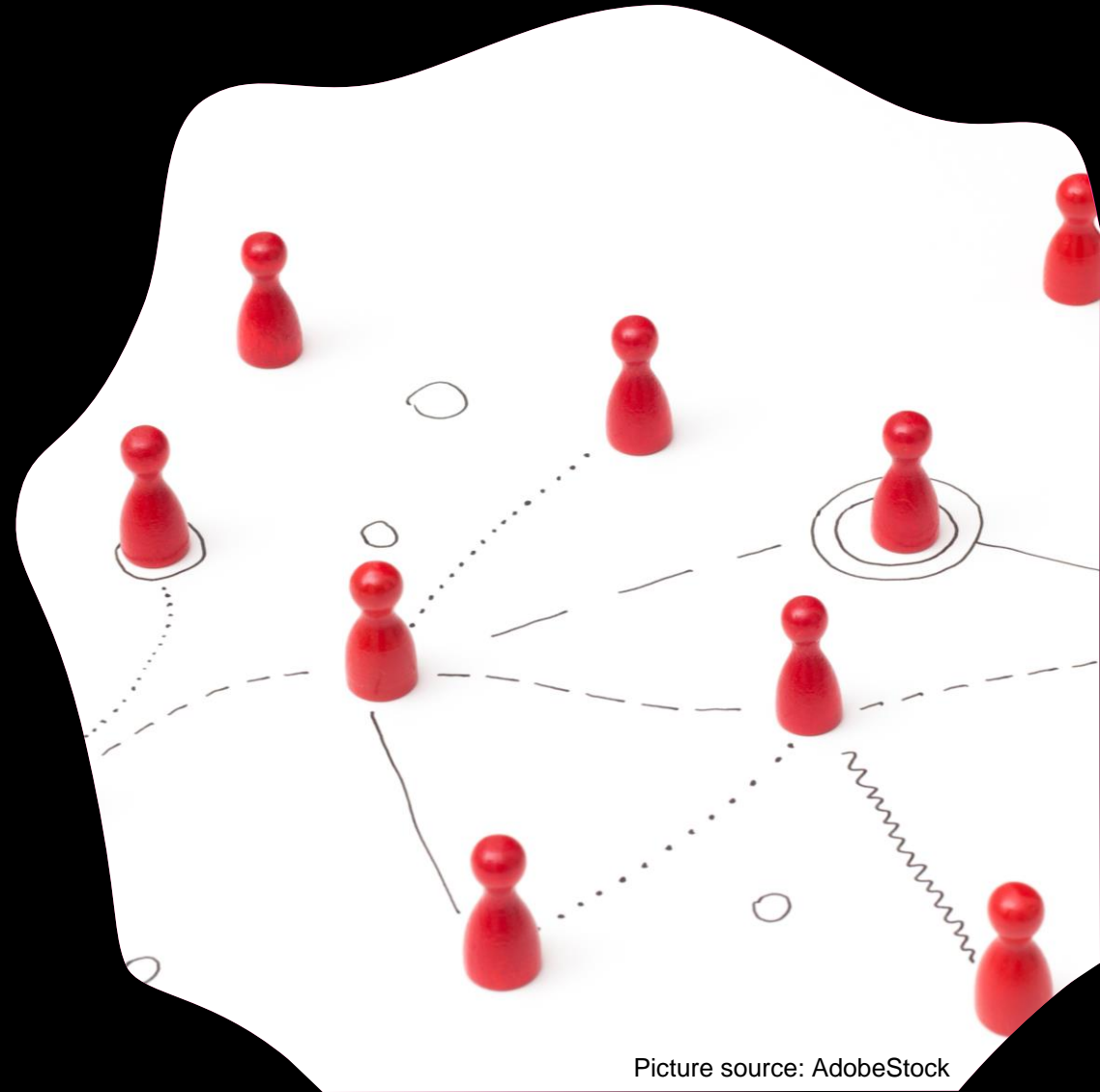
**What there is to be
done about it right
now?**



To create a cooperative system that allows foreign students to contribute effectively, we must focus on **enhancing the system's flexibility** to let them find their belonging.



Significant change arises from **individual actions** that are intentionally **repeated** and **amplified** over time.



What are you planning to change/do differently/ do more or of/ less of on the daily basis to support international students in finding their belonging in Finland? And how are you planning to amplify your actions with time?



How can we balance the work within the Finnish society around the attitudes towards different cultures?



What kind of initiatives should be considered to implement changes in the Universities and the job market to create better sense of belonging for the foreign students?



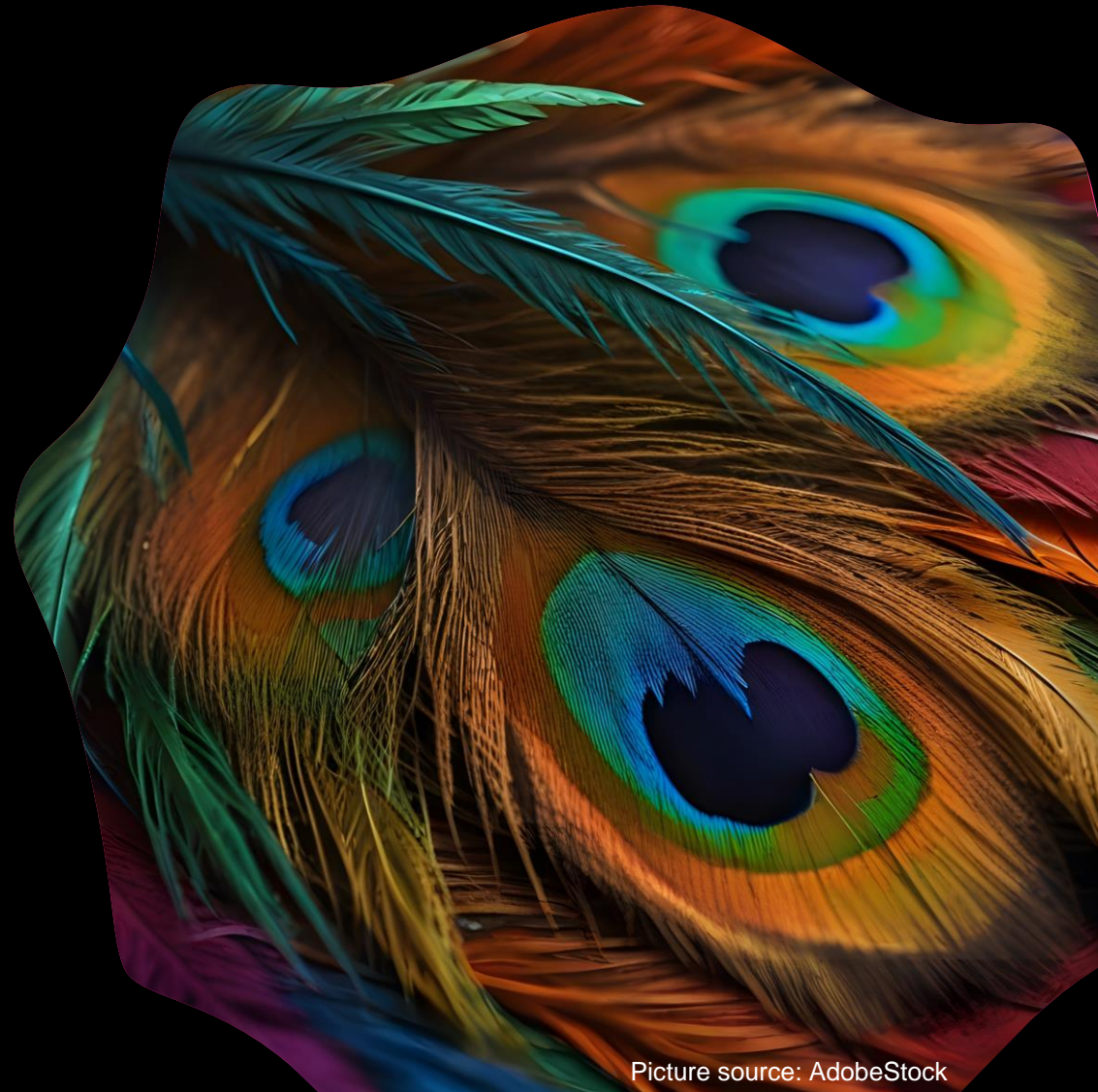
What is yet not mentioned, that is crucial for the process, but we haven't talked about here?



Any questions?

Any comments?

Any reflections?

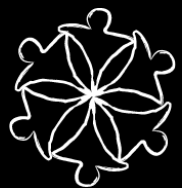


SAVONIA
AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Kiitos!

Agnieszka Laherto

agnieszka.laherto@savonia.fi



Tulevaisuuden
työkyky