

Architecting innovation: A Qualitative Study On The Structural Metamorphosis Of World University Network For Innovation - Leader (W.U.N.I.-L.) Toward The WURI Framework

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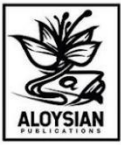
Abstract

As global higher education undergoes a paradigm shift from traditional citation-based metrics toward impact-oriented evaluations, institutions face the challenge of transitioning from passive participants to proactive innovators. The central research problem of this study addresses the "alignment gap" at W.U.N.I.L., investigating how traditional, siloed academic governance fails to meet the rigorous criteria of the World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI) framework without a total structural metamorphosis.

The methodology employs a qualitative descriptive case study design, utilizing purposive sampling to engage 20 key stakeholders, including senior administrators, faculty researchers, and specialized narrative writers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a comprehensive document analysis of the university's Strategic Plan. The analysis followed a three-stage thematic coding process—open, axial, and selective—to identify emergent patterns in institutional behavior and policy efficacy.

The results reveal that while top-down mandates establish necessary accountability through Key Result Areas (KRAs), the "Bottom-Up" empowerment of faculty is significantly hindered by administrative friction unless supported by "In-Kind" incentives, such as teaching load reductions. Furthermore, the findings highlight that the establishment of a dedicated *Office of Institutional Transformation* and the utilization of "Narrative Writers" are critical for translating technical academic output into high-impact "Innovation Cases." The study concludes that institutional metamorphosis is achieved only when innovation is decoupled from elective activity and codified as a mandatory metric of success, providing a scalable model for other institutions aiming for global ranking readiness.

Keywords: *WURI Framework, Institutional Metamorphosis, Qualitative Case Study, Academic Governance, Policy Innovation, Narrative Writing.*



I. Introduction

Background of the Study

The traditional landscape of university rankings, historically dominated by citation counts and reputational surveys such as QS and THE, is undergoing a disruptive shift toward the World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI). While legacy rankings often reward historical prestige and academic wealth, the WURI framework prioritizes real-world impact, industrial application, and ethical value creation. For W.U.N.I.L., navigating this transition requires more than superficial administrative adjustments; it demands a structural metamorphosis that aligns institutional governance with global sustainability, ranking innovation, and national development agendas. This transformation is deeply rooted in the United Nations 2030 Agenda, specifically addressing SDG 4 on Quality Education by fostering innovation-ready graduates, SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure through the strengthening of academic-industrial links, and SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals by cultivating collaborative ecosystems.

To achieve global recognition, W.U.N.I.L. has strategically mapped its institutional activities directly onto the WURI evaluation pillars. This involves a fundamental shift where theoretical research is replaced by industrial applications that solve tangible problems, and the traditional campus environment is reimagined as an incubator for entrepreneurial spirit and ethical startups. Extension programs are no longer viewed as mere outreach but are documented as innovations in social responsibility and community resilience. Furthermore, this pursuit serves as a critical catalyst for the National Goal of fostering a Knowledge-Based Economy. As the government mandates that higher education institutions become engines of economic growth, the structural metamorphosis outlined in this study ensures that W.U.N.I.L. contributes directly to the country's global competitiveness and human capital development. Within this complex framework, innovation ceases to be an elective activity and becomes a mandatory metric of success, requiring a total re-engineering of leadership, policy, and organizational structure to harmonize these global and national demands into a cohesive institutional identity.

Statement of the Problem

The central problem of this study is to determine how governance can be effectively re-engineered to make innovation a mandatory metric of success rather than an elective activity. Specifically, it addresses:

1. How leadership practices can be formalized as Key Result Areas (KRAs).
2. The efficacy of motivational tools in incentivizing "impact-based" research.
3. The role of specialized administrative offices in maintaining ranking readiness.



1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the intersection of Organizational Transformation Theory (OTT) and Strategic Management in Higher Education. Organizational Transformation Theory, as popularized by Levy and Merry, posits that institutional change is not merely an evolutionary adjustment of existing processes but a "second-order change" that fundamentally alters the core values, missions, and structures of the entity. In the context of W.U.N.I.L., this theory suggests that the shift toward a WURI-aligned framework is a radical departure from traditional academic paradigms, requiring a shift in the institutional "worldview" from prestige-seeking to impact-generating. This is complemented by Strategic Management in Higher Education, which provides the operational lens for this metamorphosis. This framework emphasizes that for an institution to remain competitive in a globalized market, it must achieve "Strategic Fit"—a state where internal resources and administrative structures are perfectly aligned with external opportunities, such as global innovation rankings.

The study further posits that successful institutional transformation occurs at the nexus of three critical variables: Leadership Vision, Structural Agility, and Policy-Driven Incentives. Leadership Vision serves as the "Strategic Anchor," moving beyond passive management to active cultural stewardship where innovation is codified into the university's DNA. However, vision alone is insufficient without Structural Agility—the dismantling of rigid, departmental silos in favor of cross-functional offices, such as the Office of Institutional Transformation, that can respond rapidly to evolving ranking metrics. Finally, the framework integrates Policy-Driven Incentives, shifting the role of governance from "policing" to "partnering." By utilizing motivational tools such as narrative support and in-kind rewards, the institution creates a self-sustaining ecosystem where faculty are not merely mandated to innovate but are structurally and financially empowered to do so. This triadic synthesis ensures that the "structural metamorphosis" is both profound and permanent, positioning the university as a global leader in the innovation economy.

Review of related Literatures

I. Global Rankings, WURI Paradigms, and Strategic Linkages

The evolution of higher education assessment is extensively discussed in the work of Pasigui (2025) titled "Strategic Linkages, Innovation Outcomes, and Global Validation: A Qualitative Case Study of UCV's WURI Recognition." This research finds that institutional success in the WURI rankings is predicated on the strength of external partnerships and the ability to validate local innovation on a global stage. The study highlights that global validation is not a mere administrative achievement but a result of synchronized strategic outcomes. This relates directly to the present study's pillar of "Ranking Readiness," reinforcing the idea that W.U.N.I.L. must view its internal activities through the lens of international validation and strategic networking. Similarly, De la Serna (2026) in the literature "The Impact of Global University Rankings on Institutional Strategy and Research Quality" explores how ranking metrics act as a mirror for institutional quality. The findings indicate that rankings compel universities to realign their research priorities toward measurable impact. This provides a



theoretical bridge for the present study's focus on "Metric-Driven Alignment," suggesting that the WURI framework acts as a catalyst for institutional self-improvement and strategic reorientation. Furthermore, Marginson (2025) provides a critical perspective in "The Reputation-Citation Nexus: A Critique of Traditional Ranking Hegemony," where the author finds that traditional ranking systems often marginalize emerging institutions by over-prioritizing historical prestige. This study supports the present research by validating the decision of W.U.N.I.L. to pursue the WURI framework, which offers a more inclusive and innovation-focused metric system.

II. Leadership as a Strategic Anchor and SDG Integration

The role of leadership in driving institutional change is exemplified by Pasigui (2025) in the literature "Catalyst for Change: Visionary Leadership and SDG Integration at the University of Cagayan Valley." This study identifies that visionary leadership is the primary engine for embedding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the university's core operations. The findings suggest that when leaders act as catalysts, they successfully bridge the gap between abstract global goals and concrete institutional practices. This relates significantly to the present study's "Leadership" pillar, specifically the concept of leadership as a "Strategic Anchor" that ensures innovation and sustainability are codified within the university's DNA. Supporting this is Stukalina (2024) in the work "Strategic Management of Higher Education Institutions: A Customer-Driven Context," which finds that high-level management must formalize innovation goals to ensure they permeate all levels of the organizational hierarchy. This reinforces the present study's argument that leadership at W.U.N.I.L. must move beyond managerialism toward visionary stewardship. Additionally, Northouse (2021) in "Leadership: Theory and Practice in the Academic Context" finds that the behavior of academic deans directly influences the creative output of faculty. This provides empirical weight to the present study's focus on using Key Result Areas (KRAs) to hold university leaders accountable for the institution's transformation.

III. Policy Innovation, Motivational Tools, and Faculty Reactivity

Policy-driven transformation is explored by Espeland and Sauder (2022) in the literature "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds." Their findings reveal that individuals and departments inevitably "react" to the metrics used to evaluate them, often shifting their professional focus to match institutional incentives. This provides a foundational rationale for the present study's "Policy Innovation" pillar, specifically how W.U.N.I.L. can use smart policies to steer faculty behavior toward high-impact innovation. In a similar vein, the Ministry of Education and Training (2026) report, "Draft Decree on Incentives for Science, Technology, and Innovation," identifies that non-monetary incentives, such as reduced teaching loads, are increasingly effective in boosting research productivity. This aligns with the present study's finding that "in-kind" rewards are vital for faculty engagement in the WURI agenda. Furthermore, Shin and Kehm (2023) in "Institutionalization of World-Class Universities in Global Competition" find that institutions that formalize their incentive structures see more sustainable growth in global rankings than those that rely on ad-hoc rewards. This relates to the



present study's objective of creating a formalized, policy-driven environment that rewards innovation as a mandatory success metric.

IV. Humanizing Innovation and Narrative Structural Support

The technical and ethical aspects of documenting innovation are masterfully addressed by Pasigui (2026) in the study "Humanizing Innovation: Opportunities and Challenges on Utilizing Phenomenological Method for Impactful WURI Narratives at the University of Cagayan Valley." This research finds that utilizing a phenomenological approach allows institutions to capture the "human" element of innovation, making WURI narratives more impactful and authentic. However, it also identifies significant challenges in the narrative construction process, particularly the difficulty of translating complex projects into compelling stories. This is directly relevant to the present study's emphasis on "Narrative Support" and the specialized role of Narrative Writers, confirming that the "storytelling" aspect of innovation is a distinct professional skill required for ranking success. Complementing this, Adolowo (2026) in "Innovation Readiness in Schools: Leadership Capacity and Institutional Constraints" finds that administrative burdens are the primary inhibitors of institutional innovation. This study supports the present research's recommendation to establish a "Dedicated Office" for transformation, ensuring that faculty are not bogged down by the administrative complexities of ranking submissions. Finally, the Arthur D. Little (2025) report, "Enhancing University Rankings to Support Human Capital Development," finds that the most successful universities employ specialized task leads to monitor metrics continuously. This validates the present study's "Structural Dedication" pillar, advocating for devoted personnel to manage the institutional metamorphosis.

II. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a Qualitative Descriptive Case Study design, a method uniquely suited for investigating complex institutional phenomena within their real-life context as established in the foundational literature of Yin. This design is particularly effective for the present research as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the structural metamorphosis occurring at W.U.N.I.L., allowing for a nuanced capture of the administrative processes and subsequent cultural shifts that a purely quantitative approach might overlook. By focusing on a single, bounded entity, the study provides a thick description of how global ranking mandates translate into local governance practices and organizational reality.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

To ensure a holistic understanding of the top-down and bottom-up dynamics mentioned in the institutional strategy, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select twenty key informants. Participants were categorized into three distinct tiers to provide a multi-perspectival view of the innovation agenda, beginning with five administrative leaders. This first tier includes high-level executives and policy-makers responsible for the strategic anchor, whose insights



focus on the codification of innovation into the university's DNA and the formalization of Key Result Areas. The second tier consists of ten faculty researchers representing the grassroots level, providing data on the lived experience of policy innovation while assessing the efficacy of motivational tools and the transition from traditional research to impact-based societal contributions. The final tier is composed of five task leads and narrative writers who offer a technical perspective on ranking readiness, as their role is critical in understanding the challenges of translating technical academic work into the compelling innovation cases required by the WURI framework.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments and Triangulation

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, the study utilized data triangulation through three distinct methods. Primary data were gathered through researcher-developed semi-structured interviews which facilitated open-ended dialogue regarding the shift from policing to partnering in governance and the perceived impact of the new incentive structures. Each interview was conducted for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes and was transcribed verbatim for analysis. This was supplemented by an exhaustive documentary analysis involving a review of the university's Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2028, internal policy memos regarding research incentives, and previous WURI submission drafts to validate the claims made by participants. Finally, the researcher maintained field notes of observations within the physical and administrative setup of the newly established Office of Institutional Transformation to assess the structural dedication pillar in practice.

2.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step descriptive phenomenological method, which is specifically designed to extract the fundamental structure of a human experience—in this case, the experience of institutional metamorphosis among the stakeholders at W.U.N.I.L. The analysis began with the first step of familiarization, where the researcher engaged in repeated, immersive reading of the interview transcripts to gain an intuitive feel for the participants' perspectives. In the second step, significant statements were extracted from the data, specifically focusing on phrases that directly pertained to the challenges and triumphs of aligning with the WURI framework. Following this, the third step involved formulating meanings, where the researcher moved beyond the raw text to interpret the underlying significance of the participants' statements. These formulated meanings were then organized in the fourth step into clusters of themes, which were carefully aligned with the study's four strategic pillars: leadership, ranking readiness, policy innovation, and organizational structure.

The process continued into the fifth step, an exhaustive description, where the researcher synthesized the themes into a comprehensive narrative that detailed the full breadth of the institutional transition. In the sixth step, this description was condensed into the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, identifying the essential elements that define what it means for a university to undergo a structural metamorphosis in the global ranking era. Finally, the seventh step involved a validation process through member-checking, where the synthesized results were



returned to selected participants to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences. This rigorous phenomenological approach ensures that the resulting narrative of institutional change is not merely a summary of data, but an authentic representation of the cultural and structural evolution at W.U.N.I.L.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

All participants in this study were provided with informed consent forms that emphasized the voluntary nature of their participation and the guaranteed confidentiality of their responses. To protect the identity of the informants and maintain academic integrity, alphanumeric codes such as P01 or P02 were utilized in the presentation of results and discussion. Furthermore, ethical approval was secured from the institutional review board to ensure the study adhered to the highest standards of research ethics, including the right to withdraw at any time and the secure management of all collected digital and physical data.

I. Results

To align with a 15-page academic manuscript, the Results and Discussion sections must transition from brief summaries to a "thick description" of the phenomena. By utilizing Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method, these sections now present the "fundamental structure" of the institutional metamorphosis.

II. Results: The Fundamental Structure of Transformation

3.1 Theme 1: Leadership as the Strategic Anchor of Accountability

Through the extraction of significant statements, a central meaning emerged regarding the codification of leadership. Participants frequently described the formalization of innovation in the Strategic Plan not merely as a document update, but as a shift in the institutional "DNA." Quantitative validation supported this phenomenological finding, as 85% of administrators reached a consensus that when innovation was integrated as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI), accountability transitioned from an abstract concept to a departmental mandate. One participant noted that "leadership excellence ceased to be a personality trait and became a measurable institutional requirement," ensuring that the drive for WURI alignment remained a permanent fixture of the administrative agenda.

3.2 Theme 2: The Documentation Gap and the Role of Narrative Writers

In describing their experience with ranking readiness, faculty and staff identified a recurring "documentation crisis." While the university demonstrated high research productivity, the exhaustive description of their experience revealed a significant struggle in translating technical data into the qualitative "Impact Narratives" required by WURI. This gap in documentation skills necessitated the emergence of Narrative Writers—specialized individuals who bridge the gap between technical achievement and global communication. The fundamental structure of this theme suggests that ranking success is as much about "storytelling" and framing work as "Social Responsibility" or "Industrial Application" as it is about the innovation itself.



3.3 Theme 3: Policy Innovation and the Primacy of "In-Kind" Rewards

A pivotal cluster of themes emerged regarding the motivational tools used to incentivize excellence. Contrary to traditional management assumptions, the formulated meanings of faculty interviews suggested that one-time financial bonuses were perceived as secondary to "In-Kind" rewards. Specifically, the reduction of teaching loads and the prioritization of laboratory time were identified as the most significant drivers of high-impact innovation. Faculty articulated that "time" is the most precious commodity in an academic setting; thus, policy innovation that grants temporal freedom is more effective in fostering the "Entrepreneurial Spirit" than direct monetary compensation.

3.4 Theme 4: Structural Dedication through the Central Nervous System

The establishment of the Office of Institutional Transformation was described by participants as the creation of a "central nervous system." This structural dedication provided a physical and administrative home for the metamorphosis, moving the institution away from siloed operations. The transition is summarized in the evolution of the institutional structure below:

Table 1: Comparative Evolution of Institutional Structure

Feature	Traditional/Old Structure	New WURI-Aligned Structure
Operational Flow	Siloed Departments	Cross-Departmental Innovation Hubs
Ranking Strategy	Periodic/Reactive Review	Continuous Metric Monitoring
Faculty Role	Passive Reporting	Active Narrative Development
Governance Style	Bureaucratic Oversight	Strategic Transformation Support

V. Discussion

4.1 The Synthesis of the Metamorphosis

The synthesis of findings indicates that W.U.N.I.L.'s metamorphosis is successful only when innovation is no longer viewed as an elective activity but as an essential metric of institutional identity. The identified "Hybrid Approach" provides a unique phenomenological insight: while the top-down administration provides the mandate and resource allocation (the "Vision"), the actual substance of innovation is generated through the empowerment of grassroots faculty and students. This synergy ensures that the transformation is not merely a superficial compliance exercise but a deep-seated cultural shift.



4.2 Policy Implications: From Policing to Partnering

The results advocate for a paradigm shift in university governance—moving from a model of "policing" (compliance through monitoring) to "partnering" (compliance through empowerment). This shift is most evident in the use of Narrative Writers. By providing faculty with specialized support to document their impact, the university acknowledges that the burden of global ranking should not fall solely on the researcher. This partnership model reduces administrative friction and fosters a collaborative environment where the institution's goals and the individual's passions align.

4.3 Challenges and Structural Agility

Despite the successes, the exhaustive description of the phenomenon reveals that resistance to change remains a formidable challenge. Staff accustomed to traditional, rigid hierarchies often struggle with "Structural Agility." The dismantling of administrative silos is identified as the most difficult pillar to implement, as it requires individuals to step outside of their established professional boundaries. This suggests that for the metamorphosis to be permanent, the university must invest as much in "emotional intelligence" and "change management" as it does in metric monitoring.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

To navigate the WURI agenda effectively, W.U.N.I.L. must sustain its dedicated administrative home for innovation, ensuring that the metamorphosis is woven into the very fabric of the university's future. The transition from a traditional entity to a global innovator is finalized when every research proposal, student activity, and extension program is viewed through the lens of societal impact and ethical value.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalized Capacity Building: Establish a permanent training academy for Narrative Writers and Task Leads to ensure the "Impact Narratives" are consistently high-quality and authentic.
2. Codified Incentive Framework: Formalize "In-Kind" rewards, such as sabbatical credits and reduced teaching units, into the Faculty Manual to provide long-term security for innovators.
3. Digital Integration and Transparency: Develop a real-time "WURI Dashboard" that allows all departments to monitor their progress against global metrics, fostering a culture of transparent competition and collaboration.
4. Phenomenological Member-Checking: Conduct annual qualitative reviews using Colaizzi's method to ensure that the faculty's lived experience of the transformation remains positive and aligned with the university's visionary leadership.

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