

## Mediating for the Transformation of the University: Identifying Challenges and Opportunities

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### How to cite this article:

Mousavi, S. S. S., Abolghasemi, M., Ghahramani, M., & Khayatian Yazdi, M. S. (2025). Mediating for the Transformation of the University: Identifying Challenges and Opportunities. *Quarterly Journal of Research and Planning in Higher Education*, 31(4), 101-119.



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### ABSTRACT

The realization of entrepreneurial university has been the subject of many researches and the realization of new generation universities has always been the goal and aspirations of policymakers and researchers. Meanwhile, the role of intermediary institutions in the realization of the third generation university has been less investigated. However, the role of intermediary institutions faces important challenges and possibilities that must be given serious attention, and the need to conduct exploratory studies around these challenges seems essential. This article is done with a qualitative approach and multiple case study method. In this research, five intermediate institutions related to the top universities of the country were selected for deeper study and through free and semi-structured interviews and document study, the necessary data were collected from the officials and experts of this institution And it was analyzed by the "content analysis" method. Failure to provide stable financial resources, lack of legal personality in accordance with the characteristics and requirements of intermediary institutions in the country, adoption of unrealistic strategies, occurrence of tension and quarrel in the times of distribution of shares between team members and investors and intermediary institutions, lack of attention to knowledge management are the most important challenges of intermediary institutions in the country. The opportunities of intermediary institutions in relation to the human capital of universities, physical and structural proximity to universities, the use of the establishment space inside the university and the high quality of human capital of intermediary institutions, are opportunities of these institutions for realization of the third generation university. With regard to the mentioned issues, suggestions have been made to improve the performance of intermediary institutions, including "definition of appropriate legal personality", "operational advancement of adopted strategies in parallel with holding planning meetings and determining strategy". Making it possible to use the establishment space inside the university", "reducing the bureaucracy of the process of cooperation with the university in attracting projects" and "Establishing an understanding between the intermediary and the entrepreneur team at the beginning of cooperation in the form of a written, explicit and detailed contract" mentioned.

**Keywords:** *Intermediary entity, Third generation university, Entrepreneur University, Multiple case study, Qualitative method*



## Introduction

The concept of the entrepreneurial university has emerged as a fundamental transformation in higher education, aiming to foster innovation and drive economic growth. While extensive research has been conducted on the development of entrepreneurial universities, the specific role of intermediary institutions has received less attention. These institutions act as bridges between academia and industry, facilitating knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial activities. This study examines the challenges and opportunities faced by intermediary institutions in the realization of entrepreneurial universities in Iran. Given that intermediary institutions have recently gained momentum in the country and are gradually establishing a stronger presence in the higher education and innovation landscape, understanding their roles, functions, and challenges is increasingly important. A comprehensive understanding of these institutions can create a foundation for fully leveraging their capacities in achieving the objectives of entrepreneurial universities.

## Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, as it allows for an in-depth and precise examination of phenomena within their real-world contexts, making it suitable for analyzing complex issues in real environments. Considering the complexity and multilayered nature of intermediary institutions and the need for a comprehensive understanding of their functions, a multiple case study method was employed. This approach facilitates simultaneous analysis of several cases, allowing for comparative evaluations and the identification of similarities and differences across the institutions studied.

The choice of a multiple case study was made to provide a thorough and accurate examination of the challenges and opportunities faced by intermediary institutions under real conditions. Through this method, common patterns and distinctions among various institutions can be identified, offering a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to their success or failure. This approach is particularly valuable in the context of the growing development of intermediary institutions in Iran, providing practical and actionable insights for policymakers and managers.

Data were collected through semi-structured and open interviews with intermediary institution managers, university faculty members, and other key stakeholders, along with document analysis. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis and coded systematically through open, axial, and selective coding to identify and categorize key themes and patterns.

## Findings

The study reveals that intermediary institutions face various challenges and opportunities across six main domains: strategic, financial, human resources, legal, knowledge management, and environmental. In the strategic domain, one of the key challenges is the misalignment between formulated strategies and the actual needs of the institutions. This often arises from a lack of adequate managerial experience and the inability to anticipate market and technological changes. Financially, the primary challenge is securing sustainable resources; excessive reliance on government support and a lack of diversification in funding sources limit the institutions' ability to engage in long-term planning.

In terms of human resources, significant challenges include a shortage of specialized personnel, talent migration, and a mismatch between existing skills and the institutions' actual needs. Legally, the absence of a clear and appropriate legal framework for intermediary institutions has led to difficulties in legal processes and contract agreements. Regarding knowledge management, the lack of an effective system for documenting, preserving, and sharing generated knowledge has been identified as a core factor contributing to reduced institutional efficiency. Finally, in the environmental domain, mutual distrust between intermediary institutions and industries, along with bureaucratic complexities, have been recognized as significant obstacles.

On the other hand, the study highlights several opportunities that could enhance the performance of these institutions. These include access to university human capital, physical proximity to academic and research centers, participation in joint research projects, utilization of governmental research funding, and strengthening ties with international organizations. These factors can empower intermediary institutions to bridge the gap between academia and industry effectively and provide a robust foundation for achieving the goals of entrepreneurial universities.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that intermediary institutions can play a pivotal role in facilitating the realization of entrepreneurial universities by fostering connections between academia and industry, promoting innovation, and supporting the commercialization of scientific research. However, these institutions face numerous challenges that require policy and managerial interventions to overcome.

One of the fundamental challenges identified is unstable financial resources, a barrier also highlighted in previous studies. Furthermore, the absence of a clear legal identity has emerged as a novel and innovative challenge in this study, potentially limiting the institutions' capabilities. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates the development of appropriate legal frameworks, the creation of sustainable financial models, and the design of efficient knowledge management mechanisms.

Additionally, empowering human resources through specialized training in entrepreneurship, innovation, and project management can significantly enhance the performance of these institutions. Expanding international collaborations and establishing joint networks with global academic and research institutions can also facilitate the transfer of innovative experiences and cutting-edge knowledge.

This research offers practical recommendations for managers and policymakers, outlining a clear path for improving the efficiency of intermediary institutions. It emphasizes that by effectively utilizing available capacities and addressing existing barriers, these institutions can play a significant role in realizing entrepreneurial universities and advancing the higher education system in Iran.

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