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Individual Work Plan (IWP) in Royal University of Bhutan: Challenges Faced by the Supervisors and Academics

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Abstract
Individual Work Performance (IWP) enhances accountability by aligning individual goals with organizational objectives. Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) adapted the IWP as a core element of its Performance Management System, with the aim of promoting professionalism, supporting evidence-based management, and ensuring a comprehensive measure of individual performance. This study attempted to assess the challenges faced by both academic staff and immediate supervisors regarding the IWP across eight constituent colleges under RUB. The data were analyzed using regression analysis, ANOVA, and Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The results indicate that, from the perspective of academic staff, factors such as Objectivity in Performance Appraisal (OPA), Fairness of Assessment (FOA), and time-consuming (TC) factors have a significant influence on IWP. Whereas, from the perspective of supervisors, the main challenge is the personnel relationship with the faculty members. The study concludes that the IWP system faces significant structural and perceptual hurdles. The study suggests a revision of the IWP on a regular basis to capture and reflect on users' feedback.

Keywords: Fairness of Assessment (FOA), Time-consuming (TC), Individual Work Performance (IWP), Objectivity in Performance Appraisal (OPA)

Introduction

Importance of IWP in Education

Individual Work Performance (IWP) is an essential in a performance management system in the education sector, as it strengthens accountability and aligns with institutional goals (Newspaper, 2019). In Bhutan, the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) introduced the Managing for Excellence (MAX) system in 2017 to enhance teacher performance, while the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) adopted the Performance Management System (PMS) the same year to promote professionalism, evidence-based management, and improved teaching, research, and service outcomes (Phuntsho, 2018). While IWP is a mandatory requirement for teachers and academics, serving as an essential tool for performance evaluation, its implementation and execution among faculty members still face considerable issues (Rinzin,2018).

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Challenges in Assessment and Execution of IWP

Despite the intended benefits, several issues have emerged in the assessment and implementation of IWP, especially in the education sector. Rinzin (2019) identified lack of clarity and consistency in the evaluation of IWP is the major challenge faced by employees. On the other hand, supervisors are seeking additional information for appraisal purposes (Lamsang, 2018; Rinzin, 2018; Tshomo, 2019; Kuensel1, 2019).

The Bhutanese government issued an executive order to review the IWP system due to repeated teacher grievances leading to a mandated review and formation of a task force to study related issues in schools (Rinzin,2018: MoE & RCSC,2019; Lamsang, 2024). This institutional challenge aligns with broader academic findings that many faculty dislike and view performance appraisal evaluations as inaccurate (Larsen, 2009; Chun et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, addressing performance appraisal remains essential as long as these systems are in place (Sherman,2020). Interviews with staff across RUB colleges also indicate several challenges with the IWP

system. Some staff reported a lack of clarity and interpretation of IWP items (J. Nair, personal communication, 2024). A related issue is the inconsistent interpretation of specific items by the supervisors (Y. Pelden, personal communication, 2024). This lack of communication meant that many staff were unaware of the particular items and activities being evaluated, which led to widespread dissatisfaction with their ratings and a perceived lack of transparency (J. Nair, personal communication, 2024; S. Dema, personal communication, 2024).

However, some colleges reported having a clear format and consistency in the evaluation of IWP (W. Wangmo, personal communication, August 15, 2024) (JNEC). D. Dema (personal communication, August 20, 2024) highlighted that the universities under RUB started with IWP much later than the schools. IWP assessments and evaluations have always been a challenge for evaluators. Most of the items were not communicated to the staff that would be evaluated, and the staff were unaware of which items and activities were taken into consideration. Many staff expressed unhappiness with the ratings and the lack of clarity of items.

Given these challenges, there is a need to understand the specific issues faced by immediate supervisors in assessing faculty performance within RUB. Although systems such as MAX and PMS aim to improve accountability and productivity, gaps remain in clarity, communication, interpretation, and consistency in IWP assessment (Thusi, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this study will investigate the challenges faced by supervisors and academics in assessing IWP within the Royal University of Bhutan. The study will be guided by the five challenges identified by Sherman (2020) and will gather evidence through a survey of supervisors and academic staff. The findings are expected to address existing gaps in the execution of IWP and contribute to improving the performance appraisal system in the University.

Research Questions

The researchers are guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key challenges faced by the supervisor in the evaluation of IWP?
2. What are the key challenges faced by academics in the execution of IWP?

Literature Review

Performance Evaluation

Samwel (2018) states that the performance evaluation serves as a systematic mechanism in which organizations measure the performance levels of individual employees. The existing empirical literature identified several challenges concerning difficulties faced by the supervisor in evaluating the faculty's performance. The researchers have classified those challenges into five categories.

1. Lack of objectivity in performance appraisal:

An annual report published by RCSE (2024) acknowledged the challenge of optimally engaging and utilizing the IWP activities, indicating lack of clarity and consistency in the assessment process remains one of the main difficulties faced by supervisors in Bhutan. Additionally, Mohammed (2020) found that the primary challenge faced by evaluators is the lack of objectivity in the evaluation process, arising from the complex nature of judging work performance

2. Familiarity with the faculty:

The study by Huckman et al. (2009) revealed that familiarity between supervisors and employees has a significant positive effect on performance, suggesting their relationship influences the performance evaluation. Similarly, Ochoti et al. (2012) find that interpersonal relationships with a supervisor have a significant impact on the performance evaluation process. The employee who maintains positive relationships with supervisors tends to get a higher performance rating compared to those with have a poor relationship (Varma et al., 2020).

3. Fairness

A study by Taneja et al. (2024) concluded that fairness and interpersonal justice take precedence in shaping employees' perceptions. Harsono & Nugroho (2023) also show that fairness in performance appraisal positively influences employees' motivation. However, employees often feel that performance appraisal is unfair, which leads to low job satisfaction, less motivation, and weaker commitment (Salleh et al., 2013). Furthermore, Shah et al. (2024) also state that ensuring fairness is challenging, and supervisors need to provide consistent and unbiased appraisals.

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4. Clashing with the organizational goals:

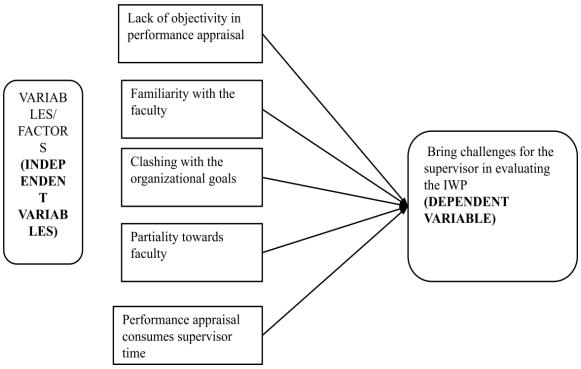
Any employee performance appraisal intends to improve the contributions of the individual employees and increase the organization's efficiency. However, the study by Grubb (2007) asserted that performance appraisal is targeted to reduce the employee's performance when it is not aligned with the organizational goals. Likewise, the study by Obisi (2011) noted that performance appraisal processes

are often unsystematic and subject to personal biases, reflecting organizations' preoccupation with achieving objectives rather than fairly evaluating employees.

5. Partiality towards faculty:
Dasanyaka et al. (2021) concluded that the staff were dissatisfied with the performance appraisal system due to partiality within the university system. Similarly, Javidmehr and Ebrahimpour (2015) argued that reducing such partiality can enhance both employee performance and satisfaction. These findings suggest that supervisors' tendency to show partiality during evaluations is a key factor undermining the effectiveness and fairness in the system. David et al. (2015) also found evidence that employees' perceptions of the performance evaluation system may vary by gender, highlighting that demographic factors can influence how individuals interpret fairness and assessment outcomes. Furthermore, Kettner (2017) suggested that personal values, relationships, or subjective ideas may lead to unfair treatment during assessments.
6. Performance appraisal consumes the time of the supervisor:
Performance appraisals studies indicate that evaluators perceive that evaluating their employees is time-consuming (Daoanis 2012; Dandalt & Brutus, 2020). Additionally, the study by Kettner (2017) confirmed that the average time spent by an evaluator is 210 hours on performance review activities.

7. Performance evaluation brings challenges for the supervisor:
Studies by Cintron & Flaniken (2011) confirmed the fact that performance appraisal brings challenges for the supervisor. Similarly, Lawrencia (2015) reported that the majority of university teachers are not familiar with the performance evaluation process, which makes it difficult for raters to accurately appraise faculty members' performance. Their findings further highlighted that, in the case of untrained supervisors, the absence of proper feedback procedures impedes the evaluation process and exacerbates the challenges faced by supervisors. Rahabav et al. (2016) also acknowledged that both supervisors and faculty members encounter difficulties in adopting the Individual Work Plan (IWP), citing time constraints, lack of understanding of the concept, and low-quality appraisal factors as key challenges

Research Methodology
Research Design
The study employed Quantitative research with a descriptive approach. The central research question is to explore the challenges faced by the academics and staff of RUB in ration to IWPS. The study is guided by the criteria mentioned in the research model.
Figure 1 Research framework



Research Framework Source: Modified and Adapted (Sherman, 2020).

Based on the research framework and extant literature, the researcher proposes the following hypotheses:
Hypothesis 1: Objectivity in performance evaluation has a positive impact on individual work performance (IWPS).
Hypothesis 2: Familiarity with academics impacts IWPS
Hypothesis 3: Conflict with organizational goals influences IWPS
Hypothesis 4: Assessment fairness influences IWPS
Hypothesis 5: Time factors play a significant role in IWPS assessment.

Study area
The study area included Program Leaders, Deans, Head of Department, faculty, and Presidents of the eight (8) RUB colleges. As the Presidents were involved in evaluating sector heads, Academic Deans were involved in evaluating Program Leaders, and Program Leaders were involved in evaluating the faculty members' performances. The researcher has omitted Paro College of Education, as they had not implemented the IWP. The data would be collected using a structured questionnaire.

Respondents:
An online survey using Google Form was employed to administer the structured questionnaire to both the supervisor (PL and Head of Department) and

faculty using the framework (Sharman model).

Table 1: Sample Size

Colleges	Supervisor	Academics	Academic Sample Size %	Sample size
GCBS	4	65	14	30
CLCS	5	45	10	21
CNR	7	60	13	28
CST	6	61	13	29
JNEC	7	55	12	26
GCIT	3	21	5	10
SC	6	101	22	47
SCE	6	45	10	21
Total	44	453	100	212
Sample Size		212		

For the supervisor, the researcher conducted a census study. The sample size for the academics' respondents was 212 by using Taro Yamane's sample size. However, the researcher got only 85 respondents. The sample selection was done by applying a simple random sampling technique.

Primary data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. A closed-ended questionnaire was circulated among target respondents. The questionnaire consisted of questions based on the indicators/variables mentioned in the report of Sherman's (2020). The questions focused on the five indicators that include lack of objectivity in performance appraisal, familiarity with the faculty, clashing with the organization's goals, partiality towards a faculty, and performance appraisal consuming the supervisor's time.

Respondents were asked to respond to the statement using a five-point Likert-type response set: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided (neither disagrees nor agrees), 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The measurement scale for the data was ordinal, but the variables were treated as continuous.

Questionnaire reliability and validity

Content validity was already proven because the survey instrument was modified from Sharman (2020). Cronbach's alpha was computed for dependability. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for reliability, with 0.812 for the 29 items, which was quite acceptable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the survey data from the perspective of academics

Demography profile

Most of the respondents are lecturers, followed by associate lecturers and assistant lecturers. Mostly males having work experience between 0-25 years. 85% of the respondents agreed that IWP is conducted every year, and 15% have the opinion that IWP is not done yearly in their respective colleges.

Table 2

Summary of Supervisor-Employee Participation and Challenges in the IWP Process

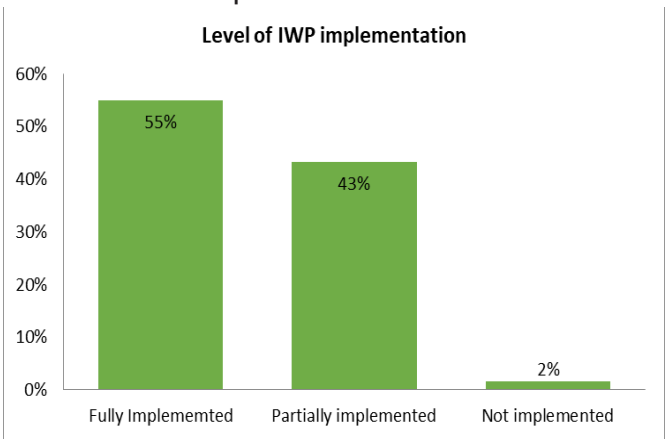
Items	Yes (%)	No (%)
Supervisor and employee discuss together for IWP preparation	68	32
Mid-review of IWP takes place every year	72	28
IWP appraisal is a challenging task	62	38

Source: Primary data

Table 2 indicates that 68% of the respondents agreed that supervisors and employees jointly discuss the preparation of the IWP, whereas 32% stated the opposite view. 72% of the respondents indicated that the mid-year IWP review does not take place every year, while 28% agreed. Furthermore, 62% stated that IWP appraisal is a challenging task, and 38% believed it is not.

Figure 2

Level of IWP implementation



Source: Primary Data

Figure 2 shows the level of IWP implementation. Fifty-five percent of the academic staff agreed that IWP is fully implemented in their respective colleges. Forty-three percent of the academic staff have the opinion that IWP is partially implemented, and only 2% of the academic staff have the opinion that IWP is not implemented.

Table 3

Regression Statistics

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.512
R Square	0.262
Adjusted R Square	0.194
Standard Error	0.604
Observations	60

Source: Author's analysis

Table 3 presents a regression analysis, which indicates a moderate correlation between the dependent variable and independent variables, with a Multiple R value of 0.512. The R Square value of 0.262 indicates that the predictors explain 26.2% of the variability in IWP implementation.

The adjusted R Square of 0.19, which indicates that 19% variations in Y values (IWP system) were explained by the independent variables under the study. The standard error value of 0.60 indicates that the average error in the proposed model is moderate. While the model is statistically significant, the R-squared value indicates only modest explanatory power, which is common in research. The findings indicate meaningful but not strong predictive effects.

Table 4
Anova Results

	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance F*
Regression	5	6.988	1.398	3.831	0.005
Residual	54	19.699	0.365		
Total	59	26.687			

Source: Prepared by the Researchers

Table 4 indicates the overall significance of the regression model. The ANOVA results indicate that the F value is 3.831 and the P value is 0.005, which implies that the model is statistically.

Table 5
Regression Results

	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*
Intercept	2.264	0.642	3.526	0.001	0.977	3.551
OPA (Mean)	-0.347	0.157	-2.206	**0.032**	-0.662	-0.032
FA (Mean)	0.091	0.095	0.951	0.346	-0.101	0.282
COG (Mean)	-0.045	0.145	-0.309	0.758	-0.337	0.247
FOA (Mean)	0.374	0.179	2.092	**0.041**	0.016	0.733
TC (Mean)	0.313	0.112	2.791	**0.007**	0.088	0.537

Source: Prepared by the Researchers

Table 5 shows the regression result where the objectivity in performance appraisal (OPA), fairness of assessment (FOA), and time-consuming (TC) factors have a significant influence on IWPS. Specifically, the p-value for OPA (0.032), FOA (0.041), and TC (0.007) are all below 0.05, confirming that these variables significantly predict IWPS.

The t-values indicate the strength and direction of the relationship: The OPA has (-2.206), FOA (2.092), and TC (2.791). Therefore, the null hypothesis associated with all three independent variables is rejected, and it is concluded that these three independent factors have a significant influence on IWPS. Out of these three independent variables, the influence of FOA is stronger than compared to the other independent variables. Next to FOA, the trailing independent variable having an influence on IWP is TC. Further, OPA has a negative influence on the IWP. The FA and COG do not have any significant influence on the IWPS.

The final regression equation is:

IWPS= 2.264 – 0.347OPA + .374 FOA + 0.313 TC + Error.

Where IWPS= Individual Work Plan System; OPA= Objectivity in performance appraisal; FOA= Fairness of assessment; TC= Time consuming; E= Error term.

Table 6

Hypotheses Result

Hypotheses	P Value	S/NS
Hypothesis 1: Objectivity in performance evaluation has a positive impact on individual work performance (IWPS). (OPE)	0.032	Significant
Hypothesis 2: Familiarity with academics impacts IWPS (FA)	0.346	Non-Significant
Hypothesis 3: Conflict with organizational goals influence IWPS (COG)	0.758	Non-Significant
Hypothesis 4: Assessment fairness influences IWP (FOA	0.041	Significant
Hypothesis 5: Time factors play a significant role in IWP assessment (TC)	0.007	Significant

Source: Developed by the Researchers Principal

Component Analysis

Table 7

Component Matrix (Academician) Component

Matrix[a]

	Component
	1
TC1	.785
OPA4	.725
OPA5	.722
COG3	.697
FOA1	.685
FA1	.661
COG4	.653
COG2	.640
FOA5	.639
OPA3	.578
FOA4	.544
OPA1	.523
FOA3	-.428
FA3	-.430

Table 7 shows the result of the principal component analysis. A principal component analysis was performed to identify the items that have a significant impact on the Individual Work performance system. Findings reveal that TC1 (IWP evaluation is time-consuming), OPA4 (IWP process is comprehensive to accommodate all aspects of performance), and OPA5 (Fairness of IWP system) are the main challenges behind individual work performance evaluation.

Analysis of the survey data from the perspective of supervisors

Demographic profile

Most of the respondents from the supervisors are male, consisting of 70% and 30% females, with the experience ranging from 6-20 years. 42% of the survey respondents are DAA, twenty-six percent are HoD, and 32% are Program leaders.

Table

Mean Values of Dimension

Dimension	Mean
TC	3.86
OPA	3.38
FOA	3.20
COG	3.18
FA	2.83

Source: Author's analysis

Table 8 shows the mean value of the different dimensions influencing the IWP system implementation. Findings indicate that TC and OPA have a stronger influence on the IWP as compared to other independent variables. The mean value of TC and OPA is 3.86 and 3.38, respectively. Next to TC and OPA, another dimension that influences the IWP is FOA. The mean value of FOA is 3.20.\

Table 9

Component Matrix (Supervisors)

Component Matrix[a]	
	Component
	1
OPA6	.828
FA2	.787
FOA2	.778
FA3	.768
COG3	.720
COG1	.703
FOA1	.694
OPA3	.685
COG2	.650
FA1	.635
OPA5	.522

Source: Developed by the Researchers

Table 9 shows the component matrix generated after doing the principal component analysis. Results indicate that OPA6, FA2, FOA2, and FA3 are the four items that have a significant influence on the IWP system. The r-value OPA6 is 0.828, FA2 is 0.787, FOA2 is 0.778, and FA3 is 0.768, respectively. Findings indicate that a personal relationship with academics has a

significant influence on the IWP system. Likewise, Familiarity with academics has a significant influence on the IWP evaluation. Therefore, it is concluded that the main challenge behind the IWP evaluation is familiarity with faculty members.

1.1 Other Findings

Table 10

Acquaintance with academics

Row Labels	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree(D)	Neutral (N)	Agree(A)	Strongly Agree (SA)	Grand Total
DAA	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	100.00%
HoD	33.33%	16.67%	33.33%	16.67%	0.00%	100.00%
PL	0.00%	11.11%	66.67%	0.00%	22.22%	100.00%
Grand Total	9.52%	9.52%	52.38%	19.05%	9.52%	100.00%

Source: Author's analysis

Table 10 analysis indicates that 50% of the DAA, approximately 16% of the HoD, and 22% of the PL believe that acquaintance with academic influences the IWP evaluation process.

Table 11

Judging documentary evidence

Row Labels	SD	D	N	A	SA	Grand Total
DAA	0.00%	9.52%	0.00%	9.52%	9.52%	28.57%
HoD	9.52%	0.00%	4.76%	9.52%	4.76%	28.57%
PL	0.00%	9.52%	4.76%	14.29%	14.29%	42.86%
Grand Total	9.52%	19.05%	9.52%	33.33%	28.57%	100.00%

Source: Prepared by the Researchers

Source: Prepared by the Researchers

Table 11 shows that around 18% of the DAA have opinions that checking the documentary evidence for IWP evaluation is a complex process. Likewise, 15% HoD and 29% PL also have the opinion that IWP evaluation is a complex process.

Table 12

Familiarity with the academic impact IWP Process

Designation	Familiarity with academics impacts IWP Process	Percentage
Associate Prof	5	8.12%
Assistant Prof.	5	7.61%
Lecturer	24	42.13%
Associate Lecturer	15	26.90%
Assistant Lecturer	11	15.23%
Grand Total	60	100.00%

Source: Developed by the Researchers

Table 12 shows that about 8% percent of Associate Professors perceive that familiarity with the academics impacts the IWP process. Likewise, around 8% of assistant professors, forty-two percent of lecturers, about 27% percent of associate lecturers, and 15% of assistant lecturers have the opinion that familiarity with academics impacts the IWP evaluation process.

Table 13

IWP process consumes time

Designation	SD	D	N	A	SA	Grand Total
Associate Prof	0.48%	1.91%	0.00%	3.83%	0.00%	6.22%
Assistant Prof.	0.00%	1.91%	2.87%	0.00%	2.39%	7.18%
Lecturer	0.96%	0.96%	11.48%	7.66%	21.53%	42.58%
Associate Lecturer	0.48%	0.00%	5.74%	11.48%	9.57%	27.27%
Assistant Lecturer	0.96%	1.91%	1.44%	7.66%	4.78%	16.75%
Grand Total	2.87%	6.70%	21.53%	30.62%	38.28%	100.00%

Source: Developed by the Researchers

Table 13 shows that around 68% of the academics have the perception that the IWP process consumes lots of their time. Findings reveal that 6% of associate professors, around 7% of assistant professors, forty-three percent of lecturers, and 27% of associate lecturers feel that the IWP process consumes their time.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research provides insight into the challenges faced by supervisors and academics in the IWP evaluation. Further, the research work tries to identify the key challenges from the perspective of the supervisors and academicians in relation to the IWP evaluation. Past studies have established the roles of IWP in evaluating the performance of employees. Results of the study indicate that objectivity in performance appraisal (OPA), fairness of assessment (FOA), and time-consuming (TC) factors significantly influence IWP evaluation. Taneja et al. (2024) also concluded that fairness in performance evaluation has positively influenced employees' motivation. Performance evaluation is Time-consuming; an average time spent by an evaluator is 210 hours (Kettner,2017). Findings show that the OPA p-value is 0.032, the FOA

P-value is 0.041, and the TC P-value is 0.007, respectively. Likewise, the OPA t value is 0.157, the FOA t value is 0.179, and the TC t value is 0.313, respectively. Out of these three independent variables, the influence of FOA is stronger compared to the other independent variables.

Next to FOA, the trailing independent variable influencing IWP is TC. From the perspective of supervisors, the main challenge is the personnel relationship with the faculty members. The second prominent challenge is familiarity with the faculty members. Because of too much familiarity, supervisors are not able to maintain fairness and unbiasedness in the performance evaluation process. Similarly, Huckman et al. (2009) also show the same result, as familiarity between supervisors and employees influences the performance evaluation of an individual. Although we have provided a few explanations of these results, surely a more in-depth investigation is required to explain this. Future studies could focus on how the IWP system can be linked with employee motivation, because if these practices do not contribute to improving teacher performance and motivation, then there is no reason to continue with the same.

Suggestions

- For proper implementation of the IWP system, it is advisable to make the entire process of evaluation objective. Any subjectivity in the evaluation process brings bias and unfairness. The IWP process must be comprehensive enough so that it can cover all aspects of employee performance evaluation.
- Supervisors must be trained to maintain fairness in the assessment process. Biasedness towards the opposite gender should be addressed.
- The IWP process consumes a huge amount of supervisors' and academician time. Therefore, it is advisable to reorganize the entire IWP system. As it is a time-consuming process so extra time must be allocated to supervisors and academicians.
- While it is challenging to eliminate subjectivity from both supervisors and academics, performance evaluation systems should incorporate mechanisms designed to minimize subjective bias.
- An effective performance evaluation system requires periodic review by key stakeholders to integrate user feedback, address emerging challenges, and align mutual expectations within educational institutions
- Lastly, IWP should be developed for each college context or at least adjusted to the specific needs of the college. A common evaluation may not adequately evaluate the IWP. Because of the limitation of time limitation, the data collection process is very fast, which made the research costly.

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