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**Abstract**

National governments in several countries have promoted and carried out different forms of mergers, consolidations and alliances within their higher education systems in order to increase efficiency, effectiveness and governmental control to ensure that the universities more directly serve the national and regional economic and social objectives. This article sets out to explore structural reforms between and within universities from a micro-level perspective by investigating how academics make sense of and respond to the structural reforms, and how these reforms shape academic cultures, work practices and identities. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with 31 Finnish academics working under structural rearrangements, five core meanings of structural reforms are discerned: structural development as part of a flood of changes, expanding bureaucracy, profiling, searching for partners and branding. The paper concludes that structural reforms along with other managerial transformations foster experiences of competition and polarization at the departmental and individual level of academia, involving redefining what it means to be a successful academic. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)