

Navigating the Transition: Industry Professionals' Experiences of Transitioning from Industry to Academic Roles at a Private Higher Education Institution

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Prof. Saras Reddy — 5 June 2026

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Dedication of the Study

I give thanks to God Almighty, whose grace sustained me through every moment of this journey and whose wisdom reminded me that all knowledge begins and ends with Him.

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To my children, Faaiqa, Jauhara and Muhammad Sideeq and to the youth of today, may this doctorate, completed at sixty-one years of age, remind you that it is never too late to earn a qualification, to pursue your studies and to invest in yourself. No qualification is ever wasted. Every step you take in learning shapes the person you are becoming.

To my colleagues, your encouragement and acts of support along the way meant more than you will ever know.

Abstract

The transition of industry professionals into academic roles at private higher education institutions (PHEIs) represents a distinctive developmental challenge that has received limited empirical attention, particularly within the South African higher education context. Industry professionals, commonly referred to as pracademics, enter academia with strong professional capital but frequently encounter identity dissonance, pedagogical uncertainty and institutional misalignment that established induction practices inadequately address (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Dunn et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). Despite the increasing reliance of PHEIs on professionally qualified staff to drive curricular relevance and graduate employability, the structural and organisational conditions that shape such transitions remain underexplored.

This dissertation examined how industry professionals experienced the transition into academic roles at a single South African PHEI, how those experiences related to institutional structures and support systems and why those relationships took the forms they did. Three interrelated research questions guided the inquiry: what the experiences of transitioning practitioners were; how those experiences related to institutional structures and support; and why those relationships manifested as they did within this specific institutional context.

The study adopted an interpretivist, constructivist orientation and a qualitative single-site case study design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen purposively selected industry professionals who had transitioned into academic roles at the study institution. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2019, 2022). Theoretical interpretation drew on an integrated framework comprising Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1986, 1987), Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 2011), Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) and Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011), supplemented in the discussion by Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital, Brunsson's (1989) organisational hypocrisy, institutional logics theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Analysis generated nine interrelated themes: the evolution of professional identity in transition; transition motivations and career change drivers; institutional support structures and gaps; pedagogical knowledge development and alignment; technology integration and digital transformation; student relationships and engagement strategies; innovation and change management capabilities; time management and work-life integration; and research and scholarship development. Transition motivations and expectancy violations emerged as the most heavily coded theme, underscoring that aspiration and subsequent disillusionment were central rather than peripheral to participants' transition trajectories.

The study advances six theoretical contributions. It conceptualises pracademic transition as Sustained Liminality rather than a bounded passage between stable role identities. It proposes Identity Bilingualism to capture the productive holding of both practitioner and academic selves. It introduces Pracademic Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PPCK) to account for the specialised work of translating tacit professional expertise into structured educational practice. It identifies Cultural Capital Erosion and Temporal Debt to explain how unmediated workload intensity depletes the educational value of professional experience. It applies Organisational Hypocrisy in Academic Onboarding to account for the gap between institutional support rhetoric and material practice. Finally, it reframes The Pracademic as an institutional asset, arguing that the value of practitioner appointments is realised only when adequate developmental conditions exist.

The Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF), developed through empirical and theoretical analysis, maps the transition across four temporal phases and five support domains, offering institutions a structured basis for designing differentiated, phased and relational support for industry professionals entering academic life. The study concludes that pracademic transition is a complex, socially situated and institutionally mediated process whose success depends less on individual resilience than on the quality of the developmental conditions institutions create and sustain.

Keywords: pracademic transition; professional identity; pedagogical content knowledge; private higher education; South Africa; liminality; institutional support

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List of acronyms

ACRONYM	MEANING
AOP	Academic Onboarding Programme
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
IPTF	Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
LMS	Learning Management Systems
PPCK	Pracademic Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Chapter 1: Overview of the study

1.1 Introduction

The higher education landscape is undergoing continual transformation, shaped by structural, organisational and policy shifts that have redefined academic work over recent decades. Globally, universities are progressively influenced by market-oriented discourses that prioritise performance, accountability, measurable outcomes and the positioning of students as consumers within competitive educational environments (Gupta et al., 2023; Raaper, 2023). These pressures have contributed to significant changes in institutional priorities and, in turn, to academic identity itself. Marques et al. (2024) argue that contemporary academic work is increasingly marked by intensified managerial expectations, role diversification and the need to reconcile traditional scholarly values with external demands for responsiveness, efficiency and relevance. In this environment, the academic cannot be assumed to occupy a singular or stable identity position.

Within this broader context, the entry into academic life is increasingly recognised as a dynamic, complex and ongoing developmental process rather than a once-off occupational shift (Myers et al., 2025). The work of teaching in higher education has become more visible, more scrutinised and more closely tied to questions of graduate employability, curriculum relevance and institutional performance. Hora and Lee (2020) note that higher education policy and practice increasingly emphasise pedagogies that prepare students for participation in the knowledge economy, with institutions expected to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also industry-ready. In many settings, this expectation has elevated the status of applied knowledge and practical experience. It has also reshaped assumptions about who is recruited to teach in higher education, particularly in professionally oriented qualifications.

These shifts, in turn, have influenced recruitment practices. To strengthen the connection between higher education and professional practice, institutions are increasingly appointing staff with substantial experience gained outside the traditional academic pathway (McCall et al., 2021). In professionally oriented fields, such appointments are often valued because they can enhance curriculum relevance, expose students to current sector expectations and make teaching more responsive to workplace realities (Hora & Lee, 2020; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). Within South Africa, this tendency is particularly visible in the private higher education sector, which has expanded in response to demand for career-focused provision and stronger alignment between study and employment (CHE, 2024a). The movement from industry to academia is not seamless.

As Dunn et al. (2025) show, second-career academics frequently enter higher education with strong professional capital while still having to adapt to unfamiliar institutional cultures, pedagogical

expectations and academic norms. Examining pracademic identities, therefore, helps explain a transition marked not only by opportunity but also by negotiation, adaptation and ongoing identity work.

The term pracademic remains particularly key to this dissertation because it captures more than a simple mid-career occupational move. It signifies a dual positioning between professional practice and academic work and it foregrounds how practitioners entering the institution often continue to draw on, negotiate and rework their professional identities rather than abandon them entirely. Dickinson and Griffiths (2023, p. 1) define the pracademic as "a professional with dual identities, those of practitioner and academic," and this formulation closely aligns with the central concern of the present study. Although the literature sometimes uses adjacent terms such as dual professional or second-career academic, the concept of the pracademic best preserves the intellectual and empirical focus of this dissertation: namely, the transition of industry professionals into academic roles and the lived complexity of occupying both worlds at once.

In the South African higher education context, these dynamics are especially visible in private higher education institutions (PHEIs), where the massification of post-school education has driven institutional growth, increased demand for flexible access routes and the growing attractiveness of professionally oriented programmes (CHE, 2024a; Hlatshwayo, 2024). PHEIs frequently position themselves around responsiveness, applied learning and graduate employability. This positioning often makes industry experience a valuable and, at times, strategically desirable form of academic capital. Practitioners are therefore recruited not simply because they are subject experts, but because they are perceived to embody current sector knowledge, professional credibility and the practical insights that students and institutions increasingly value.

However, professional expertise does not eliminate the complexities of academic transition. On the contrary, it may sharpen them. Transitioning from industry to academia entails navigating unfamiliar institutional cultures, adapting to diverse forms of performance evaluation and reconstructing professional identity within an environment governed by values, expectations and status markers that may not align with those of the workplace. Dunn et al. (2025) found that second-career academics reported significant difficulty with teaching, assessment design, technological systems, research expectations and the absence of mentoring. Similarly, Yusoff (2025) shows that tensions between prior professional selves and the symbolic and structural demands of academic institutions shape identity formation and institutional belonging among those entering academia from professional careers. These studies affirm that the transition cannot be understood as a simple transfer of expertise from one setting to another.

The present study, therefore, begins from the premise that the transition from industry to academia is not merely a technical matter of role induction or a straightforward process of acquiring new teaching skills. It is a socially situated and institutionally mediated process involving identity reconstruction, pedagogical development, professional belonging and adaptation to organisational culture. This is particularly significant within PHEIs, where market responsiveness, lean staffing structures and quality assurance requirements create a distinctive environment for academic work. Although international literature on pracademics has grown in recent years, empirical research on how industry professionals experience this transition in the South African PHEI context remains limited.

This dissertation addresses that gap by exploring the experiences of fourteen industry professionals who transitioned into academic roles at a single South African PHEI. Using an interpretivist, constructivist orientation and qualitative case study design, the study investigates how participants experienced the move into academia, how those experiences related to institutional structures and support systems and why those relationships took the forms they did within this specific institutional setting. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to interpret participants' accounts and to generate a rich understanding of the pedagogical, identity-related and organisational dimensions of pracademic transition (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

This chapter provides the conceptual foundation for the dissertation. It introduces the background and statement of the problem, explains the rationale and significance of the study, identifies the research gaps, presents the research questions and objectives, outlines the theoretical framework and conceptual orientation and situates the inquiry within its methodological, ethical and institutional context.

1.2 Background and statement of the problem

Transitioning from professional practice to academia is increasingly recognised as a complex and often ambiguous experience. Literature on professional transition frequently describes such movement as an encounter with liminal spaces: in-between zones in which old certainties are disrupted while new identities are still being formed (Gourlay, 2011). The shift from industry into higher education is not typically experienced as a neat replacement of one stable occupational identity with another. Rather, it is an unfolding developmental process involving uncertainty, learning, dislocation and reorientation (Myers et al., 2025).

For many practitioners, the move into academia is accompanied by both aspiration and unease: aspiration because higher education offers an opportunity to influence future professionals and contribute to knowledge; unease because the norms governing academic legitimacy may differ significantly from those that defined success in industry.

A central issue in this transition is identity dissonance. Individuals who enter academia after a substantial professional career often do so with a strong sense of expertise, credibility and occupational accomplishment. Once inside the institution, that prior authority may not readily transfer into academic legitimacy. Cowley (2023) notes that newly appointed academics can experience the move from recognised professional expert to novice academic as a profound shift in status and self-perception. Grassley et al. (2020, p. 370) similarly describe how individuals entering higher education may suddenly feel "no longer an expert", despite years of achievement in their previous professions. McCall et al. (2021, p. 545) cite earlier evidence that some newcomers experience the move as "starting again at the bottom of the hierarchy," and that such experiences are often accompanied by self-doubt, impostor feelings and uncertainty about belonging (Pickern & Costakis, 2024).

The present study reflects these dynamics. The professional who once derived authority from workplace expertise, organisational responsibility or technical mastery must now learn to operate within pedagogical, scholarly and institutional frameworks that assign value in different ways. Professional knowledge remains important, but it is no longer sufficient on its own (Cowley, 2023).

Pedagogical transition is therefore a second major dimension of the problem. Industry professionals often bring deep disciplinary or technical expertise into the classroom, however, many have had limited prior exposure to formal educational theory, curriculum design, student assessment or classroom management. McCall et al. (2021) note that professionals entering higher education frequently struggle with the everyday pedagogical work of teaching and must often learn rapidly how to design modules, facilitate learning and assess students. Dunn et al. (2025) found that second-career academics reported challenges related to diverse classrooms, the preparation of lectures and assessments, institutional technologies and the lack of structured guidance on "the ways of being an academic". Where institutions assume that disciplinary expertise automatically translates into teaching competence, new academics may be left to discover pedagogical principles through trial and error.

This matter is especially significant because higher education teaching increasingly carries high-stakes expectations. Students are expected to graduate not only with theoretical understanding, but with the practical, critical and communicative capacities needed for professional and civic life. Institutions, in turn, are judged by performance indicators, throughput rates, student satisfaction measures and employability narratives. In this context, the pedagogical adjustment required of pracademics cannot be treated as peripheral. It sits at the heart of academic work. Sarkar et al. (2024), in their systematic scoping review of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in higher education, reaffirm that effective teaching requires more than subject expertise; it depends on the capacity to

transform knowledge into forms that are educationally meaningful to learners. This insight is central to the present study.

A further dimension of the problem concerns the research and scholarly expectations attached to academic roles. Many industry professionals are recruited into higher education for their applied expertise, current sector knowledge and capacity to strengthen links between curriculum and practice. Once appointed, they may be evaluated against criteria that privilege publication, research productivity, postgraduate supervision and academic networking. Moffitt and Bligh (2024) note that second-career academics offer rich practitioner experience that institutions can draw upon to attract and engage students, but they may lack expertise in identifying, funding and publishing curiosity-driven research. This mismatch can generate a paradox: institutions recruit practitioners for their professional value but judge their long-term success through academic norms that may not recognise the full range of their contribution.

Within the South African context, these issues take on particular significance in the private higher education sector. PHEIs have expanded substantially over the past two decades and play an increasingly visible role in the national higher education landscape (CHE, 2024a). They are often characterised by professionally oriented programmes, market responsiveness, tuition-fee dependence and staffing models that differ from those of many public universities. These conditions can create strong incentives to recruit industry professionals, but may also limit the time, infrastructure and developmental support available to those entering academic roles. Hlatshwayo (2024) points to the pressures facing institutions operating in contexts shaped by transformation demands, resource constraints and changing academic expectations. For pracademics, this means that transition is not only personal and pedagogical; it is also deeply institutional.

Despite a growing international literature on dual professionals, pracademics and second-career academics, empirical work on the South African PHEI context remains limited. There is comparatively little research on how industry professionals in these settings make sense of the move into academia, negotiate dual identity, experience institutional support structures and how organisational conditions shape their transition. This absence matters because, without such research, institutions are left to rely on assumptions rather than evidence when designing induction, mentoring and staff development processes for practitioners entering academic life.

The problem addressed by this study, therefore, is the limited contextualised understanding of how industry professionals experience the transition into academic roles at a South African PHEI and how those experiences relate to institutional structures and support systems. The study does not assume that all pracademics experience transition in the same way. Nor does it treat transition as a deficit to

be corrected solely in the individual. It approaches pracademic transition as a complex, socially situated phenomenon shaped by the interplay of professional history, pedagogical development, institutional context and identity reconstruction.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

The transformation of higher education has intensified the demand for practice-oriented programmes and for academic staff who can connect disciplinary knowledge with industry realities. In this context, the recruitment of practitioners into academic roles has become a strategic institutional response aimed at enhancing employability, sustaining curriculum relevance and strengthening relationships between higher education and the labour market. Industry professionals bring valuable experience, networks and applied perspectives that can enrich curriculum design and pedagogy. The literature also indicates that the very value these practitioners bring may be undermined when institutions do not provide adequate support for pedagogical development, research acculturation and institutional belonging (Dunn et al., 2025; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024; Yusoff, 2025).

The rationale for this study is therefore both scholarly and practical. Scholarly significance lies in the need to deepen understanding of the pracademic transition within a context that remains underrepresented in existing research. Much of the literature on professional transition into academia is located in Western public university settings. It is not always attentive to the specific features of South African private higher education. South African PHEIs occupy a distinctive place in the post-school education and training landscape. CHE (2024b) underscores the role of standards, internal quality assurance and capacity development in strengthening higher education provision, while Hlatshwayo (2024) emphasises the continued importance of transformation in teaching, learning and institutional culture. Investigating pracademic transition in this setting, therefore, contributes new contextual knowledge to a growing international conversation.

The study is also significant because it brings pedagogical development into clearer relation with identity and institutional support. Existing work on transition often focuses either on identity disruption or on practical induction needs, but less frequently examines how professional expertise is transformed into educational practice within the institutional conditions that facilitate or constrain that transformation. By foregrounding PCK as a primary lens, this study retains close alignment with the focus on the pedagogical dimension of transition. Sarkar et al. (2024) argue that PCK remains a productive framework for understanding how higher education teachers develop the capacity to teach disciplinary content effectively. For pracademics, this question is especially important because the ability to teach cannot be assumed from professional competence alone.

Within the South African context, the study's significance is heightened by the intersecting imperatives of transformation, quality assurance and institutional diversification. South African higher education continues to grapple with the legacies of historical inequality, epistemic exclusion and uneven access to opportunity. At the same time, institutions are required to demonstrate quality, accountability and responsiveness within increasingly resource-constrained environments. The CHE (2024b) underscores the role of standards, internal quality assurance and capacity development in strengthening higher education provision, while Hlatshwayo (2024) emphasises the continued importance of transformation in teaching, learning and institutional culture. To the extent that industry professionals entering academia may contribute to workforce diversification, curricular responsiveness and new forms of student engagement, understanding how they can be more effectively supported becomes a matter not only of institutional efficiency but of broader educational significance.

The rapid growth of private higher education further strengthens the rationale for the study. As the number of registered private institutions has increased and enrolments have expanded, the academic workforce within this sector has also become more varied. Many PHEIs rely heavily on professionally qualified staff to teach in applied fields. This staffing pattern raises important questions about induction, academic identity, pedagogical support and long-term academic development. If such institutions wish to benefit fully from the expertise that practitioners bring, they need more contextually grounded knowledge of what pracademic transition actually entails. This dissertation is therefore relevant and positioned to make a meaningful contribution to how PHEIs understand and support staff entering higher education from industry.

1.4 Identified research gaps

Despite growing international interest in pracademia and related forms of professional transition into higher education, several gaps in existing scholarship justify the present investigation. These gaps are conceptual, empirical, theoretical and methodological. They do not suggest an absence of literature altogether; rather, they indicate that important aspects of pracademic transition remain insufficiently explored, especially within the South African PHEI context.

1.4.1 Conceptual gaps

One conceptual gap lies in the tendency of parts of the literature to treat academic careers as though they unfold primarily along a conventional pipeline from postgraduate study into academic appointment. Such a framing can obscure the experiences of those who enter academia after a substantial professional career and who therefore inhabit more hybrid positions. The concept of the pracademic is useful precisely because it challenges a binary distinction between "academic" and "non-academic" work. It draws attention to professionals who are neither simply former practitioners

nor fully assimilated traditional academics, but who continue to negotiate both domains. Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) have contributed notably to this discussion, nonetheless the conceptual implications of this hybridity remain underdeveloped in some parts of the literature.

A related conceptual issue concerns the relationship between identity, pedagogy and institutional culture. Identity negotiation is widely recognised as central to transitions into academia, but it is less common to find studies that explore this alongside the development of teaching expertise and the organisational conditions within which such development occurs. In other words, the literature does not always connect the question of 'who I am becoming' with the equally important question of 'how I learn to teach effectively here'. This matters because pracademic transition is not only *a*bout belonging or legitimacy; it is also about pedagogical competence, confidence and the reworking of expertise for educational purposes.

The concept of liminality also requires more careful attention. Earlier literature has helped conceptualise transitional in-betweenness, but there is a need to consider whether the liminal condition experienced by pracademics is always temporary, linear and ultimately resolved. Breier et al. (2019), in their study of academics without PhDs in South Africa and Australia, show that liminality may be prolonged, recurrent or, in some cases, effectively permanent. Yusoff (2025) likewise indicates that academic identity formation among second-career academics is dynamic and shaped by shifting relations of recognition, support and institutional culture. These insights suggest that the transition of pracademics may not end with appointment or even with early adjustment, but may remain an enduring feature of academic life. This is important for a study such as the present one, which seeks to understand not only initial induction but the lived texture of transition as experienced by participants.

1.4.2 Empirical gaps

Empirically, much of the literature on the transition into academia is concentrated in Western public university contexts, especially in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia (Grassley et al., 2020; McCall et al., 2021; Pickern & Costakis, 2024). While this work is valuable, it does not always travel neatly into the South African private higher education environment. PHEIs operate within specific regulatory, financial and cultural conditions and the practical realities of academic work within these institutions may differ considerably from those in public universities (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022; Henkel, 2005). The South African private sector has grown rapidly and is increasingly important within the higher education landscape (Naude & Sutherland, 2024), thus far, empirical studies focused specifically on pracademics in this setting remain limited (Dunn et al., 2025; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

A further empirical gap concerns the institutional conditions of transition. Studies often note that practitioners entering higher education require support, but there is less detailed evidence on how institutional structures, support systems and organisational cultures shape that transition in practice. Dunn et al. (2025) identify a lack of mentorship, uncertainty, workload pressure and teaching-related difficulties as important challenges for second-career academics. Yusoff (2025) similarly shows that institutional recognition and support substantially influence identity formation and belonging. However, there remains a need for more contextually grounded qualitative work showing how such dynamics are experienced in specific settings, especially within South African PHEIs.

There is also a relative paucity of work on pracademic transition in relation to South African transformation imperatives. Institutions do not operate in a social vacuum. Questions of language, race, class, professional history, access and legitimacy shape how individuals enter and inhabit the institution. Hlatshwayo (2024) reminds us that South African higher education continues to be influenced by broader struggles over transformation, decolonisation and epistemic justice. Relatively little empirical research has examined how such forces intersect with the transition experiences of industry professionals entering teaching roles within private higher education.

1.4.3 Theoretical and methodological gaps

Theoretically, some transition studies remain largely descriptive or policy-focused, offering useful accounts of induction and adjustment but without sufficiently robust conceptual integration. This dissertation draws on an integrated framework of PCK, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Ubuntu precisely because pracademic transition is multidimensional and cannot be adequately understood through a single lens (Trede et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998). PCK is defined as the pedagogical dimension (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). Schlossberg attends to the dynamics of transition and support (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory addresses the reconstruction and negotiation of self within a new occupational field (Ibarra, 1999; Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). Ubuntu provides the relational and ethical grounding through which institutional conditions are interpreted within the South African higher education context (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025).

There is also a specific theoretical gap concerning the application of PCK to academics entering higher education from professional practice. Sarkar et al. (2024) note the continued relevance of PCK in higher education and highlight the need to understand how disciplinary knowledge is translated into teaching practice. Brogt (2025) further demonstrates the value of PCK in academic development work within higher education, showing that pedagogical development depends on the co-construction of educational knowledge and disciplinary expertise. This insight has not been sufficiently extended

to the specific case of pracademics, for whom the movement from expert practitioner to educator raises distinctive pedagogical questions.

Methodologically, there remains a need for interpretivist qualitative inquiry that captures the lived complexity of transition. Much policy discourse tends to frame staff development in generic or programmatic terms. By contrast, qualitative research can explore the emotional textures, identity tensions, institutional ambiguities and situated practices through which transition is actually experienced. The present study responds to that need by focusing on participants' own accounts within a bounded institutional case. In doing so, it adds empirical depth to an area that is too often treated as self-evident or administratively straightforward.

These gaps justify the present study. They point to the need for a contextually grounded, theoretically integrated and qualitatively rich investigation of pracademic transition within a South African PHEI. The dissertation is designed to address that need directly.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how industry professionals experience the transition into academic roles within a South African PHEI and to examine how institutional structures, pedagogical demands and identity reconstruction shape that transition. The study is concerned not only with what participants experience during the move from industry to academia, but also with how those experiences are interpreted, negotiated and mediated within a specific institutional environment.

The study proceeds from the understanding that the transition into academia cannot be reduced to a straightforward process of occupational relocation or technical adjustment. It is conceptualised as a multidimensional, socially situated process involving pedagogical adaptation, institutional incorporation, identity negotiation and the reworking of professional legitimacy (Myers et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). In this regard, the study seeks to understand how industry professionals make sense of becoming academics within institutional contexts shaped by quality assurance pressures, employability imperatives, transformation agendas and changing expectations of higher education work (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

The study is also interpretive and explanatory in orientation. Beyond describing participants' experiences, the study seeks to explain why particular tensions, challenges and forms of adaptation emerge within the transition process. This includes examining how institutional cultures, support structures, workload conditions and pedagogical expectations shape participants' experiences of belonging, competence and professional identity. Particular attention is given to how professional

expertise is translated into pedagogically meaningful practice and how participants negotiate dual professional and academic identities within the South African PHEI context.

The study further aims to contribute contextually grounded insight into an area that remains underexplored within South African higher education scholarship. While international research on second-career academics and pracademics has expanded in recent years (Grassley et al., 2020; McCall et al., 2021), relatively little work has examined these transitions within South African private higher education institutions. The study therefore seeks to generate an empirically rich and theoretically integrated understanding that may inform institutional practice, academic development and future research concerning industry professionals entering academic life.

1.6 Contribution of the Study

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on pracademic transition by generating contextually grounded insight into how industry professionals experience movement into academic roles within a South African PHEI. While existing scholarship on second-career academics and pracademics has expanded internationally, relatively little research has examined these transitions within South African private higher education contexts, particularly through an interpretivist, theoretically integrated lens.

The study contributes conceptually by framing pracademic transition not as a once-off occupational adjustment, but as an ongoing process of pedagogical, institutional and identity negotiation. In doing so, the dissertation advances understanding of transition as a socially situated and relational phenomenon shaped by institutional culture, professional history and changing forms of academic legitimacy. The study further contributes to discussions of liminality within higher education by showing that transition may not always culminate in complete assimilation into academic identity, but may instead involve continuing negotiation between professional and academic worlds.

The dissertation also contributes to theory through the integration of PCK, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Ubuntu within a unified interpretive framework. Although these frameworks have each been used independently in higher education research, they have rarely been synthesised to examine the transition of industry professionals into academia in the South African PHEI context. The framework therefore provides a multidimensional lens capable of interpreting pedagogical adaptation, institutional support, identity reconstruction and relational belonging simultaneously.

A further contribution lies in extending the discussion of PCK into the context of pracademic transition. The study demonstrates that the pedagogical challenge facing industry professionals is not simply the acquisition of teaching techniques, but the transformation of tacit and practice-based expertise into educationally meaningful learning experiences (Sarkar et al., 2024; Brogt, 2025). In this regard, the dissertation contributes to broader conversations concerning academic development, teaching legitimacy and the limitations of assuming that professional expertise automatically translates into effective higher education teaching.

Empirically, the study contributes qualitative insight into the experiences of industry professionals within a South African PHEI environment shaped by employability imperatives, quality assurance expectations, transformation pressures and institutional resource constraints. By foregrounding participants' lived experiences, the dissertation contributes an understanding of how transition is experienced, interpreted and negotiated within institutional contexts that increasingly rely on professionally qualified staff.

Methodologically, the dissertation contributes an interpretivist and reflexive qualitative account of pracademic transition that foregrounds meaning-making, institutional context and participant voice. Through qualitative case study methodology and RTA, the study captures dimensions of transition that are often obscured within policy-oriented or managerial discussions of academic induction and staff development (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, the study contributes practically by generating insights that may assist PHEIs in designing more contextually responsive systems of induction, mentoring, pedagogical development and institutional support for industry professionals entering academic life. In doing so, the dissertation contributes to broader discussions concerning the future of academic work, institutional transformation and the diversification of academic pathways within South African higher education.

1.7 Research questions

This inquiry investigates how industry professionals experience the transition into academic roles at a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI). It is guided by three interrelated research questions that move progressively from descriptive to interpretive to explanatory levels of analysis.

- RQ1: What are the industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the PHEI?
- RQ2: How do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning to academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI?

- RQ3: Why do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning into academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they do?

These questions are sequenced intentionally. The first question attends to the lived experience of transition itself, including motivations, challenges, shifts in identity and early encounters with academic work. The second question moves to a relational level by examining how institutional structures and support systems shape those experiences. The third asks why those relationships take the forms they do, thereby opening an explanatory space in which the theoretical framework can interpret the deeper structural, cultural and pedagogical dynamics of the transition process. In this way, the study moves from description to interpretation and explanation coherently (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1.8 Research objectives

The objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the motivations, expectations and initial experiences of industry professionals embarking upon a new career in academia.
2. To explore how transitioning academics perceive and construct their professional identity within the new academic environment, particularly regarding dual identities.
3. To examine the influence of institutional structures and support systems, such as orientation, mentoring and formal professional development initiatives, on the practitioners' adjustment and expertise development.
4. To critically examine how the relationship between institutional support structures and industry professionals' pedagogical needs shapes their pedagogical development and transition outcomes within the PHEI context.
5. To formulate recommendations for PHEIs to integrate incoming practitioners into the academic community, ensuring that institutions fully benefit from the unique expertise practitioners bring.

1.9 Theoretical framework and conceptual orientation

The theoretical framework underpins this study by providing the conceptual structure through which the experiences of industry professionals transitioning into academic roles are examined and interpreted. Within qualitative inquiry, a theoretical framework functions as a conceptual and interpretive scaffold that shapes the philosophical positioning of the study, guides analytical interpretation and informs meaning-making throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2000). This dissertation draws on an integrated framework comprising PCK, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Ubuntu because, collectively, these perspectives

provide a multidimensional lens through which the pedagogical, personal, institutional, relational and contextual dimensions of pracademic transition can be understood (Trede et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998).

The framework is particularly appropriate because the transition under investigation cannot be understood as a singular or linear adjustment process. The transition involves learning to teach, learning to belong and reconstructing professional identity within a new occupational and institutional field (Ibarra, 1999; Beijaard et al., 2004). A framework focused exclusively on pedagogy would inadequately address questions of identity formation, institutional belonging and transition support. Conversely, a framework centred only on identity would underplay the practical and epistemic challenge of transforming industry expertise into pedagogically meaningful and teachable knowledge. Similarly, a framework focused solely on institutional support would not sufficiently account for the symbolic, relational and ethical dimensions through which individuals become recognised and experience themselves as academics.

Within this integrated framework, PCK explains how professional and disciplinary expertise is transformed into pedagogically accessible forms of teaching and learning (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides insight into how individuals navigate transition processes through situation, self, support and coping strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory foregrounds the reconstruction and negotiation of self that occurs as individuals adapt to new professional roles, expectations and institutional cultures (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Trede et al., 2012). Ubuntu contributes the contextual and ethical grounding through which the relational, communal and moral dimensions of institutional life are interpreted within the South African higher education context (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025). The framework is therefore not merely additive but synthetic, as each theoretical perspective explains dimensions of the transition process that the others alone cannot adequately explain.

1.9.1 Pedagogical Content Knowledge

PCK (Shulman, 1986, 1987) provides the primary theoretical lens of the study. PCK refers to the specialised knowledge that enables teachers to transform subject matter into forms that are comprehensible and meaningful to learners. It is not simply a matter of possessing content knowledge, nor is it reducible to a generic teaching technique. Rather, it concerns the distinctive blending of disciplinary understanding, pedagogical reasoning, curricular knowledge, awareness of learners and sensitivity to context that allows teaching to become educationally effective.

This lens is highly relevant to the pracademic transition because practitioners frequently enter higher education with strong disciplinary or professional expertise but limited experience in curriculum

design, assessment, student support or educational theory. The problem they face is not whether they know their field; often, they know it deeply. The problem is how to recast that expertise as learning. In this sense, transition into academia is not merely a professional relocation but a pedagogical transformation. Sarkar et al. (2024) demonstrate that PCK remains a valuable framework in higher education because it directs attention to how teachers learn to enact discipline-specific pedagogy. Brogt (2025) similarly argues that PCK provides a productive model for academic development in higher education because it foregrounds the co-construction of disciplinary and educational expertise.

PCK explains why institutional support matters. The development of pedagogical competence does not occur in a vacuum. It is shaped by access to mentoring, formal development programmes, peer interaction, curriculum guidance and opportunities for reflective practice. In this respect, PCK links directly to the practical conditions of academic transition. The question is not simply whether pracademics possess professional knowledge, but whether institutions create environments in which that knowledge can be pedagogically translated, tested, refined and expanded.

1.9.2 Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 2011) offers a second key framework for the study. The theory proposes that transitions are mediated by four interrelated resources: Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. These "4 Ss" provide a means of understanding how individuals navigate change, interpret its meaning, bring resources to it and cope with its demands. Importantly, the theory does not assume that all individuals respond to transition in the same way. Instead, it directs attention to the conditions that shape differential experience.

This makes the theory particularly useful for the present dissertation. Participants entered academia from diverse professional backgrounds, with varying expectations, differing personal resources and unequal access to support. Some described the transition as exciting and meaningful, while others experienced it as disorienting, isolating or under-supported. Schlossberg's framework enables these differences to be understood without reducing them to individual weakness or resilience alone. It asks what the situation was, what personal resources were available, what support systems existed and what strategies were mobilised in response.

The dimension of support is especially relevant. Evidence from the literature suggests that second-career academics often require clearer induction, more explicit mentoring and stronger developmental guidance than institutions routinely provide (Dunn et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). Schlossberg's framework is also valuable because it treats transition as relational and contextual rather than purely internal. Practitioners do not move into neutral spaces. They enter institutions with histories, cultures, expectations and structures that shape what transition becomes. In this sense, Transition Theory helps

the study move beyond simple accounts of adjustment and towards a more nuanced interpretation of why participants experienced transition as they did.

1.9.3 Professional Identity Theory

Professional Identity Theory provides the third component of the framework. Drawing on Beijaard et al. (2004), Henkel (2005) and Trede et al. (2012), the theory understands professional identity as something constructed, negotiated and enacted within particular social and institutional contexts. Identity is not fixed or possessed. It is formed through recognition, practice, role performance and interaction with others. This is especially important for pracademics because their transition involves not only learning new tasks but inhabiting a new professional self.

For individuals who have established identities in industry, the move into academia is rarely a complete erasure of prior selfhood. It often entails carrying forward elements of professional history while simultaneously seeking academic legitimacy. Yusoff (2025) demonstrates that second-career academics experience this process in dynamic ways shaped by institutional culture, recognition and support. Some move towards integration, some towards assimilation into academic norms and others experience more tension or resistance. Moffitt and Bligh (2024) similarly show that second-career academics can play influential roles in higher education precisely because they bring professional ways of knowing. Their legitimacy is still negotiated within institutions that may value research and academic convention over professional experience.

The use of Professional Identity Theory allows the study to analyse how participants interpreted themselves, perceived legitimacy, navigated academic expectations and how institutional cultures shaped their sense of belonging.

1.9.4 Ubuntu as Contextual and Ethical Lens

Ubuntu provides the fourth component of the framework. Drawing on Mbiti (1969), Metz (2011) and Khohliso et al. (2025), Ubuntu is understood here not as a symbolic cultural reference but as a substantive ethical and relational lens through which institutional life, pedagogical relationships and the conditions of professional belonging are interpreted. Ubuntu foregrounds the principle that personhood and professional formation are constituted through relationships of mutual recognition, dignity and communal accountability rather than through individual effort alone.

This lens is especially important for the present study because it addresses dimensions of pracademic transition that the other three frameworks do not fully reach. Schlossberg's theory explains how individuals navigate change and transition across shifting personal and professional contexts (Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory explains how legitimacy, identity and belonging are negotiated within a new occupational field (Beijaard et al., 2004). PCK explains how professional

expertise is transformed into pedagogically meaningful teaching practice (Shulman, 1987). Ubuntu addresses the moral and relational quality of the institutional environment within which all of these processes unfold, asking whether institutions engage newcomers in ways that affirm their humanity, relational dignity and sense of inclusion (Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025). Within the South African higher education context, this question carries particular significance given the broader national imperatives of transformation, equity, decolonisation and epistemic justice (Hlatshwayo, 2024; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

1.9.5 Integrated conceptual orientation

Conceptually, the study is organised around the central phenomenon of pracademic transition, understood not as a simple occupational relocation but as a socially situated process through which industry professionals negotiate competing expectations of expertise, legitimacy, pedagogy and institutional belonging within higher education (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). Rather than treating transition as a linear movement from one stable professional identity to another, the study conceptualises pracademic transition as an ongoing negotiation between professional histories, pedagogical adaptation and institutional incorporation. This position is important because the movement into academia does not merely require the acquisition of new technical competencies; it requires the reconstitution of self within institutional environments governed by different norms, values and forms of recognition (Ibarra, 1999; Yusoff, 2025).

Three intersecting domains shape this transition process. The first is the individual domain, which includes prior professional identity, motivations for entering academia, personal expectations, emotional responses and the social, cultural and experiential resources participants bring into transition. Existing literature suggests that these dimensions pointedly influence how newcomers interpret challenge, legitimacy and belonging within academic settings (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Cowley, 2023). However, the study does not treat these experiences as purely individual matters. Rather, it recognises that identity and adjustment are shaped relationally through interaction with institutional cultures, professional expectations and systems of support.

The second is the pedagogical domain, which includes curriculum design, classroom practice, student engagement, assessment, digital teaching practices and the development of pedagogical content knowledge. This domain is especially significant because professional expertise alone does not automatically translate into effective higher education teaching. Shulman (1987) argues that teaching requires the transformation of disciplinary knowledge into forms that are pedagogically meaningful and accessible to learners. For pracademics, this process is particularly complex because it involves translating tacit, practice-based and often context-specific expertise into structured educational

experiences. Sarkar et al. (2024) further demonstrate that pedagogical competence in higher education emerges through ongoing engagement with disciplinary, institutional and learner-centred forms of knowledge rather than through subject expertise alone.

The third is the institutional domain, which includes induction processes, mentoring, workload allocation, organisational culture, leadership practices, quality assurance expectations and access to developmental support. The literature increasingly suggests that transition difficulties should not be interpreted solely as personal deficits or adjustment failures, but as products of institutional arrangements that either facilitate or constrain academic incorporation (Dunn et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). Institutional structures shape not only how pracademics perform academic work, but also whether they experience themselves as recognised, supported and legitimate members of the academic community. In this sense, transition is institutionally mediated rather than individually determined.

These domains are analytically distinct but practically inseparable. Identity influences pedagogy, pedagogy influences belonging and institutional conditions shape both. The study therefore rejects reductionist explanations that isolate transition as either a pedagogical issue, an identity issue or a support issue alone. Instead, it conceptualises pracademic transition as emerging through the interaction of personal history, pedagogical adaptation and institutional context.

The broader South African PHEI environment further mediates these interactions. Market responsiveness, quality assurance requirements, transformation imperatives, resource constraints and employability discourses all shape the conditions under which pracademics enter and experience academic life (CHE, 2024a; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Within this context, institutions are simultaneously expected to demonstrate academic quality, professional relevance and transformation responsiveness, often within financially constrained environments. These pressures influence recruitment practices, workload structures, pedagogical expectations and forms of institutional support available to new academics.

The integrated theoretical framework provides the conceptual basis for interpreting these dynamics. PCK explains what must be learned pedagogically and why professional expertise alone is insufficient for effective teaching (Shulman, 1987). Schlossberg's Transition Theory explains how participants navigate transition, interpret change and experience institutional support or its absence (Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory explains why legitimacy, belonging and self-construction become central concerns in the transition from industry to academia (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Ubuntu extends the framework by foregrounding the ethical and relational conditions within which transition

occurs, asking whether institutions cultivate forms of engagement that affirm dignity, inclusion and communal belonging rather than only managing organisational adjustment (Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025). These frameworks enable pracademic transition to be interpreted not as a narrow induction problem, but as a multidimensional, institutionally situated process shaped by pedagogy, identity, power, recognition and relational conditions within higher education.

1.10 Overview of the research methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist, constructivist philosophical stance, grounded in the view that social realities are constructed, contextual and meaning-laden rather than objectively given and uniformly experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2000). This orientation is appropriate because the dissertation is concerned with how participants experienced and made sense of their transition into academia. It does not seek to measure transition in abstract terms, but to understand the meanings participants attached to it within a specific institutional environment.

A qualitative case study design was employed, focusing on a single South African PHEI as the bounded system of inquiry (Yin, 2018). The case study methodology was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of the pracademic transition within its real-life institutional context. The design supports close attention to the interaction between participants' experiences and the specific organisational conditions that shape them. It also allows for the generation of theoretically meaningful insights that may be transferable to similar settings, even though they are not statistically generalisable (Stake, 1995).

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with 14 participants who had transitioned from industry to academic roles at the institution. Documentary materials, including institutional policy texts and the academic onboarding programme, were also used to support contextual understanding. Purposive sampling enabled the inclusion of participants from a range of professional backgrounds and levels of academic experience, thereby allowing the study to capture both common and differentiated dimensions of the transition process.

The data were analysed using RTA, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach. This method was chosen because it is epistemologically compatible with interpretivist inquiry and because it supports a theoretically informed analysis of rich qualitative data. RTA recognises the active role of the researcher in generating themes and making meaning from data. It is therefore well aligned with the study's emphasis on reflexivity, contextual interpretation and conceptual depth. A fuller account of the methodology is presented in Chapter 4. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that the methodology was designed to generate a detailed and credible account of pracademic transition as lived and interpreted by the participants themselves.

1.11 Context of the study: South African private higher education

To understand the experiences examined in this dissertation, it is essential to situate them within the specific historical, regulatory and institutional context of South African private higher education. Since the end of apartheid, South African higher education has undergone substantial transformation driven by imperatives of access, equity, quality and system diversification (CHE, 2024a; DHET, 2021). The post-school system has expanded, student enrolments have grown and pressures on the public university sector have intensified. Within this broader process, private higher education has become a more visible and significant component of the national landscape.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 regulates PHEIs in South Africa. They are required to register with the DHET and offer programmes accredited through the relevant quality assurance processes. The CHE (2024a) notes the growing scale and complexity of this sector, which includes a range of institutions offering certificates, diplomas and degrees across a variety of disciplinary and professional fields. Unlike public universities, PHEIs generally operate without the same state subsidy structures and are heavily dependent on student fees. This financial model contributes to institutional responsiveness, but it also creates pressures around enrolment, retention, programme appeal and staffing models.

One consequence of this environment is a strong emphasis on career-oriented and professionally relevant qualifications. PHEIs often market themselves through their capacity to offer accessible, flexible and employment-focused learning. In such contexts, the recruitment of industry professionals into teaching roles is understandable and, from an institutional perspective, often advantageous. Practitioners can bring current field knowledge, networks, applied examples and professional credibility into the classroom. They may also align strongly with institutional messaging around employability and real-world relevance. The very conditions that make such recruitment attractive may also limit the structures available to support transition into academic work.

1.11.1 Policy environment: quality assurance and transformation imperatives

The policy environment shaping South African private higher education is both enabling and demanding. DHET (2021) sets out a broader post-school policy framework focused on participation, responsiveness, skills development and system strengthening. CHE, as the statutory quality body, plays a crucial role in accreditation, standards development, quality assurance and capacity development across the sector. The CHE's 2024 manual for standard development is particularly relevant here because it positions standards not solely as instruments of compliance, but as resources for internal quality assurance, institutional development and sector-wide capacity building. It emphasises that institutions are responsible for their own quality systems and that standards should

guide reflection, development and improvement across learning and teaching, research and related functions (CHE, 2024b).

This policy context matters for the present study because the transition of practitioners into academic roles occurs within institutions that are required to demonstrate quality, appropriate staff development and coherent internal systems. In principle, quality assurance expectations encourage institutions to invest in induction, professional development and support structures for new academics. In practice, however, translating policy expectations into institutional experience can be uneven. Where staffing needs are urgent and resources are limited, practitioners may be appointed quickly and then expected to learn the role while already carrying substantial teaching responsibility. Such conditions are not unique to South Africa, but they take on particular significance in a sector that balances regulatory obligations with market responsiveness.

Transformation adds further complexity. South African higher education continues to engage the legacies of racial inequality, exclusion and epistemic hierarchy. The transformation agenda is not only demographic, although demographics matter greatly; it is also cultural, pedagogical and structural. Hlatshwayo (2024) underscores the importance of reading contemporary higher education against these longer histories of exclusion and contestation. In this context, the entry of industry professionals into academia may contribute to the diversification of the academic workforce and to richer relationships between knowledge, profession and social context. However, such potential cannot be realised automatically. It depends on the extent to which institutions can recognise, develop and sustain those entering academic life from outside the conventional pipeline.

1.11.2 The institutional site

The institution at the centre of this study is a registered South African PHEI located in Durban. It offers professionally oriented programmes in fields such as business, commerce, marketing, logistics, management, law, information technology and education and it has a strong emphasis on work-related learning and career preparation. This makes it an appropriate site for studying pracademic transition, since a significant proportion of its academic staff are drawn from industry. The institution is therefore not incidental to the study; it is constitutive of the phenomenon under investigation. The form that transition takes is bound up with the kind of institution in which it occurs.

The Durban context is also relevant. As a major metropolitan and economic hub, Durban is closely linked to industries such as commerce, logistics, law, technology and hospitality. Many participants entered academia from sectors central to the regional economy, bringing with them knowledge that students often valued because it connected study to occupational aspirations. This alignment between professional expertise and student expectation is one of the features that gives pracademic transition

its promise. It is also one of the reasons that institutions may assume such professionals will "fit" easily into academic roles. The findings of this study challenge that assumption. Even where professional expertise aligns strongly with curricular aims, pedagogical confidence, institutional belonging and academic identity still have to be developed.

The institution's academic onboarding programme is a particularly important feature of the site. As a formal mechanism intended to support new academic staff in developing foundational pedagogical competence, the academic onboarding programme reflects institutional recognition that teaching in higher education requires more than subject expertise. At the same time, as later chapters show, formal programmes alone do not exhaust the forms of support needed by pracademics. Informal guidance, peer relationships, workload structures, leadership practices and access to communities of practice also shape transition. The institutional context, therefore, is not simply a backdrop; it is an active part of the transition process.

1.12 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of rigorous qualitative inquiry. It requires the researcher to examine their own assumptions, social location, experiences and possible influence on the research process and its interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Dodgson, 2019). In the present study, the researcher's positionality is particularly important, as he is situated within the South African PHEI sector and has direct experience of the transition from professional practice to academic life. This insider location creates both analytical advantages and ethical responsibilities.

The insider perspective supported the development of relevant interview questions, enabled a nuanced grasp of institutional language and practices and made it easier to build rapport with participants whose experiences were, in important respects, recognisable to the researcher (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Familiarity with the pressures of teaching, workload, pedagogical learning and institutional culture also enhanced theoretical sensitivity during analysis (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). At the same time, the researcher was aware that insider status could generate risks, including confirmation bias, over-identification with participants and the possibility of reading personal experience too directly into their accounts (Berger, 2015; Lewis & Quinnell, 2024).

To address these risks, reflexive practices were maintained throughout the study. A reflexive journal was used to document assumptions, reactions, emerging interpretations and moments of analytical uncertainty (Ortlipp, 2008; Finlay, 2002). Interpretive decisions were carefully considered and the relationship between the researcher's own history and the participants' accounts was treated as a site of reflection rather than as a hidden influence (Dodgson, 2019; Berger, 2015). Peer debriefing and member-oriented verification strategies further strengthened the interpretive rigour of the study

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016). Reflexivity in this dissertation is therefore not an admission of bias as a flaw, but a methodological commitment to transparency, accountability and interpretive care (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The South African context also gives positionality a broader significance. Research within higher education is not divorced from questions of power, transformation, epistemic voice and institutional inequality (Hlatshwayo, 2024). Being reflexive about positionality is therefore part of taking seriously the conditions under which knowledge is produced (Schwandt, 2000). This study seeks to honour participants' voices while also acknowledging that these voices are interpreted, organised and written through the researcher's engagement with theory, context and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1.13 Ethical considerations

The ethical conduct of this study was guided by the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). Ethical approval was obtained through the appropriate institutional research ethics processes before data collection commenced. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, the voluntary nature of participation and the measures that would be taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

Participant anonymity was protected through the assignment of participant codes (P01–P14), the removal of identifying details from transcripts and the careful handling of institutional information that might make either the institution or individual participants identifiable. Given that the study was conducted within a single institution where the researcher was employed, particular care was taken to manage power dynamics in the researcher–participant relationship, ensuring participants could speak openly about both positive and negative aspects of their experience without fear of professional consequences. In keeping with established qualitative principles, attention was therefore given not only to confidentiality, but also to relational ethics, trustworthiness and the fair representation of participants' accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethics in this study also extended to representation. The participants' narratives were not treated solely as data points to illustrate pre-existing theory. Rather, they were approached as accounts of lived experience that required careful and fair interpretation. The use of participant quotations throughout the dissertation reflects an ethical as well as methodological commitment: namely, that those whose experiences form the basis of the study should remain visible within its analysis.

1.14 Definitions of key terms

The following key terms are central to the study and are used in specific ways throughout the dissertation.

Pracademic refers to an individual who holds dual professional identities as both practitioner and academic, bridging the worlds of industry and higher education. The term is retained as the primary term in this dissertation because it best captures the study's focus: the ongoing negotiation between professional and academic ways of being, knowing and working (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Yusoff, 2025).

Pracademic transition refers to the process by which an industry professional moves into an academic role and negotiates the pedagogical, institutional and identity-related dimensions of that movement. In this study, the transition is understood as socially situated and developmental, rather than as a simple matter of role substitution or skill transfer (Myers et al., 2025).

A Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) is a higher education provider operating outside the public university funding framework, deriving income primarily from student fees and subject to registration and quality assurance requirements within the South African higher education system (CHE, 2024a).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) refers to the specialised knowledge that integrates subject-mastery with pedagogical reasoning, enabling teachers to transform disciplinary expertise into forms that students can understand and engage meaningfully (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024).

The academic onboarding programme is the formal teacher development programme offered by the study institution to support newly appointed academic staff in developing foundational pedagogical competencies.

Sustained liminality refers, in this study, to the extended in-between condition experienced by pracademics as they move between and continue to negotiate professional and academic worlds. Rather than assuming that transition culminates neatly in a settled academic identity, the term is used here to acknowledge that in-betweenness may persist as an enduring feature of academic life for some participants, particularly where institutional recognition, belonging and role clarity remain incomplete (Breier et al., 2019; Yusoff, 2025).

Identity bilingualism refers to the capacity of experienced pracademics to operate across both professional and academic identity registers, drawing strategically on each in response to pedagogical and institutional demands.

Reflexive thematic analysis is the qualitative analytic approach used in this study, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) understanding of theme development as an interpretive and reflexive process in which the researcher actively makes meaning from data.

1.15 Thesis structure

This dissertation is organised into eight interrelated chapters that collectively develop the conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical foundations of the study. The structure is designed to move progressively from contextual framing and theoretical positioning towards methodological explanation, empirical analysis, conceptual synthesis and concluding reflection. Each chapter contributes to addressing the dissertation's central concern: how industry professionals experience the transition into academic roles within a South African PHEI, how institutional conditions shape those experiences and why those relationships take the forms they do.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and establishes the intellectual and contextual foundation of the dissertation. The chapter situates the study within broader transformations in higher education, particularly the increasing reliance on professionally qualified staff in market-responsive, professionally oriented institutions. It outlines the background to the study, presents the statement of the problem, explains the rationale and significance of the inquiry and identifies the conceptual, empirical, theoretical and methodological gaps that justify the investigation. The chapter further presents the purpose of the study, research questions and research objectives, before outlining the integrated theoretical framework and conceptual orientation underpinning the dissertation. In addition, the chapter situates the inquiry within its interpretivist methodological orientation, introduces the South African PHEI context, addresses issues of positionality and ethics and concludes by outlining the overall structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and critically engages scholarship relevant to pracademic transition, identity formation, pedagogical development and institutional incorporation within higher education. The chapter reviews the literature on second-career academics, pracademics and professional transition into academia, paying particular attention to themes of liminality, legitimacy, institutional belonging and pedagogical adaptation. It further examines scholarship on academic identity, pedagogical content knowledge, academic development and institutional support structures, while also situating the discussion within broader debates on marketisation, employability, transformation and higher education change. The chapter critically evaluates existing scholarship rather than summarising it and demonstrates how the present study is positioned within and contributes to these ongoing scholarly conversations.

Chapter 3 elaborates the theoretical framework guiding the study. It provides a detailed discussion of PCK, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Ubuntu, explaining how each framework contributes to understanding distinct but interconnected dimensions of pracademic

transition. The chapter examines the conceptual assumptions underpinning each theory and demonstrates how the integrated framework enables transition to be interpreted simultaneously as a pedagogical, relational, institutional and identity-based process. Particular attention is given to the complementarity of the theories and to the contextual relevance of Ubuntu within the South African higher education environment. The chapter also develops the integrated conceptual orientation underpinning the dissertation and explains how the framework informs the interpretation of the empirical findings.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach adopted in the study. The chapter explains the interpretivist-constructivist philosophical orientation of the research and justifies the use of a qualitative case study design. It discusses the research site, participant selection processes, purposive sampling strategy and the use of semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis as methods of data generation. The chapter further explains the process of RTA following Braun and Clarke's approach and discusses how themes were developed and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework. In addition, the chapter addresses issues of trustworthiness, reflexivity, ethical practice and researcher positionality, demonstrating how methodological rigour and interpretive credibility were maintained throughout the study.

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the first phase of the empirical findings. The chapter focuses primarily on participants' lived experiences of transition into academia, including motivations for entering academic work, experiences of identity negotiation, pedagogical uncertainty, emotional adjustment and the reworking of professional legitimacy. The analysis demonstrates how participants interpreted their movement into academia and how they experienced the tensions and possibilities of becoming academics after careers in industry. Particular attention is given to themes of liminality, belonging, dual identity and the relationship between professional expertise and academic expectations.

Chapter 6 presents and analyses the second phase of the empirical findings, focusing more directly on institutional structures, pedagogical development and organisational conditions shaping transition. The chapter explores participants' experiences of induction, mentoring, workload allocation, institutional support, curriculum development, student engagement and pedagogical adaptation. It further examines how institutional culture, quality assurance expectations and organisational practices facilitated or constrained participants' incorporation into academic life. The chapter moves beyond description by interpreting these findings through the integrated theoretical framework and by identifying broader institutional and conceptual implications arising from the data.

Chapter 7 synthesises the study's major findings and develops the broader conceptual implications emerging from the research. The chapter draws together the pedagogical, institutional, relational and identity-based dimensions of pracademic transition identified across the empirical chapters. It revisits the theoretical framework in light of the findings and demonstrates how the study contributes to existing scholarship concerning pracademics, professional identity, pedagogical development and higher education transition. The chapter also develops the dissertation's broader conceptual contributions, including the ideas of sustained liminality, identity bilingualism and the relational dimensions of institutional incorporation within academic life.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by revisiting the research questions, summarising the central findings and reflecting on the overall contributions of the study. The chapter discusses the theoretical, empirical, methodological and practical implications arising from the research and considers the significance of the findings for South African PHEIs and higher education more broadly. It further addresses the limitations of the study and identifies areas for future research concerning pracademic transition, academic development and institutional support. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of the study for understanding the changing nature of academic work, professional legitimacy and institutional belonging within contemporary higher education.

1.16 Scope, delimitations and limitations of the study

This study is deliberately bounded to achieve the depth of understanding appropriate to an interpretivist qualitative design. It is situated within a single South African PHEI in Durban and focuses specifically on industry professionals who transitioned into academic roles within that setting. The single-site design enables close, contextually grounded analysis, but it also means that the findings are best understood as theoretically transferable rather than statistically generalisable (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

The participant group consists of 14 individuals, selected purposively to represent a range of professional backgrounds and transition experiences. This sample is appropriate for qualitative depth, but it does not claim to represent all pracademic experiences across the South African private sector. Nor does the study directly compare private and public universities. Its concern is with depth of insight into a particular institutional case rather than breadth across institutional types.

The study is further bounded by its exclusive focus on staff-reported experience. Data were generated through interviews and institutional document analysis; no student surveys, module evaluation data, assessment results or classroom observation were collected. Consequently, the study does not claim, and cannot support a claim, that pracademic teaching improves student learning, engagement or

academic outcomes. Any such relationship remains a distinct empirical question, identified in Section 8.7.5 as a priority for future research.

A further delimitation lies in the study's temporal framing. The data capture participants' accounts at a specific point in the institution's development and in their own academic journeys. Transition is an ongoing process and a longitudinal design might reveal additional patterns of change over time. The present study, therefore, offers a rich account of transition as experienced within a bounded period rather than a long-term developmental trajectory.

Researcher positionality is both a strength and a limitation. Insider knowledge supported contextual sensitivity and rapport, but it also required careful reflexive management. Measures such as journalling, peer engagement and member-oriented interpretive checking were used to support rigour, but readers should nonetheless interpret the findings with awareness of the researcher's location within the field of inquiry.

These delimitations are not weaknesses in a simple sense. Rather, they are justified design choices consistent with qualitative case study research. They allow the study to retain depth, conceptual coherence and contextual richness, while also identifying areas for future comparative and longitudinal inquiry.

1.17 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the dissertation and established its scholarly and contextual foundation. It has been argued that the transition of industry professionals into academic roles within a South African PHEI is an important yet under-researched phenomenon that cannot be understood as a simple matter of occupational change or skill transfer. Instead, pracademic transition has been framed as a multidimensional process involving identity reconstruction, pedagogical development, institutional adaptation and the negotiation of belonging within a new professional field.

The chapter has shown why this matters. PHEIs increasingly recruit industry professionals to strengthen curriculum relevance, employability and professional responsiveness. The literature and the study's early framing both indicate that such appointments pose significant challenges. The assumption that disciplinary or professional expertise automatically translates into effective academic practice is inadequate. Pracademics must learn to teach, to belong and to interpret themselves differently within institutions whose norms, values and expectations may differ substantially from those of their former professional environments.

To investigate this phenomenon, the study draws on an integrated framework of PCK, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Ubuntu, each of which explores a distinct but interconnected dimension of transition. The chapter has also situated the study within its interpretivist

qualitative methodology, its South African PHEI context and its ethical and reflexive commitments. In doing so, it has established the conceptual and methodological platform on which the rest of the dissertation builds.

Chapter 1 has clarified the dissertation's central concern: how industry professionals experience the move into academic roles, how those experiences relate to institutional structures and support systems and why those relationships take the forms they do. The chapters that follow develop this concern through literature review, theoretical elaboration, methodological explanation and empirical analysis. Chapter 2 now turns to the literature to locate the present study more fully within existing scholarship on pracademics, transition, identity and higher education work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and scope

This chapter critically reviews the literature relevant to the transition of industry professionals into academic roles, with particular reference to the context of a South African PHEI. Although such transitions are often presented as a natural extension of professional expertise, the literature suggests that the move from industry to academia is neither seamless nor occupational. Rather, it is a complex process involving the reconstitution of identity, legitimacy, pedagogy and institutional belonging (Breier et al., 2019; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024; Myers et al., 2025). What appears to be a transfer of expertise from one setting to another is, in practice, a negotiated movement across different forms of knowledge, value and recognition.

This review is organised around four interrelated strands. First, it considers how the literature conceptualises professionals who move from industry into academic work, with particular attention to the analytic value of the term pracademi*c*. Second, it examines identity formation and professional transition, focusing on liminality, legitimacy and the revaluation of prior professional capital. Third, it reviews pedagogical adaptation, including pedagogical content knowledge, the expert–novice relationship, assessment, curriculum and digital pedagogy. Fourth, it analyses the institutional and contextual conditions shaping transition, including induction, mentoring, communities of practice, private higher education and the South African higher education environment.

A critical rather than only descriptive review is necessary for three reasons. First, much of the literature treats industry entrants instrumentally, valuing them primarily for employability, relevance and market responsiveness. Second, existing work is weighted toward the Global North and public universities, leaving South African private higher education underexamined. Third, transition difficulties are often framed as personal deficits rather than as products of institutional norms, epistemic hierarchies and uneven support structures. This chapter therefore, does not simply summarise scholarship; it interrogates the assumptions through which transition has been understood and identifies the conceptual and contextual gaps that justify the present study.

2.2 Defining pracademics and the influence of market forces

2.2.1 Conceptualising the pracademic

The literature uses several terms to describe professionals who enter higher education after careers in industry, including second-career academics, industry-to-academia entrants and pracademics. While these terms overlap, they do not carry the same conceptual implications. The term second-career academic suggests a linear occupational shift from one stable professional identity to another. By contrast, pracademic more usefully captures the hybrid, unsettled and relational character of this

movement because it foregrounds the continuing interaction between professional practice and academic identity rather than implying that one replaces the other (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Yusoff, 2025).

This distinction is important because the language used to describe transition shapes how it is understood. To frame such individuals merely as second-career academics risks underestimating the extent to which prior professional knowledge, values and dispositions remain active in academic work (Pousadela et al., 2025). The concept of the pracademic draws attention to hybridity, boundary-crossing and the continued negotiation of role legitimacy. It also helps explain why industry entrants may be simultaneously valued and marginalised: valued because they bring current professional expertise, nonetheless marginalised because that expertise does not automatically align with academic norms of teaching, scholarship and institutional participation (Campbell, 2022; Lennox, 2026).

The term pracademic is therefore particularly appropriate for this study because it reflects not only a change of workplace but also a continuing tension between two knowledge worlds. It captures the dual positioning of individuals whose legitimacy must be negotiated across competing expectations concerning practice, pedagogy, scholarship and belonging (Lennox, 2026). For this reason, this study uses pracademic as its primary analytic term, while acknowledging that some of the literature continues to use the language of second-career academics.

The definitional fluidity around the term pracademic is itself theoretically significant. Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) demonstrate that the hybrid professional positioning of the pracademic remains conceptually underdeveloped within institutions, even as the practical presence of industry professionals in academic roles has expanded considerably across multiple disciplinary fields. Institutions that recruit industry professionals based on their applied expertise do not always provide pathways to legitimise that expertise in scholarly terms. The result is a persistent ambiguity in which the pracademic is simultaneously valued and institutionally undefined. This ambiguity is not resolved simply by settling on a preferred term; it requires sustained attention to the conditions under which hybrid professional identities are structurally supported and academically recognised (Mynott & Zimmatore, 2022; Pousadela et al., 2025)

Moffitt and Bligh (2024) extend this conceptual discussion by demonstrating that second-career academics in business and management education bring distinctive pedagogical assets to their institutions, particularly the capacity to illustrate abstract theoretical principles through current and contextually grounded professional examples. Their research confirms that students often respond more positively to practitioners-turned-academics than to career academics on perceived relevance and vocational preparedness, a finding that aligns with the broader institutional rationale for recruiting

industry professionals. However, Moffitt and Bligh (2024) also document a recurring pattern in which these same professionals encounter research expectations and promotional criteria for which their prior careers have not prepared them, thereby creating a structural misalignment between the reasons for appointment and the standards by which performance is ultimately evaluated. Understanding this misalignment is central to the scholarly contribution that the term pracademic makes possible, as it draws sustained analytical attention to the dual positioning it names.

2.2.2 Marketisation, employability and recruitment logics

The rise of the pracademic must be understood against the backdrop of changing higher education priorities. Across many systems, institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate relevance, employability outcomes and responsiveness to labour-market demands. Under these conditions, the recruitment of industry professionals into academic roles is often framed as evidence of institutional relevance and vocational credibility. Such trends are closely associated with broader neoliberal shifts in higher education that position institutions as both public-good organisations and competitive service providers (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

These pressures are especially visible in professionally oriented programmes and in private higher education, where responsiveness to student demand and labour-market expectations often forms a core part of institutional identity. Industry experience may therefore be treated as a strategic asset, particularly in programmes where professional currency is assumed to strengthen student preparation for employment (Lennox, 2026; Bucher, 2025). However, this recruitment logic is not neutral. It shapes how industry entrants are valued and what kinds of contributions are expected of them. When professional credibility becomes the primary reason for appointment, pedagogical formation and scholarly development may be treated as secondary or presumed to follow automatically from expertise.

A critical reading of the literature reveals a contradiction at the centre of this discourse. On the one hand, marketisation creates opportunities for industry professionals to enter higher education by increasing the value attached to practice-based knowledge. On the other hand, it can reduce such entrants to instruments of institutional competitiveness. In such settings, the pracademic may be welcomed as evidence of relevance but not necessarily supported as an emerging academic subject (Campbell, 2022; Pousadela et al., 2025). This matters because it frames transition less as a developmental process than as an immediate performance expectation, thereby placing pressure on entrants to demonstrate academic capability before the institution has meaningfully invested in their academic formation.

Raaper (2023) provides a useful analytical lens for understanding this institutional contradiction by demonstrating that market-oriented quality discourses in higher education reshape the conditions under which academic staff are recruited and evaluated. His analysis shows that as institutions become more dependent on quantifiable indicators of quality and student satisfaction, the appointment of professionals with strong industry credentials becomes both more attractive and more instrumentally motivated. This insight is important for the present study because it highlights that the structural conditions shaping pracademic transition are not incidental; they are actively produced by the same market logic that justifies the appointment in the first place. The pracademic is therefore not simply a response to pedagogical need but a strategic institutional resource deployed in relation to competitive market positioning.

Raaper (2023) further demonstrates that the student-as-consumer discourse, which has become pervasive in marketised higher education systems, intensifies expectations for tangible career relevance in teaching. Where students frame their educational investment in terms of return on investment, academic programmes that demonstrate direct vocational applicability are advantaged. This creates institutional pressure to appoint staff who can credibly demonstrate industry knowledge in the classroom. However, Raaper's (2023) analysis also shows that such pressures do not necessarily translate into genuine pedagogical quality; the performance of professional credibility may satisfy student expectations without actually developing the deeper pedagogical capacities that effective higher education teaching requires. For pracademics, this means that the institutional conditions which facilitate their entry also carry the risk of reducing their contribution to a performative rather than a developmental function.

2.3 Identity construction and professional transition

2.3.1 Identity as negotiation, not transfer

Identity construction is central to understanding the transition into academia. Entering higher education does not only involve taking up a new role; it requires reworking professional self-understanding in relation to different norms, expectations and evaluative criteria. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that professional identity is dynamic and relational rather than fixed, a view that is especially relevant when individuals move from one occupational field into another. Similarly, Ibarra’s (1999) concept of provisional selves explains how individuals experiment with new ways of being while retaining elements of earlier identities.

For professionals entering academia from industry, this process is often marked by liminality. They are no longer positioned fully within their former professional communities and they are not immediately recognised as academic insiders. Liminality in this context is not simply a temporary psychological state but a structural condition arising from movement across professional and

epistemic boundaries. Recent work on liminal identity development reinforces the argument that transitional roles generate uncertainty, reflexivity and experimentation, while also offering possibilities for transformation where the institutional environment supports belonging and growth (Liddle, 2025; Qian et al., 2026).

The value of this literature lies in its challenge to linear narratives of transition. Rather than presenting the move into academia as a gradual process of assimilation, it suggests that identity remains negotiated, contingent and context-dependent. This perspective is significant for the present study because industry experience is not incidental to participants' identities; it is central to how they understand their value, authority and uncertainty within academic spaces (Bucher, 2025).

The negotiated character of identity formation during professional transition has been examined across a range of occupational contexts beyond higher education and these broader studies offer productive comparative insights. Ibarra (1999) argues that career transitions require provisional experimentation with new self-conceptions, a process she describes as crafting provisional selves. This process is not simply additive; it involves testing, revising and sometimes discarding possible identities in relation to the feedback, recognition and sense of fit that social environments provide. For pracademics, the provisional nature of emerging academic selfhood is intensified by the fact that prior professional identity is not solely a background condition but an active competitor for the self-definition that academic life demands (Campbell, 2022; Mynott & Zimmatore, 2022). The practitioner does not simply add the role of academic to an existing repertoire; the two orientations must be brought into a working relationship that is coherent enough to sustain daily professional functioning.

Myers et al. (2025) developed the concept of ongoing transition to capture the non-linear and temporally extended nature of this identity work. In contrast to models that treat professional transition as a bounded passage from one stable state to another, Myers et al. (2025) demonstrate that academic identity among second-career practitioners continues to be negotiated and revised long after formal appointment. Their longitudinal analysis shows that identity renegotiation is triggered not only by entry but by subsequent encounters with research expectations, promotion criteria, collegial recognition and curriculum change. This finding substantially strengthens the case for understanding pracademic transition as an ongoing developmental process rather than a discrete induction event. It also reinforces the argument that institutional support cannot be confined to the first weeks or months of appointment but must be available across a longer developmental arc.

2.3.2 Industry credibility and academic legitimacy

A central tension in the literature is that industry credibility and academic legitimacy are not equivalent forms of authority. Industry professionals are often recruited into higher education because

they bring current practice-based expertise, professional networks and vocational relevance. However, the institutional logic of academia does not automatically recognise these attributes as sufficient markers of academic legitimacy. Yusoff (2025) clarifies this tension by showing that second-career academics enter the academic field with valuable professional capital, still, that capital does not convert seamlessly into recognition where research productivity, disciplinary gatekeeping and established academic trajectories remain dominant. Dunn et al. (2025) similarly show that the transition into higher education is often experienced not as a straightforward extension of professional competence, but as a destabilising move from recognised expertise to uncertain institutional standing.

This distinction matters because it exposes the limits of celebratory narratives that treat professional experience as self-evidently beneficial in academic work. While some institutional discourses imply that industry credibility is enough to justify an academic appointment, this position collapses two distinct questions: whether an individual is professionally accomplished and whether that accomplishment is recognised as academically authoritative (Lennox, 2026). The literature suggests that academic legitimacy is produced through historically established norms governing research, pedagogy and scholarly identity, rather than solely through expertise. As a result, feelings of inadequacy among pracademics should not be reduced to personal insecurity. More accurately, they reflect a structurally produced misalignment between prior forms of achievement and the norms through which academic worth is assessed (Campbell, 2022; Lennox, 2026; Pousadela et al., 2025).

The analytical significance of this argument is that it relocates the discussion from psychology to institutional recognition. The issue is not whether entrants possess knowledge, but whether the knowledge they possess is institutionally legible and symbolically valued within academia. This distinction also prepares the ground for the next section, because the problem is not one of self-concept; it is also one of how expertise must be reconstituted in pedagogical and institutionally legitimate form (Pousadela et al., 2025).

The distinction between industry credibility and academic legitimacy becomes especially consequential when one considers the differential institutional recognition accorded to research productivity and teaching effectiveness. In most higher education institutions, promotion and formal academic status are more closely tied to scholarship and publication than to pedagogical excellence, regardless of the quality of professional expertise a practitioner brings to the classroom (Henkel, 2005). For pracademics, this institutional hierarchy means that the very strengths for which they are appointed carry diminished symbolic value in the systems through which academic status is conferred. Dunn et al. (2025) found that second-career academics reported significant confusion around research expectations, often having been recruited with no clear communication about how publication, supervision and scholarly engagement would feature in their professional evaluation.

This lack of clarity intensifies the legitimacy problem by leaving pracademics uncertain about the terms on which their contributions will ultimately be judged.

Pickern and Costakis (2024) draw attention to the subjective experience of this structural misalignment, documenting how otherwise highly accomplished professionals describe feeling fraudulent or inadequate in academic settings where credentialling norms prioritise doctoral qualifications and publication records. Their study shows that such experiences are not simply expressions of low self-esteem but rational responses to institutional contexts in which the currency of professional expertise is genuinely devalued. Pickern and Costakis (2024) found that perceptions of professional competence among students and experiences of misrecognition among colleagues can coexist within the same pracademic, creating a split between two evaluative registers that institutions typically make no provision to bridge. The analytical implication is clear: the gap between industry credibility and academic legitimacy is not a personal problem to be resolved through individual resilience but a structural feature of institutions that have not developed adequate frameworks for recognising and developing the contribution of practice-experienced staff.

2.3.3 Liminality, belonging and the devaluation of prior capital

Studies of second-career academics repeatedly show that prior professional capital may be simultaneously acknowledged and diminished. On the one hand, industry entrants are encouraged to draw on their practical expertise in teaching and curriculum design. On the other hand, they may encounter subtle institutional messages that such experience lacks the prestige of conventional academic markers, especially in environments where scholarly identity is narrowly defined (Dunn et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). This produces a form of status ambiguity in which industry knowledge is welcomed rhetorically but not always granted equal legitimacy in practice.

Liminality helps explain this ambiguity. Individuals in transition occupy an in-between position in which older forms of competence no longer guarantee belonging and new forms of legitimacy have not yet been fully secured. In this space, uncertainty is intensified by institutional routines, disciplinary expectations and peer comparison. Liminality should not be romanticised. While it can create opportunities for reflexive growth, it can also become prolonged when institutions fail to provide clear pathways into the academic community (Ainslie, 2024). The literature therefore suggests that belonging is not simply interpersonal or emotional; it is structurally mediated through induction, collegial recognition, developmental opportunity and access to institutional knowledge.

This interpretation is more productive than framing the transition solely in terms of impostor syndrome. Although some studies refer to impostor-like feelings, a stronger critical reading understands such experiences as symptoms of contested legitimacy rather than as evidence of

individual weakness. The question is not only why entrants doubt themselves, but how institutional cultures generate or reduce such doubt by legitimising certain pathways into academic identity while marginalising others.

Breier et al. (2019) examined the position of academics without doctoral qualifications in South African and Australian universities, finding that such individuals occupy a persistently liminal institutional position in which neither their professional expertise nor their teaching contribution is sufficient to secure the unambiguous academic legitimacy that the doctorate confers. Their study is relevant to the present dissertation because it shows that liminality in academic settings is not always temporary or transitional; it may become a chronic structural condition for those whose academic credentialing does not align with dominant institutional expectations. For pracademics in the South African PHEI context, this raises important questions about whether the pathways through which transition eventually resolves into a stable academic identity are genuinely available, or whether the structural conditions of the institution perpetuate a form of in-betweenness that cannot be resolved through effort, development, or professional accomplishment alone.

Gourlay (2011) further enriches this analysis by problematising the widely invoked concept of communities of practice as a vehicle for academic socialisation. Drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) original framework, Gourlay (2011) argues that the notion of legitimate peripheral participation assumes a community that is relatively open to newcomers and willing to extend the conditions for fuller membership. In practice, academic communities may be notably more fragmented, hierarchical and exclusionary than this assumption implies. Established faculty members may have little incentive to actively include new colleagues whose professional backgrounds differ from those that dominate departmental culture. For pracademics, this means that peripheral participation may not be a transitional phase on the way to fuller belonging but a more enduring position in which the costs of boundary crossing are borne predominantly by the entrant. Belonging, in this reading, is not a natural outcome of time and competence but a negotiated social achievement that depends on institutional culture, collegial generosity and the willingness of existing communities to make room for forms of expertise they do not fully recognise.

There is, however, a tension in the liminality literature that the present study must acknowledge. Turner's (1969) original formulation treated liminality as a transitional phase with a temporal limit: it ends with reincorporation into a new social position. Much of the pracademic literature imports this temporal assumption without interrogating it. Gourlay (2011), Breier et al. (2019) and Yusoff (2025) collectively suggest that, in academic settings, liminality may not resolve as Turner envisaged. Where institutional credentialing norms remain unchanged, liminality may become structurally permanent rather than transient. This disagreement between the canonical transition literature and the

pracademic-specific literature is not simply terminological; it has direct methodological implications for the present study. An approach that assumes liminality will eventually resolve may systematically underestimate the proportion of pracademics for whom in-betweenness is a durable occupational condition rather than a developmental phase to be passed through.

2.3.4 Reconstructing professional identity

Despite these challenges, the literature does not present transition only in terms of loss or dislocation. Several studies indicate that industry entrants may, over time, develop more integrated identities that draw productively on both professional and academic experience (Myers et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025). Such reconstruction, however, is not best understood as simple assimilation into pre-existing academic norms. Rather, it involves selective adaptation, reinterpretation of prior expertise and the gradual development of confidence in teaching, scholarship and institutional participation.

This reconstruction is most sustainable when institutions recognise transition as developmental rather than self-evident. Hybrid identity becomes viable where professional knowledge is not simply extracted for market value but actively linked to pedagogical and scholarly practice. In that sense, identity integration depends not only on individual resilience but also on institutional mediation. The pracademic identity becomes sustainable when institutions create conditions in which hybrid expertise is recognised as academically meaningful rather than solely professionally useful (Pousadela et al., 2025).

Yusoff (2025) provides the most detailed recent account of how identity reconstruction actually unfolds among second-career academics, identifying the three trajectories noted earlier in this chapter and demonstrating that each carries distinct developmental implications.

2.4 Pedagogical challenges and teaching competence

Assimilators, who adopt dominant academic norms, tend to achieve faster surface integration but may experience a diminishing return on the professional capital that initially justified their appointment. Integrators, who develop a hybrid working identity, often take longer to achieve collegial acceptance but are better positioned to make the distinctive pedagogical contribution that pracademic appointments are intended to enable. Resistors, whose prior professional identities prove most resistant to academic reframing, may remain institutionally productive in teaching terms while experiencing persistent identity strain. Yusoff's (2025) typology is analytically useful for the present study because it frames identity reconstruction not as a single destination but as a range of possible resolutions, each shaped by the interaction between individual disposition and institutional conditions.

It is important to note, however, that the sustainability of identity reconstruction depends heavily on institutional culture. Moffitt and Bligh (2024) found that institutions that actively created spaces for practitioners to draw on their professional knowledge in curriculum design, research partnerships and student mentoring were more likely to produce integrated pracademic identities, because in such environments the professional self did not need to be suppressed to gain academic credibility. Conversely, institutions that offered no structural acknowledgement of practitioner expertise beyond teaching tended to produce either rapid assimilation or persistent resistance, with neither outcome fully enabling the distinctive contribution that hybrid professional identity makes possible. The reconstructed identity of the pracademic is therefore not only a personal achievement; it is an institutional product shaped by the degree to which organisations are willing to create conditions for genuine integration.

2.4.1 Beyond the pedagogical deficit narrative

One of the most persistent claims in the literature is that industry professionals entering higher education face a pedagogical deficit. At one level, this claim reflects a genuine challenge: expertise in professional practice does not automatically translate into effective teaching. But, the concept becomes problematic when it is framed as a personal lack rather than a developmental issue situated within institutional and disciplinary contexts. A more critical reading suggests that the problem lies not in professionals being inherently deficient, but in the mistaken assumption that subject expertise and pedagogical competence are interchangeable.

Shulman's (1987) concept of PCK remains particularly useful here because it distinguishes between knowing a subject and knowing how to represent, sequence, explain and scaffold it for learners. More recent scholarship reinforces this distinction by showing that teaching expertise requires deliberate engagement with curriculum design, student learning, assessment and reflective practice (Sarkar et al., 2024; Brogt, 2025). The challenge, then, is not that industry entrants lack valuable knowledge, but that higher education often underestimates the work required to transform that knowledge into pedagogical practice.

This distinction has important implications for the present study. If pedagogy is treated as secondary to industry expertise, difficulties in teaching are likely to be misread as personal failure rather than as evidence of weak developmental support.

2.4.2 The expert–novice debate and the limits of the gold-standard view

The assumption that expert practitioners are necessarily strong teachers remains one of the least examined ideas in discussions of industry-to-academia transition. At face value, the argument appears persuasive: if higher education seeks relevance and professional authenticity, then those with

extensive industry expertise should be ideally placed to educate students. Nevertheless, this "gold-standard" view rests on a conceptual slippage between possessing advanced knowledge and being able to mediate that knowledge pedagogically. Shulman's (1987) formulation of PCK is especially important because it demonstrates that teaching requires more than subject mastery; it requires the capacity to represent knowledge in ways that are intelligible to learners, responsive to misconceptions and sequenced appropriately for developmental progress.

A stronger critical reading of the expert–novice relationship shifts attention from expertise as possession to expertise as translation. What makes transition to academia difficult is not that industry professionals know too little, but that what they know has often become tacit, compressed and routinised through years of practice. Dunn et al. (2025) show that second-career academics often struggle with teaching approaches, classroom diversity and unfamiliar academic expectations, suggesting that the pedagogical challenge lies not in professional insufficiency but in the difficulty of rendering expert judgement visible to novices. The problem with the gold-standard view, then, is that it treats proximity to real-world expertise as educationally self-validating. However, this study contends that unless professional knowledge is deliberately unpacked, scaffolded and aligned to novice learning, it may impress students without necessarily enabling understanding.

This argument deepens the earlier critique of pedagogical deficit. The core issue is not whether pracademics possess expertise, but how that expertise is transformed into teachable form. Once this is recognised, pedagogical transition appears not as a secondary adjustment but as a central intellectual task of becoming academic.

Sarkar et al. (2024) provide further empirical support for the argument that the gold-standard view is educationally inadequate. In their systematic scoping review of PCK in higher education, they found consistent evidence that academic teaching quality is not predicted by the depth of disciplinary expertise alone but by the extent to which that expertise has been pedagogically transformed into forms that are accessible, motivating and developmentally appropriate for learners at different stages. Their review further shows that the most common gap in the development of new higher education teachers, including but not limited to practitioners entering from industry, is precisely this transformative capacity: the ability to move from knowing a subject to being able to teach it in ways that produce genuine learning rather than just the appearance of understanding.

Brogt (2025) extends this analysis by examining how academic development programmes can be designed to accelerate the development of PCK among newly appointed academics. His work is particularly relevant to the present study because it identifies the conditions under which the expert-to-novice transition in pedagogy is most likely to generate genuine professional learning rather than

compliance-oriented behaviour change. Brogt (2025) argues that effective academic development must engage with the tacit knowledge that practitioners bring rather than simply overlaying generic teaching techniques on existing professional dispositions. This insight aligns closely with the study's argument that induction programmes oriented toward compliance rather than toward the substantive transformation of professional knowledge into pedagogical practice are unlikely to address the core developmental challenge of pracademic transition.

2.4.3 Assessment, curriculum and academic design

The challenge of transition becomes even more apparent when attention shifts from classroom presence to curriculum and assessment design. In many professional settings, performance is judged through efficiency, accuracy, speed, compliance or client satisfaction. Higher education, by contrast, requires formal alignment between learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment tasks, feedback processes and standards of moderation. Pracademics are therefore not simply required to teach what they know; they must learn to convert disciplinary and professional knowledge into curriculum architectures that satisfy pedagogical and institutional requirements. Dunn et al. (2025) indicate that second-career academics often enter higher education without adequate guidance in these areas, particularly when expected to develop materials quickly while simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar academic routines.

This shift from practice to academic design is analytically important because it reveals a second misconception embedded in recruitment discourse: that professional experience naturally prepares individuals for curriculum work. It does not. Curriculum is not a neutral container for expertise but a selective, value-laden process through which knowledge is organised, legitimised, paced and assessed. In the private higher education context, this challenge is intensified by quality assurance requirements that subject curriculum and assessment practices to external scrutiny and accreditation processes. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) show that South African PHEIs operate under strong quality assurance pressures, requiring pracademics not only to teach effectively but also to work within tightly regulated academic systems.

The transition is therefore not simply from industry to teaching. It is also a shift from practice to curriculum governance, in which legitimacy depends on aligning knowledge with institutional standards rather than just demonstrating professional competence. This helps explain why otherwise accomplished professionals may find early academic work destabilising: they are being asked to demonstrate pedagogical and curricular expertise that cannot be assumed from industry experience alone.

The alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment tasks, commonly referred to as constructive alignment following Biggs and Tang (2011), requires a specific form of curriculum literacy that is rarely part of professional formation outside of education. Practitioners entering higher education must learn to think about their teaching in terms of intended learning outcomes, cognitive levels, feedback cycles and standards moderation, none of which have direct equivalents in most professional environments. Biggs and Tang (2011) argue that constructive alignment is not just a technical procedure but a form of pedagogical reasoning that requires sustained engagement with educational theory and ongoing reflection on learning evidence. For pracademics, the development of this reasoning represents one of the most significant pedagogical adjustments required by the transition and it is a form of development that cannot be assumed from industry experience, regardless of how extensive or expert that experience may be.

Hora and Lee (2020) provide a complementary perspective by examining how higher education institutions manage the relationship between curriculum and workplace preparation. Their analysis shows that institutions increasingly rely on classroom practitioners to embed employability outcomes within academic programmes, however, they rarely equip those practitioners with the curriculum design knowledge needed to achieve this integration rigorously. The result is often an ad hoc reliance on professional anecdote rather than the deliberate construction of learning experiences that systematically develop the competencies students will need in professional life. Hora and Lee (2020) argue that this gap represents a missed pedagogical opportunity: the very practitioners best placed to connect curriculum to workplace realities are often least prepared to do so in ways that satisfy the standards of academic rigour and curricular coherence that accreditation bodies require. This observation is directly relevant to the South African PHEI context, where the alignment between graduate outcomes and employer expectations is both an institutional priority and an ongoing quality assurance concern.

2.4.4 Digital pedagogy and contemporary teaching demands

The digitalisation of higher education further complicates the pedagogical demands facing pracademics. Digital pedagogy is frequently misrecognised as a technical matter of platform use, yet it is more accurately a question of pedagogical design under digitally mediated conditions. Dunn et al. (2025) show that second-career academics encountered difficulties with technologies such as Moodle, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, but the deeper issue is not technological unfamiliarity alone. Rather, digital environments require academics to rethink interaction, accessibility, pacing, feedback and student engagement in ways that are not reducible to professional digital competence acquired elsewhere.

This strengthens the chapter's broader argument. The transition into academia is not a simple transfer of expertise, because academic work demands forms of pedagogical judgement that must be learned within higher education rather than presumed on entry. The digital dimension intensifies that challenge by making visible the extent to which teaching competence in contemporary higher education involves design, mediation and student-centred responsiveness rather than platform familiarity alone.

The broader literature on digital pedagogy in higher education confirms that the intensification of digital expectations has created additional layers of professional adjustment for practitioners entering academia from industry sectors where digital tools are deployed for different purposes and according to logics distinct from those governing academic environments. The critical challenge is not technological illiteracy but epistemological reorientation: learning to think about digital tools as pedagogical instruments chosen and deployed in relation to learning goals rather than as operational platforms valued primarily for efficiency and speed. This reorientation requires explicit attention in academic development programmes and its absence from generic induction processes represents a meaningful gap in the support available to pracademics navigating the digital dimensions of their new professional context. Dunn et al. (2025) confirm this pattern, showing that second-career academics reported particular difficulty with learning management systems (LMS) and the epistemological assumptions embedded in academic digital environments.

2.5 Institutional factors and support systems

2.5.1 Induction and onboarding

Institutional support is a decisive factor in shaping the transition experience. Induction and onboarding are often the first formal mechanisms through which new academics encounter institutional expectations. However, the literature suggests that such processes are frequently narrow, administrative and compliance-oriented, focusing on procedures rather than the intellectual, pedagogical and cultural dimensions of academic work (McCall et al., 2021). It would be reductive, however, to present all induction as inherently inadequate. The literature does identify instances of effective practice. Prebble et al. (2004) reviewed the effectiveness of academic development programmes across institutional types, identifying that the most effective induction approaches are sustained over a meaningful developmental period, are contextually specific to the institution's disciplinary and regulatory environment and combine formal learning with structured collegial support. Where these conditions are met, induction can function as genuine developmental scaffolding rather than ceremonial compliance. The critical issue, therefore, is not whether structured induction can be effective but whether the specific conditions that make it effective are institutionally affordable and organisationally prioritised. This distinction is important for the present study because it means

that inadequate induction at this PHEI should not be read as inevitable; it should be read as an institutional choice shaped by resource constraints and competing logics.

A stronger approach to induction would recognise that transition involves more than operational adjustment. It requires orientation to pedagogical norms, assessment expectations, scholarly practices, collegial relationships and institutional culture. Without this broader induction, newcomers are often left to infer expectations informally, which can reproduce uncertainty and reinforce exclusion. Weak onboarding, therefore, does not only fail to support transition; it shapes the conditions under which legitimacy must be negotiated.

McCall et al. (2021) examined induction practices across a range of professionally oriented higher education institutions. They found that the most commonly reported inadequacy was the failure to provide sustained, contextually specific pedagogical guidance rather than generic administrative orientation. Their participants described induction processes that efficiently communicated procedural requirements, such as assessment submission systems, attendance policies and quality assurance obligations, while providing almost no structured support for the more demanding intellectual and relational work of becoming an academic teacher. This finding is significant because it suggests that institutional induction is typically designed around compliance rather than around developmental need and that the gap between what institutions provide and what newly appointed pracademics require is structural rather than accidental. Closing this gap requires not only improved programme content but a fundamental reconceptualisation of what induction is for.

Hora and Lee (2020) add an important comparative dimension to this analysis by showing that the form and quality of academic induction vary considerably across institutional types, with teaching-focused institutions, including private providers, often offering less elaborate academic development infrastructure than their research-intensive counterparts. In the South African context, where private higher education institutions operate under particular resource and staffing constraints, this variation is likely to be especially pronounced. The implication for the present study is that the induction experiences reported by participants cannot be assessed against an ideal standard derived from well-resourced research universities; they must be understood in relation to the specific institutional context in which they occurred and the constraints under which that context operates.

2.5.2 Mentoring and professional development

Mentoring is frequently proposed as a key support mechanism for new academics, but its effectiveness depends on quality, consistency and contextual fit. The literature suggests that mentoring is most useful when it is relational, ongoing and responsive to the specific needs of transitioning professionals (Atenas et al., 2023). Generic or symbolic mentoring arrangements may

offer reassurance, but they do not necessarily help newcomers interpret institutional norms, refine pedagogy, or build academic confidence.

Professional development plays a similarly important role. Where institutions provide sustained opportunities for pedagogical learning, curriculum design support and reflective engagement, the burden of transition is less likely to fall entirely on the individual. Conversely, when support is episodic or optional, it may unintentionally signal that adaptation is a private responsibility (Fernandes et al., 2023; Atenas et al., 2023). A critical reading of the literature therefore suggests that the presence of support structures is not enough; their form, accessibility and legitimacy within the institution matter greatly.

The quality of mentoring available to newly appointed academics has been identified as one of the most reliable predictors of successful transition in the literature on academic socialisation (Trede et al., 2012). Effective mentoring in academic settings is characterised by regularity, reciprocity, disciplinary specificity and a focus on the substantive intellectual and pedagogical challenges of the role rather than on administrative compliance. Trede et al. (2012) argue that informal mentoring relationships, while often more valued by new academics than formal arrangements, are, by definition, unequally distributed and depend on the goodwill and availability of individual colleagues. Where institutions rely on informal mentoring as the primary mechanism for supporting transition, the quality of support experienced by new staff members becomes a function of departmental culture, collegial personality and social capital rather than of systematic institutional commitment.

Dunn et al. (2025) found that second-career academics reported mentoring as one of the most frequently cited support gaps in their transition experience. Many described being assigned formal mentors who were either too busy to maintain regular contact, insufficiently familiar with the specific challenges of transitioning from industry, or primarily focused on helping new colleagues navigate administrative systems rather than on developing their teaching or scholarly practice. This finding points to a substantive distinction between the presence of a mentoring structure and the availability of mentoring that genuinely addresses the developmental needs of the mentee. For the South African PHEI context, where structural mentoring arrangements may be shaped by resource constraints and staffing configurations that differ considerably from those of larger public universities, this distinction carries particular weight.

2.5.3 Communities of practice, collegiality and exclusion

Communities of practice are often invoked in higher education literature as spaces through which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation. Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework remains influential in explaining how professional learning occurs through participation in social

practice. However, later scholarship has cautioned against treating communities of practice as inherently inclusive or harmonious. Gourlay (2011), for example, challenges romanticised assumptions that academic communities naturally support newcomers, showing instead that such communities may be fragmented, exclusionary and shaped by power.

This critique is especially relevant to transitioning professionals. While collegial networks can support belonging and practical learning, they can also reproduce hierarchies concerning what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is recognised as a credible academic. Entry into an academic community is therefore not simply a matter of time served. Access, recognition, institutional norms and disciplinary cultures mediate it. The implication is that collegiality should not be assumed; it must be analysed in relation to inclusion, power and the social valuation of different forms of expertise.

Wenger (1998) himself acknowledged that communities of practice are not uniformly open or inclusive, noting that access to participation is always mediated by the power relations and reification processes that structure communal life. In academic settings, the reification of scholarly norms through publication expectations, credential requirements and disciplinary conventions can produce forms of exclusion that are all the more powerful for being implicit and naturalised. Pracademics who lack the academic credential structure of their colleagues may find that even well-intentioned communities of practice are shaped by assumptions about appropriate academic behaviour, scholarly identity and legitimate knowledge that their professional backgrounds have not equipped them to navigate (Pousadela et al., 2025; Lennox, 2026). The critical insight that communities of practice may reproduce exclusion rather than enable inclusion is therefore especially important in contexts where the diversity of academic staff backgrounds is increasing.

The critical dimension of community exclusion in academic settings has been well documented in the scholarship on academic socialisation. Gourlay (2011) challenges assumptions that academic communities naturally support newcomers, showing instead that such communities may be fragmented, exclusionary and shaped by power relations that systematically marginalise those whose professional backgrounds differ from those that dominate departmental culture. This critique is especially important in the South African higher education context, where the development of inclusive communities of practice requires deliberate institutional intervention rather than the assumption that collegial generosity will emerge organically from shared professional settings. For pracademics whose knowledge worlds have been shaped by industry rather than by the institution, access to the informal knowledge networks through which curriculum decisions, collegial recognition and professional belonging are organised may remain structurally limited unless institutions create specific mechanisms to enable it (Campbell, 2022; Lennox, 2026). The implication is that belonging

and professional socialisation for pracademics are institutionally produced outcomes rather than natural consequences of appointment.

2.5.4 Institutional culture and the conditions of belonging

Institutional culture shapes transition in profound ways. It influences workload expectations, the value attached to teaching versus research, the visibility of support and the meanings attached to professionalism and scholarship. In institutions where academic identity is narrowly defined, industry entrants may feel pressure to suppress aspects of their prior professional identities to gain legitimacy. In more flexible environments, hybrid expertise may be recognised as a resource for pedagogy, curriculum innovation and student engagement (Allen et al., 2024)

The literature suggests that culture matters because it establishes the terms on which belonging is possible. Transition is eased where institutions acknowledge the distinctiveness of practice-based entrants, provide developmental pathways and value multiple forms of contribution. It is constrained when expectations are implicit, support is weak and legitimacy is tied solely to traditional academic trajectories (Wilson et al., 2026). Institutional culture is therefore not background context; it is an active condition shaping how transition is interpreted and lived.

Marques et al. (2024) argue that academic work has become increasingly marked by intensified managerial expectations, role diversification and the need to reconcile traditional scholarly values with external demands for responsiveness, efficiency and relevance. This characterisation resonates strongly with the conditions that pracademics in the present study described, where institutional culture communicated competing expectations about professional relevance and academic compliance that were not always reconcilable within the constraints of a full teaching load. The cultural dimension of transition is therefore not simply about whether colleagues are welcoming or whether departments are collegial; it is about whether the institutional culture communicates a coherent and enabling understanding of what academic work is for and how different forms of contribution are valued (Wilson et al., 2026). In institutions where this cultural coherence is absent, pracademics must construct their own working understanding of academic purpose from within an environment that provides contradictory signals, a task that is both intellectually demanding and motivationally costly.

2.6 The private higher education context

The private higher education context sharpens many of the tensions already identified in the literature by combining market responsiveness with formal regulatory accountability. South African PHEIs are often positioned as agile, professionally oriented and responsive to student demand, which helps explain why they may recruit industry professionals whose expertise appears immediately relevant to

employability and applied learning. However, Matadi and Uleanya (2022) demonstrate that intense quality assurance requirements and accreditation demands also shape private higher education in South Africa. This means that the pracademic in a PHEI is not simply a professionally credible lecturer, but a staff member whose work must be legible within tightly governed academic systems.

This context complicates simplistic claims that PHEIs offer a natural home for pracademics. On the one hand, private institutions may appear more open to practice-based knowledge because of their emphasis on relevance, flexibility and student responsiveness. On the other hand, the very market logics that make industry experience attractive may also narrow the terms on which that experience is valued. If pracademics are recruited primarily to enhance institutional competitiveness, their knowledge risks being instrumentalised rather than developed. In such circumstances, support for pedagogical growth, research development and academic identity formation may become secondary to delivery, responsiveness and visible outcomes.

A more critical reading, therefore, suggests that the PHEI should not be treated solely as the backdrop to transition, but as an active structuring condition of it. The pracademic enters a space where professional credibility may be highly prized at the point of recruitment, where academic legitimacy must still be established through pedagogical competence, curriculum compliance, documentation and institutional fit. This makes the private higher education context especially important for the present study, as it reveals that the transition is not only a question of identity or teaching adaptation in the abstract. It is also a question of how institutional form shapes what kinds of expertise can be recognised, supported and sustained as legitimate academic contribution.

2.7 International comparative perspectives

International research provides valuable conceptual insight into the transition from industry to academia. Studies from the United Kingdom, Australia and other contexts identify recurring themes such as liminality, identity reconstruction, pedagogical adaptation and institutional support (Breier et al., 2019; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024; Myers et al., 2025). These studies are useful because they show that the challenges experienced by transitioning professionals are not isolated or idiosyncratic. Across contexts, entrants frequently encounter uncertainty about legitimacy, difficulty translating expertise into pedagogy and uneven institutional support.

However, the transferability of these findings requires caution. Concepts such as liminality, hybridity and pedagogical translation may travel productively across settings, but policy assumptions and institutional conditions do not. Many international studies are located in public universities with different histories, funding structures, staffing models and support systems from those that

characterise South African PHEIs. Direct comparison is, therefore, limited unless contextual differences are explicitly considered.

A critical use of comparative literature should therefore be selective rather than imitative. International studies help clarify conceptual lenses and recurring patterns, but they cannot substitute for context-sensitive inquiry. Their value lies in sensitising the present study to important themes, not in providing a model that can be imported uncritically into the South African private higher education context.

Moffitt and Bligh (2024) contribute a particularly valuable comparative perspective from the United Kingdom context, demonstrating that second-career academics in business and management education there face a structurally similar set of challenges to those documented in the present study, including the devaluation of professional expertise in promotion criteria, the absence of structured pedagogical development tailored to practitioners and the tension between industry-oriented self-concept and research-oriented institutional evaluation. Their analysis is useful for the present study not because it provides a template that can be applied to the South African context but because it confirms that the structural contradictions experienced by pracademics are not idiosyncratic to the specific institution examined here; they reflect wider patterns in how higher education institutions have responded to the recruitment of industry professionals without fully rethinking the institutional conditions that define and evaluate academic contribution.

The comparative literature provides further insight into how qualification frameworks shape the institutional legibility of professional expertise. Esmond and Wood (2017), in their study of occupationally experienced teachers entering further education in England, show that practitioners with substantial professional backgrounds encounter institutional resistance embedded in qualification hierarchies, whereby the absence of formal academic credentials constrains recognition even where occupational competence is not in question. Their analysis demonstrates that market-driven institutional environments tend to reproduce morphostasis rather than enabling fuller professional integration, a dynamic that is directly relevant to the PHEI context where the absence of doctoral credentials among many practitioner-academics may systematically constrain the recognition accorded to their professional contributions. Katartzi et al. (2020) extend this analysis through the concept of "transitional frictions," showing that the epistemic incompatibilities between vocational or practice-based knowledge and academic institutional norms persist despite ongoing qualification reform. While the regulatory contexts differ from that of South Africa, the underlying dynamic that qualification frameworks determine how professional expertise is institutionally read and valued is a structural feature common to higher education environments shaped by credentialling hierarchies.

2.8 Research gaps and methodological considerations

Several important gaps emerge from the reviewed literature. The first is geographic and contextual. While research on second-career academics and pracademics is growing, relatively little attention has been given to South African higher education and even less to private higher education institutions within South Africa. This is a significant omission because institutional type and national context shape the pressures, opportunities and meanings associated with transition.

The second gap concerns intersectionality. Much of the literature discusses transition in generalised terms, with insufficient attention to how race, gender, class, age and prior educational trajectory may mediate experiences of legitimacy and belonging. This omission is especially important in South Africa, where historical inequalities and debates over transformation continue to shape academic life. A generic account of transition may therefore conceal substantial differences in how academic legitimacy is recognised or withheld.

The third gap concerns the relationship between policy discourse and lived institutional experience. Much of the literature acknowledges employability, relevance, professional alignment and quality assurance, however, fewer studies examine how these institutional imperatives are actually experienced by those entering academia from industry. The result is an underdeveloped account of how organisational structures, market logics and cultural norms interact with personal transition.

These gaps have methodological implications. Because the present study seeks to understand how industry professionals experience and interpret transition within a specific institutional context, a qualitative and interpretive approach is appropriate. Braun and Clarke's (2019) RTA offers a useful framework because it allows for the analysis of meaning, contradiction and complexity rather than reducing transition to predefined variables. Such an approach is well-suited to investigating how pracademics make sense of identity, pedagogy, legitimacy and institutional support within a South African PHEI.

2.9 South African higher education context

2.9.1 Transformation, history and professional transition

Any analysis of academic transition in South Africa must be located within the broader history of higher education transformation. South African universities and colleges continue to operate within the afterlives of colonialism, apartheid and uneven access to opportunity. As a result, academic identity is shaped not only by disciplinary expectations and institutional norms, but also by longstanding struggles over inclusion, representation and the purposes of higher education. Transition into academia therefore, occurs within a sector where legitimacy is historically layered and politically charged.

This context complicates simplistic understandings of professional entry into academic work. Industry professionals do not enter a neutral institutional space; they enter one shaped by transformation imperatives, equity agendas and ongoing debates about whose knowledge counts. For some entrants, professional expertise may support inclusion by widening the social and experiential base of academia. For others, the pathway into academic legitimacy may remain uneven, especially where institutional norms continue to privilege traditional academic trajectories and historically dominant forms of authority.

Hlatshwayo and Moloi (2024) argue that transformation in South African higher education cannot be reduced to demographic change in staff and student profiles, significant as such change is. Genuine transformation requires the ongoing questioning of epistemic hierarchies, pedagogical traditions and institutional cultures shaped by historical exclusion and that continue to influence which knowledge is valued and whose presence is legitimised within academic spaces. For pracademics in the South African context, this means that the transition into academia occurs within an institution itself engaged in contested processes of cultural and epistemic change. The challenge of establishing professional legitimacy is therefore not only personal and occupational but also historical and political, shaped by the broader struggles over recognition and authority that characterise post-apartheid higher education.

Hlatshwayo (2024) further shows that the expansion of private higher education in South Africa has created new institutional actors that operate outside the traditional transformation frameworks of the public university system, nonetheless subject to and implicated in the broader social imperatives of equity, access and representivity. Private higher education institutions are not exempt from transformation obligations; they are required to demonstrate responsiveness to equity imperatives while also operating within the financial and competitive pressures that define the private sector. For pracademics within PHEIs, this means that their transition occurs in an institutional space that is simultaneously more commercially oriented than the public university and equally subject to the social expectations that South African higher education carries.

The challenge of transformation in South African higher education is further complicated by rapid structural change in the sector's learning and teaching landscape. Naude and Sutherland (2024) argue that South African higher education is facing a set of scenario-driven futures in which market demands, digital disruption and access imperatives are simultaneously reshaping how teaching and learning are conceptualised and delivered. Their analysis is particularly relevant to private higher education, which faces intense pressure to align its pedagogical models with both vocational relevance and regulatory expectations. For pracademics entering this environment, the instability of the sector's pedagogical landscape is not solely a backdrop; it is an active feature of the transition, requiring constant adaptation to shifting institutional norms and evolving expectations of what

constitutes effective academic practice. This transformation imperative intensifies the already complex identity and pedagogical challenges that pracademic transition entails.

2.9.2 Ubuntu, epistemic justice and private higher education

An Ubuntu-informed reading of South African higher education introduces a necessary ethical and epistemic challenge to narrowly instrumental accounts of the pracademic. Radebe (2025) argues that Ubuntu should not be treated as a symbolic cultural add-on, but as a grounding principle for academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability. On this view, the purpose of higher education cannot be reduced to market efficiency, reputational competition or the production of employable graduates alone. Rather, universities are accountable to the communities they serve and to the broader project of socially responsive knowledge production. This matters for the present study because it reorients the value of the pracademic away from a narrow employability discourse and toward the question of whether professional knowledge is mobilised in ways that advance human development, communal relevance and epistemic inclusion.

This perspective is especially important in private higher education, where the language of responsiveness can easily collapse into the language of customer satisfaction and institutional branding. Ubuntu does not reject professional relevance; rather, it demands that relevance be judged against wider ethical and social purposes (Khohliso et al., 2025). In that sense, the South African pracademic occupies an ambivalent position. Such academics may serve as conduits for socially grounded and practice-based knowledge, nevertheless, they may also be absorbed into neoliberal institutional logics that value practice only insofar as it enhances competitiveness. A stronger critical argument, then, is that the significance of the pracademic in South African PHEIs lies not simply in bridging academia and industry, but in whether that bridge is oriented toward public good, epistemic justice and transformation rather than market utility alone.

Khohliso et al. (2025) extend the application of Ubuntu to higher education pedagogy by demonstrating how communal and relational values can be embedded in teaching practice in ways that affirm learner identities, build collective intellectual capacity and challenge the individualism that characterises much of the Western pedagogical tradition. Their systematic review identifies Ubuntu-informed pedagogies as particularly effective in South African multilingual classroom contexts where students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds are recognised as resources rather than deficits. While their focus is primarily on pedagogical practice rather than staff development, the principles they identify have direct implications for how institutions should receive, support and develop pracademics (Waghid, 2022). An Ubuntu orientation toward staff development would foreground mutual recognition, shared responsibility for new colleagues' success and the

understanding that institutional well-being is constitutively linked to the well-being of individual members.

Radebe (2025) positions Ubuntu not simply as a pedagogical resource but as a normative framework for evaluating institutional accountability in higher education. He argues that Ubuntu obligations extend beyond interpersonal care to the structural conditions that enable members of the academic community to thrive. Applied to pracademic transition, this means that institutional responsibility cannot be discharged simply by providing formal induction; it requires ongoing attention to whether the conditions of academic work, including workload distribution, collegial recognition and developmental opportunity, are genuinely supportive of the flourishing of all members of the academic community (Waghid et al., 2023). The Ubuntu perspective, therefore, gives institutional critique a moral dimension that purely structural analysis does not capture and it grounds the recommendations that emerge from this study in an ethical vocabulary specifically relevant to the South African higher education context.

2.9.3 Racialised legitimacy and academic recognition

The question of academic legitimacy in South Africa cannot be separated from race, history and institutional recognition. Zulu's (2022) work on the academic identities of Black women professors is particularly important here because it shows that academic identity is not formed on neutral terrain; it is shaped within institutions whose histories continue to structure visibility, belonging and the recognition of authority. This has direct implications for the present study. If academic legitimacy is already unequally distributed within South African higher education, then the transition of industry professionals into academia cannot be analysed simply as a matter of occupational adjustment. It must also be understood in relation to broader hierarchies that influence whose knowledge is recognised as authoritative and whose presence must still be negotiated.

This point deepens the earlier discussion of credibility and legitimacy. Professional experience does not enter academic space under uniform conditions, because institutional histories and social power mediate the value assigned to that experience. In practice, this means that the same professional capital may not carry the same institutional weight for all entrants.

Zulu (2022) demonstrates, through her study of Black women professors in South African universities, that the processes by which academic authority is recognised and conferred are not racially neutral. Her participants described navigating institutional environments in which their scholarly credentials were more frequently questioned, their intellectual contributions were more readily attributed to identity position than to academic merit and their authority was more persistently challenged than that of their white male counterparts. While the present study does not focus

specifically on the experiences of Black academics, Zulu's (2022) analysis is directly relevant to understanding the structural conditions within which all pracademics who enter higher education through non-traditional pathways must negotiate legitimacy. If academic authority is already unevenly distributed along racial, gendered and credential-based lines, then the transition of industry professionals into academic roles occurs within an institution that is not a level field. The specific form that legitimacy struggle takes will vary across individuals, but the structural conditions that shape that struggle must be part of any contextually honest account of pracademic transition in South Africa.

Hlatshwayo (2024) extends this analysis by arguing that the broader discourse of transformation in South African higher education creates particular pressures on institutions to diversify their academic workforce while simultaneously maintaining quality assurance standards that were themselves shaped by historically exclusive epistemic traditions. The tension between these imperatives is not easily resolved and for pracademics, particularly those from historically underrepresented backgrounds, it may produce specific forms of institutional ambivalence: an organisation that publicly values their presence while structurally failing to provide the conditions for their contribution to be fully realised. Acknowledging this complexity is not a counsel of despair; it is a necessary condition for designing support that is genuinely adequate to the context in which it must operate. It should be noted that the present study was not designed to compare experiences across race, gender, age, class or language groups; the sample was not stratified for this purpose and no participant was asked to reflect explicitly on intersectional dynamics. The structural conditions discussed above are therefore drawn from the literature and from participants' general accounts of legitimacy struggle rather than from a dedicated intersectional analysis of the data. Section 8.7.4 identifies this as a distinct priority for future research.

2.9.4 Regulation, quality assurance and academic work

The South African higher education environment is also shaped by a strong regulatory architecture that directly affects the transition into academic work. Quality assurance is not only an institutional background condition; it structures what counts as acceptable curriculum, assessment, teaching practice and academic accountability. In private higher education, these pressures are often especially visible because accreditation and institutional credibility are closely tied to regulatory compliance. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) show that quality assurance requirements meaningfully shape the operation of PHEIs, while the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2024b) further underscores the extent to which academic work is embedded in formal systems of standardisation, review and accountability.

For pracademics, this means that transition involves not only adapting to teaching and scholarship but also learning how to work within a highly codified regulatory environment. A practitioner may enter

higher education with considerable disciplinary expertise yet still need to acquire the documentary, procedural and pedagogical literacies through which quality is institutionally demonstrated. Regulation, therefore, does not simply constrain academic work; it shapes the forms of evidence through which academic legitimacy is recognised. In the South African PHEI context, the transition to academia is thus simultaneously pedagogical, institutional and regulatory. Recognising this helps explain why adaptation may feel burdensome even for highly capable entrants: the challenge is not only to perform academic work, but to perform it in ways that satisfy both educational and regulatory expectations.

The CHE (2024b) has further specified the relationship between quality standards and institutional capacity development, with direct implications for how institutions design and resource academic staff development. The Council's framework positions staff development not simply as an institutional goodwill gesture but as a quality assurance requirement that institutions must be able to demonstrate is systematically implemented and evaluated. This regulatory framing is analytically important for the present study because it means that the inadequacies in staff development provision that participants described are not simply suboptimal institutional choices; they potentially represent non-compliance with the regulatory expectations to which PHEIs are subject. Understanding this regulatory dimension helps explain both why private higher education institutions maintain formal induction programmes and why those programmes may be designed primarily to satisfy the demonstrability requirement of quality review rather than the developmental needs of the staff who participate in them.

2.10 Synthesis of the Literature and Conceptual Alignment

2.10.1 Experiences of transition and identity negotiation

The first research question concerns how industry professionals experience the transition into academic roles. The literature reviewed throughout this chapter demonstrates that such a transition is rarely experienced as a straightforward occupational shift. It is characterised by identity negotiation, liminality, uncertainty and the reworking of professional legitimacy within unfamiliar institutional environments (Gourlay, 2011; Myers et al., 2025). Existing scholarship consistently challenges the assumption that professional expertise transfers seamlessly into academic competence. Instead, the literature suggests that practitioners entering academia frequently encounter tensions between prior professional identities and the symbolic, pedagogical and institutional expectations associated with academic work (Cowley, 2023; Yusoff, 2025).

The literature further indicates that transition often involves disruption to established forms of authority and self-understanding. Industry professionals may enter higher education with strong

professional capital and occupational confidence, but may still experience uncertainty regarding belonging, legitimacy and competence within academic environments (Grassley et al., 2020; Pickern & Costakis, 2024). These tensions are reflected in discussions of hybridity, liminality and dual professional identity, all of which point towards transition as an ongoing and negotiated process rather than a bounded stage of adjustment (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Breier et al., 2019). The literature therefore, supports the interpretive orientation of the present study by demonstrating that pracademic transition is shaped not only by technical role adaptation but also by identity reconstruction and institutional recognition (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012).

2.10.2 Institutional structures and support in pracademic transition

The second research question focuses on the institutional structures and support systems shaping the transition into academic work. Across the literature, considerable attention is given to the role of induction, mentoring, professional development, collegial inclusion and organisational culture in facilitating or constraining transition experiences (Dunn et al., 2025; Ndlovu et al., 2024). Existing studies suggest that institutional support is central to whether transition is experienced as developmental and enabling or fragmented and isolating (Yusoff, 2025).

However, the literature also demonstrates that support structures cannot be understood solely in procedural or administrative terms. Formal induction alone does not necessarily produce meaningful institutional incorporation. Rather, the effectiveness of support depends on whether it is contextually credible, relationally sustained and responsive to the specific pedagogical and identity-related challenges faced by industry entrants (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Several studies further suggest that institutions often recruit practitioners for their professional expertise while simultaneously underestimating the pedagogical, emotional and scholarly demands associated with academic transition (McCall et al., 2021; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). This creates conditions in which practitioners are expected to perform academic competence before sufficient developmental support has been established.

The literature, therefore, positions institutional structures not as neutral organisational mechanisms but as active conditions that shape experiences of legitimacy, belonging and pedagogical development (Henkel, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This insight is particularly significant for the present study because it directs analytical attention towards the relationship between institutional culture, organisational support and participants' lived experiences of transition.

2.10.3 Transition as relational and contextually mediated

The third research question examines the relationship between participants' experiences and the broader institutional and contextual conditions within which those experiences occur. The literature strongly suggests that transition cannot be adequately understood at the level of the individual alone. Identity uncertainty, pedagogical difficulty, legitimacy struggles and experiences of belonging are mediated by institutional cultures, organisational expectations, workload conditions and access to developmental opportunities (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Dunn et al., 2025).

The literature also indicates that broader historical, structural and contextual realities shape transition. Questions of market responsiveness, employability, quality assurance, transformation and institutional diversification influence both the recruitment of industry professionals and the conditions under which they experience academic work (Raaper, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). In the South African context, particularly, transition occurs within institutions shaped by wider debates concerning equity, epistemic justice, institutional transformation and the changing role of higher education (Hlatshwayo, 2024; Radebe, 2025).

The literature, therefore, reinforces the need for an analytic approach capable of reading individual experience in relation to broader institutional and contextual forces. This supports the study's interpretivist and theoretically integrated orientation by recognising that pracademic transition emerges from the interaction of biography, pedagogy, organisation and context rather than from individual adjustment alone (Schwandt, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.10.4 Emergent conceptual themes from the literature

Five interrelated conceptual themes emerge across the literature reviewed in this chapter.

The first theme is hybridity, reflected in the concept of the pracademic and in the continuing interplay between practice-based and academic forms of expertise (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Yusoff, 2025). The literature suggests that practitioners entering academia do not simply abandon prior professional identities but instead continue to negotiate dual forms of professional belonging and legitimacy.

The second theme is liminality, which captures the in-between condition experienced by individuals moving between industry and academic worlds (Gourlay, 2011; Breier et al., 2019). The literature demonstrates that this condition is not always temporary or linear. Instead, transition may involve ongoing negotiation, uncertainty and partial incorporation into academic culture.

The third theme is pedagogical translation. Existing scholarship repeatedly highlights that professional expertise alone is insufficient for effective higher education teaching (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). Practitioners entering academia must learn to transform tacit, disciplinary and practice-based knowledge into forms accessible to learners through curriculum design, assessment and pedagogical engagement (Brogt, 2025).

The fourth theme is institutional mediation, which highlights the role of organisational culture, induction practices, mentoring structures and collegial relationships in shaping transition experiences (Henkel, 2005; Wenger, 1998). The literature demonstrates that institutional conditions pointedly influence whether practitioners experience transition as developmental, isolating or fragmented.

The fifth theme is contextual specificity. The literature suggests that the meanings, pressures and expectations associated with transition differ across institutional and national contexts (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). This is especially important within South African private higher education, where market responsiveness, transformation imperatives and regulatory demands shape both institutional practice and academic work in distinctive ways.

These themes suggest that pracademic transition is best understood as a multidimensional and institutionally mediated phenomenon rather than a simple occupational adjustment. The literature therefore supports an interpretive and theoretically integrated approach capable of examining the interaction between identity, pedagogy, institutional context and professional history.

2.10.5 Implications for the present study

The themes emerging from the literature carry important conceptual and methodological implications for the present study. The theme of hybridity directs attention towards the dual positioning of industry professionals entering academia. It suggests that pracademic identity should not be treated as a transitional residue but as an enduring and analytically significant dimension of academic work (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). This requires research instruments and interpretive frameworks capable of exploring how participants negotiate overlapping forms of expertise, legitimacy and belonging.

The theme of liminality suggests that transition should be understood as an extended, potentially unresolved process rather than a temporary stage of adjustment (Breier et al., 2019; Yusoff, 2025). This reinforces the value of qualitative inquiry capable of capturing uncertainty, identity negotiation and the evolving meanings participants attach to their experiences over time.

The theme of pedagogical translation highlights the importance of examining not only what participants teach but also how they learn to teach. It also foregrounds the relationship between professional expertise, pedagogical development and institutional support, thereby reinforcing the relevance of PCK as a central theoretical lens for the study (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024).

The theme of institutional mediation further supports the need to examine transition relationally and contextually rather than solely at the level of the individual (Wenger, 1998; Henkel, 2005). Participants' experiences must therefore be interpreted in relation to organisational culture, support structures, workload expectations and broader institutional conditions.

Finally, the theme of contextual specificity underscores the importance of grounding the study in the South African PHEI environment rather than uncritically relying on international assumptions about academic transition (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022; Hlatshwayo, 2024). The study therefore responds directly to the need for contextually grounded understanding of pracademic transition within institutional settings shaped by market responsiveness, transformation imperatives and regulatory pressures.

These themes provide both a conceptual synthesis of the literature and a rationale for the interpretivist, qualitative and theoretically integrated design adopted in the present study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

2.10.6 Synthesis of Gaps and Conceptual Implications

The literature reveals an important analytical imbalance. Existing studies have shown that the transition into academia involves identity disruption, pedagogical adaptation and uneven institutional support (McCall et al., 2021; Dunn et al., 2025; Yusoff, 2025), however, these dimensions are frequently examined in isolation or within institutional contexts that differ substantially from those of South African private higher education. What remains underdeveloped is an account of how these processes intersect under conditions simultaneously shaped by market responsiveness, transformation imperatives and regulatory accountability (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). This analytical blind spot becomes particularly visible once the South African PHEI context is taken seriously. Within such environments, pracademics are not merely adjusting to a new profession; they are negotiating pedagogical legitimacy, institutional belonging and a hybrid professional identity within institutions required to satisfy accreditation demands, respond to market pressures and operate within broader transformation agendas.

This gap carries important implications for the present study and provides a conceptual bridge into Chapter 3. The literature suggests that generic models of academic transition are insufficient because they do not adequately explain how institutional form, national context and organisational expectations shape the meaning of becoming academic (Schlossberg, 2011; Trede et al., 2012). The value of the present research therefore, lies not solely in documenting transition experiences, but in examining how the specific institutional conditions of South African private higher education mediate identity, pedagogy and belonging. The chapter has demonstrated that pracademic transition is best understood as a situated and institutionally mediated process in which professional expertise is recognised, translated, or, at times, misrecognised, shaped by the interaction between organisational norms, pedagogical expectations and sectoral pressures (Wenger, 1998; Henkel, 2005).

This synthesis also points towards a broader methodological implication. Understanding pracademic transition within South African private higher education requires not only greater empirical attention, but also a more integrated analytical lens capable of holding the personal, pedagogical and institutional dimensions of transition in view simultaneously. The present study responds to this need through its integrated theoretical framework and interpretivist case study design, both of which enable the contextual depth and interpretive richness required to engage the complexity of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The gaps identified in the literature are therefore not only deficiencies to be catalogued; they are generative of the specific intellectual contribution this dissertation seeks to make. By attending to what has been fragmented, under-theorised or insufficiently contextualised within existing scholarship, the study positions itself to contribute to precisely those areas where deeper empirical and conceptual understanding remains necessary.

2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature relevant to the transition of industry professionals into academic roles, with particular attention to the South African private higher education context. The review has shown that transition is not a simple transfer of expertise from one field to another. Rather, it is a complex process of identity reconstruction, pedagogical adaptation, institutional negotiation and contextual positioning. The concept of the pracademic has been argued to be especially useful because it captures the hybrid and unsettled nature of this transition more effectively than linear notions of second-career movement.

The chapter has also demonstrated that many of the difficulties associated with transition are inadequately explained when framed as an individual deficit. Institutional structures, recognition cultures and broader sectoral pressures deeply mediate the challenges of belonging, pedagogy and legitimacy. This is particularly true in South African private higher education, where market

responsiveness, regulatory accountability and transformation imperatives create a distinctive environment for academic transition.

Finally, the literature review has identified significant gaps in existing scholarship, especially the limited attention to South African PHEIs, the under-theorisation of intersectional legitimacy and the insufficient integration of identity, pedagogy and institutional context within existing studies. These gaps justify the present research and provide the conceptual basis for the methodological choices discussed in the next chapter. The study that follows is therefore positioned to contribute a contextually grounded understanding of how industry professionals experience and make sense of becoming academics within a South African private higher education institution.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter develops the theoretical framework that underpins the study of pracademic transitions in South African private higher education institutions. It proceeds from the premise that movement from industry into academia is not a simple occupational shift, but a complex process involving transition, identity reconstruction, pedagogical development and ethical and relational positioning within a specific institutional context. The chapter, therefore, establishes the conceptual architecture through which the experiences of second-career academics can be interpreted in relation to the demands, cultures and structures of South African private higher education.

The central argument advanced here is that no single theory can adequately explain the layered nature of pracademic transition. The move from industry into academia entails more than adjustment to a new workplace. It includes the renegotiation of expertise, the reconstruction of professional identity, the translation of industry knowledge into pedagogical practice and the search for recognition and belonging within an academic community. In South African private higher education institutions, these processes are further shaped by quality assurance requirements, regulatory oversight, market pressures and broader questions of inclusion, transformation and educational relevance (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022). A multidimensional theoretical framework is therefore necessary if the study is to account for both the personal and structural dimensions of pracademic transition.

To address this complexity, the chapter draws on four complementary lenses: Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory, PCK and Ubuntu. Schlossberg's Transition Theory offers a way to understand how individuals experience and respond to change through the interaction among situation, self, support and strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory explains how second-career academics negotiate legitimacy, belonging, identity work and hybridity within academic settings (Beijaard et al., 2004; Henkel, 2005; Trede et al., 2012; Yusoff, 2025). Pedagogical Content Knowledge, as defined by Shulman (1986), explains how professional expertise is transformed into teachable knowledge. Ubuntu contributes a South African ethical and relational lens that foregrounds human dignity, mutual recognition, reciprocity and communal accountability in higher education (Khohliso et al., 2025; Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025).

The strength of this integrated approach lies in the limitations of each theory when used alone. Transition Theory clarifies movement and adjustment, but does not fully explain how academic legitimacy is socially constructed. Professional Identity Theory explicates legitimacy and belonging, but does not provide a sufficiently detailed account of how professional knowledge becomes pedagogy. PCK explains the transformation of expertise into teaching, but does not fully address the

moral and relational quality of institutional life. Ubuntu addresses this gap by situating academic work and educational participation within a framework of relational personhood and ethical responsibility. These theories make it possible to conceptualise pracademic transition as a process shaped by biography, institutional context, pedagogical labour and normative questions of recognition and belonging.

This chapter is organised into six parts. Section 3.2 discusses Schlossberg's Transition Theory as the entry point for understanding movement into academia. Section 3.3 examines Professional Identity Theory and its relevance to legitimacy, belonging, identity work, hybridity and academic socialisation. Section 3.4 discusses PCK as the pedagogical dimension of becoming an academic. Section 3.5 develops Ubuntu as a contextual and ethical lens. Section 3.6 integrates these perspectives into the Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework. Section 3.7 considers the theoretical implications of the framework for the study and Section 3.8 concludes the chapter by linking the theoretical framework to the methodological design of Chapter 4.

3.2 Schlossberg's transition theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides the first conceptual anchor for this study, as the movement from industry to higher education is fundamentally transitional. Schlossberg (2011) defines transition as an event or non-event that alters roles, routines, relationships, or assumptions. This definition is especially relevant to the present study because the entry of experienced professionals into academic work involves more than a contractual change in employment. It entails a reorientation of everyday practice, a redefinition of competence and a shift into a field governed by unfamiliar expectations, evaluative criteria and institutional norms.

A key strength of Schlossberg's theory is that it treats transition as both subjective and contextual. Individuals do not experience the same transition in identical ways, even when they enter similar environments. What matters is how the change is perceived, what resources are available and how the person interprets the demands before them (Schlossberg, 2011). This is highly relevant to second-career academics because their professional biographies differ considerably. Some enter academia from highly structured professions with visible hierarchies and clear standards of competence. In contrast, others come from fields in which practical judgment, innovation and situational responsiveness are highly valued. These prior orientations shape not only expectations for academic work but also how newcomers interpret their own capacities and vulnerabilities upon entering the institution.

Within the context of this study, Transition Theory is especially useful because it explains why the move into academia can be disruptive even for highly accomplished professionals. Industry expertise

does not automatically prepare individuals for the diffuse and often tacit expectations of academic work. Teaching, assessment, curriculum design, student support, committee participation, administrative compliance and scholarly engagement may all become part of the role, often with little clarity about how these demands should be prioritised. The theory, therefore, provides a valuable starting point because it captures both the destabilising and adaptive dimensions of pracademic transition.

3.2.1 The 4S system

The most widely applied dimension of Schlossberg's theory is the 4S system, namely situation, self, support and strategies. Schlossberg (2011) presents these four dimensions to understand how people cope with transition and what conditions shape that coping. In this dissertation, the 4S framework is used as an analytic heuristic rather than a rigid checklist. It makes visible the interacting factors that shape the transition of second-career academics into South African private higher education.

3.2.1.1 Situation

The first dimension, situation, concerns the context in which the transition occurs. It includes the trigger for the move, the degree of control the individual has over it, the timing of entry, the nature of the role change and the presence of concurrent pressures or uncertainties (Schlossberg, 2011). For second-career academics, the situation encompasses the conditions under which they are recruited, whether they are appointed for their industry expertise, whether they receive structured induction and how clearly academic expectations are articulated.

In South African PHEIs, the situation must also be understood in relation to wider institutional and sectoral pressures. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) argue that private higher education institutions operate under significant quality assurance, accreditation and policy requirements. These demands shape programme structures, staffing expectations, curriculum oversight and teaching practices. As a result, a new academic entering this sector does not step into a neutral institutional environment. Instead, the individual enters a context already structured by compliance pressures, reputational concerns and the need to demonstrate educational value within a competitive landscape.

The situation dimension also includes symbolic conditions. A practitioner may enter academia assuming that extensive professional experience will automatically confer authority, only to discover that academic status is attached to different forms of capital, such as research outputs, publication histories and established disciplinary networks. In this respect, the situation is not solely a practical context of entry. It is also a symbolic environment in which prior expertise may be recognised, reinterpreted, or diminished. Transition Theory is useful here because it foregrounds the fact that movement into a new role is always shaped by conditions that exceed the individual.

3.2.1.2 Self

The second dimension, self, refers to the personal and psychological resources individuals bring to transition. Schlossberg (2011) directs attention to outlook, resilience, commitment, values, previous experience and perceived agency. This is especially important in the case of second-career academics, who often enter higher education with well-established professional identities, deep subject expertise and confidence derived from previous success in industry.

At the same time, the self dimension is where transition often becomes unsettling. The forms of competence and authority that carried value in industry do not necessarily translate into academic legitimacy. A senior professional may feel secure in knowledge of the field, yet uncertain about teaching, assessment, student engagement, or scholarly expectations. What was once a stable source of confidence may become fragile when placed within a new evaluative structure. The self dimension therefore, includes not only personal assets, but also the vulnerability that emerges when established competence is relocated into an unfamiliar professional field.

This point can be read alongside Beijaard et al. (2004), who argue that professional identity is shaped by biography and the ongoing interpretation of experience. Although their work is not a theory of transition as such, it enriches the self dimension by showing that prior experiences remain active during role change. For pracademics, this means that transition is mediated by what they have learned to value, how they have previously understood expertise and what kinds of recognition they have come to expect. The self dimension therefore, already gestures beyond adjustment and toward identity.

3.2.1.3 Support

The third dimension, support, is one of the most significant elements of Schlossberg's framework for this study. Support refers to the institutional and interpersonal relationships that assist individuals in coping with transition. In higher education, this may include induction programmes, mentoring, peer support, collegial networks, leadership practices and access to teaching development (Schlossberg, 2011).

Support is analytically important because transition is not negotiated in isolation. New academics must often make sense of tacit institutional norms, ambiguous expectations and unfamiliar pedagogical demands. Where support structures are present and meaningful, transition may become more navigable and less isolating. Where such support is weak, uneven, or absent, the burden of adaptation becomes highly individualised. This can intensify uncertainty and reinforce a sense of peripheral status.

In the context of South African private higher education institutions, support must also be understood in relation to organisational priorities. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) show that quality assurance pressures and operational constraints shape private institutions. These conditions may produce environments in which support is informal, inconsistent, or subordinated to performance imperatives. If institutions recruit practitioners for their applied expertise but do not adequately support them in becoming teachers and academic colleagues, the transition becomes precarious, potentially undermining both staff development and educational quality.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) elaborate the support dimension by distinguishing between four types of support: intimate relationships, which provide emotional sustenance; family units, which offer a sense of belonging; networks of friends and colleagues, which provide information and reciprocity; and institutional supports, which include formal services and developmental resources. For second-career academics, the institutional support dimension is particularly salient because the informal relational supports that characterise strong collegial cultures are often underdeveloped in the early period of transition, before meaningful professional relationships have been established. This means that the formal institutional provisions for support, including induction, mentoring and professional development, carry a heavier burden in the early transition period than they would in settings where informal support networks were already in place.

Myers et al. (2025) apply this understanding to the academic context by demonstrating that the adequacy of institutional support is assessed by considering the transition of academics not only in terms of what is formally provided but also in terms of how responsive and adaptable that support is to the specific and evolving needs of the individual. Support that is generic, front-loaded or oriented toward institutional compliance rather than developmental need may satisfy a formal audit requirement while failing to address the substantive challenges that pracademics experience. This distinction between support as provision and support as developmental response is central to the argument that private higher education institutions must move beyond compliance-oriented induction models toward genuinely responsive developmental frameworks.

3.2.1.4 Strategies

The fourth dimension, strategies, refers to the ways individuals respond to and cope with transition. These strategies may include seeking information, observing colleagues, asking for feedback, relying on prior professional strengths, experimenting with teaching methods, or gradually learning institutional expectations (Schlossberg, 2011). Strategies matter because transition is not simply something that happens to individuals. It is also something they actively interpret and negotiate.

For second-career academics, strategic responses are often experimental and evolving. New entrants may initially rely on familiar practitioner modes of communication, only later realising that these require modification for academic teaching. Others may seek legitimacy through strong student engagement, curriculum innovation, or visible professional relevance. Still others may pursue formal development opportunities or selectively foreground certain aspects of their professional history to meet academic expectations. These variations indicate that the transition is not uniform. It is a process of active positioning under conditions of incomplete information and unequal support.

Strategies also have a temporal dimension. What assists adjustment early in the transition may later become limiting. For example, strong reliance on prior practitioner identity may provide initial confidence, yet hinder fuller academic integration if it becomes a defensive stance against new learning. Conversely, rapid assimilation into academic norms may assist early acceptance while muting the distinctive value of applied expertise. This reinforces the need to move beyond transition alone and consider how strategies are mediated by identity, legitimacy and pedagogical development.

Schlossberg (2011) elaborates on the strategies dimension by distinguishing between strategies for taking action, strategies for changing the meaning of a situation and strategies for managing stress. For pracademics, all three forms of strategic response are evident in the transition experience. Action strategies include seeking collegial advice, enrolling in formal development programmes and proactively learning institutional systems. Meaning-change strategies include reframing the expert-to-novice reversal as a form of professional renewal rather than status loss, finding validation in student relationships and constructing narratives of academic purpose that draw productively on prior professional identity (Ibarra, 1999; Beijaard et al., 2004). Stress management strategies include establishing boundaries around working hours, developing routines for managing marking load and seeking informal peer support from colleagues experiencing similar challenges (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Wenger, 1998). The analytical value of distinguishing these strategy types is that it reveals the multiple registers in which individuals must simultaneously operate during transition and it highlights the extent to which effective coping requires not only practical problem-solving but also cognitive reframing and emotional regulation (Schlossberg, 2011; Trede et al., 2012).

3.2.2 Liminality and in-betweenness

Although Schlossberg's theory is not explicitly framed as a theory of liminality, it is highly compatible with the idea that transition places individuals in an in-between state. This concept is particularly useful for understanding second-career academics, who often occupy positions that are neither fully external to academia nor fully integrated within it. They may be valued for their professional expertise yet remain uncertain of their status as academics. They may be confident in subject knowledge, but

unsure about pedagogy, research and institutional belonging. This condition of in-betweenness helps explain why transition is often experienced not as learning, but as dislocation.

Recent scholarship strengthens the relevance of liminality to academic identity formation. Povilaitis and Jõgi (2026), writing in Frontiers in Education, conceptualise academic identity as a dynamic, relational and liminal process of becoming shaped by the interactions among institutional, collective and personal conditions. Their study argues that liminality is not external to academic life but constitutive of it, particularly within universities characterised by contradictory logics such as collegiality and autonomy on the one hand and managerialism and metric-based accountability on the other. This insight is highly relevant to the present study because South African PHEIs similarly operate under overlapping pressures of quality assurance, institutional credibility, market responsiveness and educational relevance (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). For pracademics, these tensions may intensify the experience of in-betweenness by making it difficult to determine which forms of expertise are genuinely valued and which forms of academic participation are required for full recognition (Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026).

Liminality is useful because it prevents transition from being understood too narrowly as a problem of individual adjustment. A liminal reading suggests that uncertainty is not always a sign of personal deficiency. It may instead reflect the structural ambiguity of academic institutions themselves. Contemporary universities frequently generate contradictory expectations around teaching, scholarship, employability, collegiality and performance (Ainslie, 2024). In such settings, new entrants may find that the path to legitimacy is unclear. This is particularly relevant to second-career academics, whose practitioner expertise may be welcomed rhetorically while remaining only partially translatable into recognised academic capital. Liminality, therefore, connects subjective uncertainty to institutional contradiction.

This line of argument is further strengthened by Liddle (2025), who explores how doctoral scholar-practitioners navigate liminal spaces between professional and academic worlds. Liddle (2025) argues that such spaces are central to both identity development and the cultivation of new professional competencies. Although the focus is on doctoral scholar-practitioners rather than second-career lecturers specifically, the conceptual overlap is significant. In both cases, the individual is positioned between established professional experience and emerging academic identity and must negotiate not only technical competence but also professional self-understanding across intersecting fields. This makes liminality especially relevant to pracademic transition, where the challenge is not just entering academia but inhabiting an identity suspended between applied credibility and academic legitimacy.

Liminality also has implications for academic socialisation. Qian et al. (2026), in their qualitative study of graduate students' conference participation, frame academic identity formation as a process closely linked to academic socialisation and participation in disciplinary spaces. Although their study examines graduate students rather than second-career academics, the underlying insight remains useful here: academic identity is not formed privately, but through participation in communities, practices and recognition networks that make academic membership intelligible. For pracademics, this suggests that identity development depends not only on formal employment but also on access to socialisation opportunities through which academic norms, values and expectations are learned and negotiated.

These newer contributions suggest that liminality should be treated not as a minor descriptive concept but as a valuable interpretive bridge in the chapter. Schlossberg's model explains how transition is encountered, but liminality explains why transition often feels suspended, ambiguous and identity destabilising. It helps clarify why second-career academics may appear functionally integrated while still feeling symbolically unfinished. It also strengthens the conceptual movement into the next section, since the liminal state between practitioner and academic worlds naturally leads to questions of legitimacy, belonging and identity work.

Breier et al. (2019) applied a liminality framework to academics without doctoral qualifications in South Africa and Australia, finding that the in-between status these individuals occupied was not resolved by growing teaching competence or administrative familiarity alone. Instead, it persisted as long as the institutional credentialling expectations that defined full academic membership remained unchanged. This finding is significant for the present study because it suggests that liminality in academic settings may be maintained by structural conditions that are not amenable to individual developmental effort and that the resolution of liminal status may depend as much on institutional change as on personal growth. For pracademics in South African PHEIs, this means that the developmental pathways through which sustained liminality might eventually give way to consolidated academic identity must be understood in relation to the specific credentialling, recognition and support structures that the institution either provides or withholds.

3.2.3 Strengths and limits of transition theory

Transition Theory contributes significantly to this dissertation because it offers a clear and analytically useful language for understanding entry into academia as a process rather than a singular event or occupational shift. By foregrounding the interaction between personal and contextual factors, the theory highlights how transition experiences are shaped not only by individual biography and coping capacity, but also by access to support, institutional conditions and the meaning individuals

attach to change itself (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Schlossberg, 2011). The framework is especially valuable because it enables participant narratives to be interpreted through the interplay of circumstance, self, support and coping strategies, thereby moving analysis beyond simplistic notions of adjustment or resilience.

Transition Theory is particularly relevant within the South African private higher education context because it helps connect individual experiences of adaptation to broader institutional conditions shaped by quality assurance demands, organisational expectations, market responsiveness and regulatory pressures (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). In this regard, the theory supports an understanding of transition as institutionally mediated rather than solely psychologically experienced. It therefore provides an important interpretive lens through which the experiences of pracademics can be examined in relation to the environments within which transition unfolds.

At the same time, Transition Theory is not sufficient on its own. While it explains how individuals encounter, interpret and manage change, it does not fully account for how academic legitimacy is socially constructed or how professional identities are negotiated within academic cultures. Nor does it provide a detailed explanation of the pedagogical work involved in transforming professional expertise into effective higher education teaching. For these reasons, Transition Theory serves as an important point of departure rather than a complete explanatory framework in this dissertation. To understand how transition becomes identity formation and pedagogical practice, the discussion must now turn to Professional Identity Theory.

3.3 Professional identity theory

Professional Identity Theory is central to this study because the transition from industry into academia is not exhausted by formal appointment, institutional induction or role adjustment. It also involves a deeper process through which second-career academics come to understand themselves and are understood by others, as legitimate members of the academic profession (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). In this sense, transition is not only occupational but also ontological and relational. The issue is not only whether individuals can perform the tasks associated with academic work, but whether they can inhabit academic identity in ways that are recognised, sustained and institutionally validated (Henkel, 2005). This makes professional identity especially significant in a study of pracademics, whose prior expertise may be strongly established and professionally valued in one field while remaining only partially legible or institutionally recognised in another (Yusoff, 2025).

A useful starting point is Beijaard et al. (2004), who argue that professional identity should not be understood as a fixed attribute possessed by an individual, but rather as an ongoing process of

interpretation and reinterpretation. Their work is especially important because it resists essentialist understandings of professional selfhood and instead conceptualises identity as dynamic, context-dependent and composed of multiple sub-identities that may coexist in tension. This perspective is particularly valuable for understanding second-career academics because it explains why entry into higher education does not simply replace one professional identity with another. Rather, practitioner identities remain active and continue to shape how individuals interpret expertise, authority and professional value within academic settings (Ibarra, 1999; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The transition into academia therefore entails not only adaptation to new routines and institutional expectations but also the negotiation of competing self-understandings formed across different professional worlds. For pracademics, this process may involve tension between established forms of professional credibility and emerging forms of academic legitimacy, particularly within institutional environments where scholarly authority, pedagogical competence and research productivity remain central markers of recognition (Moffitt & Bligh, 2024; Myers et al., 2025). Professional Identity Theory consequently provides an important conceptual lens through which the present study can examine how participants negotiate belonging, legitimacy and self-construction during the transition into academic life.

While Beijaard et al. (2004) establish the dynamic and interpretive character of professional identity, Henkel (2005) extends the discussion by showing that academic identity is formed within institutional and policy environments rather than in isolation from them. Her argument is especially relevant to this dissertation because it situates identity within the structures that shape academic work, including governance, accountability, disciplinary norms and institutional expectations. Academic identity is therefore not only a matter of personal commitment or self-description. It is also shaped by the conditions under which academic roles are defined and recognised. This is significant for second-career academics, since their prior professional standing may not automatically translate into academic credibility within institutions that privilege traditional markers of scholarship, disciplinary affiliation and academic autonomy. Identity formation must therefore be read not only as a subjective process, but also as a response to institutional norms that determine what counts as legitimate academic work.

Trede et al. (2012) deepen this perspective by arguing that professional identity development in higher education is fostered through reflection, participation and meaning-making. Their contribution is important because it shifts attention from identity as a static outcome to identity as something enacted through engagement in professional communities. In higher education, academics do not simply acquire identity through job titles or formal status. They develop it through practice, dialogue,

collegial interaction and participation in the values and routines of the institution. For second-career academics, this means that identity development depends not only on what they bring from previous careers, but also on whether the academic environment offers meaningful opportunities for reflection, inclusion and participation. This emphasis on identity as socially mediated is particularly useful for the present study because it helps explain why some pracademics come to experience deeper belonging over time, while others remain at the margins despite formal role occupancy.

Recent scholarship sharpens these insights by directly addressing second-career academics. Yusoff (2025) argues that a persistent tension between prior professional selves and the expectations of academic institutions shapes pracademic identity formation. This tension is not solely psychological. It is structured by the unequal convertibility of capital across fields. Drawing on Bourdieusian logic, Yusoff (2025) shows that second-career academics may enter higher education with substantial cultural, social and professional capital derived from industry, but find that this capital does not always convert into recognised academic value. The result is often symbolic misrecognition, whereby practical expertise is desired institutionally but insufficiently rewarded symbolically. This helps explain why second-career academics may be appointed precisely because of their applied experience while still feeling that they must prove their legitimacy within the institution.

Yusoff (2025) further proposes three identity trajectories among second-career academics: assimilation, integration and resistance. This typology is especially helpful for the present study because it captures the non-linear and differentiated nature of pracademic identity development. Assimilators seek legitimacy by adopting dominant academic norms, sometimes distancing themselves from their practitioner histories in order to fit established expectations. Integrators develop hybrid identities in which professional and academic selves are actively combined, often with productive effects in applied teaching contexts. Resistors, by contrast, struggle to reconcile the values of prior professional practice with the logics of academic institutions and may become disengaged or remain at the periphery of academic life. What makes this framework particularly useful is that it avoids romanticising hybridity or assuming that all transitions culminate in integration. Instead, it recognises that identity formation is shaped by institutional recognition, symbolic valuation and the availability of supportive academic spaces.

3.3.1 Legitimacy, belonging, identity work and hybridity

The preceding discussion suggests that four dimensions are especially relevant to this study: legitimacy, belonging, identity work and hybridity. Legitimacy concerns whether second-career academics are recognised as credible academics by themselves, their students, their colleagues and their institutions. Belonging concerns whether they experience themselves as accepted and meaningful participants in the life of the academic community. Identity work refers to the reflective,

emotional, practical and discursive labour through which individuals construct, revise and defend a professional self. Hybridity refers to the coexistence of practitioner and academic orientations within a single professional trajectory.

Legitimacy is especially important because second-career academics often enter academia from non-traditional pathways. They may possess substantial practical expertise, but still feel that they need to justify their presence and competence within the institution. Yusoff (2025) shows that this legitimacy gap is often intensified by symbolic misrecognition, where practical expertise is treated as secondary or insufficient within the academic field. The issue is therefore not simply whether individuals are competent, but whether the forms of competence they possess are institutionally legible and valued.

Belonging is closely related to legitimacy, but analytically distinct. One may be regarded as competent and still feel socially peripheral. Trede et al. (2012) emphasise that professional identity in higher education develops through participation in professional communities. For pracademics, this may include whether colleagues invite them into conversations about teaching and curriculum, whether their expertise is treated as intellectually valuable and whether institutional culture makes room for non-traditional professional trajectories. Yusoff (2025) similarly argues that belonging is shaped by recognition or misrecognition of prior professional capital. Where institutions create hybrid spaces that value practical expertise, second-career academics may experience deeper inclusion. Where such expertise is marginalised, belonging may remain tentative.

Identity work is significant because the transition into academia is not only technical or procedural. It is also interpretive, relational and affective in nature. Feelings of uncertainty, impostor syndrome, defensiveness, aspiration and pride may all accompany the effort to become recognised as an academic within a new institutional environment (Grassley et al., 2020; Pickern & Costakis, 2024). Identity work may involve learning new academic language, repositioning prior professional expertise, adjusting assumptions about authority and legitimacy and deciding how to present oneself within academic culture (Ibarra, 1999; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In supportive institutional environments, this process may become reflective, developmental and generative. In more exclusionary, gatekeeping or dismissive contexts, however, identity work may become defensive, emotionally exhausting and marked by ongoing uncertainty regarding belonging and legitimacy (Yusoff, 2025; Lewis & Quinnell, 2024).

Hybridity is especially important because the term pracademic itself implies the coexistence of practitioner and academic orientations (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). Hybridity should not be understood as a seamless fusion of two compatible identities. Rather, it refers to a position in which different logics of value, expertise and professional practice intersect and, at times, compete. For some

second-career academics, hybridity may be empowering because it enables them to connect theory and practice, enrich teaching through lived professional experience and contribute to institutional relevance and employability agendas (Hora & Lee, 2020; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). For others, however, hybridity may be destabilising because it generates ambiguity concerning status, belonging and evaluative criteria within academic environments that may privilege conventional scholarly trajectories over professional expertise (Henkel, 2005; Myers et al., 2025).

Professional Identity Theory is particularly useful in this regard because it avoids assuming that identity coherence necessarily requires uniformity or sameness. Instead, the theory recognises multiplicity, negotiation and tension as normal features of professional life, especially during periods of transition and institutional change (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). This perspective is highly relevant to the present study because it allows pracademic identity to be understood not as incomplete academic assimilation, but as a dynamic, evolving negotiation among overlapping professional worlds.

The concept of hybridity in professional identity has been theorised most extensively in occupations that deliberately bridge multiple knowledge domains. Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) argue that the pracademic's dual positioning should not be understood as a temporary condition to be resolved through eventual assimilation into academic culture, but rather as a permanent and generative feature of professional contribution. From this perspective, the value of the pracademic lies precisely in the capacity to sustain productive tension between professional practice and academic knowledge. Institutions that push too strongly towards full assimilation into conventional academic norms may therefore inadvertently diminish the very contribution they sought to enable. This argument resonates strongly with the present study because South African PHEIs frequently position themselves around professional relevance, employability and applied learning (CHE, 2024a; Hora & Lee, 2020). The institutional logic that justifies the recruitment of industry professionals should therefore, in principle, also create space for preserving the hybrid professional identity that makes such appointments educationally distinctive.

Dunn et al. (2025) provide important empirical evidence for this argument by documenting how second-career academics in their study described identity negotiation as a gradual, ongoing process rather than a once-off adjustment. Their participants reported that the most productive phases of transition occurred when they could draw simultaneously on professional knowledge and academic frameworks, rather than being required to choose between them. The conditions most likely to enable this integration were those in which institutional cultures were sufficiently flexible to recognise multiple forms of expertise and contribution, mentors and colleagues explicitly encouraged the

retention of professional perspectives and curriculum structures allowed meaningful integration of applied examples alongside theoretical content. These findings reinforce the argument that identity work within pracademic transition is not merely an individual psychological process; it is institutionally mediated and shaped by organisational cultures, pedagogical expectations and systems of recognition (Wenger, 1998; Henkel, 2005).

3.3.2 Academic socialisation and identity consolidation

The discussion of professional identity can be further deepened by recognising that identity formation is inseparable from academic socialisation. Beijaard et al. (2004), Henkel (2005) and Trede et al. (2012) all imply that professional identity develops through participation, recognition and situated interpretation rather than through isolated self-definition. More recent literature makes this point even more explicit by foregrounding the role of liminal participation, institutional ambiguity and socialisation processes in academic becoming. For second-career academics, this is especially significant because they enter higher education with mature professional identities but often without the socialisation experiences that more traditional academic trajectories provide.

Qian et al. (2026) show that academic identity develops through participation in academic socialisation spaces, including conferences and other sites where individuals encounter disciplinary norms, recognition practices and professional expectations. Although the study focuses on graduate students, its implications extend beyond doctoral training. It suggests that academic identity is consolidated through visible participation in academic communities rather than through role occupancy alone. This is highly relevant to second-career academics, who may be appointed into teaching roles without full access to the social and symbolic spaces through which academic legitimacy is typically reproduced. From this perspective, belonging is not simply a feeling of comfort. It is tied to whether institutions enable access to the practices through which academic identity becomes socially legible.

This point complements Yusoff's (2025) argument that institutional recognition or misrecognition considerably shapes belonging among second-career academics. If the conversion of professional capital into academic legitimacy depends partly on recognition, then academic socialisation becomes one of the mechanisms through which that recognition may either be extended or withheld. Participation in curriculum conversations, scholarly events, collegial dialogue and pedagogical communities may support the movement from peripheral participation to fuller institutional belonging. Conversely, exclusion from such spaces may reinforce the sense that the institution employs one without being fully of it.

A liminality lens strengthens this argument by showing that socialisation is not simply a process of absorption into an already stable culture. Povilaitis and Jõgi (2026) argue that contemporary academic identity is formed within an institutional environment marked by persistent instability, ambiguity and competing expectations. This means that academic socialisation is itself liminal. Newcomers are not entering a settled professional field governed by transparent and stable norms, but rather a space in which academic work is continually redefined by competing institutional, pedagogical and managerial demands (Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026; Raaper, 2023). For second-career academics, this further complicates the identity project because they are not only learning the culture of the institution; they are entering institutions that are themselves unsettled, hybrid and often contradictory in the signals they communicate about legitimacy, performance and academic value (Henkel, 2005; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

This observation is theoretically important because it helps explain why some pracademics may continue to experience ambiguity even after developing classroom confidence or achieving functional role competence. Identity consolidation depends not simply on time spent within the institution, but also on whether institutional culture provides coherent pathways for recognition, inclusion and meaningful participation (Wenger, 1998; Beijaard et al., 2004). In this sense, academic belonging is best understood not as a private emotional outcome, but as a relational and institutional achievement shaped by participation, recognition and professional legitimacy (Trede et al., 2012; Yusoff, 2025). This interpretation aligns closely with Ubuntu, which later grounds the framework in a relational understanding of personhood, dignity and inclusion (Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025).

Myers et al. (2025) extend the socialisation argument by demonstrating that the developmental arc of second-career academics is shaped not only by initial socialisation experiences but by the opportunities for ongoing professional learning and collegial engagement that institutions create over the longer term. Their longitudinal findings show that identity consolidation among pracademics is most closely associated with access to communities of scholarly practice, structured opportunities for curriculum collaboration and the experience of being genuinely included in the intellectual life of the department rather than merely occupying a teaching role within it. For institutions in the South African private sector, where the pressure to maximise teaching productivity may leave little institutional space for the collegial intellectual engagement that social identity consolidation requires, these findings represent both a diagnostic challenge and a practical imperative: if institutions wish to retain and develop effective pracademic staff, they must create the social and intellectual conditions under which academic identity can consolidate rather than remain perpetually provisional.

3.3.3 Strengths and limits of professional identity theory

Professional Identity Theory is indispensable to this dissertation because it explains dimensions of pracademic transition that Transition Theory alone cannot fully capture. While Transition Theory provides insight into how individuals encounter and navigate change, Professional Identity Theory reveals that becoming an academic is not just a matter of adapting to new tasks or organisational expectations. It also involves negotiating recognition, belonging, selfhood and symbolic value within a professional field governed by specific institutional norms, forms of legitimacy and evaluative logics (Beijaard et al., 2004; Henkel, 2005). The theory therefore, provides an important conceptual vocabulary for interpreting participant narratives concerning legitimacy, community, identity work, hybrid positioning and academic socialisation (Trede et al., 2012; Yusoff, 2025).

Professional Identity Theory is particularly valuable because it foregrounds the relational and socially constructed nature of academic identity formation. It draws attention to how professional selves are shaped through institutional recognition, collegial interaction and participation within communities of practice rather than through individual adjustment alone (Wenger, 1998; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This is especially relevant for pracademics, whose prior professional expertise may be highly valued in industry contexts while remaining only partially recognised within academic environments. The theory therefore enables the present study to move beyond procedural understandings of transition towards a deeper interpretation of how participants negotiate belonging, legitimacy and professional self-understanding within higher education institutions.

Professional Identity Theory also has limitations when used in isolation. While it explains the processes of recognition, belonging and identity negotiation, it does not, by itself, provide a sufficiently detailed account of pedagogical practice or teaching development. A second-career academic may develop a meaningful sense of academic identity and institutional belonging while still struggling to design curriculum, scaffold student learning, or assess students effectively. The movement from practitioner expertise to pedagogical competence, therefore, requires an additional conceptual lens to explain how disciplinary and professional knowledge are transformed into educationally meaningful teaching practice. It is at this point that PCK becomes essential to the integrated theoretical framework guiding the present study.

3.4 Pedagogical content knowledge

If Transition Theory explains entry into academia and Professional Identity Theory explains the struggle for legitimacy and belonging, PCK explains how second-career academics learn to teach. The transition from expert practitioner to effective academic is not complete when an individual

secures an appointment or begins to identify with academic work. Rather, it becomes educationally meaningful when professional expertise is transformed into forms of knowledge, explanation, assessment and interaction that support student learning (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Pedagogy is therefore not peripheral to pracademic transition; it is one of its central dimensions. This is particularly significant for second-career academics whose authority may initially derive from professional expertise but whose long-term effectiveness in higher education depends on their capacity to facilitate meaningful learning within academically structured environments.

Shulman (1986) introduced the concept of PCK in response to the assumption that teaching could be reduced to either subject expertise or generic instructional techniques. His argument was that effective teaching depends on a specialised form of professional knowledge that enables educators to represent subject matter in ways learners can understand. PCK, therefore, involves more than knowing content; it includes understanding how knowledge can be organised, explained, sequenced and adapted for diverse learners (Shulman, 1987). Shulman further argues that PCK includes awareness of what makes particular topics difficult to learn, including misconceptions, assumptions and conceptual barriers that students are likely to bring into the learning process. This insight is especially important for the present study because second-career academics frequently enter higher education with deep disciplinary or professional expertise, but often discover that such expertise does not automatically translate into effective teaching practice (McCall et al., 2021; Sarkar et al., 2024).

The importance of PCK lies in its understanding of teaching as an act of transformation rather than transmission. Educators must decide which aspects of the subject are most significant, how content should be sequenced, how complex ideas can be made accessible and how learning can be assessed in valid, developmental and pedagogically meaningful ways (Shulman, 1987). For second-career academics, this means that professional knowledge must be reworked into curriculum design, instructional explanation, assessment practice and responsiveness to student learning. Knowing a field well is therefore not equivalent to knowing how to teach it effectively. This distinction is particularly relevant in the case of pracademics because much of their expertise may be tacit, context-specific and developed within professional environments that differ substantially from the epistemic and pedagogical expectations of higher education (Brogt, 2025).

The relevance of PCK is heightened within South African private higher education institutions, where teaching quality, student experience, curriculum coherence and graduate outcomes are institutionally significant concerns. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) demonstrate that private higher education institutions operate under strong quality assurance and regulatory requirements that shape programme approval, assessment design and institutional credibility. Within such environments, the pedagogical

development of second-career academics is not only a matter of individual competence or professional growth. It is also closely connected to institutional quality, student success and the broader educational legitimacy of the institution.

3.4.1 The transformation of expertise

PCK is particularly useful for this study because it clarifies the nature of the transformation required when professionals enter academia. The transition is not from ignorance to knowledge, but from one mode of knowing to another. Industry knowledge is often tacit, action-oriented, context-specific and developed through repeated professional practice (Hora & Lee, 2020). Academic teaching, however, requires such knowledge to be made explicit, structured, sequenced and rendered meaningful to learners who do not yet share the expert's frame of reference (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). The challenge facing second-career academics, therefore, lies not simply in possessing expertise, but in transforming that expertise into forms pedagogically accessible to students within formal educational environments.

This transformation is demanding for several reasons. First, tacit expertise must be articulated. What experienced professionals do intuitively may be difficult to explain precisely because it has become embedded within habitual practice and professional judgement (Brogt, 2025). Second, complex workplace processes often need to be simplified for novice learners without reducing their conceptual integrity or practical significance. Third, effective teaching requires anticipating misconceptions, meaning that the academic must understand not only the subject itself but also how learners are likely to misunderstand, oversimplify, or misinterpret it (Shulman, 1986). Fourth, teaching requires a significant shift in orientation from demonstrating one's own competence towards facilitating the learning and development of others. These demands make clear why professional expertise alone is insufficient as a basis for effective higher education teaching (Sarkar et al., 2024; McCall et al., 2021).

This point is especially important for the discourse on pracademics because private higher education institutions often recruit practitioners for their ability to connect theory with real-world experience. Such recruitment can be highly valuable, however, Shulman's (1986) framework reminds us that relevance is not identical to teachability. Industry examples, authenticity and practical knowledge can enrich classrooms, but they become educationally effective only when they are pedagogically mediated. PCK, therefore, enables the study to distinguish between professional relevance and pedagogical capability without devaluing either.

3.4.2 Core pedagogical dimensions in this study

For this dissertation, four dimensions of PCK are especially important: curriculum, instruction, assessment and knowledge of learners. These dimensions align with the practical realities of academic work and provide a useful basis for interpreting the pedagogical development of second-career academics.

3.4.2.1 Curriculum

Curriculum concerns the selection, sequencing, organisation and alignment of content within programmes and modules. For second-career academics, curriculum design may be unfamiliar because it requires movement beyond expert knowledge toward questions of coherence, progression, level appropriateness and alignment with institutional outcomes. In professional environments, knowledge is often mobilised in response to immediate tasks or real-time problem-solving. In higher education, by contrast, knowledge must be organised in ways that support staged learning across time.

Shulman (1987) describes this transformative process as consisting of several distinct but interrelated pedagogical activities. These include interpretation, whereby the teacher analyses the underlying structure of content and determines what is most important for learners to understand; representation, whereby appropriate analogies, demonstrations, explanations and examples are identified; instructional selection, whereby suitable teaching approaches are chosen in relation to learner characteristics and educational goals; and adaptation, whereby pedagogical representations are modified in response to the prior knowledge, learning needs and interests of specific students. Each of these activities requires pedagogical reasoning that extends far beyond content mastery alone (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024).

For pracademics, the development of such pedagogical reasoning is often one of the most cognitively demanding aspects of transition because it requires not only the acquisition of new pedagogical knowledge but also the deliberate reconstruction of professional expertise into forms accessible to learners who do not yet share the expert's conceptual framework (Brogt, 2025). This challenge is particularly significant because much professional knowledge is acquired experientially and enacted intuitively within workplace settings rather than explicitly articulated for instructional purposes (Hora & Lee, 2020). Second-career academics must therefore learn to externalise tacit expertise, organise complex professional knowledge pedagogically and align teaching practices with institutional, curricular and assessment expectations within higher education environments (McCall et al., 2021).

Sarkar et al. (2024) confirm in their systematic review that Shulman's (1987) framework retains substantial explanatory power in contemporary higher education settings, where the demands placed on teachers include not only content transmission but the facilitation of critical thinking, problem

solving and the development of professional judgement in students. They find that the most effective university teachers are those who have developed a working integration of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and contextual knowledge, allowing them to respond flexibly to the specific learning challenges that arise in particular classroom settings. For pracademics, this integrated form of PCK is typically not present at the point of entry and must be actively constructed through teaching experience, reflective practice and engagement with pedagogical support structures. The study therefore affirms that institutions cannot assume that professional expertise will spontaneously generate effective pedagogy and that deliberate developmental investment is a necessary condition for the realisation of the educational potential that practitioner appointments are intended to deliver.

Biggs and Tang (2011) provide the most widely applied framework for curriculum design in higher education, arguing that effective curriculum requires constructive alignment: the deliberate connection between intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks in ways that ensure students are consistently required to engage in the kind of learning that the outcomes specify. For pracademics, developing constructive alignment literacy is often one of the most technically demanding aspects of curriculum work, because it requires a form of educational reasoning that professional training and industry experience typically do not develop (Skea, 2023). The practitioner who designs curriculum primarily by asking what professional knowledge students need to acquire may inadvertently create misalignments between declared outcomes and actual assessment tasks, a pattern that quality assurance review processes are designed to identify and correct. Providing structured support for constructive alignment is therefore a concrete, high-priority element of the pedagogical development that new pracademics require.

This dimension is particularly important in private higher education, where curricula are closely tied to accreditation, programme review and institutional quality assurance (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022). Second-career academics may therefore find themselves working within highly specified outcome structures, moderation systems and module descriptors. While such systems can support consistency, they can also intensify the transition for practitioners unfamiliar with curriculum architecture. PCK is valuable here because it frames curriculum as a central pedagogical practice rather than a purely administrative requirement.

3.4.2.2 Instruction

Instruction refers to the methods, representations and pedagogical interactions through which learning is enabled. This includes explanation, modelling, questioning, discussion, demonstration, scaffolding and the use of examples (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). Instruction is often the most visible

aspect of academic work, but it is also one of the most complex because it requires continuous judgment about pace, clarity, engagement and responsiveness.

For second-career academics, instructional development may require significant shifts in orientation. Professional workplaces often assume a baseline of task competence among peers, whereas higher education involves learners who are still developing conceptual understanding and disciplinary language (Hora & Lee, 2020). Practitioners may therefore need to learn how to unpack concepts more slowly, distinguish between expert and novice understandings and use formative teaching strategies rather than assuming that exposure to authentic examples will automatically produce learning. PCK helps explain why this shift is difficult. Experts often forget what it is like not to know, whilst teaching requires precisely that return to the learner's perspective (Shulman, 1986; Brogt, 2025).

Hora and Lee (2020) provide useful empirical detail on the instructional challenges practitioners face when entering higher education teaching, noting that the transition from professional communication to pedagogical instruction requires them to develop new forms of attentiveness to learners' cognition and responses. In professional settings, communication is typically addressed to audiences who share significant prior knowledge and contextual understanding; in educational settings, the teacher must continuously calibrate instruction to learners at multiple stages of understanding simultaneously. This calibration requires the development of what Shulman (1987) calls knowledge of learners: an understanding of where students are cognitively, what assumptions they bring, where misconceptions are likely to arise and how engagement can be sustained across diverse levels of preparedness. For practitioners entering teaching from industries in which most professional communication is peer-to-peer and assumption-dense, developing this learner-oriented instructional sensitivity is often a more demanding challenge than developing subject knowledge itself.

3.4.2.3 Assessment

Assessment is a further key dimension of PCK because it requires decisions about how learning will be evidenced, judged and supported. In higher education, assessment must align with module outcomes, reflect appropriate cognitive demand and provide fair and meaningful opportunities for students to demonstrate learning. It also needs to generate feedback that supports development rather than assigning marks.

For second-career academics, assessment can become a particularly visible site of transition. They may initially favour workplace-style tasks that capture authenticity and real-world performance. While such approaches can be pedagogically valuable, they do not always align neatly with academic criteria, level descriptors, moderation practices, or institutional assessment policies. Conversely, strict reliance on conventional academic tasks may diminish the applied value practitioners bring. PCK

allows these tensions to be understood not as simple errors, but as part of the learning required to align authenticity, fairness and academic rigour.

3.4.2.4 Knowledge of learners

Knowledge of learners is perhaps the most relational dimension of Pedagogical Content Knowledge. It involves understanding students' backgrounds, levels of preparedness, prior experiences, aspirations, likely misconceptions and support needs. This is especially relevant in the South African context, where diverse linguistic, socio-economic and educational trajectories shape higher education classrooms. Khohliso et al. (2025) underscore the importance of recognising learners' identities, languages and social locations within higher education practice, especially in relation to inclusive and decolonial pedagogies.

For second-career academics, developing knowledge of learners may involve a significant adjustment. Professional environments often assume adult competence and immediate task engagement. Higher education, by contrast, requires sustained attention to uneven academic preparedness, conceptual development and the hidden rules of academic participation. Teaching effectively, therefore, requires more than conveying expert knowledge. It requires the ability to read learners, recognise forms of struggle and respond in ways that make learning possible.

3.4.3 Pedagogical development as relational and institutional

Although PCK is frequently discussed as a feature of teaching practice, it should not be understood in this study as a purely individual possession. Pedagogical development is also institutional and relational. Second-career academics do not learn to teach in isolation. Their pedagogical growth is shaped by induction, mentoring, observation, feedback, curriculum collaboration, student response and participation in academic communities.

This point is important because it connects PCK to the preceding theories. Support structures affect whether pedagogical learning becomes possible. Identity and legitimacy influence whether individuals feel able to ask questions, seek assistance and experiment with new teaching approaches. Pedagogy, therefore, does not sit outside the broader transition process. It is deeply interwoven with support, belonging and institutional culture.

In PHEI, the institutional conditions shaping pedagogical development may be especially visible. Teaching-focused environments may provide strong incentives for instructional innovation and responsiveness. At the same time, workload demands, resource constraints and performance pressures may limit the space available for reflective pedagogical development (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022). PCK therefore, cannot be understood purely as a technical acquisition. It develops within institutional contexts that enable or constrain the transformation of expertise into teaching.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) extend the communities of practice framework to argue that professional learning in complex institutional settings occurs primarily at the boundaries between communities, where different forms of expertise and knowledge are brought into productive contact. For pracademics, the boundary position they occupy, straddling professional practice and academic culture, is therefore not only a source of identity challenge but also a potential site of distinctive intellectual and pedagogical contribution. The transformation of professional expertise into PCK is precisely the kind of boundary-crossing work that Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) identify as generative of new forms of understanding. This perspective reframes the developmental challenge of PCK formation for pracademics: rather than a deficit to be remediated, the translation of tacit professional knowledge into explicit pedagogical form is intellectual work that adds value to the academic community while simultaneously developing the individual's capacity to contribute to it. Institutional support for this work is therefore not just a developmental service but an investment in the intellectual capital of the institution as a whole.

3.4.4 Strengths and limits of pedagogical content knowledge

PCK is indispensable to this dissertation because it explains how professional expertise is transformed into educational practice. The framework demonstrates that becoming an academic involves more than a successful transition into a new occupational setting or the negotiation of academic identity. It also requires the development of a specialised pedagogical knowledge base through which curriculum design, instructional practice, assessment and responsiveness to student learning can be enacted in coherent and educationally meaningful ways (Shulman, 1986, 1987). In this regard, PCK provides a critical conceptual lens for understanding why professional competence alone is insufficient for effective higher education teaching and why pedagogical development is a central dimension of pracademic transition (Sarkar et al., 2024).

The explanatory strength of PCK lies in its ability to explain the pedagogical reasoning processes through which disciplinary and professional knowledge are translated into forms accessible to learners. It foregrounds the intellectual work involved in selecting content, sequencing ideas, anticipating misconceptions, adapting explanations and facilitating meaningful learning across diverse educational contexts (Shulman, 1987; Brogt, 2025). This is particularly relevant for second-career academics whose expertise may be highly developed within professional environments but not whilst pedagogically structured for teaching within higher education institutions. PCK therefore, enables the present study to move beyond simplistic assumptions that professional expertise naturally or automatically produces teaching competence.

PCK does not fully explain the social, relational and institutional dimensions through which academic legitimacy and belonging are constructed. Although the framework offers a sophisticated account of pedagogical development, it pays less attention to the politics of recognition, institutional inclusion and the ethical quality of academic relationships. A technically competent pedagogy may still unfold within institutional environments that marginalise newcomers, privilege traditional academic trajectories or fail to cultivate meaningful forms of collegial belonging (Henkel, 2005; Wenger, 1998). In this sense, pedagogical competence alone cannot guarantee institutional recognition, relational inclusion or professional affirmation.

While PCK explains how knowledge is transformed pedagogically, it does not sufficiently theorise the broader moral and relational conditions within which teaching and academic participation occur. Questions concerning dignity, care, inclusion and institutional humanity remain underdeveloped within the framework itself. For this reason, the discussion now turns to Ubuntu, which provides the contextual and ethical lens necessary to deepen the dissertation's account of institutional life, pedagogy and belonging within the South African higher education context (Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025).

3.5 Ubuntu as a contextual and ethical lens

Ubuntu is included in this dissertation not as a symbolic gesture towards African philosophy, but as a substantive theoretical lens through which pracademic transition can be interpreted within the South African higher education context. Its inclusion is necessary because the study is concerned not only with how second-career academics adjust, identify and teach, but also with how they are recognised, received and related to within institutional environments. Ubuntu foregrounds precisely those dimensions of relationality, dignity, reciprocity and communal responsibility that remain underdeveloped within more individualised accounts of transition and professional development (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011).

This lens becomes especially important when considering the limitations of the theories already discussed. Transition Theory explains how individuals navigate change, but does not fully theorise the ethical quality of institutional response (Schlossberg, 2011). Professional Identity Theory explains legitimacy and belonging but does not necessarily provide a normative framework for evaluating whether institutions are humane, caring, or relationally just (Beijaard et al., 2004; Henkel, 2005). PCK explains how professional expertise is transformed into teaching practice, but it does not in itself address the ethical character of pedagogical relationships or institutional life (Shulman, 1987). Ubuntu addresses these limitations by locating academic participation, pedagogy and institutional

incorporation within a broader moral understanding of human interdependence and communal becoming (Metz, 2011; Radebe, 2025).

Ubuntu is therefore indispensable to the integrated framework because it enables the dissertation to move beyond procedural understandings of transition towards a more relational interpretation of academic belonging and institutional participation. It shifts the focus from asking merely whether pracademics adapt successfully to asking whether institutions create conditions in which newcomers are recognised, supported and enabled to flourish as members of an academic community. In this regard, Ubuntu provides the contextual and ethical grounding through which the pedagogical, institutional and identity-related dimensions of transition can be interpreted within South African higher education.

Table 3.1: Ubuntu as a Relational and Ethical Lens for Pracademic Transition

Ubuntu Dimension	**Key Theorists**	**Core Conceptual Focus**	**Relevance to Pracademic Transition**
Relational personhood	Mbiti (1969)	Personhood constituted through relationships and communal recognition	Becoming academic occurs through institutional inclusion, recognition and participation
Institutional ethics	Metz (2011); Radebe (2025)	Dignity, solidarity and communal obligation	Institutional support and belonging carry ethical significance beyond procedural induction
Higher education praxis	Khohliso et al. (2025); Hlatshwayo (2024)	Ubuntu-informed pedagogy, collegiality and institutional culture	Academic development and teaching occur within relational and communal environments
Critical Ubuntu	Radebe (2025)	Critical engagement with power, exclusion and institutional contradiction	Prevents romanticisation of community and enables critique of institutional practices

Source: Developed by the researcher from Mbiti (1969), Metz (2011), Hlatshwayo (2024), Khohliso et al. (2025) and Radebe (2025).

3.5.1 Ubuntu and Relational Personhood

Mbiti (1969) provides one of the most influential formulations of African relational personhood, often captured through the proposition that personhood is constituted through others. The significance of this argument lies in its rejection of radically individualised understandings of identity and human development. From this perspective, individuals do not become fully realised persons in isolation, but

through relationships of belonging, mutual recognition and communal participation. Identity is therefore relationally constituted rather than privately possessed.

This understanding is highly relevant to the present study because it suggests that becoming an academic is not solely a matter of individual competence, technical adjustment or private achievement. It is also a process of being received into, recognised within and enabled to participate meaningfully in an academic community (Wenger, 1998). Academic becoming is therefore relational as much as it is occupational. For second-career academics, whose expertise and professional legitimacy may already be strongly established outside higher education, successful transition depends not only on acquiring new institutional knowledge but also on whether institutional communities recognise and validate their participation within academic life.

Mbiti's framework deepens the meaning of support and belonging within the dissertation. Transition Theory identifies support as an important factor shaping adjustment, while Professional Identity Theory highlights belonging and recognition as central to identity formation (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Beijaard et al., 2004). Ubuntu clarifies why these dimensions matter at a deeper philosophical level. Support and belonging are not simply instrumental resources that improve organisational adjustment or reduce transition difficulty. They are constitutive of professional becoming itself. This shifts the analysis away from a model of isolated adaptation towards one of relational incorporation and communal participation.

This perspective is especially important for understanding the experiences of second-career academics within South African PHEIs. Entry into academia may depend as much on collegial recognition, institutional welcome and opportunities for participation as on formal appointment or disciplinary expertise. If professional becoming is relational, then mentorship, collegial engagement and institutional inclusion are not optional developmental enhancements. They are integral to the process through which a newcomer becomes intelligible as a legitimate member of the academic community.

Mbiti's relational philosophy has subsequently been extended by contemporary African scholars seeking to explore its implications for institutional life and higher education practice. Metz (2011) develops relational personhood into a broader moral framework grounded in solidarity and communal obligation, while Radebe (2025) applies Ubuntu specifically to the South African higher education environment, arguing that institutional responsibility extends beyond procedural compliance towards the creation of relationally just and humanising academic environments. These developments

strengthen the relevance of Ubuntu to the present study by connecting philosophical understandings of personhood to the institutional realities within which pracademic transition occurs.

3.5.2 Ubuntu as Institutional Ethics

While Mbiti (1969) establishes the ontological grounding of relational personhood, Metz (2011) develops Ubuntu into a more explicit moral theory concerned with dignity, solidarity and harmonious social relations. Metz (2011) argues that human flourishing is tied to the capacity for communal relationships, understood as both identification with others and action that expresses mutual care and solidarity. His contribution is especially important because it extends Ubuntu beyond interpersonal morality and situates it within the ethical evaluation of institutional and public life. In this dissertation, Ubuntu serves not only as a descriptive lens for understanding belonging but also as a normative framework for evaluating institutional responses to pracademic transition.

From this perspective, institutional practices are not ethically neutral. Induction structures, mentoring relationships, workload allocation, collegial interaction and recognition practices all possess moral significance because they shape whether individuals are treated in ways that affirm dignity, inclusion and communal value (Metz, 2011). For second-career academics, this means that support, collegiality and professional inclusion are not simply functional mechanisms that improve adjustment or productivity. They are expressions of institutional ethics. An environment that isolates newcomers, instrumentalises professional expertise or neglects developmental support can therefore be understood not only as organisationally ineffective, but as relationally and morally deficient.

This ethical framing is particularly significant within South African private higher education institutions operating under conditions of market responsiveness, quality assurance accountability and increasing performance pressures (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Within such contexts, institutional practices may become increasingly managerial and performance-oriented, potentially reducing academic staff to operational functions rather than relational participants within a scholarly community. Ubuntu provides a counterpoint to this tendency by foregrounding the ethical responsibility institutions bear towards the people who constitute them. It therefore shifts the analytical focus from whether institutions merely manage transition effectively towards whether they cultivate conditions of dignity, reciprocity and meaningful inclusion.

Metz's (2011) interpretation also strengthens the study's conceptualisation of belonging. Within many institutional settings, belonging is often framed as an emotional or psychological outcome associated with adjustment and collegial comfort. Ubuntu repositions belonging as a relational and ethical achievement grounded in recognition, participation and communal affirmation. In this sense,

academic belonging is not reducible to individual feeling; it is produced through institutional relationships and organisational practices that either enable or constrain meaningful participation within academic life (Wenger, 1998; Henkel, 2005).

This ethical interpretation has important implications for understanding the pracademic transition. Second-career academics may enter institutions with significant professional expertise and occupational credibility, whilst still experience exclusion or uncertainty if institutional environments fail to recognise their contribution meaningfully. Ubuntu, therefore, enables the dissertation to interpret institutional support not simply as a procedural resource but as a relational practice through which institutions communicate value, legitimacy and communal membership.

Metz's (2011) moral interpretation of Ubuntu is further developed in South African higher education scholarship by Radebe (2025), who argues that communal ethics require both structural and interpersonal expression within universities. From this perspective, institutions demonstrate relational accountability not merely through collegial warmth or supportive rhetoric, but through how they allocate resources, distribute workloads, recognise contributions and create developmental opportunities. Ubuntu therefore, becomes relevant not only to institutional culture in an abstract sense, but also to the material and organisational conditions shaping academic life.

This perspective is particularly valuable for the present study because it deepens the analysis of institutional responsibility in pracademic transition. The framework suggests that institutions are not passive environments within which transition occurs. Rather, they are active participants in shaping whether newcomers experience academic life as humanising, developmental and relationally inclusive. Ubuntu therefore enables the study to interpret transition not only as a matter of individual adaptation but also as an institutional and ethical process shaped by the quality of relationships, recognition and communal participation available within academic environments.

3.5.3 Ubuntu and Higher Education Practice

If Mbiti (1969) provides the ontological grounding of relational personhood and Metz (2011) clarifies Ubuntu's ethical significance, Khohliso et al. (2025) demonstrate its relevance to higher education practice. Their systematic review argues that Ubuntu pedagogies provide a transformative lens for reimagining higher education through communal, inclusive and decolonial values. This contribution is especially important because it shows that Ubuntu is not confined to abstract philosophical reflection. It has direct implications for pedagogy, curriculum design, staff development and institutional culture within contemporary higher education environments.

Khohliso et al. (2025) identify several themes especially relevant to the present study. They demonstrate that Ubuntu-informed educational practices can support shared knowledge construction, affirm diverse identities and experiences, challenge highly individualised models of learning and promote communal accountability within teaching and learning environments. Their work further suggests that meaningful educational engagement depends not only on cognitive participation but also on relational inclusion and the recognition of students and colleagues as members of a shared educational community.

This perspective has important implications for understanding pracademic transition within South African private higher education. It suggests that belonging and recognition are not merely interpersonal experiences confined to collegial relationships. Rather, they are embedded within the pedagogical and institutional life of the university itself. Ubuntu therefore helps explain not only how second-career colleagues receive academic support but also the kind of educational environment into which they are entering and helping to shape. In this sense, pedagogical development and institutional belonging become deeply interconnected rather than separate dimensions of transition.

Ubuntu also provides an important counterpoint to highly individualised and performative understandings of academic work increasingly associated with marketised higher education systems (Raaper, 2023). Within institutions shaped by managerialism, quality assurance metrics and performance accountability, academic labour may become fragmented into measurable outputs and operational responsibilities. Ubuntu challenges this orientation by foregrounding the communal and relational dimensions of educational practice. Teaching, mentoring and academic development are therefore understood not simply as technical activities, but as relational practices through which knowledge, participation and professional identity are collectively constructed.

This interpretation is particularly significant for pracademics because many enter academia precisely through their ability to connect theory and practice in ways students perceive as relevant and meaningful (Hora & Lee, 2020; Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). Ubuntu strengthens this contribution by emphasising that educational value is not produced solely through the transfer of knowledge, but through the quality of the relationships within which learning occurs. It therefore aligns strongly with pedagogical approaches that prioritise dialogue, accessibility, responsiveness and shared meaning-making within higher education classrooms.

The practical relevance of Ubuntu to higher education is also reinforced by Hlatshwayo (2024), who argues that South African universities must be understood within broader historical struggles concerning exclusion, transformation and epistemic justice. From this perspective, institutional

culture cannot be separated from questions of power, recognition and participation. Ubuntu therefore provides not only a relational philosophy of educational inclusion but also a contextual framework for interpreting institutional responsibility within South African higher education.

Applied to the present study, this means that pracademic transition cannot be understood only as a private developmental journey undertaken by isolated individuals. Rather, it unfolds within institutional environments that actively shape whether newcomers experience inclusion, recognition and pedagogical growth. Ubuntu therefore, strengthens the dissertation's broader argument that transition is fundamentally relational and institutionally mediated. It also reinforces the importance of examining how organisational cultures, collegial relationships and pedagogical practices either enable or constrain meaningful incorporation into academic life.

3.5.4 Ubuntu, belonging and institutional culture

Ubuntu is particularly valuable for theorising institutional culture because it foregrounds the relational conditions through which individuals are welcomed into, recognised within or excluded from professional communities. Within the present study, institutional culture is not understood merely as a collection of formal values, policies or organisational routines. It is conceptualised as the lived pattern of relationships, expectations, recognitions and exclusions through which second-career academics encounter academic life (Wenger, 1998; Henkel, 2005). Ubuntu deepens this understanding by emphasising that institutional participation is fundamentally relational and that professional becoming occurs through communal interaction rather than isolated individual effort.

Through this lens, belonging is not simply an emotional state associated with comfort or adjustment. It is a relational accomplishment produced through practices of recognition, dignity, inclusion and shared purpose (Metz, 2011). A second-career academic may be formally employed, administratively inducted and operationally functional while nevertheless remaining relationally marginal within institutional life. Ubuntu helps expose this distinction by demonstrating that procedural incorporation does not necessarily produce meaningful communal inclusion. Institutions may therefore succeed administratively while failing relationally.

This distinction is especially important for the present study because many pracademics enter academia from professional environments in which expertise, authority and occupational legitimacy were already well established. Transition into higher education may therefore involve not only learning new pedagogical and institutional practices, but also renegotiating professional value within communities governed by unfamiliar norms and evaluative criteria (Beijaard et al., 2004; Yusoff,

2025). Whether this negotiation becomes developmental or alienating depends much on the relational quality of the institutional environment.

Ubuntu also strengthens the dissertation's interpretation of mentorship and collegiality. Within procedural models of staff development, mentoring is often framed as a mechanism for improving performance, transmitting institutional knowledge or supporting induction. Ubuntu broadens this understanding by positioning mentorship as a relational practice through which newcomers are recognised, affirmed and incorporated into communal academic life (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011). Collegial relationships therefore, become significant not only because they facilitate organisational adjustment, but because they contribute to the development of professional personhood and institutional belonging.

This perspective also has important pedagogical implications. If teaching and learning are fundamentally relational activities, then the institution's moral atmosphere inevitably shapes pedagogical practice. Institutions characterised by instrumentalism, fragmentation or excessive performativity may struggle to sustain deeply relational forms of teaching and collegial engagement (Raaper, 2023). Conversely, institutional environments grounded in mutual support, collegial development and shared responsibility may be better positioned to foster meaningful pedagogy, collaborative academic growth and stronger forms of student engagement.

Ubuntu therefore operates across the present framework not as an isolated philosophical theme, but as a contextual and ethical lens connecting transition, identity, pedagogy and institutional culture. It reinforces the argument that successful pracademic transition depends not solely on individual resilience or technical competence, but also on whether institutions cultivate relational environments in which newcomers can participate meaningfully, develop professionally and experience themselves as valued members of the academic community.

Mbiti's (1969) argument that community precedes and constitutes the individual further strengthens this interpretation. From this perspective, professional capability is not understood as a purely self-generated achievement later brought into institutional life. Competence itself is developed, sustained and made meaningful through relationships of mutual recognition and communal participation. Applied to the treatment of pracademics, this implies that institutions are not merely sites within which academic competence is displayed; they are constitutively responsible for enabling the conditions under which such competence can emerge and flourish.

Hlatshwayo (2024) extends this argument within the South African higher education context by suggesting that Ubuntu provides a more contextually resonant framework for institutional accountability than highly individualised and managerial approaches to academic development. Institutional responsibility therefore, extends beyond procedural compliance with induction and support requirements towards the cultivation of relationally just and developmentally supportive academic environments. Within the present study, this insight is especially significant because it positions institutional culture not as background context, but as an active condition shaping the possibilities of belonging, pedagogical development and professional legitimacy during pracademic transition.

3.5.5 A critical use of ubuntu

Ubuntu is not romanticised within this dissertation. It is not treated as an uncomplicated celebration of harmony, nor is it assumed that the invocation of relational language automatically produces justice, inclusion or institutional care. While Ubuntu provides an important ethical and contextual lens for understanding belonging, collegiality and communal responsibility, a critical engagement with the framework requires attentiveness to power, exclusion and institutional contradiction (Radebe, 2025). Institutions may espouse the language of community and inclusion while simultaneously reproducing hierarchical, performative or exclusionary organisational practices.

This critical stance is particularly important within higher education environments increasingly shaped by managerialism, accountability pressures and market responsiveness (Raaper, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Under such conditions, the rhetoric of collegiality may coexist with excessive workloads, limited developmental support and institutional cultures that marginalise newcomers despite formal commitments to inclusion. Ubuntu therefore, cannot be approached as a purely descriptive account of institutional life. It must also function as a critical evaluative standard against which institutional practices can be assessed.

A critical use of Ubuntu also requires recognition that relationality itself may become exclusionary if notions of community suppress disagreement, discourage critique or privilege conformity over meaningful participation. Institutional cultures that emphasise harmony without addressing structural inequality or unequal power relations may unintentionally silence vulnerable voices or obscure experiences of exclusion. For second-career academics, this may manifest in subtle forms of gatekeeping that undervalue professional expertise, narrowly define academic legitimacy, or condition participation on assimilation into dominant institutional norms (Henkel, 2005; Yusoff, 2025).

The value of Ubuntu within the present study therefore, lies not in presenting an idealised image of the academic community, but in providing a framework capable of contextually examining the ethical quality of institutional relationships through a critical lense. Ubuntu is most analytically useful when understood simultaneously as an interpretive lens and a normative standard. It helps explain why dignity, recognition, reciprocity and communal participation matter within academic transition, while also enabling the dissertation to interrogate whether institutions genuinely embody these values in practice.

This critical framing strengthens the integrated theoretical framework by ensuring that relational belonging is not treated sentimentally or abstractly. Instead, belonging is understood as institutionally produced, unevenly distributed and shaped by broader organisational and structural conditions. Ubuntu therefore deepens the dissertation's analysis by connecting identity, pedagogy and institutional culture to questions of ethics, power and relational justice within South African higher education.

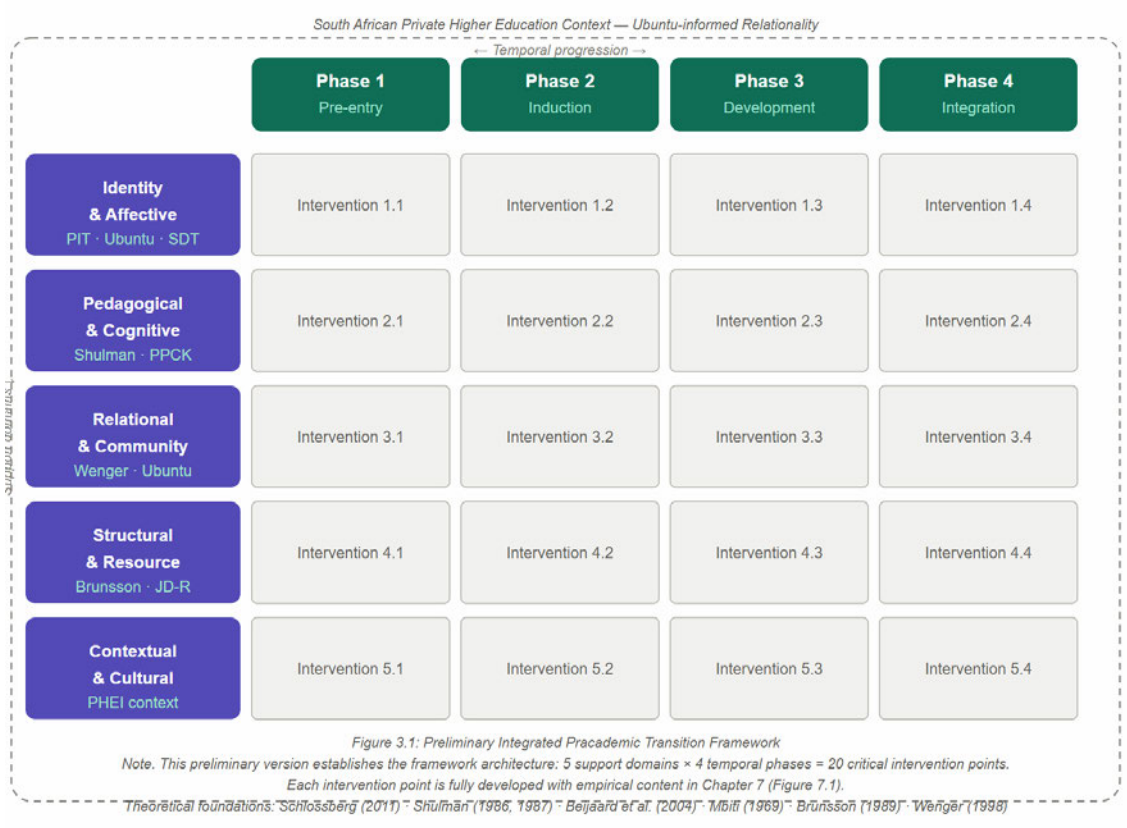
In this sense, Ubuntu does not replace the other theoretical frameworks employed in the study, but rather extends and grounds them contextually. Transition Theory explains how individuals navigate change; Professional Identity Theory explains how legitimacy and belonging are negotiated; and PCK explains how expertise is transformed into teaching practice. Ubuntu adds a further dimension by asking whether these processes occur within institutional environments that affirm humanity, foster communal participation and sustain meaningful forms of academic inclusion. Collectively, the integrated framework therefore enables pracademic transition to be interpreted not merely as a technical or psychological process, but as a deeply relational, pedagogical and institutionally situated experience shaped by broader ethical and contextual conditions.

3.6 The preliminary integrated pracademic transition framework

The preceding sections have shown that no single theory is sufficient to explain the complexity of pracademic transition in South African private higher education institutions. Schlossberg's Transition Theory explains movement and adjustment, but not the full social construction of legitimacy. Professional Identity Theory explains legitimacy, belonging, hybridity and identity work, but not the pedagogical transformation of expertise. PCK explains the development of teaching capability, but not the broader ethical and relational dimensions of institutional life. Ubuntu provides this contextual and ethical grounding while also situating the framework within South African higher education. For these reasons, the study advances a Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework that brings these strands into a coherent conceptual whole.

At this stage of the chapter, the relationship between these theories can be represented visually. Figure 3.1 presents the Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework that guides the study.

Figure 3.1: Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework



Note. The framework situates pracademic transition within the South African private higher education context. It shows how Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK operate as interconnected domains, with recursive feedback across them. The principal outcomes are pracademic adaptation, academic legitimacy, pedagogical development and institutional belonging.

The figure is placed here because this section marks the shift from individual theoretical discussion to conceptual synthesis. The diagram visually clarifies the layered and recursive logic of the framework. It enables the reader to see how context, transition, identity, pedagogy and outcome relate to one another within a single interpretive structure.

3.6.1 The South African private higher education context as the outer frame

The outer frame of the model is the South African private higher education context. This framing is deliberate and theoretically important because it indicates that pracademic transition does not occur in an abstract academic space. It unfolds within institutions shaped by marketisation, regulation, transformation pressures, resource constraints and Ubuntu-informed relationality. These conditions shape recruitment, teaching expectations, workload, programme design, quality assurance and institutional culture.

Matadi and Uleanya (2022) show that private higher education institutions in South Africa occupy an important place within the higher education landscape, but do so under conditions of regulatory scrutiny and operational constraint. These conditions matter because they shape the practical environment in which second-career academics work. Transition, identity and pedagogy are therefore always contextualised rather than free-floating. The inclusion of Ubuntu-informed relationality within the outer frame also signals that context is not merely structural or managerial. It is also moral and relational.

3.6.2 Transition theory as the entry domain

The first internal domain of the framework is Transition Theory. This domain represents the initial movement from industry into academia and is organised around situation, self, support and strategies. In the figure, these are represented as situation and context, self and agency, support as institutional and social and strategies as coping and adaptation.

This domain functions as the entry point because becoming a pracademic begins as a transition. Individuals encounter unfamiliar routines, altered roles and new institutional expectations. They interpret their situations, draw on their personal and professional resources, seek or receive support and develop strategies for managing uncertainty. Transition Theory thus provides the conceptual language for understanding the first layer of the pracademic experience.

However, the framework also makes clear that the transition does not remain self-contained. It flows into and becomes mediated by identity. Liminality helps explain this space between entry and recognition. It captures the condition in which second-career academics have entered the academic field but have not fully secured legitimacy, belonging, or pedagogical confidence. This is especially important because the framework is not intended to suggest a smooth linear passage from industry to academia. Rather, it represents a recursive and uneven process in which entrants may remain suspended between worlds for extended periods (Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026; Liddle, 2025).

3.6.3 Professional identity theory as the mediating domain

The second internal domain is Professional Identity Theory. In the figure, this domain includes legitimacy, belonging, identity work and hybridity. Its placement between transition and pedagogy is intentional. It indicates that becoming an academic is not simply about coping with change or learning technical tasks. It also involves being recognised, participating meaningfully and negotiating a viable sense of self within the academic field.

Legitimacy refers to whether second-career academics are recognised as credible academics. Belonging refers to whether they experience themselves as included members of the academic community. Identity work refers to the reflective and practical labour of reconstructing selfhood in

relation to new norms. Hybridity refers to the coexistence of practitioner and academic selves. This domain is mediating because it explains how transition becomes socially and symbolically meaningful.

Its mediating role is theoretically important. Transition does not move directly into pedagogical enactment without passing through the field of identity. How individuals teach, how confidently they participate and how they respond to institutional feedback are all shaped by whether they experience legitimacy and belonging. The framework therefore, treats identity not as an optional layer, but as a central interpretive domain.

3.6.4 Pedagogical content knowledge as the enactment domain

The third internal domain is Pedagogical Content Knowledge. In the figure, this includes curriculum, instruction, assessment and knowledge of learners. This domain represents the point at which academic identity becomes enacted through teaching and learning practice.

Its position in the framework is theoretically significant. It suggests that second-career academics do not become academics solely by virtue of appointment or internal identification. They become academics through the practical work of teaching, designing learning experiences, assessing students and responding to learner diversity. Pedagogy is therefore one of the principal sites through which academic identity becomes visible, credible and consequential.

At the same time, pedagogy is shaped by the earlier domains. Transition affects how prepared individuals feel to teach. Identity affects their confidence, authority and sense of legitimacy in the classroom. Conversely, pedagogical success or difficulty feeds back into both identity and transition. This is why the framework includes recursive feedback rather than a simple linear flow.

3.6.5 Recursive feedback across domains

A defining feature of the framework is its recursive structure. The arrows across the domains indicate that the relationship between transition, identity and pedagogy is iterative rather than linear. Development in one domain can reshape the others. For example, meaningful institutional support during transition may foster stronger confidence and encourage pedagogical experimentation. Effective teaching may strengthen legitimacy and deepen belonging. Conversely, identity insecurity may inhibit pedagogical confidence, while weak support may intensify both role uncertainty and instructional difficulty.

Liminality strengthens the explanatory power of this recursive design. It helps explain why transition, identity and pedagogy do not unfold in neatly completed stages. A second-career academic may feel pedagogically effective while still experiencing symbolic misrecognition. Another may begin to develop a hybrid professional identity while remaining uncertain about institutional belonging.

Liminality therefore, helps explain the recursive feedback loops already built into the framework by showing that transition, identity and pedagogy are lived as overlapping rather than sequential processes (Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026; Yusoff, 2025).

Liddle's (2025) focus on identity development and competency formation in liminal spaces is especially useful here. It suggests that liminality should not be interpreted only as uncertainty or deficit. It can also serve as a developmental space where new professional capacities are formed. This insight prevents the dissertation from construing in-betweenness solely as a problem. For pracademics, the liminal position between academic and professional fields may also create distinctive opportunities for reflexivity, hybrid competence and the bridging of theory and practice.

3.6.6 The outcome layer

The final block of the figure identifies four outcomes: pracademic adaptation, academic legitimacy, pedagogical development and institutional belonging. These outcomes are treated as the principal domains through which successful transition can be interpreted in the study.

Pracademic adaptation refers to the individual's broader adjustment to academic work and culture. Academic legitimacy refers to recognition as a credible academic by oneself and others. Pedagogical development refers to the growth of teaching capability through curriculum, instruction, assessment and responsiveness to learners. Institutional belonging refers to meaningful inclusion within the academic community. These outcomes are distinguished for analytical clarity, but in practice, they are deeply interconnected. Adaptation without legitimacy remains fragile. Legitimacy without pedagogical development may be superficial. Pedagogical development without a sense of belonging may be difficult to sustain. Belonging without adaptation may remain symbolic rather than functional.

3.6.7 Ubuntu as a contextual and ethical moderator

Although Ubuntu is not represented as a separate internal block in the same way as the other theories, it functions across the framework as a contextual and ethical moderator. This is a deliberate choice. Ubuntu does not replace transition, identity, or pedagogy. It shapes how each is interpreted. It informs what counts as meaningful support, legitimate recognition, relational pedagogy and authentic belonging.

This cross-cutting role is particularly important because it grounds the model normatively within South African higher education. It reminds the study that academic transition is not simply about role performance and procedural adjustment. It is also about the quality of the relationships through which persons are received, recognised and enabled to flourish. Ubuntu therefore ensures that the framework remains attentive to dignity, reciprocity and communal life rather than becoming a purely technical model of adaptation.

3.7 Theoretical implications of the framework

The Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework has several important implications for the study. First, it establishes that the pracademic transition should be analysed as a multidimensional process rather than a singular occupational event. This means that participant experiences cannot be interpreted adequately through the lens of change management alone. Their accounts must also be read in relation to identity negotiation, pedagogical development, institutional culture and liminality. The framework therefore, broadens the study's analytical scope and resists reductionist explanations.

Second, the framework highlights the central role of institutional conditions. By situating the process within the South African private higher education context, it recognises that transition, identity and pedagogy are shaped by regulation, quality assurance, resource limitations, organisational priorities and relational cultures (Matadi & Uleanya, 2022). This has direct implications for the study's interpretation of participant narratives. Challenges faced by second-career academics cannot automatically be attributed to personal deficiency. They must be examined in relation to institutional arrangements that enable or constrain adaptation, recognition and development.

Third, the framework implies that support should be understood broadly. Support is not confined to formal induction or administrative orientation. It includes collegial welcome, mentorship, pedagogical guidance, institutional recognition and opportunities for meaningful participation. Because the framework is recursive, support in one domain can have effects in others. Strong pedagogical support, for example, may enhance identity and belonging, just as recognition may encourage further pedagogical growth. This reinforces the need for the study to attend closely to both formal and informal institutional practices.

Fourth, the framework positions legitimacy and belonging as central rather than peripheral concerns. This has methodological as well as theoretical implications. Participant accounts of feeling recognised, misrecognised, included, or marginalised are not incidental personal responses. They are analytically significant indicators of how academic identity is being constituted within a specific institutional environment. The framework therefore, provides a basis for interpreting emotional and relational experiences as theoretically meaningful rather than only anecdotal.

Fifth, the framework foregrounds pedagogy as a crucial site of pracademic development. This means that teaching experiences, curriculum challenges, assessment practices and learner responsiveness should be interpreted not only as operational matters, but as central indicators of academic becoming. The study is therefore positioned to show how pedagogical practice serves as both a developmental domain and an arena in which legitimacy and identity are enacted.

Sixth, the integration of liminality and academic socialisation sharpens the chapter's account of belonging. Belonging is no longer treated simply as an outcome of successful adaptation, but as a relational and institutional process shaped by socialisation, recognition and participation in academic communities. Recent work on academic identity suggests that access to professional spaces of meaning-making is central to becoming academic (Qian et al., 2026; Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026). This has direct relevance for the dissertation's interview analysis, since participant accounts of collegial inclusion, exclusion, mentorship and visibility may now be read not merely as workplace experiences, but as indicators of identity formation itself.

Finally, the inclusion of Ubuntu gives the framework a critical and normative orientation. It ensures that the study does not treat institutional integration solely as an effective adjustment to existing structures. Instead, it encourages analysis of whether those structures cultivate dignity, reciprocity and meaningful belonging. This allows the study to engage not only with how second-career academics adapt, but also with whether institutional cultures are ethically responsive to their presence and contribution. The discussion chapter further supplements this framework with targeted perspectives from organisational sociology and occupational psychology, specifically Bourdieu's cultural capital, Brunsson's organisational hypocrisy, institutional logics theory and Self-Determination and Job Demands-Resources theories, to address the structural, motivational and organisational dimensions of transition that the core framework addresses only partially.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter develops the theoretical framework for the dissertation by arguing that pracademic transition in South African private higher education institutions is a complex, multidimensional process. It cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical lens because it involves transitioning into a new professional environment, identity reconstruction within an academic field, the pedagogical transformation of expertise and the relational and ethical conditions of institutional life.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory has shown how the move from industry to academia can be understood through situations, self, support and strategies. The concept of liminality has deepened this account by revealing the suspended and ambiguous nature of becoming between established professional and emerging academic identities. Professional Identity Theory has demonstrated that this transition is mediated by legitimacy, belonging, identity work, hybridity and academic socialisation. PCK has clarified that becoming an academic also requires transforming professional expertise into curriculum, instruction, assessment and learner responsiveness. Ubuntu has grounded the framework in a South African moral and relational vocabulary that foregrounds dignity, reciprocity and communal accountability.

By integrating these perspectives, the chapter has advanced the Preliminary Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework as the conceptual anchor of the study. The framework captures the recursive interaction between transition, identity and pedagogy within the context of South African private higher education, while also foregrounding the ethical significance of institutional culture. It provides a coherent explanation of how second-career academics experience and negotiate the move into academia and it offers a structured basis for analysing participant narratives in the chapters that follow.

The theoretical framework developed here directly informs the methodological choices in Chapter 4. It shapes the kinds of data the study seeks, the interpretive categories applied during analysis and the manner in which individual experience will be situated within broader institutional and contextual structures. Chapter 4 therefore builds on this conceptual foundation by explaining how the study will investigate the lived experiences of pracademic transition in methodological terms.

Chapter Four: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

Having established the theoretical architecture of the study in the preceding chapter, which integrated Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK, this chapter presents the comprehensive methodological framework that guided the empirical investigation. The primary aim of this doctoral research is to investigate how industry professionals experienced their transition into academic roles at a South African PHEI and to critically examine how institutional structures and support systems facilitated or constrained this complex transition. Understanding the non-linear realities of moving from a familiar professional domain into the multifaceted environment of academia demands rigorous methodological scaffolding capable of capturing subjective human experience within a highly specific organisational context.

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by three primary research questions that steer the empirical inquiry. Firstly, what are the industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the PHEI? Secondly, how do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning to academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI? Thirdly, why do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning into academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they do? These questions collectively move the inquiry from descriptive accounts of the transition phenomenon towards deeply explanatory and theoretical insights, demanding a methodology that is highly sensitive to depth, context and structural complexity.

The fundamental purpose of this chapter is to explicitly outline the methodological framework and justify the methodological choices made throughout the research trajectory. Methodological transparency is paramount in qualitative inquiry, serving as the foundation for the study's overall trustworthiness and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By articulating the underlying philosophical assumptions, research design and systematic procedures for data generation and analysis, this chapter establishes the rigorous parameters within which the empirical findings are situated. This chapter provides a detailed, critical reflection on my insider researcher positionality. Specifically, it addresses the methodological implications and inherent power dynamics associated with my dual role as the senior academic leader and the primary architect of the institution's academic onboarding programme. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of the ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations that define the boundaries of the inquiry.

4.2 Philosophical foundations: interpretivist paradigm

4.2.1 Ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations

All rigorous research is anchored in philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the role of values in the inquiry process (axiology). This study is situated firmly within the interpretivist paradigm, which fundamentally rejects the positivist assertion of a single, objective and measurable reality. Instead, interpretivism operates on the foundational premise that reality is socially constructed, fluid and inherently multifaceted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this lens, meaning is not discovered waiting 'out there' in the world; rather, it is actively constructed by individuals as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in a subjectivist position. In contrast to objectivist epistemologies that privilege researcher detachment and the assumption of an external, discoverable reality, subjectivism posits that knowledge is actively co-constructed through empathetic and dialogic engagement between the researcher and participants (Schwandt, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Knowledge generation in this study is therefore understood as an interactive and interpretive process rather than the neutral extraction of objective facts. Through the semi-structured interviews, meaning was not merely collected from participants; rather, it was jointly negotiated through dialogue, reflection and engagement. The dialogic nature of these interactions enabled mutual reflection, in which the questions posed, prompts offered and ensuing discussions collaboratively generated rich, nuanced understandings to address the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Axiologically, interpretivism openly acknowledges that research is a value-laden endeavour rather than a value-free exercise in detached observation (Lincoln et al., 2011). Researchers inevitably bring their own experiences, assumptions, professional histories and interpretive orientations into the research process, all of which shape the trajectory of inquiry and the meanings ultimately constructed from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the present study, my position in a Teaching and Learning leadership role at the selected PHEI means that I possess a direct professional interest in the institutional mechanisms being examined. Rather than attempting an impossible façade of value-neutrality, this axiological position requires rigorous and ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process (Berger, 2015; Dodgson, 2019). Values, assumptions and positional influences were therefore actively interrogated and managed to ensure that they functioned as sensitising resources for interpretation rather than sources of unchecked bias.

4.2.2 Alignment between paradigm and study

The selection of the interpretivist paradigm is not arbitrary but is fundamentally aligned with the study's core objectives and theoretical underpinnings. Professional transition is inherently meaning-laden. It involves significant emotional labour, identity renegotiation and the navigation of new cultural norms. Attempting to quantify such profound personal transformations would strip them of their contextual richness and explanatory power. The integrated theoretical framework developed in Chapter Three strongly emphasises subjective experience. Schlossberg's Transition Theory focuses on the individual's perception of the transition and their appraisal of their coping resources. Professional Identity Theory is rooted in the continuous, subjective negotiation of the self. Similarly, Shulman's PCK framework acknowledges that the transformation of content knowledge for teaching relies on the instructor's unique cognitive and reflective processes. The interpretivist paradigm provides the necessary philosophical grounding to operationalise these theories effectively, ensuring that participants' subjective realities remain the focal point of the inquiry.

4.3 Research design: qualitative case study

4.3.1 Rationale for qualitative approach

Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach was selected as the overarching methodological design. When industry professionals enter academia, they undergo a complex process of unlearning practitioner habits, confronting profound feelings of professional inadequacy and developing new pedagogical competencies. These subtle, intricate psychosocial processes cannot be adequately captured or measured through rigid quantitative instruments. The primary research questions, which focus on exploring the texture of lived experiences and the contextual influences of institutional structures, demand qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research allows for the depth of inquiry required, enabling the researcher to probe beneath surface-level responses, observe contradictions in participants' narratives and construct a holistic understanding of the pracademic transition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.3.2 Case study strategy

Within the broad spectrum of qualitative methodologies, this research employs a single-site, instrumental case study design, guided by the foundational principles of Stake (1995) and Yin (2018). The selected case is a South African PHEI that specialises in a diverse array of applied fields, including business, management, technology, education and healthcare management. The justification for selecting this specific institution as the bounded case is multifaceted. Notably, this PHEI intentionally and strategically recruits industry-experienced professionals to bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and industry practice. It operates a structured academic onboarding programme designed specifically to scaffold the pedagogical development of these non-traditional academic

entrants. This makes the institution an information-rich site for examining institutional support mechanisms.

According to Yin (2018), a case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. In this study, the transition of pracademics is inextricably linked to the specific policies, cultures and support structures of the PHEI. The design is specifically an instrumental case study rather than an intrinsic one. While intrinsic case studies are undertaken simply because the case itself is of unique interest, instrumental case studies use a particular case to provide insight into a broader issue or to revise a generalisation (Stake, 1995). Here, the specific PHEI serves as the instrument through which the wider, complex phenomenon of industry-to-academia transitions in the Global South is examined and understood.

4.3.3 Boundaries of the case

To ensure methodological coherence and manageability, the case must be strictly demarcated. Case study literature defines a case as a bounded system, meaning there are clear parameters that define what falls within and what falls outside the scope of the inquiry (Yin, 2018). In this study, the boundaries are threefold: temporal, disciplinary and geographic. The temporal boundary restricts participation to industry professionals who have transitioned into full-time academic roles at the PHEI within the past three years. This timeframe ensures that participants' transitional experiences are recent enough to be recalled in rich detail, while also allowing sufficient time for deep reflection on institutional support structures. The disciplinary boundary is confined to applied professional fields such as business, technology, law and healthcare management, where the tension between industry practice and academic theory is especially pronounced. Finally, the geographic boundary centres on the Durban location of the PHEI, which, despite its national footprint, maintains a centralised organisational and pedagogical culture significantly shaped by this hub.

4.3.4 Unit of analysis

In case study research, defining the unit of analysis is critical for maintaining focus. In this research, there is a dual focus. The primary unit of analysis is the individual pracademic experiencing the transition. Their narratives, identity negotiations and pedagogical adaptations form the core of the empirical data. However, the institutional mechanisms (specifically the onboarding policies, induction procedures and the academic onboarding programme) serve as a secondary unit of analysis. This dual focus is deliberate, enabling a highly sophisticated examination of the interplay between individual agency (how the pracademic navigates the transition) and structural constraints or enablers (how the institution supports or hinders that transition).

4.4 Research context

Understanding the macro- and micro-context is vital in interpretivist case study research. At the macro level, the South African private higher education sector is expanding rapidly. The sector operates within a strict regulatory framework overseen by the CHE and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), while also being shaped by intense market orientation, agile programme design and a strong emphasis on graduate employability. To meet these market demands, PHEIs frequently recruit industry professionals. These individuals are brought in to ensure that curricula remain relevant, practical and aligned with contemporary industry standards, thereby enhancing graduate employability. However, this recruitment strategy presents a profound institutional challenge. While these professionals possess deep disciplinary expertise, they typically lack formal pedagogical training, assessment literacy and an understanding of academic administrative cultures. They are frequently content experts, but novice educators.

Micro-contextually, the selected PHEI recognised this systemic challenge and instituted the academic onboarding programme. The academic onboarding programme is an extensive, mandatory professional development initiative comprising multiple distinct units. These units cover critical pedagogical dimensions including understanding learning theories, curriculum design, assessment strategies, teaching diverse student populations, academic integrity, educational technology integration, reflective practice, research-informed teaching, quality assurance, student support services and library resources. The programme is explicitly intended to accelerate the development of PCK among incoming pracademics, making it a critical focal point for this investigation.

4.5 Population, sampling and participants

4.5.1 Target population

The target population for this study consisted of industry professionals who had transitioned into academic teaching positions at the selected PHEI within the past three years. These individuals held full-time academic roles across multiple applied schools, including Business, Healthcare Management, Law and Information Technology. A defining characteristic of this population is the basis of their appointment: they are typically recruited for extensive domain expertise and professional credibility rather than through a conventional academic trajectory built around postgraduate research degrees and publication records. They are second-career academics navigating the highly porous boundary between established professional practitioner identities and newly assumed academic responsibilities.

4.5.2 Sampling strategy

Given the qualitative nature of the inquiry, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of participants based on their specific characteristics and their

capacity to provide rich, detailed and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is a non-probabilistic approach, explicitly focused on depth and contextual nuance rather than statistical representativeness.

To operationalise this, a strict criterion sampling strategy was used. The inclusion criteria required that participants (1) possessed a minimum of 3 to 5 years of active industry experience prior to entering academia; (2) had transitioned into their academic role at the PHEI within the past three years; (3) were currently employed in a full-time capacity; (4) were teaching within applied professional fields; and (5) had completed at least the foundational units of the institution's academic onboarding programme. Within these strict parameters, a maximum variation sampling technique was concurrently applied (Palinkas et al., 2015). The objective was to intentionally seek diversity across several dimensions, including gender, specific teaching disciplines, former industry backgrounds and the exact timing of their transition. By capturing a heterogeneous cross-section of the target population, the study ensures a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of the transition experience, preventing the findings from being skewed by a homogeneous subgroup.

4.5.3 Sample size, information power and saturation

The final sample comprised 14 participants. In qualitative interpretivist research, sample size is not determined by statistical power calculations but rather by the principles of theoretical saturation and data richness. It is critical, however, to frame saturation not as a mechanical threshold or a formulaic certainty, but as a nuanced analytical judgement made by the researcher during the iterative process of data generation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). As Malterud et al. (2016) argue, the concept of "information power" is methodologically far more robust than arbitrary participant counts; the requisite sample size depends heavily on the study's aim, sample specificity, the use of established theory, the quality of dialogue and the analysis strategy. Given the highly specific purposive sample, the strong theoretical framing (Transition Theory, PCK) and the extended duration of the interviews, the 14 participants provided exceptional information power for this single-site case study.

To rigorously assess saturation, this study adopts the distinction articulated by Hennink and Kaiser (2022) and Guest et al. (2020) between 'code saturation' (the point at which no entirely new overarching codes or themes are identified) and 'meaning saturation' (the point at which the researcher fully understands the nuances, dimensions and complexities of the identified themes). Analytical judgement regarding code saturation was reached approximately by the ninth or tenth interview, as the fundamental thematic architecture concerning identity dissonance, trial-and-error pedagogical learning and institutional support gaps had clearly stabilised. However, data generation deliberately continued through to the fourteenth participant to ensure robust meaning saturation. The evidence that later interviews elaborated rather than fundamentally altered the coding architecture was observed in

how new data provided richer, context-specific examples of already established codes. For instance, later interviews provided unique disciplinary examples of impostor syndrome or specific digital technology frustrations without generating entirely novel categories of transition experience. This approach avoids the trap of treating saturation as a rigid endpoint, recognising instead that while qualitative data is infinitely rich, a point of sufficient theoretical and analytical depth was achieved to confidently answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

4.5.4 Participant profiles

The 14 participants included 8 women and 6 men, with ages ranging from 25 to 50 years. Their prior industry experience ranged extensively from 5 to 20 years, ensuring that all participants possessed deeply ingrained practitioner identities before entering the institution. Their academic experience at the time of the interviews ranged from 1 to 3 years, with one participant specifically at 2.5 years. Participants were drawn from a wide array of professional fields, including business, law, taxation, human resources, healthcare, project management, hospitality, entrepreneurship, information technology and data science. Table 4.1 below outlines the demographic and professional profiles of the 14 participants. To maintain strict confidentiality, pseudonyms (P01 to P14) have been used and identifying details have been carefully anonymised while retaining the contextual accuracy necessary for the study.

Table 4.1: Participant demographic and professional profiles

ID	Gender	Age Range	Former Industry	Years in Industry	Years in Academia	Academic Role	Teaching Discipline	Employment Status
P01	Female	30-35	Retail Management	7	2	Lecturer	Business Management	Full-time
P02	Female	35-40	Legal Practice	10	1.5	Lecturer	Law/Legal Studies	Full-time
P03	Male	30-35	Supply Chain/Logistics	9	1.5	Lecturer	Supply Chain Management	Full-time
P04	Female	30-35	Legal Services	9	2	Lecturer	Legal Studies	Full-time
P05	Male	40-45	Tax Manager	15	3	Lecturer	Taxation & Accounting	Full-time
P06	Female	40-50	HR Manager	15	3	Manager	School Manager - MBA	Full-time
P07	Female	30-35	Pharmacist	20	3	School Manager	School Manager - Healthcare Management	Full-time
P08	Male	40-50	Transnet Project Manager	15	3	Lecturer	Project Management	Full-time
P09	Female	30-35	Retail Management	9	3	School Manager	School Manager - Supply Chain Management	Full-time
P10	Female	40-45	Hospitality Management	14	3	Lecturer	Hospitality	Full-time
P11	Male	45-50	Entrepreneur	10	2.5	Lecturer	Entrepreneurship	Full-time

ID	Gender	Age Range	Former Industry	Years in Industry	Years in Academia	Academic Role	Teaching Discipline	Employment Status
P12	Female	25-30	Software Development	5	1	Lecturer	Information Tech	Full-time
P13	Male	30-35	Data Analytics	6	1	Lecturer	Data Science	Full-time
P14	Male	40-45	Computer Science	15	3	School Manager	School of Information & Digital Technologies	Full-time

4.6 Data generation methods

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary vehicle for data collection in this study. This method was selected because it strikes an appropriate balance between necessary structural consistency and responsive flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). Using a pre-designed interview guide ensures that the core research questions are systematically addressed across all 14 participants, allowing for robust cross-case thematic comparison. Simultaneously, the semi-structured nature permits the researcher to pivot, probe deeper into unexpected revelations and allow participants the freedom to express their lived realities in their own vernacular. This dialogic elasticity promotes deep rapport and authentic sharing, effectively mitigating some of the power barriers inherent in the researcher-participant dynamic and aligning closely with the interpretivist commitment to uncovering subjective, co-constructed meaning.

The interview guide was meticulously developed and structurally mapped directly onto the study's theoretical frameworks: Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK (Kallio et al., 2016). Section 1 focused on the background and transition experience, prompting reflections on initial motivations and how professional identity shifted upon entering the PHEI, directly operationalising Transition Theory and PIT. Section 2 addressed PCK and teaching experiences, asking participants to describe their initial pedagogical challenges, such as translating industry knowledge into accessible academic content and the evolution of their teaching strategies. Section 3 explored institutional structures and support, explicitly linking to Schlossberg's 'Support' factor by questioning the efficacy of formal induction processes and the academic onboarding programme. Before finalisation, the guide was rigorously pilot-tested with two non-participant academics to ensure clarity, relevance and the absence of leading terminology.

Adapting to the modern, hybrid work environment of the PHEI, interviews were conducted both face-to-face in private institutional offices and virtually via Microsoft Teams to accommodate participant schedules and ensure a comfortable environment (Archibald et al., 2019). The interviews were comprehensive, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, with a mean duration of approximately 75 minutes, ultimately yielding a rich corpus of roughly 17.5 hours of audio-recorded data. During the sessions, field notes were actively documented to capture non-verbal cues, contextual atmosphere and initial analytical hunches, a practice that enriches the qualitative context (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Following each session, automatic transcriptions were rigorously verified line-by-line against the audio recordings, followed by a member-checking process (Birt et al., 2016).

Participant evidence derived from the transcript corpus guided ongoing methodological sensitivity. For example, during early fieldwork, participants such as P03 and P10 expressed acute feelings of

professional inadequacy, akin to impostor syndrome, when navigating their new academic roles. Recognising this deeply emotional terrain necessitated immediate analytical sensitivity; subsequent probing was carefully adjusted to allow participants to explore these identity dissonances at their own pace. Similarly, when participants like P07 and P14 highlighted the stark reality of trial-and-error pedagogical learning, it became methodologically crucial to probe how this informal learning intersected with the formal expectations of the academic onboarding programme. Also, participants' mentions of intense workload pressures, such as P12, required the researcher to sensitively explore the tension between being recruited as an "expert" and being institutionally trained as a "novice." This responsiveness ensured the interviews remained authentically grounded in the participants' lived realities.

4.6.2 Document analysis

To triangulate the subjective interview data and deepen the contextual analysis, document analysis was employed as a complementary method (Bowen, 2009). In institutional research, documents serve as critical artefacts that reveal the organisation's underlying values, priorities and discursive practices (Prior, 2003). By analysing official texts, the study systematically compared the institution's 'espoused theories' (what the PHEI claims to do via its policies) against the 'theories-in-use' (what participants actually experience on the ground). The document corpus was extensive, totalling approximately 200 pages. This included the complete suite of academic onboarding programme materials: the overarching Programme Guide, detailed unit guides and associated assessment rubrics. The strategic institutional policies were selected for review, including the Onboarding Policy, Induction Procedure and Staff Development Policy.

Documents were assessed through the theoretical lenses of Transition Theory, PIT and PCK, examining how the institution discursively constructs transition, academic identity and pedagogical competence. To ensure methodological cohesion, documents were parallel-coded alongside the interview transcripts. A highly significant finding from this initial document discourse analysis was the profound linguistic tension present in the texts: recruitment documents frequently heralded incoming staff as "experts with real-world insights," while the internal academic onboarding programme materials often discursively positioned them as "novices needing training." This textual contradiction perfectly mirrored the identity dissonance and transitional friction reported by the participants in the interviews, validating the necessity of a multimodal data-generating approach.

To ensure systematic and theoretically consistent analysis, a structured document analysis protocol was developed prior to the review phase. This framework mapped each research question onto specific analytical foci drawn from Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK, and is included in full as Appendix D

4.6.3 Data generation timeline

The data generation and analysis process was carefully sequenced to ensure iterative learning, rigorous ethical compliance and sufficient time for analytical immersion. The timeline reflects a credible doctoral research trajectory, ensuring that data collection and the intensive, interpretive phases of analysis were appropriately staggered. Table 4.2 illustrates the sequential and concurrent phases of this timeline. It is critical to clarify that while preliminary coding, transcription checking and initial memoing occurred concurrently during the highly compressed fieldwork phase (September to November 2025), the deeper, intensive interpretive analysis, theme refinement and chapter drafting extended meaningfully beyond the final interview, continuing into early 2026. This clearly demonstrates the prolonged engagement and iterative intellectual labour required for rigorous qualitative scholarship.

Table 4.2: Data generation and analysis timeline

Phase	**Timeframe**	**Key Activities**
Phase 1: Preparation & Ethics	February - August 2025	Finalised research design; obtained ethical clearance (UKZN); developed and pilot-tested the interview guide; initiated purposive sampling and participant recruitment.
Phase 2: Initial Fieldwork & Concurrent Analysis	September - October 2025	Conducted initial semi-structured interviews; initiated document collection; performed concurrent manual transcription, verification and preliminary analytic memoing.
Phase 3: Saturation & Document Review	November 2025	Conducted final interviews to reach meaning saturation; completed formal document extraction; distributed verified transcripts for member checking.
Phase 4: Intensive Interpretive Analysis	December 2025 - February 2026	Conducted full RTA using ATLAS.ti; integrated interview and document codes; performed recursive theme reviewing and defining; mapped findings to theoretical frameworks.
Phase 5: Synthesis & Drafting	March - May 2026	Finalised thematic mapping; drafted Findings and Discussion chapters; developed the Integrated

Phase	Timeframe	Key Activities
		Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF); final editing and formatting.

4.7 Data analysis: reflexive thematic analysis

4.7.1 Rationale for reflexive thematic analysis

The vast corpus of qualitative data (comprising roughly 17.5 hours of interview audio, verified transcripts and approximately 200 pages of institutional documents) was systematically analysed using RTA, as pioneered and continually refined by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2022). The selection of RTA is justified for several compelling reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates strong epistemological alignment with the interpretivist paradigm; RTA inherently acknowledges the researcher's active subjectivity and interpretive lens in knowledge production, rejecting the notion that meaning emerges passively from data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Secondly, it elegantly accommodates the study's integrated theoretical frameworks, allowing for a nuanced blend of inductive data exploration (grounded in the participants' voices) and deductive theoretical mapping (sensitised by Transition Theory, PIT and PCK). Thirdly, its inherent flexibility makes it ideal for synthesising mixed qualitative data types, such as interviews and documents. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), themes in this study are understood not as pre-existing entities buried in the text waiting to be passively extracted, but as complex patterns of shared meaning actively constructed by the researcher through deep, recursive engagement with the data.

4.7.2 Analytical software and audit trail

To manage the scale and complexity of the dataset, ATLAS.ti was utilised as the primary Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). ATLAS.ti facilitated the systematic organisation of transcripts and documents, highly efficient line-by-line coding, robust code management and the generation of a meticulous, time-stamped audit trail of analytical decisions, thereby enhancing the study's dependability (Carcary, 2020). However, it is essential to emphasise that ATLAS.ti functioned strictly as a data management and organisational tool, not as the analytical method itself. The software organised the data fragments, built networks and provided searchability, but the actual intellectual labour of interpreting nuances, constructing themes, identifying contradictions and drawing complex theoretical connections remained exclusively the domain of the human researcher. The software supported the analysis, but it did not "do" the analysis.

4.7.3 Phase 1: familiarisation

The RTA process commenced with an intensive, immersive familiarisation phase. This involved transcription review within 48 hours of each interview to ensure contextual proximity, followed by multiple reading approaches. An initial, casual reading allowed me to re-experience the interview's conversational flow. This was followed by a highly active, analytical reading where the text was constantly interrogated: What is the participant truly saying? What latent meanings are present? What is surprising or contradictory? During this phase, extensive analytic memos were drafted. For example, early memos noted the visceral, recurring use of language related to professional inadequacy, signalling a critical node of identity dissonance. This phase concluded with a comprehensive data summary that served as a mental map of the entire dataset prior to granular coding.

4.7.4 Phase 2: generating initial codes

Phase 2 involved systematic, line-by-line coding using an inclusive, generous approach to ensure no potentially vital data was prematurely discarded. Following Saldaña's (2021) robust guidelines, multiple coding approaches were blended: descriptive coding (summarising topics), in vivo coding (using participants' exact wording to preserve authenticity), process coding (using gerunds to capture transitional action) and theoretical coding (anchoring data specifically to Transition Theory, PIT and PCK). For instance, passages discussing the shock of first-time lecturing generated simultaneous codes relating to pedagogical training, disciplinary knowledge translation, teaching-skill gaps and institutional responsibility for training. Ultimately, this granular and highly iterative process yielded 2,592 initial codes across 1,631 coded segments and 4,401 coded instances.

4.7.5 Phase 3: searching for themes

The search for themes involved moving from micro-level codes to broader patterns of meaning through a continuous process of inductive emergence and deductive theoretical mapping. To support this intensive intellectual work, codes were manually clustered and repeatedly reviewed in relation to the study's three theoretical lenses. Through repeated sorting and re-sorting, initial candidate themes began to crystallise, including identity dissonance, negotiation and learning to teach through trial and error. Initially, numerous provisional themes were identified, which were subsequently collapsed and refined into broader, more conceptually dense narratives.

4.7.6 Phase 4: reviewing and refining themes

The candidate themes were subjected to rigorous scrutiny across two critical levels of review. The first level evaluated 'theme-code coherence', ensuring that all constituent codes within a theme genuinely coalesced around a singular, unifying central concept. The second level assessed 'theme-data fit', re-reading the raw data excerpts to ensure the theme accurately represented the original

voices without forcing data into preconceived boxes. This phase included intensive peer debriefing and active supervisory review. During these reviews, initial thematic framings were frequently challenged for potentially over-emphasising individual psychological resilience while under-reporting systemic structural deficits. This important intervention prompted a substantial reconceptualisation, resulting in final themes that more accurately balanced personal agency against institutional constraints.

4.7.7 Phase 5: defining and naming themes

In Phase 5, the final themes were definitively named and detailed and analytical definitions were constructed. Each definition explicitly outlined the essence of the theme captured, its constituent sub-themes, its direct theoretical relevance and its data scope. The final analytical structure yielded nine major themes: (1) Evolution of Professional Identity in Transition; (2) Transition Motivations and Career Change Drivers; (3) Institutional Support Structures and Gaps; (4) Pedagogical Knowledge Development and Alignment; (5) Technology Integration and Digital Transformation; (6) Student Relationships and Engagement Strategies; (7) Innovation and Change Management Capabilities; (8) Time Management and Work-Life Integration; and (9) Research and Scholarship Development.

4.7.8 Phase 6: Producing the report

The final analytical phase involved weaving the thematic framework into the comprehensive empirical narrative presented in the subsequent findings and discussion chapters. This involved striking a delicate, scholarly balance between elevating authentic participant voices (through verbatim quotations) and providing rigorous interpretive commentary. Adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2022, p. 118) fundamental directive that analysis must truly "complete the analytic work," the report was meticulously drafted to ensure that participant quotations were never left to stand alone; rather, they were embedded within interpretive, theoretically-informed syntheses that directly answered the overarching research questions.

4.8 Trustworthiness and rigour

In qualitative research, positivist concepts of validity and reliability are appropriately replaced by the overarching paradigm of trustworthiness, grounded in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Ensuring trustworthiness is critical to demonstrating the methodological rigour and evidentiary foundation of a doctoral study (Adler, 2022).

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility assesses whether the research findings accurately and authentically represent participants' lived realities (Shenton, 2004). To achieve high credibility, several strategic interventions were

carefully implemented. Firstly, prolonged engagement was established through deep, 60-to-90-minute interviews, fostering the necessary trust required for participants to disclose professional vulnerabilities. Secondly, rigorous methodological triangulation was conducted by synthesising subjective interview data with objective institutional documents, thereby allowing a multidimensional perspective on the phenomenon (Denzin, 2012). Thirdly, extensive member checking was conducted. Eleven of the fourteen participants actively reviewed and validated their transcripts, effectively authenticating the raw data and ensuring their voices were captured accurately (Birt et al., 2016). Finally, routine peer debriefing sessions provided essential external critical scrutiny, testing emerging themes against alternative explanations.

4.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative findings can be meaningfully applied to other contexts or settings. Unlike quantitative research that pursues broad statistical generalisation, qualitative case study research pursues analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018). This is achieved through the provision of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 3). By exhaustively detailing the specific institutional context, the nature of the South African PHEI sector, the intricacies of the academic onboarding programme and the diverse demographic profiles of the participants, this study provides readers with the necessary contextual depth to determine if the findings apply to their own unique institutional settings.

4.8.3 Dependability

Dependability ensures that the research process is logical, traceable and meticulously documented, allowing external reviewers to audit the entire methodological trajectory. This was secured through the creation of a comprehensive, chronological audit trail (Carcary, 2020). Using ATLAS.ti and external reflexive journals, every methodological decision, sampling adjustment, coding iteration and thematic restructuring was systematically recorded. Dated analytical memos traced the precise evolution of interpretive thought processes from initial familiarisation through to final report generation, ensuring that the study's conclusions are logically derived and methodologically defensible.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the necessity that the research findings emerge directly from the data itself, rather than being fabricated by researcher bias, imagination, or institutional agenda. Given my insider status, achieving confirmability was paramount. This was operationalised through relentless reflexive journaling (Ortlipp, 2008), documenting precisely how my preconceptions as part of the Teaching and Learning leadership were challenged or confirmed by the data. The explicit articulation of my positionality, combined with the reliance on methodological triangulation, provided transparent

structural safeguards against single-perspective bias. A further structural safeguard applied specifically to the document analysis of the academic onboarding programme was the development of a pre-designed analytical protocol, constructed prior to any engagement with the documentary materials and mapped onto each research question through the study's three theoretical frameworks. This protocol, reproduced in full as Appendix D, ensured that the analysis of the AOP was conducted against a fixed, theoretically grounded set of analytical foci rather than through researcher discretion, directly addressing the confirmability risk inherent in evaluating a programme of which I was the primary architect.

4.9 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

4.9.1 Insider researcher position

In qualitative interpretivist inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, making the articulation of positionality an absolute methodological necessity. In this study, I occupied a highly embedded insider position as Teaching and Learning leadership at the case institution and, explicitly, as the primary architect and overseer of the academic onboarding programme being evaluated by the participants. This positionality is a double-edged sword that requires constant vigilance. On one hand, it afforded immense advantages: unparalleled access to participants and strategic documents, a deep, tacit understanding of the institutional culture and the ability to interpret organisational jargon and nuanced narratives that an external researcher might overlook (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Lewis & Quinnell, 2024).

Conversely, this role duality presented profound challenges regarding power relations and potential bias. The most significant methodological tension was the risk of "over-rapport," in which shared assumptions might prevent probing deeper issues. More critically, there was a pronounced risk that participants, recognising me as the architect of the academic onboarding programme and a senior manager, might suppress their authentic criticisms of the institution's support structures due to perceived hierarchical power dynamics or a desire to provide socially desirable, overly positive accounts (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Acknowledging this profound risk was the first critical step in methodologically mitigating it.

4.9.2 Reflexive practice

To systematically manage my insider biases, I integrated continuous reflexive practice into every phase of the research cycle (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity requires the researcher to engage in relentless self-examination of how their subjectivity, history and institutional position influence the data they collect and the interpretations they generate (Charmaz, 2014). This was practically operationalised through a dedicated reflexive journal, which served as both a chronological methodological record and a critical cognitive mirror. The journal served as a crucial holding space

for processing ethical tensions, ensuring I remained acutely aware of my own biases. For instance, when participants praised the academic onboarding programme, I reflexively questioned whether my pride as its architect unconsciously encouraged validation, prompting me to adopt a deliberately neutral, detached interviewing posture in subsequent sessions to ensure critique was not suppressed.

4.9.3 Managing dual allegiances and power dynamics

The intersection of being a senior institutional manager and an independent doctoral researcher inevitably produces significant role strain; a deep-seated tension between loyalty to the organisation's reputation and an academic commitment to unvarnished critique (Kerstetter, 2012; Goundar, 2025). To actively reduce the risk that participants would suppress criticism of the AOP programme, several concrete, methodologically defensible steps were implemented to cultivate a negotiated insider status (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Firstly, during the recruitment and briefing phases, I explicitly decentred my administrative authority, positioning myself strictly in my capacity as a doctoral student seeking to learn from their lived experiences. I openly acknowledged my role in creating the AOP. I explicitly invited them to dismantle it, stating clearly that a genuine critique was the only way the research could be valuable or lead to actual improvements. Secondly, questions regarding institutional support were framed neutrally and indirectly, prompting participants to reflect on what was missing from their transition journey before evaluating specific programmatic elements. Thirdly, the guarantee of absolute anonymity through pseudonyms enabled participants to speak candidly about structural failures without fear of professional reprisal. Finally, all research data was compartmentalised and stored on independent hardware separate from institutional servers, completely divorcing the narrative from internal performance management metrics.

A fifth and analytically distinct measure addressed the specific risk of researcher-induced interpretive distortion during the document analysis phase. Because the AOP materials under analysis were institutional texts that I had authored or overseen, there was a heightened risk that my reading of those documents would be shaped by authorial investment rather than critical scrutiny. To mitigate this, a structured document analysis protocol was developed before any documentary reading commenced. The protocol operationalised each research question into a set of discrete analytical foci drawn from Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and Pedagogical Content Knowledge, establishing in advance the criteria against which the AOP materials would be assessed. Working from a pre-defined framework constrained my interpretive latitude, ensuring that the document analysis was systematically oriented toward evidence rather than toward validation of the programme I had designed. This protocol is reproduced in full as Appendix D.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical integrity formed the absolute bedrock of this research design, ensuring the unwavering protection of participants' rights, dignity and psychological safety throughout the entire investigative process.

4.10.1 Ethical clearance and institutional permission

Formal ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). The research also fully complied with the rigorous legal stipulations of the Republic of South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (Republic of South Africa, 2013). Formal gatekeeper permission was secured from the executive leadership of the participating PHEI before any data collection commenced.

4.10.2 Informed consent

Consent was approached not as a singular bureaucratic hurdle, but as a continuous, iterative ethical process. Potential participants were provided with a comprehensive Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form that transparently detailed the study's aims, data-generating procedures, potential risks and their absolute right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice, explanation, or penalty. Written electronic consent was secured prior to scheduling and this consent was verbally reaffirmed at the commencement of the audio recording, ensuring participants retained full autonomy over their involvement at all times.

4.10.3 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Safeguarding participant identities in a bounded institutional case study requires meticulous execution (Saunders et al., 2015). Strict pseudonyms (P01–P14) were assigned immediately upon data collection. Any specific identifying markers, such as highly unique previous job titles or narrow departmental sub-units, were generalised in the transcripts and final report to prevent deductive disclosure. However, in the spirit of ethical transparency, participants were explicitly informed during the consent process of the inherent "internal confidentiality" challenge (Tolich, 2004, p. 101), acknowledging that, despite rigorous anonymisation, close institutional colleagues might, in theory, recognise certain narrative patterns given the specific nature of the PHEI.

4.10.4 Non-maleficence and psychological safety

While the study was classified as minimal risk, exploring professional struggles, identity crises and impostor syndrome carries the potential to evoke psychological discomfort. Upholding the principle of non-maleficence, participants were continually reminded of their right to decline answering distressing questions. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' preferred times and in non-threatening locations to maximise comfort. Details for the institution's Employee Wellness

Programme were provided as a proactive safeguarding measure, ensuring psychological safety was prioritised over data extraction.

4.10.5 Data management and storage

In line with the Protection of Personal Information Act requirements (Republic of South Africa, 2013), data management protocols were strictly enforced. All digital raw data, including audio recordings, verified transcripts and ATLAS.ti files, were stored on highly encrypted, password-protected external drives entirely separate from institutional servers. Following the final publication of this dissertation, the data will be securely retained for a mandatory period of 5 years before permanent, irreversible deletion. Physical consent forms remain stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible exclusively to the primary researcher.

4.10.6 Voluntariness and power relations

Given the researcher's administrative position, ensuring true voluntariness free from any subtle coercion was paramount. Recruitment invitations were deliberately disseminated through a neutral, third-party administrative channel rather than directly from my email account. Participants were explicitly assured in writing that their decision to participate, or the specific nature of their interview responses, would have no bearing on their professional standing, teaching allocations, or performance evaluations, thus satisfying the ethical mandate of procedural justice.

4.11 Limitations and delimitations

4.11.1 Limitations

Acknowledging methodological limitations is vital for scholarly transparency. Firstly, the use of a single-site case study design inherently restricts the broad statistical generalisability of the findings across the entire higher education sector; the findings are intensely localised to this specific PHEI, although they offer robust analytical transferability (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Secondly, despite the deployment of rigorous reflexive protocols, the potential for lingering insider-researcher bias and social desirability bias in participant responses cannot be entirely eradicated. Thirdly, the study relies on cross-sectional, retrospective data collection. By interviewing participants at a single point in time (1 to 3 years post-transition), the data may be subject to selective recall and to reinterpretation in light of participants' subsequent adjustment to their academic role; accounts of early transition may therefore be coloured by how settled or unsettled a participant has since become, rather than reflecting that period as it was lived at the time. The design cannot capture the real-time, longitudinal trajectory of their identity evolution. Finally, relying on voluntary participation may inadvertently introduce self-selection bias, potentially over-representing individuals who experienced relatively successful transitions or who are more naturally inclined to articulate their reflections.

4.11.2 Delimitations

Delimitations represent the conscious boundaries established by the researcher to narrow the study's scope. This research was strictly delimited to the private higher education sector, intentionally excluding public universities which operate under vastly different funding, governance and cultural models. The temporal scope was delimited to professionals transitioning within the past three years, ensuring the investigation focused on contemporary realities. The inquiry was sharply delimited to focus on pedagogical adaptation, teaching identity and institutional support, explicitly excluding detailed examinations of research productivity or broader academic administrative career progression. Lastly, the sample was delimited to applied professional fields, where the contrast between industry practice and academic theory is most starkly observable.

4.12 Chapter summary

This chapter has exhaustively delineated the methodological framework constructed to empirically investigate the transition of industry professionals into academic roles at a South African PHEI. Rooted deeply in an interpretivist paradigm, the study fundamentally recognises that transition and professional identity formation are highly subjective, socially constructed phenomena. The qualitative, single-site instrumental case study design provided the optimal structure to examine these complex human experiences within their highly specific institutional boundaries.

Data generation successfully combined 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews (yielding 17.5 hours of audio) with the document analysis of approximately 200 pages of institutional policies and AOP materials. The sampling strategy, driven by purposeful and maximum variation techniques, ensured a rich, diverse dataset. Meaning saturation was achieved through careful, ongoing analytical judgement rather than mechanical thresholds. The data were rigorously processed through Braun and Clarke's six-phase RTA, generating a robust coding architecture (2,592 codes, 4,401 instances) that speaks directly to the study's theoretical frameworks of Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK.

These methodological choices were supported by robust trustworthiness procedures, extensive reflexive engagement with the complexities of my insider positionality as senior academic leader and strict ethical safeguards designed to protect participant vulnerability and mitigate power dynamics. Having established this comprehensive and defensible methodological architecture, the dissertation now turns to the presentation of the empirical findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study on the transition of industry professionals into academic roles at a South African PHEI. Building on the methodological framework set out in Chapter 4, the chapter reports the patterns of meaning generated through RTA of fourteen semi-structured interviews and the accompanying document corpus. The purpose here is to present the findings in a manner that remains close to participants' accounts while also showing how their experiences clustered around recurring thematic concerns. The chapter, therefore, answers the first research question directly by setting out what participants experienced as they moved from industry into academia and it begins to address the second research question by tracing how institutional structures and support arrangements shaped those experiences.

The findings indicate that the move into academia was neither linear nor uniform. Participants did not describe a simple transfer of expertise from one professional setting to another. Rather, they portrayed transition as a layered process marked by identity disruption, pedagogical adaptation, institutional negotiation and ongoing efforts to secure legitimacy within an unfamiliar field. Although participants were recruited for their professional experience, they quickly discovered that academic work required forms of competence, recognition and social navigation that differed from those that had sustained them in industry. This tension sat at the centre of the transition experience and recurred across the dataset in varied but connected ways.

Nine themes were developed through the analytic process: Evolution of Professional Identity in Transition; Transition Motivations and Career Change Drivers; Institutional Support Structures and Gaps; Pedagogical Knowledge Development and Alignment; Technology Integration and Digital Transformation; Student Relationships and Engagement Strategies; Innovation and Change Management Capabilities; Time Management and Work-Life Integration; and Research and Scholarship Development. These themes are presented below not as isolated containers but as interrelated dimensions of a broader process of becoming academic. In keeping with the interpretivist orientation of the study, the thematic sections highlight both common patterns and important variation across participant accounts.

The chapter is organised in three movements. It begins by outlining the overall character of participants' transition experiences and the thematic structure of the findings. It then presents the nine themes in detail, showing how each theme contributes to an understanding of pracademic transition within this institutional context. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of how the themes connect with one another and a summary of the main findings that prepares the ground for the interpretive discussion in the next chapter.

In presenting the findings, care has been taken to retain the texture of participants' accounts rather than reducing their experiences to a thin inventory of problems. What became evident in the analytic process was that participants often narrated the same experience across multiple registers simultaneously. A demanding classroom episode could be described as a pedagogical challenge, an identity shock, a workload burden and a moment of growth simultaneously. Similarly, institutional support could be described as procedural provision, emotional reassurance, or evidence that the institution either did or did not understand the labour of transition. The findings are therefore written to preserve this density. Each theme names a focal pattern, but the discussion within and across themes shows how easily one dimension of the transition flowed into another.

This extended treatment of the findings is also important because the study is concerned with a transition that is often oversimplified in institutional discourse. Practitioner entrants are frequently represented as obvious assets who merely need orientation to systems. The data did not support such a narrow view. Participants certainly brought assets, but the empirical material repeatedly showed that those assets entered a field with its own rules of communication, judgement, visibility and legitimacy. The findings chapter therefore, does more than report recurrent experiences. It documents how participants encountered academic life as a dense social world whose expectations had to be interpreted, inhabited and, in some cases, endured before they could be used confidently.

5.2 Overview of the Findings

Across the dataset, participants depicted transition as a process of simultaneous gain and dislocation. On the one hand, many experienced entry into academia as purposeful and affirming. They valued the opportunity to teach, share industry knowledge, shape future professionals and enter a role they perceived as socially meaningful. On the other hand, this movement also involved a loss of familiarity, confidence and settled professional identity. Participants often entered the institution with a strong sense of disciplinary credibility, only to find that this credibility did not automatically translate into pedagogical confidence, academic legitimacy or organisational belonging.

A recurring feature of the findings was the gap between appointment on the basis of industry expertise and the subsequent demand to function as a full academic. Participants described being hired as experienced professionals, however, once inside the institution, they were expected to master teaching, assessment, curriculum design, student support, digital systems, quality processes and, in some cases, research expectations. Many therefore experienced the early transition period as a shift from visible competence to exposed uncertainty. This pattern did not mean that participants lacked commitment or ability. Rather, it reflected the breadth of academic labour and the limited extent to which prior professional authority could shield newcomers from the demands of academic practice.

The findings also showed that institutional support mattered, but not in simple ways. Formal structures such as induction processes and the AOP programme were often viewed as necessary and sometimes helpful, especially in introducing academic procedures, pedagogical language and institutional expectations. Participants also reported gaps between formal provision and lived need. Support was experienced as most effective when it was relational, timely and responsive to the realities of classroom practice. Where support was overly generic, delayed, administratively oriented or weakly embedded in departmental life, participants felt left to learn through improvisation, observation and personal resilience.

Another cross-cutting pattern concerned the recursive relationship between identity, pedagogy and belonging. Participants' sense of themselves as legitimate academics developed partly through actual teaching practice, partly through feedback from students and colleagues and partly through the institution's recognition or non-recognition of their prior expertise. Confidence rarely emerged all at once. Instead, it developed unevenly through classroom encounters, curriculum work, technological experimentation, successful student interaction and gradual familiarity with institutional systems. The findings, therefore, suggest that becoming a pracademic is not reducible to a single domain of adjustment. It is a cumulative and relational process in which professional self-understanding, pedagogical competence and institutional positioning are continually negotiated.

A further feature of the findings overview was the coexistence of anticipation and surprise. Participants had not entered academia blindly; most had some sense that teaching would require preparation and that institutional adaptation would be necessary. However, the depth and simultaneity of demands still took many by surprise. Several described the first months as a period in which they were confronted not by a single steep learning curve but by multiple learning curves unfolding simultaneously. They were working out how to prepare and teach while also interpreting policy language, learning digital systems, responding to students and trying to understand how their work would be evaluated. This made the transition feel more intense than many had expected before the appointment.

The overview also showed that participants tended to mark progress through small but significant moments rather than through any single decisive breakthrough. Feeling more secure after a class went well, managing an assessment cycle with fewer mistakes, receiving positive student feedback or becoming able to navigate an online system without assistance were all described as meaningful indicators that transition was becoming more manageable. These moments were important precisely because the broader transition often remained unsettled. Participants were not waiting for a complete transformation before they felt any growth. Rather, they assembled a sense of becoming academic

through repeated instances in which uncertainty became slightly more intelligible or competence became slightly more reliable.

Equally important was the finding that participants' accounts were shaped by a language of work rather than a language of abstract identity alone. Even when participants clearly described status dislocation or struggles with belonging, they often narrated those experiences through concrete tasks: lesson preparation, student consultations, online submissions, moderation, curriculum planning, or meetings with colleagues. This suggests that the transition was lived through work practices rather than around them. The overview thus points to a central empirical insight that carries through the rest of the chapter: academic identity, support and belonging were not experienced as separate, reflective topics. They were encountered in and through the everyday labour of academic work.

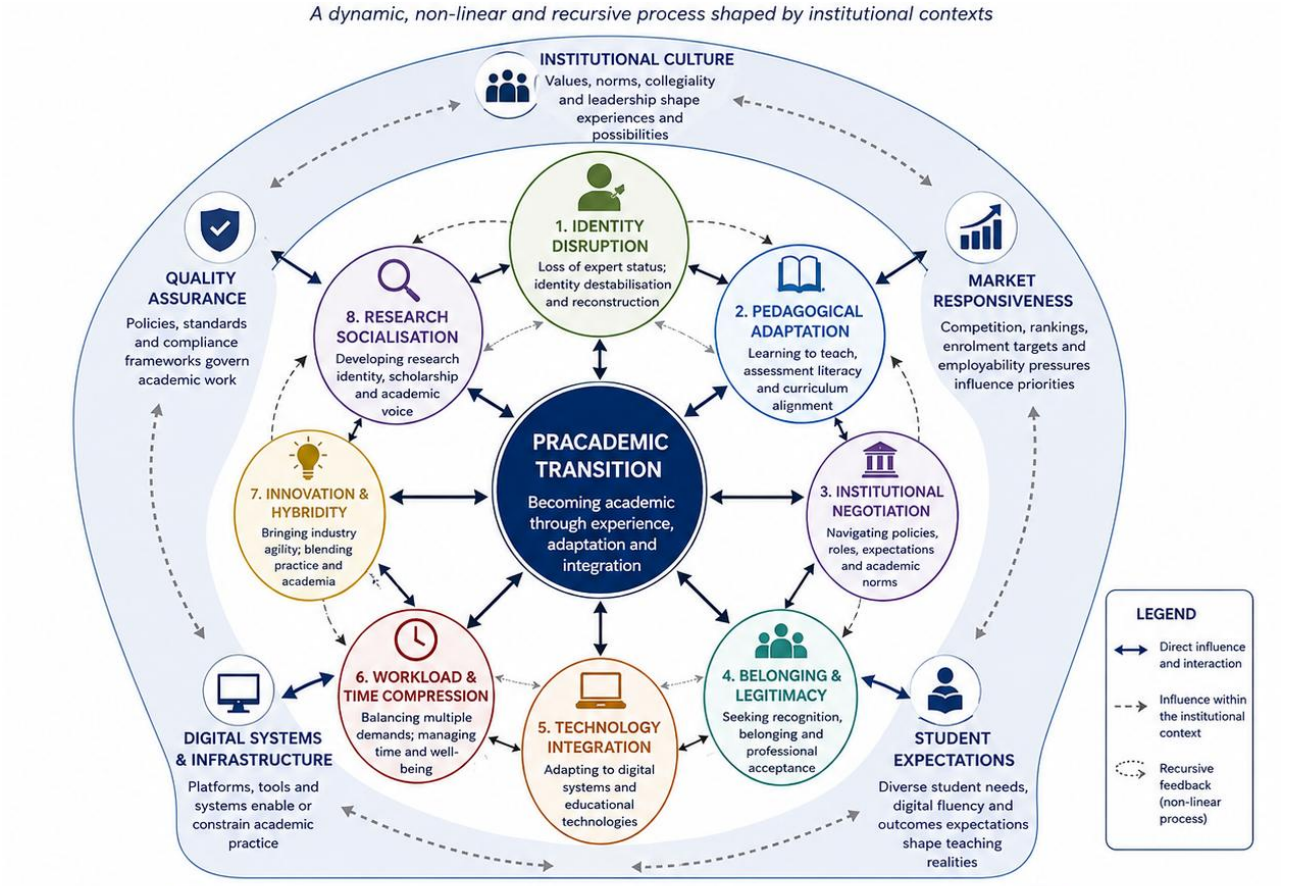


Figure 5.1: Conceptual architecture of pracademic transition (Source: Developed by the researcher from empirical findings and integrated theoretical interpretation.)

Figure 5.1 presents the conceptual architecture emerging from the empirical findings and illustrates pracademic transition as a dynamic, recursive and institutionally mediated process rather than a linear movement from industry into academia. At the centre of the figure is the phenomenon of pracademic transition itself, understood as the ongoing process through which industry professionals negotiate academic identity, pedagogical competence, institutional belonging and professional legitimacy within the higher education environment.

Surrounding the central phenomenon are eight interconnected dimensions that emerged across the dataset: identity disruption, pedagogical adaptation, institutional negotiation, belonging and legitimacy, technology integration, workload and time compression, innovation and hybridity and research socialisation. These dimensions are represented as mutually influencing rather than sequential stages. Participants' experiences demonstrated that movement within one dimension frequently shaped experiences in another. For example, pedagogical confidence influenced identity consolidation, while institutional support affected participants' willingness to experiment with technology, engage in research or develop stronger forms of academic belonging.

The outer institutional layer represents the broader organisational and contextual conditions shaping transition experiences within the South African PHEI environment. Quality assurance demands, market responsiveness, institutional culture, digital systems and student expectations collectively created a field of pressures, constraints and possibilities through which participants navigated academic life. The arrows in the figure reflect the recursive and overlapping nature of these interactions, indicating that pracademic transition was experienced not as a stable progression but as an evolving process characterised by repeated negotiation, adaptation and reinterpretation.

Figure 5.1 therefore, provides an integrated visual synthesis of the findings and foregrounds the central analytical argument emerging from the chapter: that pracademic transition is simultaneously pedagogical, relational, institutional and identity-based. The figure also establishes the conceptual framework for interpreting the detailed thematic findings presented in the remainder of the chapter.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the major themes generated through the RTA and summarises the analytical focus, conceptual tensions and dominant theoretical resonances associated with each theme. While the themes are presented separately for analytical clarity, the findings demonstrated that

participants rarely experienced these dimensions in isolation. Instead, the themes frequently overlapped and interacted within participants' accounts of transition.

The table serves two functions within the chapter. First, it provides a thematic roadmap for the empirical findings that follow, enabling the reader to see how the different dimensions of pracademic transition are conceptually connected. Second, it demonstrates the analytical relationship between the empirical findings and the integrated theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3. Themes relating to legitimacy, identity reconstruction and belonging align strongly with Professional Identity Theory, while themes concerning teaching development and instructional adaptation resonate with PCK. Institutional negotiation, support and workload pressures connect closely with Transition Theory, while Ubuntu provides an important relational and ethical lens through which belonging, collegiality and institutional inclusion can be interpreted.

The table therefore illustrates that the findings are not merely descriptive categories emerging from the data, but analytically significant dimensions of a broader transition process shaped by institutional structures, pedagogical demands, relational experiences and professional identity negotiation within South African private higher education.

Table 5.1: Overview of Themes, Subthemes and Analytical Meaning

Theme	**Core Analytical Focus**	**Key Conceptual Tension**	**Dominant Theoretical Resonance**
Evolution of Professional Identity in Transition	Reconstruction of professional legitimacy and belonging within academia	Expert practitioner vs novice academic	Professional Identity Theory
Transition Motivations and Career Change Drivers	Biographical, vocational and contextual drivers shaping entry into academia	Purpose and fulfilment vs institutional reality	Transition Theory
Institutional Support Structures and Gaps	Experiences of induction, mentoring and organisational support	Formal support vs usable support	Transition Theory / Ubuntu
Pedagogical Knowledge Development and Alignment	Transformation of professional expertise into pedagogical practice	Subject expertise vs teaching competence	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
Technology Integration and Digital Transformation	Adaptation to digitally mediated academic work	Technological competence vs digital exposure	PCK / Hybrid identity

Student Relationships and Engagement Strategies	Construction of pedagogical relationships and lecturer presence	Authority vs care and accessibility	Ubuntu / PCK
Innovation and Change Management Capabilities	Transfer of adaptive industry practices into academia	Agility vs institutional bureaucracy	Hybrid pracademic identity
Time Management and Work-Life Integration	Compression and expansion of academic labour	Professional passion vs exhaustion	Transition strain
Research and Scholarship Development	Emerging engagement with research and academic scholarship	Survival teaching vs scholarly legitimacy	Professional Identity Theory

Source: Developed by the researcher from the findings of reflexive thematic analysis.

5.3 Evolution of Professional Identity in Transition

The most pervasive theme concerned the reworking of professional identity. Participants consistently described the move into academia as more than a change of employer or role title. It required a renegotiation of who they were in relation to their own expertise, to students and to the institution. In the industry, many had occupied positions of recognised authority. Their competence was visible, their responsibilities were familiar and their value was affirmed through performance in settings where expectations were relatively clear. Entry into academia unsettled this position. Participants often found that the authority associated with being an accomplished practitioner did not carry over seamlessly into the classroom or departmental life.

This identity shift was often described in terms of becoming a novice again. Participants did not usually frame themselves as novices in their discipline. Rather, they saw themselves as novices in the social and pedagogical practices of academic work. The distinction mattered. They continued to regard themselves as knowledgeable professionals, however, their lack of familiarity with assessment design, academic writing conventions, curriculum pacing, institutional systems and classroom management placed them in a position of dependence that felt unfamiliar and, at times, disorienting. This gave rise to a form of identity dissonance in which established professional confidence coexisted with a newly felt sense of uncertainty.

For some participants, this dissonance was heightened by the symbolic order of academia. They entered the institution expecting that industry credibility would be enough to establish legitimacy, particularly in applied disciplines that value real-world knowledge. Instead, they encountered an environment in which credibility was distributed through different markers, including pedagogical fluency, academic qualifications, familiarity with policy processes and, for some, emerging research capacity. As a result, participants often described themselves as occupying an in-between position.

They were not fully outsiders, because they had been recruited for their professional expertise. They did not immediately feel like insiders either, because they had not yet mastered the norms and practices that conferred academic confidence and recognition.

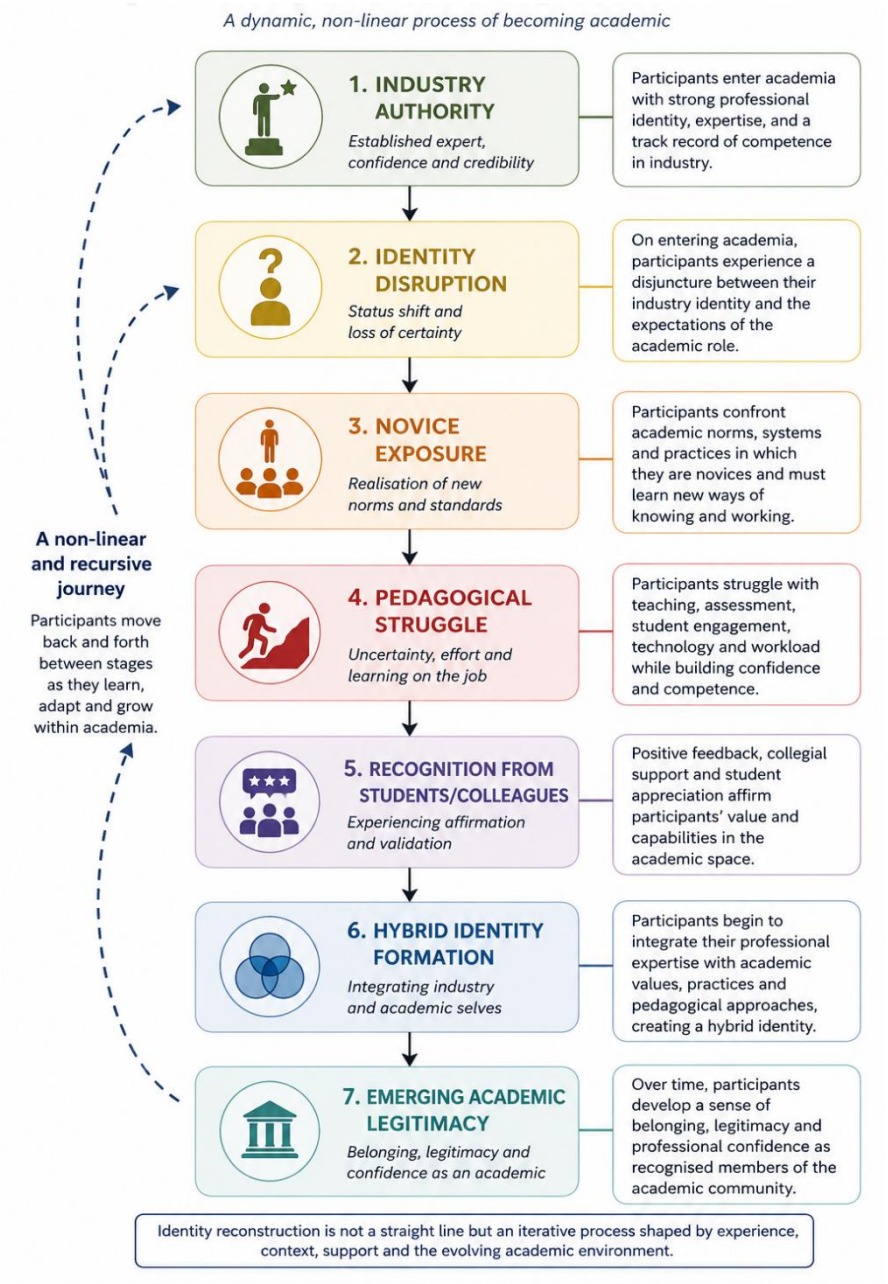


Figure 5.2: Identity Reconstruction during transition into academia (Source: Developed by the researcher from participant narratives and thematic analysis findings).

Figure 5.2 illustrates the process of identity reconstruction experienced by participants during their transition from industry into academia. The figure conceptualises transition as a dynamic, non-linear process through which participants move from established professional authority to emerging academic legitimacy. Rather than representing a fixed or sequential progression, the figure

demonstrates how identity disruption, pedagogical struggle, institutional recognition and hybrid identity formation interact recursively throughout the transition experience. It visually synthesises the findings presented in this section and highlights the relational and developmental nature of becoming academic within the South African PHEI context.

5.3.1 Displacement of Established Authority

One of the more subtle but powerful elements of identity change was the displacement of established authority. Participants did not usually describe themselves as stripped of expertise, but they did describe a change in the settings through which expertise could be recognised. In prior professional roles, credibility was often quickly confirmed through outcomes, reputation, decision-making responsibility, or long-standing professional standing. In the academic setting, by contrast, many felt that authority had to be re-earned through unfamiliar performances.

The shock of this transition was articulated clearly by P05, who had held a senior strategic role in a revenue service before entering higher education. Reflecting on the shift in his daily reality, he noted that the move felt like a complete reversal of his prior working life. He explained that he had moved from a management capacity into an operational role, experiencing the shift as a complete 360, or, if you can say it, 180. The significance of this displacement lies in the reorientation of professional action. Where he had previously directed large-scale operations, he was now responsible for the granular, frontline delivery of academic teaching. His authority was no longer structural; it had to be established pedagogically.

P02, a legal professional who had built his identity around winning cases and demonstrating fearless advocacy, captured this same reversal with particular candour when describing his professional self before the transition:

> *I was very, very focused on the wins. I knew that I had to win. I had to be fearless and I had to be really knowledgeable given the fact that the legal fraternity is really competitive. So, I didn't really have a perspective that informed my decision making. I knew my task. I knew that I had to win. (P02)*

Once inside the academic environment, that singular focus on outcome-driven performance had to give way to something more relational and pedagogically mediated. He noted that his identity had evolved drastically, with greater self-awareness and empathy, as his influence shifted from individual cases to shaping the outlook of future lawyers.

A similar displacement of authority was noted by P06, who had transitioned from a senior human resources role. She observed that her prior professional standing had been largely hierarchical and command-driven, but that her new environment required a fundamentally different approach. She

described adopting an identity based on authority to one of facilitation and guidance. This represents a profound shift in professional ontology. The participant recognised that the authoritative stance that had served her well in corporate human resources was incompatible with the developmental ethos required in higher education. Authority, in this new context, was not wielded; it was mediated through the careful facilitation of student learning.

P03, who had exercised considerable formal authority as a supply chain planner, articulated the contrast with particular sharpness. Having described how in industry people feared the planner and the planner's word was final, he reflected:

> *It's totally different. You don't get to be or to have that much authority. In fact, you try by all means to accommodate the students. You try and ensure that you keep them and make them understand. There will be times where you explain things and from the questions they answer, you realise they do not understand. And you try and say, guys, let's think about it in this manner. (P03)*

This displacement also shaped how participants experienced visibility and autonomy. P12, a former software developer, highlighted the contrast between the isolated nature of technical work and the highly visible, relational nature of academia. He noted that in his previous career, *programming meant you mind your own business, whereas in higher education, there's a lot of interaction and collaboration*. This shift from solitary expertise to collaborative exposure forced a re-evaluation of what it meant to be a competent professional. Competence was no longer just about writing functional code; it was about communicating concepts, managing classroom dynamics and negotiating with colleagues.

P08, who had held a senior project management role at a major national transport utility, reflected that his prior authority had been at once formal and relational. He described sitting at investment committees, being called upon when executives had questions and having the mandate to convene the relevant people for any task. The contrast with the academic environment, where decisions often appeared to flow downward without consultation, was sharp. He observed:

> *I would challenge them. Why do you do that? What purpose is it saving? I remember at some point we were sitting and I kept asking: when are we going to sit at brainstorm? When are we going to sit with other people who are involved in this? Understand the bigger picture. You are telling me to do this, why? (P08)*

This account reveals an executive professional struggling to inhabit an environment where the collaborative, problem-framing practices that had defined his authority were not yet available to him

as an academic newcomer. His prior credibility had been built through precisely the kind of inquiry and stakeholder engagement that the academic setting initially presented as outside the established order.

5.3.2 Becoming Novice Without Becoming Empty

The accounts also make clear that participants resisted being understood as empty novices. They often accepted that they were beginners in academic teaching, curriculum design or institutional procedure, whilst they simultaneously insisted on the ongoing value of what they already knew. This produced a delicate balancing act. Participants wanted to remain open to learning, without erasing their professional histories.

P06 vividly expressed this duality. Despite her extensive corporate experience, she frankly admitted her lack of pedagogical preparation, noting that she entered with no academic background. The resulting workload was staggering as she attempted to bridge the gap between her subject knowledge and her teaching ability. She recounted spending endless hours, sitting up until 4:00 in the morning, because she had to teach herself at the same time. Her motivation for this intense self-directed learning was rooted in her professional integrity: she was determined not to shortchange my student. Here, the participant accepts the novice status in pedagogy, but a mature professional ethic guides her response.

P04, a legal professional who described himself as a para-academic, articulated this dual positioning directly. He explained that he could be proficient in both practice and the academic space, viewing each as mutually enhancing. He described maintaining the same work ethic and personal brand across both environments:

> *It hasn't really changed because I still put the same person into the space, even with the work ethic. I still maintain that. In as much as I can negotiate a deadline, even for me in my reputation, in my brand, I still get to mitigate that. I have work ethic to meet my commitments and with the quality that I produce, it must be of the same level. (P04)*

Another participant similarly highlighted the tension between deep industry knowledge and the specific mechanics of academic delivery. Coming from a project management background, he observed that while he understood the core concepts perfectly, the mechanisms of academic evaluation were entirely foreign. He described the early days as just about survival, then pointing out that the real learning was on the job. This reinforces the notion that participants were not learning their subjects from scratch; they were learning the foreign grammar of academia. Their prior knowledge was intact, but their ability to articulate it within the required institutional parameters was still under construction.

P11, who had previously been a lecturer at another institution before joining the PHEI, reflected that the motivation for the move was partly the flexibility and support he had not found elsewhere. Yet even with prior academic experience, he noted that each institutional context imposed its own demands of identity adjustment. The sense of being known and trusted professionally had to be rebuilt in each new setting, regardless of prior credentials.

What emerged from the data was a form of layered self-understanding. Participants frequently spoke as experienced professionals and as beginning academics simultaneously. This layering could be generative when it enabled humility without self-erasure, but it could also become emotionally demanding when participants felt the institution recognised only the latter, not the former. When participants felt they were being treated solely as underprepared new lecturers, frustration or defensiveness sometimes followed. Where prior expertise was acknowledged as meaningful, even while further development was expected, identity strain appeared more manageable.

5.3.3 Recognition, Belonging and Identity Consolidation

Recognition from others played a central role in whether identity began to stabilise. Participants frequently linked growing confidence to moments in which students responded positively, colleagues affirmed a teaching approach, or managers signalled trust in their developing competence. These moments mattered not only because they encouraged persistence, but because they offered evidence that the participant's emerging academic self was becoming socially intelligible. Belonging was therefore not narrated as a purely internal feeling. It was produced in interaction.

The validation provided by students was particularly potent. P09 observed that her students actually appreciated the industry experience, an acknowledgement that affirmed the value of her non-academic background. When students responded well to real-world examples, it validated the pracademic's unique contribution to the learning environment. Similarly, another participant noted that prior to entering academia, they had felt put in a box with little room for growth, but in their new role, they found more value in academia because their expertise was actively sought out and respected by both students and peers.

P02 reflected on how the social dimensions of recognition differed markedly across his two professional lives. He described the legal fraternity as closed, hard and competitive, a space where you had to fight to be heard and prove yourself continuously. By contrast, he found the academic environment genuinely supportive:

> *Over here, it's really supportive. Everyone is supportive. They're understanding, they listen. They make time to listen to you. It's not that environment where you have to*

> *fight to be heard or to earn your respect. And that changed. So that's part of that professional identity, how we changed from that to this. (P02)*

This experience of being heard and responded to as a full professional rather than merely a new employee was significant. For P02, recognition was not just about academic competence but about having a collegial standing that made the transition feel purposeful rather than just functional.

Conversely, a lack of recognition severely hindered identity consolidation. P05 expressed profound frustration with top-down institutional communication, lamenting that there *was no engagement from leadership and that decisions were simply shoved down their throat*. This lack of dialogue not only undermined his sense of agency but also dismissed the extensive managerial expertise he brought to the institution. When prior experience is ignored in this manner, the transition feels less like an integration of skills and more like an imposition of compliance, severely stalling the development of a secure academic identity.

P12 reflected on how academia had grown him in ways he had not anticipated. While he had always been the person colleagues turned to when they needed help understanding something, the academic environment had formalised and deepened that quality. He noted:

> *I think higher education has changed me in that from a programming perspective you just mind your own business. But now coming to higher education, there's a lot of interaction and collaboration. I have grown in my ability to interact with people, in my ability to articulate my thoughts and to present myself. That I think I've grown in that perspective. (P12)*

Table 5.2 summarises the major processes shaping identity reconstruction during the transition into academia. The findings indicate that participants frequently experienced the move into higher education as a disruption to previously established forms of professional authority and confidence. Many described feeling like "novices again" despite extensive industry expertise, producing forms of identity dissonance as participants negotiated unfamiliar academic expectations and evaluative standards.

The table further demonstrates that the complete replacement of professional identity with academic identity did not characterise identity reconstruction. Instead, participants frequently occupied hybrid positions in which practitioner and academic orientations coexisted simultaneously. This hybrid identity often produced experiences of liminality, as participants moved between professional worlds without feeling fully assimilated into either. At the same time, recognition from students, colleagues and institutional actors played an important role in shaping participants' developing sense of academic

legitimacy. Positive feedback and pedagogical affirmation contributed to increased confidence and a sense of belonging in academic environments.

However, participants also described experiences of institutional misrecognition in which prior expertise was undervalued or insufficiently acknowledged within academic contexts. Such experiences frequently generated frustration and reinforced uncertainty regarding status and legitimacy. Over time, the development of pedagogical competence emerged as a particularly important stabilising force within the transition process. As participants became more confident in curriculum design, teaching practice and student engagement, they increasingly experienced themselves as legitimate academics rather than temporary outsiders. The table therefore illustrates that identity reconstruction was shaped not only by individual adjustment, but by the interaction between institutional recognition, pedagogical development and the ongoing negotiation of hybrid professional identity.

Table 5.2: Summary of Identity Transition Dynamics

Process	**Participant Experience**	**Consequence**
Loss of authority	"Novice again"	Identity dissonance
Hybrid identity	Practitioner + academic	Liminality
Recognition seeking	Student validation	Emerging legitimacy
Institutional misrecognition	Expertise undervalued	Frustration
Pedagogical competence	Teaching mastery	Identity stabilisation

Source: Developed by the researcher from participant narratives and thematic analysis findings.

5.4 Career Change Drivers

Participants' accounts of why they moved into academia were complex and often layered. Very few described the transition as the result of a single motivation. Rather, participants spoke of intertwined personal, professional and contextual drivers that made academic work appear desirable, timely or necessary. A prominent driver was the wish to make a meaningful contribution through teaching. Many participants were drawn to the idea of shaping future professionals, sharing industry experience and influencing students' readiness for the workplace.

Another recurring motivation concerned career redirection. Some participants described the industry as unsustainable, whether due to burnout, changing personal priorities, limited advancement, or a desire for a different work rhythm. Academia was sometimes imagined as more purposeful, more developmental or better aligned with family life and long-term aspirations. The findings suggest that these expectations were only partly realised. Participants often entered the institution with an idealised view of academic work as reflective, balanced or intellectually open, only to find that it also involved administrative pressure, constant preparation, emotional labour and multiple accountability demands.

5.4.1 Contribution, Purpose and the Appeal of Teaching

A particularly strong pull factor in the data was the desire to contribute through teaching. Participants often framed academia as a space in which accumulated experience could be redirected toward the development of others. This orientation mattered because it gave the move moral significance. The transition was not described solely in terms of employment or convenience; it was often narrated as a chance to make prior professional knowledge matter in new ways.

P14 articulated this sense of purpose clearly, stating that a passion for knowledge sharing and institution transformation drove his transition. He viewed his entry into higher education not merely as a job change but as an opportunity to enact systemic change by preparing better-equipped graduates. Similarly, P06 expressed a strong desire to impart knowledge and share industry experiences, aiming to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical workplace realities. For these participants, teaching held an almost generative promise: that long years of practice could be transformed into guidance, examples and preparation for students entering the profession.

P07, who came from the pharmaceutical sector, described a specifically scaled version of this same impulse. In the industry, her impact was very strong on a one-on-one basis within a particular community. Academia offered a different kind of impact, one she found deeply compelling:

> *With academia, it's a very different form of impact because you're impacting early career or sometimes mid-career professionals. It's a different kind of moldings that I was very interested in. Teaching foundational knowledge, from the roots kind of knowledge. So I found that the impact was going to be very different. (P07)*

This sense of calling was echoed by a legal professional (P01), who noted that his move was driven by a desire to contribute to the future of law, despite a saturated legal market. Rather than simply fighting individual cases, he saw academia as a platform to shape the ethical and professional foundation of the next generation of lawyers. Another participant from the supply chain sector explicitly described the academic profession as a calling, highlighting the deep vocational commitment that many industry professionals bring to their new roles.

P05, reflecting on what teaching had meant to him before the formal transition, described the motivation in terms of societal contribution:

> *Before joining academia, making a difference to someone's life by adding value, teaching them and engaging them around your experiences so that you could add value to them and then they could add value to society as a consequence of that. When I talk about academia, that's essentially what I saw: the value that you can essentially bring to a person's life. (P05)*

This framing of academia as a form of public service drew a direct line between participants' prior professional work and their reasons for entering the educational space. For P05, having spent years serving the public through a revenue authority, the shift to academia represented a continuity of purpose rather than a departure from it.

5.4.2 Career Redirection, Timing and Biographical Fit

Participants' motivations were also shaped by life stage and biographical timing. For some, the move into academia followed periods of professional saturation in industry. They had achieved seniority, accumulated experience and begun to ask whether the next phase of their working life should involve a different form of contribution. For others, the transition aligned with changing family commitments, a desire for work that appeared more sustainable, or a search for a professional identity that felt more developmental than transactional.

P12 provided a stark account of how work-life balance considerations drove his transition. Recalling the punishing hours and relentless demands of his previous role in software development, he concluded, *This can't be the life I want to live. Academia, from the outside, appeared to offer a more humane and manageable rhythm*. He described *working from 7 AM to 9 PM in a single day during the COVID period, on top of working Saturdays and Sundays* and reflected:

> *It was hectic and I'm a family-oriented person. In 2021 I started a family. Because I'm a family-oriented person, I thought you know this can't be the life I want to live. Part of what has made me stay at [PHEI], amongst many things, is the work-hours structure. I think it's welcoming to people like us. (P12)*

The decision to transition was not always entirely voluntary or planned. P05 openly admitted that his move into academia was precipitated by organisational restructuring at his previous employer. He stated plainly that *it wasn't a decision I made easily… it was a situation I was essentially placed in*. This highlights that while some actively seek out academia, others are pushed into it by external

industry pressures, economic shifts, or corporate downsizing. These differing origins notably coloured participants' subsequent experience of the challenges of their new academic environment.

P07 identified specific industry conditions that had made the pharmaceutical sector unsustainable for her in the longer term and reflected candidly on what she had been seeking:

> *Pharmacy retail sector is known for very long hours and not a lot of work-life balance. For that particular reason I jumped into an academic role which allowed a bit more flexibility and a little bit more work-life balance. That's the personal reason. (P07)*

The biographical dimension of transition was also evident in how participants described their pre-existing sense of themselves as people who enjoyed teaching or sharing knowledge. P12 recalled that even in his software development career, colleagues would seek him out when they needed help understanding something. His mother had commented on the teacher she saw in him. P14 similarly noted that he had always adopted a leadership role within his engineering team, educating colleagues on the job and seeing it as a natural expression of who he was. For these participants, the move into academia was experienced not only as a response to external circumstances but as an arrival at something that had always been latent in their professional character.

5.4.3 Expectations Recalibrated in Practice

The findings repeatedly indicate that motivations did not disappear once participants encountered difficulty. Instead, they were reinterpreted. Participants who had entered for reasons of purpose, balance or continuity often had to ask whether those aims remained achievable and, if so, in what form. Some responded by deepening their commitment to teaching and accepting the demands of transition as part of a meaningful route. Others became more ambivalent, recognising that the role differed substantially from what they had imagined.

The gap between expectation and reality was a common thread. P06 confessed that *I clearly underestimated the significance of this role and the amount of work it will entail*. The realities of lesson planning, assessment design and student support rapidly dismantled her initial assumption that teaching merely involved sharing her existing knowledge. Similarly, P01 initially thought the academic role was teaching, only to discover the complex pedagogical and administrative architectures that underpinned the educational process.

P07 described the distance between her pre-transition perceptions and the actual architecture of the role in concrete terms:

> *Traditionally, in my perception, I saw it as content delivery, lecturing, maybe mentoring, dabbling in research. But being an academic is a little bit more different,*

> *especially with the framework that we have in place. It is in facilitation, but it's more actively involved in assessments. There are three levels of assessments, moderation, clustered reviews and quality assurance. Then it's your online student journey. (P07)*

P04 anticipated some flexibility in the academic role, based on his observations of lecturers as a student. He reflected with some humour on how mistaken that impression had proved:

> *Before I joined, I thought it was very flexible, like you controlled it. It's not. It's the same, I think, with just being a professional. When I was in university, my lecturers used to leave the office early. What happened to me? I'm at the office until the end of the day. It's a different reality altogether. (P04)*

For those seeking better work-life integration, the reality of academic workload often proved jarring. The participant from the supply chain sector, despite viewing the role as a calling, noted the *relentless nature of the work, which frequently spilt over into late evenings… weekends… and public holidays*. Thus, original motivations continued to matter because they shaped whether this strain was interpreted as a worthwhile investment in student futures or as evidence of a more fundamental mismatch between their expectations and institutional realities.

5.5 Institutional Support Structures and Gaps

Institutional support emerged as one of the clearest determinants of participants' transition experience. Participants generally recognised the value of formal support structures and did not dismiss the institution's attempt to create pathways for induction and development. The existence of the AOP programme, onboarding processes and policy guidance signalled that the institution understood the need to support industry entrants. The findings also show that support was experienced unevenly and that the presence of formal structures did not guarantee that participants felt adequately held during the transition.

A central distinction in the findings was between formal support and usable support. Formal support referred to the visible structures provided by the institution, such as scheduled induction, programme materials, workshops and policy frameworks. Usable support was defined as whether those structures actually helped participants in moments when they felt uncertain, exposed, or in need of practical guidance. Participants often valued receiving institutional information, but many also noted that information alone was insufficient.



Figure 5.3: Institutional Support Ecology (Source: Developed by the researcher from ATLAS.ti-informed thematic analysis)

Figure 5.3 presents an ATLAS.ti-informed thematic network illustrating the institutional support ecology shaping participants' transition into academic life. The figure demonstrates that transition support was experienced not as a singular institutional mechanism, but as a complex interplay between enabling structures, relational practices and constraining organisational conditions.

At the centre of the network is the concept of transition support, representing the broader institutional environment through which participants navigated their movement into academia. The enabling nodes illustrate institutional and interpersonal resources that facilitated adaptation, including the academic onboarding programme, mentorship, peer support, line management support and informal learning processes. Participants frequently described these structures as important sources of pedagogical guidance, emotional reassurance and institutional orientation during uncertain phases of transition.

The figure also foregrounds the significance of relational support, which emerged as distinct from formal institutional mechanisms. Participants repeatedly emphasised that encouragement, collegial affirmation and informal conversations with trusted colleagues often carried greater developmental value than procedural induction structures alone. Relational support therefore functioned as a protective and stabilising factor within the transition process.

In contrast, the constraining nodes represent organisational conditions that complicated or weakened transition experiences. SOP gaps, timing issues and broader forms of institutional misalignment contributed to uncertainty, frustration and additional workload pressures for participants. These findings suggest that institutional support was not experienced uniformly, but as uneven, dynamic and strongly shaped by the alignment between formal structures and lived institutional realities.

The network structure further demonstrates that these enabling and constraining conditions interacted recursively rather than independently. Participants frequently compensated for institutional gaps through peer relationships, informal learning and self-directed adaptation. Figure 5.3 therefore reinforces the broader analytical argument emerging from the chapter: that pracademic transition is relationally and institutionally mediated, unfolding through overlapping systems of support, negotiation and constraint within the South African PHEI context.

5.5.1 Formal Architecture and the Visibility of Support

Many participants acknowledged the presence of a formal architecture designed to ease their entry into the institution. P09 noted that institutional training and development is weekly, indicating a visible commitment to ongoing staff enhancement. P01 similarly acknowledged the institution's efforts, stating that they offered hand-holding and opportunities for new staff. This visibility of support served an important symbolic function: it communicated that the institution recognised the complexity of the academic role and was willing to invest resources in its staff.

P14 provided a particularly detailed and appreciative account of the formal support received. He noted that the institution had offered workshops on delivery skills, assessment design, qualification development and curriculum development, as well as a range of staff development interventions from the teaching and learning department. His account stood out in the dataset for its clarity about the breadth of provision:

> *There's a lot of training and mentorship provided and it really helped to adjust to the academic role. It was exceptionally useful and still continues to be so. So far the trainings have been beneficial because I'm now understanding my role far better compared to when I started. (P14)*

P06, reflecting on the value of the formal induction architecture she had helped to design, noted that the AOP programme provided participants with the basic understanding of what each department does, the processes that are followed and about assessment and curriculum development. She observed that the most valuable support came from senior colleagues who helped translate abstract institutional language into daily practice, noting:

> *You would speak to your peers and they would basically help you with regard to understanding the academic landscape and the languages, or should I say the lingo that goes with academia. The most valuable support came from senior colleagues. (P06)*

5.5.2 Usable Support and the Timing of Need

However, the existence of formal programmes did not always equate to usable support when participants were in the thick of their daily duties. The timing of interventions is often misaligned with the immediate, practical crises new academics face. A participant starkly highlighted this gap, noting, *nobody taught me how to lecture*. This simple, profound statement underscores that while broad institutional policies may have been covered, the granular, performative act of standing before a class and facilitating learning was left largely unaddressed.

P05 articulated this structural gap directly, comparing the absence of procedural guidance in academia to the robust institutional memory systems he had known at a large revenue authority:

> *The preparation part from the organisation side was essentially very minimal. In fact, that's one of the elements I find challenging. I had to find my way around things. For example, with all the cluster head reviews and things that we have to do, or setting up assessments, system wise, clicking here and clicking there, all the practical operational aspects, that was never done. Any individual that walks through your door should have a set of standard operating procedures. Not maybe necessarily a standard operating procedure, even working instructions. When somebody walks through the door, this is the different policies that exist, this is the structure of the organisation, these are the areas that deal with one, two, three, four and five. (P05)*

P07 described a similar experience of having to construct her understanding of the institution's systems through informal channels rather than formal provision:

> *A lot of it was on-the-job learning. I'd reach out to someone in curriculum and say, hey, I need to understand what you need from me, can we meet and talk about it? And that's sort of how I learned: through conversations or through meetings or sessions. I had to learn a lot about what I do now just through on-the-job experience. (P07)*

When support was delayed or overly theoretical, participants were forced to rely on their own resourcefulness. The lack of immediate, practical guidance meant that the transition felt unsupported precisely when support was most critical. As one participant observed, the rapid pace of the academic

calendar meant that learning was necessarily on-the-job, a trial-by-fire approach that exacerbated the stress of the initial transition period.

5.5.3 The AOP Programme as Foundation and Pressure Point

The AOP programme was viewed ambivalently across the dataset. On the one hand, participants acknowledged its importance in introducing pedagogical concepts, formal expectations and a language through which to think about teaching. For some, it offered a necessary foundation and gave shape to a transition that might otherwise have remained chaotic.

P03 spoke positively about the structured nature of the onboarding process, including the AOP:

> *I did a whole lot of training and it was structured in a manner that it addresses every key aspect of what I'll be doing here. I found that very, very useful. You have curriculum come and onboard you on what the expectations are from the point of view of curriculum and then assessment as well. So that prepared me. It was very useful in preparing me and ensuring that I'm ready to operate. (P03)*

On the other hand, several participants experienced the programme as competing with the very teaching load it was meant to support. Its usefulness depended heavily on timing, workload conditions and the extent to which its content could be connected to immediate classroom realities. When the demands of the AOP were layered on top of an already taxing schedule of marking, preparation and student consultation, it often felt like a pressure point rather than a lifeline, compounding the very exhaustion it was ostensibly designed to mitigate.

5.5.4 Relational Support as Everyday Mediation

Relational support was often described as more decisive than formal structures alone. Participants who had access to collegial guidance, informal mentoring, approachable line managers or peers willing to answer practical questions tended to narrate the transition in more manageable terms. P09 highlighted the immense value of this informal network, noting how colleagues did share their experiences, which provided crucial, context-specific advice that formal manuals lacked.

This relational mediation was so critical that participants actively recommended its formalisation. P09 strongly advocated for institutions to recommend shadowing or mentoring, recognising that observing a seasoned academic navigate the complexities of the classroom and administrative systems provided far more usable knowledge than standalone training sessions. Relational support reduced isolation and made the opaque institutional culture legible, translating abstract policies into workable daily practices.

P02 described how the collegial culture of the institution had been one of the most striking differences from his prior professional life and how it had actively helped to ease his transition:

> *In the legal environment it's hard to fit in because everyone is chasing their own goals. You have to fight to be heard. Over here, it's really supportive. Everyone is supportive. They're understanding, they listen, they make time to listen to you. So yeah, that changed. That's part of that professional identity, how it changed from that to this. (P02)*

P09 further reflected on the institution's culture of lifelong learning as a stabilising feature:

> *It has been easy because we all have the notion of lifelong learning and everyone that I've been exposed to was readily available to provide advice and guidance. The institution also embarked on training and development which is weekly and which also enabled me to understand my role a bit more. (P09)*

5.5.5 Support Gaps and Institutional Meaning

Where support was absent or poorly executed, it carried significant symbolic weight. It was not merely perceived as an administrative oversight, but as an indicator of institutional indifference. P05's assertion that *expectations were simply shoved down your throat reflects* the deep alienation that occurs when managerial directives are disconnected from developmental support. To mitigate this, he argued strongly for the implementation of clear standard operating procedures, which would provide a stable, predictable framework for new entrants, replacing chaotic improvisation with structured guidance.

P08 described the disorientation of arriving without adequate practical scaffolding in vivid terms:

> *The onboarding was done in three days, online. It was more like a test to complete. The real learning was on the job when you realised you had to do the review or assessment. With assessments, I don't know how I got it right the first time, but I think it was by accident, not because someone showed me. That area needs to be closed. (P08)*

P01 suggested that support needed to be far more nuanced, noting that support could be more personalized. A one-size-fits-all induction model failed to account for the vastly different backgrounds and specific pedagogical gaps of individual industry professionals. The findings clearly indicate that support is only perceived as authentic institutional care when it is timely, relational and tailored to the lived realities of the pracademic.

P06, who had been part of the team that designed the institution's induction documentation, reflected candidly on the structural inadequacy of current provision:

> *I don't think they are generally adequate for a smooth transition. There is no formal support. We need to address the deep-seated challenges that professionals face coming into academia: that identity conflict, the need to bridge the gap and start seeing themselves as academics when they are in the academic role. We need to look at getting to know the academic governance structures and translating the knowledge they required from industry into scholarly output. (P06)*

5.6 Pedagogical Knowledge Development and Alignment

A major theme across the data was that subject expertise did not automatically equate to pedagogical competence. Participants repeatedly described the move from knowing a field to teaching a field as one of the most demanding aspects of transition. Industry expertise provided credibility and rich examples, but it did not remove the need to learn how to sequence knowledge, respond to misunderstanding, design assessments or make concepts teachable. The assumption that an expert practitioner naturally makes an expert teacher was swiftly dismantled in the early stages of their academic careers.

5.6.1 From Knowing the Field to Teaching the Field

Participants often had to slow down knowledge that, in industry, had become tacit, automatic or professionally routinised. They had to deconstruct their own expertise to make it accessible to novices. P12 emphasised this translational labour, stating that teaching should communicate in a way that you will understand. This required a profound shift in perspective: from focusing on the execution of a task to focusing on the cognitive journey of the learner attempting to grasp that task.

P14 demonstrated this translational labour with particular precision. He described the challenge of teaching abstract network concepts to students who had never had hands-on exposure to the infrastructure he had worked with for years:

> *You can't really cut a wire to see what's a network broadcast. You can't see what's a network storm. You cannot see how a router minimises some of these conflicts and redirects traffic. But if I take that analogy and say, listen guys, let's align it to the road, the whole road infrastructure: look at your local community, talk about the number of lanes you have. So that's the contention, that's the number of cars on that lane. Peak hour becomes traffic and that's what happens when your connectivity slows down or degrades. (P14)*

He extended this into a broader principle about the distinction between holding knowledge and conveying it:

> *Knowing a subject well is one thing, but knowing how to teach it effectively is something completely different. You have to be a people's person as well. You've got to be able to read your audience. You've got to know what makes them tick. You've got to know why they're in that particular qualification. (P14)*

P07 offered a complementary account of the same distinction. She noted that many people have a wealth of knowledge but struggle to articulate it to others, observing:

> *I can have a lot of knowledge in my head, but I have no way of getting it out to the next person. So there are people sitting out there with a wealth of knowledge in their head, but the articulation is not good. Knowing a subject well and knowing how to teach it effectively are very different things. (P07)*

The vulnerability inherent in this process was articulated by P05, who recounted the unsettling experience of being challenged by learners: students now will throw questions at you. He noted that this rapid-fire inquiry quickly revealed how in-depth your knowledge actually needs to be. In industry, authority often insulates professionals from foundational questioning; in academia, foundational questioning is the very substance of the interaction. This necessitated a rigorous re-engagement with the core principles of their disciplines, moving beyond practical application to theoretical justification.

P02 described a deliberate redesign of his entire approach to teaching law, motivated by his own negative experience as a student:

> *I initially approached teaching very traditionally. My PowerPoints were a lot of information. I thought that the power of knowledge came in written form. And that was misinformed by perhaps the incorrect ideology of teaching. But that has transcended into now using gamification, which I rely on wholeheartedly. I use Mentimeter to teach, I use videos, I use a flipped classroom approach and a lot of AI because I believe AI is the future. So let's teach with that. (P02)*

5.6.2 Early Classroom Uncertainty and the Labour of Preparation

Early pedagogy was often marked by intense uncertainty and heavy preparatory labour. The transition from practitioner to educator required the rapid acquisition of entirely new skill sets. P06's account is emblematic of this struggle; she described *the mental and physical toll of having to teach myself at the same time as she was expected to deliver content. The sheer volume of preparation required to*

translate complex industry knowledge into digestible academic lessons resulted in endless hours of unseen labour, often sitting up to three 4:00 in the morning.

P09 described the experience of early preparation as equally intensive, noting that the challenge was not the subject matter but learning the conventions and expectations of the academic format:

> *When I started there was no specific programme as such, but the training and mentorship did help me understand my role a bit more. It was through experience and through tasks and activities that we get exposed to, where there would be training or there would be some guiding document to help us go through the activity. That then helps with my preparation in these areas. (P09)*

This labour of preparation was invisible to the institution but deeply felt by the participants. Another participant, reflecting on the shift in their identity, used the term "para academic" to describe their dual positioning, a phrasing that resonates closely with the study's central concept of the pracademic. They noted that their pedagogical evolution required moving from a traditional teacher-centred approach to one of a facilitator. This shift meant relinquishing the safety of merely transmitting facts and instead undertaking the much more complex preparatory work of designing interactive scenarios, utilising videos and case studies to foster genuine comprehension.

5.6.3 Assessment, Curriculum and the Weight of Judgement

Assessment design emerged as a particularly significant site of transition. In industry, evaluation is often tied to immediate outcomes, project delivery and financial metrics. In academia, evaluation is governed by strict pedagogical frameworks, taxonomies and regulatory standards. P14 explicitly identified challenges in assessment design and navigating quality assurance frameworks as major hurdles in his transition. Developing assessments that were fair, rigorous and aligned with complex curriculum outcomes was a foreign language that required urgent fluency.

P08 described the experience of having to design an assessment without adequate preparation or guidance:

> *The challenging part was setting assessments. I'm not thinking as an academic. It's a project, so I know what the project is and what we need to look at. But those things were new to me at that time. I don't know how I got it right the first time, but I think it was by accident, not because someone showed me or whatever. I don't know. (P08)*

The weight of academic judgement weighed heavily on participants. They were no longer simply evaluating the success of a business process; they were evaluating the cognitive development and

future prospects of human beings. This required the adoption of rigorous moderation practices, the construction of detailed rubrics and adherence to institutional policies. The transition from the pragmatic evaluations of industry to the structured, theoretical evaluations of academia was a profound site of learning and frequent anxiety.

P03, who had been highly comfortable with data-driven performance evaluation in supply chain management, described the unfamiliarity of having to construct the entire evaluative apparatus from scratch:

> *In the industry there is always a framework that is already prepared and you just follow. On this side you start from scratch. You get to design the case study itself and the questions that you want students to answer and how you want them to answer. So that was the challenge. Before I learned how to use AI, it used to take forever. But also the number of assessments that you have to do: the supplementary, the main exam, supplementary assessments and the tally or the permission. (P03)*

5.6.4 Pedagogy as a Route into Legitimacy

Despite the challenges, pedagogical growth also served as a primary route into institutional legitimacy. As participants mastered the art of teaching, they began to feel truly integrated into the academic community. P01 recounted his own evolution, noting that he initially thought the role was teaching, viewing it through a highly reductive lens. However, as he matured in the role, he discovered and later valued the flipped classroom approach, recognising the depth of pedagogical strategy required to foster independent student learning.

P02 articulated how his early frustration with the limits of traditional delivery had been transformed into a principled commitment to learner-centred pedagogy:

> *I resented the way I was taught in law school. It was really, really traditional. There was no support. It was two or three words in a blank PowerPoint that you had to decipher for yourself. So I went in and I asked myself: what would I like if I was a student? I would have liked content to be made easier, to break it down into pictures and visuals, to allow me the opportunity to come into class and speak. So I used those things that I would like to actually teach. (P02)*

Legitimacy was thus earned not through past industry triumphs, but through present classroom efficacy. When participants successfully translated their practical expertise into engaging, structured academic delivery, they validated their dual identity. Pedagogy operated not just as a set of technical

skills to be acquired, but as the very medium through which the pracademic claimed their rightful place within the university structure.

P12 described a moment of genuine pedagogical achievement that affirmed his academic belonging. He had learned to translate abstract computational concepts into everyday analogies that students could relate to directly. Reflecting on this evolution, he noted:

> *For me, teaching is sharing information for you to understand, for you to learn. My primary goal when it comes to teaching is not for me to just deliver information to you, but it must be in a way that you will make sense of it and that you can practically answer it and make use of it. (P12)*

5.7 Technology Integration and Digital Transformation

Technology emerged as both a challenge and a resource. Participants described the digital environment as a core part of contemporary academic work rather than a peripheral skill. For some, technology was a site of vulnerability, demanding the rapid acquisition of unfamiliar platform competencies. For others, particularly those with technical backgrounds, it was a domain in which prior competence could be recovered and leveraged to enhance the academic experience.

5.7.1 Digital Systems as Pedagogical Infrastructure

The post-pandemic landscape permanently altered the delivery of higher education, embedding digital systems as the primary pedagogical infrastructure. P05 observed that, post-COVID, *we've seen a transition to online learning, fundamentally shifting the nature of academic interaction. The physical classroom was replaced by a learning management system, requiring academics to master not only their subject matter but also the medium of delivery.*

This shift required profound adaptation. P12 captured the magnitude of this change, stating plainly that online teaching is a different ball game altogether. The traditional cues of student comprehension: eye contact, body language and the physical energy of a room, were absent or muted in the digital space. Academics had to develop entirely new strategies to gauge engagement, deliver content effectively and maintain a commanding presence across a screen.

P07, who had come from an industry with well-established in-person service protocols, described the difficulty of mapping the institution's complex system architecture. P07 also described the challenge of driving engagement in a digital environment without the non-verbal cues that had anchored her communication in pharmacy practice. She noted:

> *The non-verbal communication was a big indicator and it's what allowed you to push engagement in a traditional setting. But in our style of delivery with distance, not*

having non-verbal communication, you rely solely on forcing engagement through innovative methods. You have to pull the engagement out of a student. (P07)

5.7.2 Technology, Confidence and Recovery of Competence

For participants who embraced technology, digital tools provided a pathway to recover the confidence they had enjoyed in the industry. P14, leaning into his background, purposefully pivoted his identity to become an educational technologist. He saw technology not as an obstacle but as the very tool needed to embed practicality in the academic space. By leveraging advanced systems, he could simulate industry environments, addressing his concern that students/graduates often emerged very theoretically inclined but not practically inclined.

Other participants proactively sought out innovative digital solutions to manage their workload and enhance delivery. One participant detailed their extensive use of emerging AI and engagement tools, noting that they use Gamma, NotebookLM, polls, short videos and pop quizzes. These technologies allowed them to create dynamic, interactive learning experiences that bridged the gap between passive reception and active participation, thereby asserting their competence in a modern, digitally mediated academic landscape.

P14 described a specific transition in his pedagogical philosophy, from purely direct instruction to problem-based and project-based learning and identified this shift as an expression of his industry formation:

Now it's like flipped classrooms, problem-based learning and so on, which is quite exciting because coming from the industry we are faced with problems all the time. Nobody calls you because they just want to talk to you. They only reach out to you when there's a problem. So the problem-solving concept is a big part of me and that's the troubleshooting. That's the common word in the technical space. So, I try and be an educational technologist. (P14)

5.7.3 Uneven Institutional Mediation of the Digital Environment

At the same time, the institution's mediation of the digital environment was experienced unevenly. While the institution mandated the use of specific platforms, the training provided often focused on the mechanical aspects of the software rather than its pedagogical integration. Participants were taught which buttons to click, but rarely how to leverage the technology to facilitate deep learning.

When the digital infrastructure failed or proved inadequate for complex pedagogical tasks, participants felt exposed. P05 described the demoralising experience of trying to engage silent students in online forums, comparing the effort to hitting your head against a brick wall and noting that extracting participation was like pulling teeth. These visceral metaphors highlight the severe

emotional and professional frustration that arises when technology serves as a barrier rather than a conduit for connection, particularly when institutional support for digital pedagogy is superficial.

P14 noted a fundamental epistemological tension between how technology was understood in industry and how it was governed in academia:

> *Academia emphasises more on compliance, reflection and theoretical depth, whilst industry values agility and delivery. We just want the situation sorted out immediately and move on. So there needs to be a strategic alignment between the two. The pace is a lot slower in terms of change and implementation in academia as opposed to industry. (P14)*

Table 5.3 summarises participants' experiences of digital transition within the academic environment and highlights the emotional dimensions associated with technology integration during pracademic transition. The findings indicate that participants' encounters with digital systems were not merely technical adjustments but identity-shaping experiences closely connected to confidence, legitimacy and professional competence.

Participants frequently described LMS and institutional digital platforms as sources of confusion and overwhelm, particularly during the early stages of transition when they were simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar pedagogical and administrative expectations. Online teaching further intensified feelings of exposure and anxiety, as participants became acutely aware of gaps in digital pedagogical knowledge and the visibility of teaching performance within technologically mediated environments.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that technology was not experienced solely as constraining. Several participants described engagement with AI tools and educational technologies as enabling creativity, experimentation and the recovery of professional confidence. In some cases, digital innovation allowed participants to reconnect with strengths associated with industry agility and problem-solving, thereby contributing positively to identity reconstruction within academia.

The table also highlights the relational challenges associated with digitally mediated teaching. Experiences of student silence, disengagement and limited feedback in online environments frequently generated frustration and uncertainty about teaching effectiveness and student connection. Nevertheless, experimentation with educational technologies also emerged as a site of innovation and professional growth, allowing participants to develop new pedagogical approaches and rebuild confidence in their academic capabilities.

Table 5.3 demonstrates that digital transition was experienced ambivalently as both a source of vulnerability and a site of adaptation, innovation and emerging pedagogical competence. The findings therefore reinforce the broader argument that technology integration within pracademic transition is not merely technical in nature, but deeply connected to identity, confidence, pedagogical legitimacy and institutional belonging.

Table 5.3: Digital Transition Experiences

Technology Function	**Experience**	**Emotional Response**
LMS systems	Confusion	Overwhelm
Online teaching	Exposure	Anxiety
AI tools	Creativity	Recovery of competence
Digital engagement	Student silence	Frustration
EdTech experimentation	Innovation	Identity rebuilding

(Source: Developed by the researcher from participant narratives and reflexive thematic analysis findings)

5.8 Student Relationships and Engagement Strategies

Students occupied a central place in participants' narratives of transition. They were not only recipients of teaching but active mediators of participants' developing academic identities. Student interaction could affirm competence, expose gaps, generate motivation and reshape teaching approaches. Navigating this relationship required a delicate balance between maintaining professional authority and demonstrating pedagogical care.

5.8.1 Students as Sources of Validation

Participants consistently identified student response as their most powerful source of validation, often outweighing formal institutional feedback. When students engaged deeply with the material and recognised the value of the pracademic's background, it provided a profound sense of achievement. P09 highlighted this dynamic, expressing satisfaction that students actually appreciated the industry experience. This validation confirmed that their prior professional lives were not irrelevant history, but vital assets in the academic environment.

P14 articulated this dynamic with particular clarity, describing the bond that authentic industry knowledge created with students:

> *I've got a lot of industry experience in the IT field, so I speak from my experiences and students can see the authenticity in that. It resonates with them, it identifies with them. So you create this kinship with students because then they start to trust what you're saying. And even though you gain the trust, you can't abuse that trust. You have to use*

it as a hook to take it further or to give them that extra knowledge they're looking for. And you see that a lot. (P14)

P12 further emphasised this reciprocal dynamic, noting the classroom joy when students can offer real examples grounded in the theories discussed. When students actively applied theoretical frameworks to practical scenarios drawn from the pracademic's experience, it demonstrated the success of the pedagogical transaction. These moments of connection served as crucial counterweights to the self-doubt and institutional friction that often characterised the broader transition experience.

P03 described a similar dynamic when teaching supply chain concepts, noting that industry examples helped bridge theory and application:

Whatever I teach is something that I've done myself before in my past life. So that's the beauty of it to me. I always say to my students, based on the examples that I've given in class, that's something I've done practically. It helps me in that regard. And it normally makes sense to them and they normally appreciate those examples. (P03)

5.8.2 Students as Corrective to Practitioner Assumptions

Students also acted as a vital corrective to practitioner assumptions. Industry professionals often enter academia with preconceived notions about learner capabilities, assuming that students will grasp complex, fast-paced industry concepts with the same alacrity as their former corporate colleagues. P06 quickly realised this fallacy, recognising the urgent need to bridge that gap between high-level industry discourse and foundational student comprehension. She learned that she could not take basic study skills or industry terminology for granted; everything had to be scaffolded.

P07 described a principle she had derived from her pharmaceutical background: that trust had to be created before learning could occur and that this required a deliberate shift away from formal assessment modes:

You have to invite them into a conversation rather than a style of assessment. Every student will have pride. They don't want to look stupid, especially to the facilitator. So you have to pull them into a conversation and make things a lot more casual to try and gain trust. Whether your student is NQF 5 or NQF 8, at the end of the day they're still learning. They're still on a journey of learning. (P07)

This required a posture of pedagogical humility. Pracademics had to learn to read the room, adjusting their pace, tone and complexity based on student feedback. The realisation that a brilliant industry presentation does not automatically translate into an effective academic lecture forced participants to

dismantle their professional arrogance and rebuild their communication strategies from the ground up, centring on the learner's needs rather than the expert's performance.

P05 described his own evolution in understanding the relationship between teacher and student. He had come to see the role in familial rather than transactional terms:

> *The manner in which you deliver feedback in academia is very different to how you would do that in industry. In industry, essentially it's all about now achieving and producing results or performance management reviews. Here it's more of a parent-child kind of situation. You are trying to get the student to the point of understanding what it is you'd like him to understand. The manner in which you deliver it is very different. (P05)*

5.8.3 Care, Authority and the Formation of Lecturer Presence

Participants' accounts suggest that an effective lecturer presence was formed through the careful calibration of care and academic authority. They could not rely on the positional authority of their past managerial titles; they had to earn respect through their commitment to student success. P06's declaration that she would not shortchange my student exemplifies this ethic of care. Her authority in the classroom stemmed directly from the immense effort she put into ensuring her students received a quality education.

P14 articulated this ethic in practical terms, drawing on his experience managing technical teams to describe how he approached student vulnerability in the online classroom:

> *Students are already on the back foot today. They are nervous. They are stressed. They've got other commitments in life. I feel it is my job to try and make that space, even if it's online, comfortable and safe for them to feel like I need to engage. I might get something wrong, but I'm not going to be criticised or shut down. I will actually be mentored and supported and guided in that interaction. (P14)*

This dual requirement: to be both an authoritative subject matter expert and an empathetic facilitator, was a complex identity to forge. It required the pracademic to be approachable without losing academic boundaries and rigorous without becoming punitive. The successful negotiation of this balance was a critical marker of a completed transition into the academic community.

5.9 Innovation and Change Management Capabilities

Participants' industry backgrounds often provided adaptive habits that could be carried into academic work. These included agile problem-solving, responsiveness to systemic change and a drive for continuous improvement. The data also showed that innovation in the academic space was complex;

it functioned both as a vital contribution to institutional progress and, at times, as a necessary compensation for structural support gaps.

5.9.1 Adaptability as a Carried Resource

Pracademics brought a distinct agility to the often slow-moving university environment. P09 observed a clear dichotomy within the institution, noting that long-serving academics may be less willing to change and adapt to innovation compared to their industry-transitioned peers. The pracademics, accustomed to the relentless pace of corporate markets, viewed change not as a disruption to be managed, but as a standard operating condition to be leveraged.

This adaptability was echoed by another participant who, reflecting on the sluggishness of university processes, argued forcefully that academics need to be more agile. They viewed the rigid adherence to historical academic methods as a liability in a rapidly evolving global economy. By bringing a mindset oriented toward efficiency, outcome-based design and rapid iteration, these industry professionals injected a necessary dynamism into their departments.

P07 articulated this orientation as having been a primary motivation for leaving industry in the first place:

> *I'm not a very traditional person. It's one of the reasons I've left industry: because I was craving innovation and creativity. I was bored of doing the same thing every day. I was very good at it, I was very efficient, but I craved innovation. Academia allows a little bit more agency, flow, innovation, creativity. You have a little bit more of a voice that you want to have. (P07)*

P09 observed a structural difference between long-serving academics and industry professionals that directly related to this adaptability orientation:

> *Long-serving academics have more experience, obviously in the field, but they are less willing to change and adapt to innovation than industry professionals who come with a lot of experience in the innovation space and from a customer service perspective. (P09)*

5.9.2 Innovation Between Contribution and Compensation

However, the drive to innovate was not always purely a desire to advance pedagogical practice; often, it was a survival mechanism to compensate for institutional deficiencies. When faced with unwieldy administrative systems or inadequate teaching resources, pracademics used their problem-solving skills to engineer workarounds. P14 noted the inherent tension between innovation and academic

conservatism, observing that his attempts to introduce agile, practical methodologies were frequently stifled by institutional inertia.

He expressed frustration that academia is often slower due to red tape, a reality that clashed sharply with the rapid-deployment strategies he was accustomed to in the technology sector. Innovation, therefore, was a double-edged sword. It allowed pracademics to survive and occasionally thrive, but it also highlighted the institution's rigidities, forcing them to expend significant energy battling bureaucratic structures to implement logical improvements.

P08 described this same tension through the lens of project management, where the distance between an idea and its implementation was far greater in academia than in the infrastructure projects he had managed:

> *In industry it's easier to see the fruits of your action immediately. In academia you don't see the fruits of your action immediately. You only perceive what it's going to be like because it's a theoretical thing. You haven't tried it out, you haven't put it into practice. I've been struggling with ideas of how to really bring that to pass so that our students can tangibly understand that they have this knowledge. (P08)*

5.9.3 Innovation as Early Sign of Hybrid Academic Formation

These adaptive tendencies signalled the emergence of a truly hybrid academic identity. Participants were not merely shedding their industry skins to don academic robes; they were actively fusing the two. The integration of advanced digital tools, the insistence on practical application and the drive for agility were all manifestations of this hybridity. The resulting pracademic identity was distinct from the traditional academic archetype: it was more porous to external industry trends and more impatient with internal inefficiencies, representing a vital evolutionary step in the profile of the modern higher education practitioner.

P07 described how academia had, in some important ways, delivered the creative agency she had been seeking, even while its bureaucratic dimensions constrained it:

> *Academia does allow a little bit more agency, flow, innovation, creativity. There's a lot of room for creativity and innovation that I didn't have previously. Coming into or evolving into an academic, it is still process-driven, but there's a lot more room for creativity and innovation. Professionally, my identity is forced me to look at things more holistically. (P07)*

P08 proposed a practical model to bridge the gap between academic theory and industry practice, one that emerged from his frustration with the disconnection between the curriculum and professional

reality. He envisaged a kind of resource hub that would allow academics and students to access and apply live industry tools in the classroom, directly connecting theoretical learning with the operational world he had come from.

5.10 Time Management and Work-Life Integration

Time pressure was one of the most persistent, overwhelming features of the transition. Participants' accounts make clear that time was not simply a matter of poor personal organisation or a temporary adjustment. It was a structural reality dictated by the demands of the academic role itself, particularly the expectation that development, teaching, exhaustive assessment and administrative compliance had to occur simultaneously and flawlessly.

5.10.1 The Hidden Expansion of Academic Work

Participants repeatedly described the hidden, seemingly boundless expansion of academic labour beyond visible teaching hours. Unlike many industry roles, where the workday has a defined end, academic work has a porous boundary that easily blurs into personal time. A participant managing a full teaching load captured this desperation, stating that *dealing with four modules simultaneously is taxing and, frankly, admitting, I am feeling the heat.*

The invisible labour of academia drives this hidden expansion: the meticulous construction of rubrics, the exhaustive marking of scripts, the mandatory moderation processes and the endless email correspondence with anxious students.

P03 captured the normalisation of this boundary erosion through the language of vocation:

> *In the industry, working on public holidays or weekends would only really happen during the peak season and you would even get handsomely paid for it. In academia, it's a normal. It's a calling. Yeah, you work after work, late in the evenings. Yeah. (P03)*

P12, who had specifically left software development to escape the unsustainable hours he had been working, reflected on whether academia had actually delivered the work-life balance he had hoped for:

> *Obviously it has changed in terms of understanding different platforms and modes of delivery. But from a work hours structure, I think it's welcoming to people like us. Part of what has made me stay at [PHEI], amongst many things, is that work structure. It is more welcoming than where I was. (P12)*

5.10.2 Overlap, Spillover and the Compression of Development

An acute compression of development marked the transition. Participants were not afforded a grace period to learn the role before performing it; they were expected *to build the aeroplane while flying*

it. P06's recounting of her endless hours of late-night preparation illustrates this compression perfectly. She was simultaneously learning pedagogical theory, designing curriculum and delivering lectures.

This overlap of learning and performance generated immense stress. The cognitive load of mastering institutional systems, understanding complex regulatory frameworks and maintaining a high standard of teaching resulted in significant psychological spillover. The mental labour of preparation and the anxiety of potential exposure in the classroom meant that participants rarely experienced true downtime during their first years in the institution.

P04 described the compression through the accumulation of simultaneous assessment demands, which arrived without adequate warning or preparation time:

> *Assessments come all at once. You're busy marking a case study, they're expecting an assessment and there's also the creating of an assessment and the two things are all basically close to each other. You're thinking, I'm servicing this thing here, can you work on this? But because there's nothing that can be controlled, it's just the nature of the beast. Teaching is a calling. However, you look at it, you'll always do more than what you're paid for. But at the end of the day it's your passion and it's fulfilling. (P04)*

5.10.3 Time as a Marker of Institutional Structuring

Time, or the lack thereof, revealed the deep institutional structuring of the pracademic experience. In the industry, time is money and efficiency is rewarded. In academia, time is often consumed by processes, consensus-building and regulatory compliance. P14's frustration with the slow pace dictated by red tape highlights this temporal disjuncture. The institution dictates the rhythm of work: unforgiving assessment cycles and rigid semester dates, leaving the pracademic with little autonomy over their own schedule. This structural imposition of time limits the capacity for deep reflection and often delays the development of the final component of academic legitimacy: research.

P05 articulated the mismatch between the pace of academic decision-making and the institutional agility he had been accustomed to at a revenue authority. He described the frustration of having to wait for processes to unfold when the operational need was immediate:

> *I found that there was no specific engagement with us. So there's no engagement. I found that very difficult to accept. When there's no engagement, there's things that are just essentially put on your plate. There's no consideration to the fact that you have knowledge, you have experience, you have a voice. (P05)*

5.11 Research and Scholarship Development

Research and scholarship emerged as an important, intimidating and often deferred dimension of transition. For many participants, research did not initially occupy the centre of their role experience. Teaching, assessment and immediate survival were far more urgent priorities. Within the symbolic economy of higher education, research remained the ultimate, unyielding marker of full academic legitimacy.

5.11.1 Research as Horizon Rather Than Immediate Centre

Several participants described research as an approaching horizon rather than an immediate area of mastery. It was a looming expectation that they knew they eventually had to address to secure their standing. P05 acknowledged the institutional reality, recognising that active scholarship was a critical element of the role. However, given the immediate pedagogical and operational fires that needed extinguishing, engaging deeply with research felt like a distant, albeit necessary, luxury.

P12 identified this expectation as a significant source of anxiety, noting that the pressure to publish comes from the rigour it brings. The standards of academic peer review, the necessity for theoretical grounding and the demand for methodological precision represented a steep learning curve and the daily demands of teaching left little time to ascend it.

P05 described the pressure to publish as something he had not fully grasped when entering the role:

> *I feel the pressure now to start getting myself involved in research. I didn't initially clearly grasp and understand that it is also a critical part of the role as an academic. Research and being involved in such. I need to start pursuing that quite vigorously. I have understood that to be quite critical. (P05)*

5.11.2 From Professional Experience to Potential Inquiry

Participants did not generally reject the concept of research; rather, they experienced it as a foreign domain requiring translation. The supply chain participant captured this difficulty succinctly, stating that compared to the rapid, pragmatic problem-solving of industry, academic research was much more structured. It required adherence to rigid epistemological and ontological frameworks that felt restrictive to professionals accustomed to fluid, outcome-based investigation.

P06 echoed this sentiment, openly admitting that engaging with academic literature was daunting. She perceptively noted that research writing involves a different discourse entirely. It is a language of caveat, theoretical positioning and extensive citation, far removed from the decisive, bullet-pointed executive summaries that dominate corporate communication. Transitioning from professional

experience to formal academic inquiry required a fundamental rewiring of how knowledge was validated and expressed.

P02 described the epistemological discontinuity between legal research, which he had practised extensively and academic research, which operated under entirely different rules:

> *The hardest thing for me was probably research, because I wasn't really involved in too much research on an academic scale. On a legal scale, research is not the same. So it's very difficult for me to even acclimatise myself to the academic expectations of research. (P02)*

P03 described a similar conceptual gap, recounting the kind of informal market intelligence he had called "research" in industry and contrasting it with the structured demands of academic inquiry:

> *In the industry you don't bother with research, but it's very key when you transition into academia. So that was the hardest part. The last time I dealt with research was when I was doing my master's thesis. Now it's something that I need to do more often. Here it's more structured: you have to follow particular principles and guidelines. (P03)*

5.11.3 Scholarship and the Layered Nature of Legitimacy

Research intensified the layered, complex nature of academic legitimacy. A pracademic could be an exceptional teacher, beloved by students and respected for their industry insights, however, still feel inherently inferior if they lacked a publication record. Scholarship extended the transition period indefinitely, ensuring that even after mastering the classroom, the pracademic remained a novice in the eyes of the broader academic community until they contributed to the formal body of literature. This layered legitimacy underscores that becoming a fully recognised academic is not a singular event, but a protracted, multi-faceted process of cultural and intellectual assimilation.

P14 represented a notable exception to the pattern of research deferral. He had entered the institution with a clear aspiration to publish and pursue doctoral study and described the institutional environment as having enabled, rather than obstructed, that ambition:

> *One of the chief motivators for me to transition into academia is obviously the dissemination of knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge because I want to achieve my PhD. I never published a paper before; only when I got into [PHEI] was I able to collaborate with peers who guided me into publishing my first paper. That was a massive achievement for me. I don't think I would have achieved that had I still remained in industry. (P14)*

The low coding prevalence of this theme, showing 36 instances across the full dataset compared to 1,891 for Theme 2 and 829 for Theme 1, is itself analytically significant and should not be read as evidence of relative unimportance. Rather, it reflects the structural position that research occupies in the pracademic's experience at this institutional site: it is a deferred imperative rather than a present demand. Participants were not positioned to engage with research because the immediate structural conditions of the PHEI, namely full teaching loads from week one, compressed moderation schedules and the absence of protected time for scholarly development, made research impossible to prioritise without sacrificing the pedagogical and administrative work on which their continued employment depended. The temporal debt spiral identified across Themes 3 and 8 did not merely delay research engagement; it structurally precluded it during the early transition period. Research marginalisation is therefore not incidental to the transition experience at this institution; it is an institutionally produced condition, a predictable outcome of workload regimes that allocate time to immediate throughput demands while leaving long-term scholarly development unprotected. This structural diagnosis has direct implications for how institutions should conceptualise and resource academic career development for pracademics, a point addressed further in the framework recommendations of Chapter 7.

5.12 Cross-Theme Synthesis

The findings demonstrate that pracademic transition cannot be understood as a straightforward movement from professional expertise into academic competence. The transition emerged as a deeply entangled process in which identity, pedagogy, institutional structure, workload, technology and legitimacy continually interacted with and reshaped one another. Participants did not encounter these dimensions sequentially or in isolation. Instead, they experienced them simultaneously, often under conditions of institutional compression that required them to learn, perform and adapt at the same time. The findings therefore challenge developmental narratives that portray transition as a gradual progression from induction towards stable incorporation. What emerged instead was a recursive and uneven process characterised by repeated cycles of disruption, adaptation, partial stabilisation and renewed uncertainty (Schlossberg, 2011; Trede et al., 2012).

At the centre of this process was a persistent tension between prior professional authority and emerging academic vulnerability. Participants entered academia with established occupational identities, practical expertise and, in many cases, significant leadership experience. Yet the institutional logic of higher education redistributed legitimacy through unfamiliar markers such as pedagogical fluency, assessment competence, academic language, technological confidence and research engagement (Henkel, 2005). As a result, participants frequently experienced themselves as

simultaneously expert and exposed. Their professional knowledge remained intact, but the institutional conditions through which that knowledge could be recognised had fundamentally changed. The transition therefore involved not simply acquiring new skills but renegotiating the terms under which expertise itself became visible and credible within academic life (Beijaard et al., 2004).

The findings further demonstrate that pedagogy functioned as one of the principal sites through which this identity disruption was experienced. Participants repeatedly discovered that industry expertise did not automatically translate into teaching competence. The classroom exposed the limits of tacit professional knowledge by requiring participants to articulate, sequence and pedagogically transform what had previously been enacted intuitively within workplace environments. This process was cognitively and emotionally demanding because it required participants to revisit foundational assumptions they had long ceased consciously to examine. Teaching therefore became more than a technical responsibility; it became a mechanism through which participants confronted the gap between knowing a field and making that field learnable for others (Shulman, 1987).

Pedagogical adaptation did not occur under protected developmental conditions. Participants were expected to construct pedagogical competence while already carrying full teaching, assessment and administrative responsibilities. The findings therefore suggest that transition within this institutional context operated through simultaneous performance and learning rather than staged professional development. This structural compression intensified the emotional labour of transition because participants were required to perform confidence publicly while privately negotiating uncertainty. Institutional systems often assumed operational readiness before pedagogical confidence had fully formed, producing conditions under which participants relied heavily on improvisation, self-directed learning and informal collegial support (McCall et al., 2021; Yusoff, 2025).

The institutional environment itself emerged as an active mediator of transition rather than a passive background context. Support structures such as the AOP programme, mentorship and onboarding processes were important, but their effectiveness depended less on their formal existence than on their usability within the lived realities of academic work. Participants consistently distinguished between visible institutional support and support that was practically and relationally meaningful in moments of uncertainty. Relational support, particularly from peers and approachable colleagues, frequently carried greater developmental value than procedural induction mechanisms alone. This finding suggests that institutional incorporation is experienced relationally before it is experienced administratively. Belonging was therefore not produced simply through formal appointment or policy provision, but through everyday experiences of recognition, guidance and collegial inclusion (Wenger, 1998; Metz, 2011).

Institutional structures also generated forms of strain that complicated transition. Workload intensity, assessment cycles, technological demands and compressed timelines collectively produced what may be understood as temporal overcrowding, a condition in which multiple developmental demands competed simultaneously for limited cognitive and emotional capacity. Participants were not merely adapting to academic culture; they were adapting under conditions of chronic time scarcity. This explains why several themes became recursively connected. Pedagogical uncertainty intensified workload pressure; workload pressure limited time for research development; inadequate support increased dependence on informal learning; and technological demands amplified feelings of exposure and competence anxiety. The findings therefore reveal transition as a structurally interconnected experience rather than a collection of isolated adjustment challenges.

Technology further complicated this process by functioning simultaneously as a source of vulnerability and a site of competence recovery. For some participants, unfamiliar digital systems heightened feelings of exposure and uncertainty, particularly within online teaching environments where student engagement became difficult to interpret. For others, especially those with strong technological or problem-solving backgrounds, digital innovation became a means of reclaiming professional confidence and reshaping lecturer identity (Hora & Lee, 2020). Technology therefore operated ambivalently within the transition process: it both destabilised and enabled participants, depending on the alignment between prior expertise, institutional support and pedagogical adaptation.

A particularly important finding concerns the role of students in mediating academic legitimacy. Participants repeatedly described student engagement, feedback and recognition as central to the consolidation of emerging academic identity. Positive student responses frequently provided reassurance that professional expertise retained educational value within the classroom. In this sense, students became active participants in the production of academic legitimacy rather than passive recipients of teaching. However, this legitimacy remained fragile because it was continually measured against broader institutional expectations concerning assessment, administration, digital competency and research productivity.

Research occupied a distinct and revealing position within the findings. Although participants recognised scholarship as symbolically central to full academic legitimacy, research engagement was often deferred due to the overwhelming immediacy of teaching and operational survival. The relatively limited coding prevalence of research-related concerns was therefore analytically significant rather than marginal. It revealed the structural sequencing of academic labour within this institutional context, where teaching competence and operational functionality became urgent priorities while scholarly development remained postponed. Research therefore emerged as a horizon

of legitimacy rather than an immediate dimension of transition, reinforcing the broader finding that pracademic incorporation into academia remained incomplete, uneven and institutionally mediated.

The findings suggest that pracademic transition is best understood as a condition of sustained liminality rather than temporary adjustment (Gourlay, 2011; Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026). Participants did not move cleanly from outsider to insider status, nor did they simply replace practitioner identity with academic identity. Instead, they occupied hybrid positions in which professional expertise and academic expectations remained in ongoing negotiation (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). This hybridity was at times empowering, enabling participants to connect theory and practice in ways valued by students and institutions. At other times, however, it generated ambiguity concerning belonging, legitimacy and institutional recognition. The transition into academia therefore emerged not as a singular achievement but as an evolving process through which participants continually interpreted, defended, reconstructed and legitimised themselves within the complex social world of higher education.

5.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the study's empirical findings through nine interconnected themes that collectively explore the complexity of pracademic transition within a South African PHEI. The findings demonstrate that the movement from industry into academia is not adequately explained as a simple occupational relocation or technical adjustment. It emerged as a multidimensional, institutionally mediated process characterised by identity disruption, pedagogical reconstruction, relational negotiation and the ongoing pursuit of academic legitimacy.

Across the dataset, participants consistently described transition as involving the destabilisation of previously established professional authority. Entry into academia required not only adaptation to unfamiliar pedagogical and institutional practices, but also the renegotiation of selfhood within a professional environment governed by different norms of recognition, expertise and value. Participants frequently experienced themselves as simultaneously accomplished professionals and uncertain academic newcomers, revealing the liminal and hybrid nature of pracademic identity formation. The findings therefore suggest that becoming academic is not a singular achievement reached through formal appointment alone, but an evolving process of institutional incorporation, pedagogical development and symbolic recognition.

The chapter further demonstrated that pedagogical adaptation occupied a central position within this transition process. Participants repeatedly discovered that deep disciplinary or industry expertise did not automatically translate into teaching competence. The transformation of tacit professional

knowledge into pedagogically meaningful learning experiences required sustained intellectual, emotional and practical labour. This process was intensified by the structural conditions within which the transition occurred. Participants were expected to develop pedagogical fluency while simultaneously managing demanding teaching loads, assessment responsibilities, digital systems and institutional administrative requirements. As a result, the transition unfolded under conditions of temporal compression, in which learning and performance occurred concurrently rather than sequentially.

Institutional support emerged as both significant and uneven. While formal structures such as onboarding processes and the AOP programme provided visible institutional support, participants consistently distinguished between procedural provision and support that was practically usable, relationally meaningful and contextually responsive. Informal collegial relationships, mentorship and peer guidance frequently carried greater developmental value than formal induction mechanisms alone. The findings therefore suggest that institutional incorporation is experienced relationally before it is experienced administratively and that belonging is shaped as much by everyday practices of recognition and collegial inclusion as by official organisational structures.

The findings also revealed the emergence of hybrid pracademic identities through which participants attempted to reconcile professional expertise with academic expectations. Participants brought important forms of agility, innovation, practical relevance and technological adaptability into the institution, often drawing on industry habits of problem-solving and responsiveness to navigate academic challenges. At the same time, however, their legitimacy within the academic field remained contingent upon mastering unfamiliar pedagogical, institutional and scholarly expectations, particularly in relation to assessment, research and academic discourse.

The chapter demonstrates that pracademic transition is best understood as recursive, non-linear and structurally mediated. Participants moved repeatedly between moments of confidence and vulnerability, legitimacy and uncertainty, belonging and dislocation. Their experiences reveal that transition is shaped not only by individual resilience or competence, but also by the interaction among institutional conditions, pedagogical demands, relational support and broader organisational expectations within the South African PHEI environment.

These findings provide a rich empirical foundation for the interpretive discussion that follows in Chapter 6. The next chapter moves beyond thematic presentation towards deeper theoretical interpretation by examining how the findings engage with Transition Theory, Professional Identity

Theory, PCK and Ubuntu to theorise the broader implications of pracademic transition within contemporary higher education.

Chapter 6: Discussion and theoretical analysis

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided a detailed empirical exposition of the findings from the lived experiences of 14 industry professionals transitioning into academic roles at a South African private higher education institution. This chapter advances the dissertation from empirical description to a sustained, doctoral-level theoretical analysis. The explicit analytical mandate of this discussion is to systematically interpret the nine thematic findings to answer the study's three interrelated research questions definitively. The first research question examines the fundamental nature of the transition experiences of industry professionals. The second research question critically examines the complex relationships between these individual transition experiences and the institutional support structures provided by the private higher education institution. Finally, the third research question seeks to uncover the underlying structural and cultural factors that explain why these relationships take the specific forms they do. Rather than repeating the descriptive data or merely summarising participant quotations, this chapter seeks to uncover the precise theoretical mechanisms that govern the transition from practitioner to academic, offering a robust explanatory account of the phenomena observed. By shifting the analytical gaze from what happened to why it happened, the discussion clarifies the deeply embedded structural forces shaping second-career academic trajectories.

To achieve the required analytical depth for doctoral-level inquiry, this discussion is rigorously anchored in the integrated conceptual framework established in Chapter 3. This core framework relies fundamentally on Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory to map the situational context of change. Transition Theory provides an essential vocabulary for assessing how individuals navigate altered roles, relationships and routines through the interacting dimensions of Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. The framework integrates Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) to understand the continuous renegotiation of the professional self, framing identity not as a static possession but as an ongoing, socially mediated achievement. It further utilises Shulman's (1987) PCK to evaluate epistemic translation, explaining how sophisticated subject matter expertise must be radically reconfigured for instructional purposes. Finally, it adopts Ubuntu as a foundational contextual and ethical lens (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011), ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in the relational imperatives of the South African context. This highly structured theoretical scaffolding enables a sophisticated interpretation of the empirical data, moving significantly beyond individual psychological accounts to encompass broader relational, structural and epistemological challenges.

Table 6.1: Breakdown of Principal and Supplementary theoretical frameworks

Principal frameworks (core analytical architecture)	**Supplementary lenses (targeted structural and motivational dimensions)**
Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2011)	Bourdieu's cultural capital (1986)
Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004)	Brunsson's organisational hypocrisy (1989), with Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983)
Shulman's PCK (1987)	Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011)	Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)

The four principal frameworks structure the analysis throughout; the supplementary lenses are drawn on selectively, where the data raise structural or motivational questions the principal frameworks do not address alone.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this chapter supplements the core framework with targeted perspectives from organisational sociology and occupational psychology to address the structural and motivational dimensions of transition that the four primary lenses address only partially. It mobilises Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of cultural capital to understand the profound depreciation of industry expertise upon academic entry, treating knowledge as a field-dependent currency. It integrates Brunsson's (1989) theory of organisational hypocrisy, alongside Meyer and Rowan's (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theories, to dissect the profound contradictions between policy rhetoric and enacted institutional support. This sophisticated combination of theories provides a robust mechanism for understanding why private higher education institutions behave in ways that often directly contradict their own developmental mandates. The analysis demonstrates how institutional structures actively mediate the individual transition experience, frequently serving organisational legitimacy and financial efficiency over genuine pedagogical effectiveness.

The chapter applies Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to deconstruct the shifting motivational dynamics of transitioning professionals, distinguishing sharply between initial entry motivations and long-term motivational sustainability. It relies on Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) to explicate the heavy temporal and workload shocks that characterise the pracademic experience. The overarching argument advanced in this comprehensive discussion is that the transition into academia is not a straightforward functional onboarding process, but rather a structurally constrained, epistemologically demanding and profoundly destabilising process of identity reconstruction. This process is systematically complicated by the neoliberal, compliance-driven imperatives characteristic of private higher education. Table 6.1 provides a synthesised

overview of how these theoretical lenses intersect with the empirical themes, forming the basis for the comprehensive discussion that follows.

Table 6.2: Cross-cutting theoretical synthesis of pracademic transition themes

Empirical Theme (Chapter 5)	**Dominant Theoretical Lenses**	**Main Analytical Implication**
1. Identity reconstruction	Professional Identity Theory; Cultural Capital; Liminality	Transition imposes structural liminality and the devaluation of industry capital, necessitating negotiated identity bilingualism rather than simple institutional assimilation.
2. Motivational dynamics	Self-Determination Theory	High expectancy violations concerning autonomy and workload erode intrinsic motivation, exposing the structural contradictions inherent in private higher education recruitment discourse.
3. Institutional support	Organisational Hypocrisy; Institutional Theory	Formal induction operates as ceremonial compliance, while informal peer networks function as vital, unremunerated compensatory infrastructure revealing institutional failure.
4. Pedagogical development	Pedagogical Content Knowledge	The primary barrier is not a deficit of subject knowledge, but the severe epistemic challenge of translating tacit, automated industry expertise into explicit, scaffolded curricula.
5. Digital adaptation	Pedagogical Content Knowledge; Institutional Theory	Industry digital fluency does not ensure academic technological legitimacy, highlighting the tension between pragmatic corporate utility and academic regulatory compliance.
6. Student engagement	Ubuntu; Professional Identity Theory	Academic authority must be earned relationally through an ethic of care, requiring significant hidden emotional labour that transcends traditional positional power.
7. Innovation and change	Institutional Isomorphism	Pracademic agency to drive industry-aligned innovation is heavily constrained by bureaucratic inertia and coercive institutional isomorphism aimed at securing regulatory legitimacy.

Empirical Theme (Chapter 5)	Dominant Theoretical Lenses	Main Analytical Implication
8. Temporal restructuring	Job Demands-Resources Theory	Boundary erosion and temporal shock reflect the systemic intensification of workload inherent to the neoliberal, teaching-heavy academic model, threatening sustainability.
9. Research and scholarship	Cultural Capital; Institutional Theory	The structural marginalisation of research reveals the instrumental, teaching-focused valuation of pracademics in private higher education contexts, limiting their academic capital.

(Source: Developed by the researcher from participant narratives and reflexive thematic analysis findings)

6.2 Professional identity reconstruction: from expert authority to negotiated academic legitimacy

The empirical findings concerning professional identity reconstruction confirm that the movement from industry to academia initiates a profound ontological and epistemological crisis for the transitioning professional. When interpreted through the lens of Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) alongside the concept of liminality (Ndlovu et al., 2024), it becomes evident that the transition strips practitioners of their previously unassailable expert authority. Industry professionals enter the academic environment assuming that their extensive practical experience will automatically translate into academic legitimacy. However, they rapidly discover that they occupy a liminal, in-between space. They are no longer fully recognised as current industry practitioners because they lack the requisite pedagogical and institutional literacies to be accepted as fully fledged academics. This sustained liminality is not merely a fleeting phase of initial disorientation; it is a structural condition of the pracademic role that mandates continuous and exhaustive identity work to reconcile competing professional self-concepts. The crossing of symbolic boundaries reveals the highly precarious nature of professional self-worth when divorced from its original contextual anchors.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital provides a powerful analytical mechanism for understanding the severity of this profound disruption. The professional capital accumulated over decades in corporate environments depreciates immediately and severely upon entry into the academic field. The PHEI operates within vastly different symbolic economies, where pedagogical

fluency, administrative compliance, theoretical abstraction and academic credentialism dominate the criteria for legitimate participation. Consequently, the pracademic's primary currency is abruptly devalued. This devaluation forces the individual into a state of deficit, requiring them to constantly prove their worth in an environment that inherently privileges theoretical discourse over pragmatic application. The resulting identity strain reflects the structural reality that higher education institutions, despite their rhetorical embrace of industry relevance, maintain rigid epistemological hierarchies that subordinate practical knowledge to formal academic validation. The impostor syndrome, widely reported among participants, is therefore not a psychological failing but a deeply rational response to a field that systematically invalidates their primary source of professional worth.

To survive this systemic devaluation, pracademics must engage in highly sophisticated capital conversion strategies. They achieve this by cultivating what Yusoff (2025) theorises as identity bilingualism. Instead of completely shedding their practitioner identities, a process that would fundamentally destroy their core value proposition as industry experts, successful pracademics learn to code-switch seamlessly between distinct cultural fields. They strategically deploy their industry narratives and practical case studies to establish credibility and relevance with their students, while simultaneously internalising and adopting academic lexicons, assessment protocols and regulatory discourses to negotiate legitimacy with their institutional peers and academic management. Identity bilingualism, therefore, is not a state of confusion; it is an advanced, highly adaptive competency that allows the pracademic to function as a bridge between the disparate worlds of corporate practice and academic theory. However, developing this dual fluency requires immense cognitive and emotional resources, underscoring the intensity of the identity work demanded by the transition and the heavy burden it places on the individual self.

The independent assessment of this theme requires an explicit recognition that identity bilingualism is both a triumph of individual resilience and a symptom of institutional neglect. The institution demands the benefits of the pracademic's dual identity but provides no structural support for its development. The pracademic is left to negotiate the clash of professional cultures in isolation. In terms of Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, the Self is heavily burdened by the Situation precisely because Institutional Support is lacking, forcing the individual to rely entirely on internally generated Strategies. This dynamic highlights the deeply individualised nature of academic transition in neoliberal contexts, where systemic induction failures are reframed as personal resilience challenges. The successful pracademic manages to synthesise an identity that is acceptable to the institution while remaining authentic to their industry roots, a synthesis achieved despite the institution rather than because of it.

This theoretical reading is further enriched by a critical analysis of the divergent cases identified within the empirical dataset. Participants who possessed prior part-time teaching experience or guest lecturing backgrounds exhibited noticeably smoother transition trajectories. For these specific individuals, prior exposure to the academic field functioned as a vital identity buffer (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). They had already begun the arduous process of capital conversion in a lower-stakes environment, allowing them to cross the symbolic boundaries of the institution with an existing, albeit nascent, academic identity. Their experiences underscore the fact that identity disruption is directly proportional to the abruptness of the boundary crossing. Without such buffering, the unmediated collision between the fast-paced, pragmatic culture of industry and the deliberative, highly regulated culture of academia leaves the practitioner professionally isolated (Gourlay, 2011; Henkel, 2005). They are forced to reconstruct their professional self-concept from the ground up while simultaneously performing the high-stakes duties of a fully competent educator. This structural demand for simultaneous performance and identity reconstruction represents a critical failure point in traditional academic onboarding models, confirming that standard induction frameworks grossly underestimate the ontological weight of the transition.

The struggle for academic legitimacy reveals the exclusionary nature of the academic field itself. The private higher education institution symbolically recruits for industry expertise but operationally rewards academic compliance. The pracademic must quickly decipher the unwritten rules of this new field. They learn that their past professional achievements hold limited currency among academic peers unless translated into pedagogical outcomes or research outputs (Shulman, 1987; Henkel, 2005). This conditional legitimacy creates a pervasive sense of marginalisation, where the pracademic is perpetually positioned as an outsider seeking validation. The theoretical interpretation of this identity reconstruction process therefore exposes a deep structural hypocrisy, pointing to an institutional environment that commodifies professional experience for marketing purposes while simultaneously resisting its full integration into the established academic hierarchy (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

6.3 Motivational dynamics and career transition

A complex interplay of push and pull factors propels the transition into academia and rigorous theoretical interrogation is demanded well beyond surface-level descriptions of career mobility. Applying Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the findings illustrate that exceptionally strong intrinsic motivators initially drove participants. The profound desire for intellectual autonomy, the pursuit of a meaningful vocation and the generative impulse to mentor the next generation of professionals served as powerful pull factors into the higher education sector. These generative

aspirations were frequently coupled with urgent push factors from industry, most notably intense corporate burnout and a fundamental philosophical misalignment with toxic, profit-driven corporate environments (Dunn et al., 2025). The critical analytical insight of this chapter, however, emerges not from these initial entry motivations but from the acute expectancy violations that occur post-transition and their devastating impact on motivational sustainability.

Expectancy violations regarding autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance are pervasive and deeply entrenched among the participants. Importantly, these violations must not be interpreted as mere personal misunderstandings or individual miscalculations made during the recruitment process. Instead, they are structural manifestations of the neoliberal labour conditions that deeply characterise contemporary private higher education (Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). The recruitment discourse of private higher education institutions frequently leverages idealised, historical notions of academic freedom, workplace flexibility and scholarly contemplation to attract high-calibre industry talent (Myers et al., 2025). Upon formal integration into the institution, pracademics confront a starkly different operational reality. They encounter heavily intensified teaching loads, rigid bureaucratic surveillance and the relentless, instrumental demands of student consumerism. The pronounced contradiction between the institutional discourse used to recruit industry professionals and the lived reality of the academic shop floor creates a profound cognitive dissonance that damages the transitional experience.

This resulting workload dissonance represents a notable breach of the institutional psychological contract. According to Self-Determination Theory, sustained human motivation requires the continuous and stable fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The reality of the private higher education environment systematically frustrates these precise psychological needs. Prescriptive curricula heavily curtail autonomy, standardised assessments and stringent quality assurance rubrics enforced by external regulators. The lack of structured pedagogical scaffolding and the sudden devaluation of established industry expertise undermine competence. Relatedness is often compromised by the isolating nature of academic work and the lack of genuine, supportive mentorship. Consequently, the intrinsic motivation that initially fuelled the bold career transition is subjected to severe, ongoing erosion. The failure to sustain this motivation is not an individual deficit but an institutionally produced outcome.

As a direct result of this motivational erosion, pracademics find themselves increasingly reliant on extrinsic motivators or driven by sheer survival instincts, risking a secondary, academic form of burnout that tragically mirrors the industry exhaustion they originally sought to escape (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Raaper, 2023). This analysis exposes a critical structural contradiction at the heart of the sector. Institutions recruit industry professionals by appealing to their intrinsic desire for meaningful work,

professional autonomy and a more balanced academic life, whilst they are rapidly subjected to neoliberal performance pressures, workload intensification and production-oriented metrics that undermine the very motivational foundations upon which successful transition depends (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). The findings, therefore, suggest that the institution's failure to sustain the initial motivational capital of its recruits reflects a broader systemic inability to align academic labour practices with the humanistic and developmental ideals historically associated with higher education.

This motivational decline is inextricably linked to the broader themes of identity strain and institutional support failure. As intrinsic motivation weakens, the exhausting identity work required to sustain hybrid professional and academic forms becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Participants' capacity to navigate liminality, uncertainty and ongoing legitimacy negotiation is correspondingly diminished (Gourlay, 2011; Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). The findings therefore confirm that motivational sustainability cannot be achieved merely through individual resilience initiatives, wellness programmes or isolated staff support interventions. Rather, it requires more fundamental institutional changes, particularly the restructuring of workload models, the provision of protected developmental time and the genuine extension of professional autonomy within academic work environments. Such changes are necessary if the basic psychological needs identified within Self-Determination Theory, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, are to be meaningfully supported within the everyday operational realities of pracademic life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation must therefore be understood not as a stable individual characteristic, but as a highly contingent and institutionally mediated resource that is continually depleted or replenished through organisational conditions and relational experiences.

Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that the sustainability of intrinsic motivation depends critically on the ongoing satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. In the South African private higher education context, each of these needs is subject to distinctive pressures that the present study's findings explain. The standardised curriculum structures frequently undermine the need for autonomy, prescriptive assessment formats and compliance-oriented quality assurance systems that characterise the PHEI environment. Participants who entered academia seeking intellectual autonomy and the freedom to apply their professional judgement in curriculum design found instead an environment in which curricular decisions were largely pre-determined and pedagogical innovation required navigating multiple layers of institutional approval. The resulting sense of thwarted autonomy represents not a personal deficiency but a structural feature of institutions whose quality assurance architecture prioritises standardisation over teacher-led development.

The need for competence is similarly challenged by the expert-to-novice reversal that is central to pracademic identity disruption. Participants who had spent years developing deep professional competence found themselves in a context where the norms of academic performance were unfamiliar and where their established expertise carried diminished institutional recognition. Schlossberg (2011) identifies perceived competence as one of the most powerful determinants of how individuals navigate transition, noting that those who feel competent in the new role are significantly better able to deploy adaptive coping strategies than those who experience sustained competence anxiety. For pracademics, the absence of structured opportunities to develop and demonstrate academic competence in assessment design, curriculum development, or scholarly engagement is therefore not merely an administrative gap; it actively erodes the motivational foundation on which successful transition depends.

The need for relatedness, the sense of being valued and connected within a community of practice, is addressed partially through student relationships, as Theme 6 of the present study demonstrates, but is often insufficiently satisfied at the collegial and institutional level. Dunn et al. (2025) found that second-career academics frequently described a sense of professional isolation that persisted well beyond the initial entry period, particularly where formal mentoring was inadequate and informal collegial networks were slow to develop. This persistent isolation carries significant implications for motivational sustainability, because relatedness to an academic community is not only emotionally supportive but epistemically formative: it is through collegial interaction that academic norms, values and standards of practice are transmitted and internalised. Institutions that fail to create the structural conditions for genuine collegial inclusion therefore impoverish not only the well-being of their pracademic staff but also the quality of the academic formation those staff undergo.

6.4 Institutional support, institutional mediation and structural contradiction

The empirical examination of institutional support structures reveals profound institutional deficiencies that require theorisation well beyond the simple identification of administrative service gaps. Formal induction mechanisms, such as the academic onboarding programme and officially assigned mentorships, must be analytically understood as complex forms of institutional mediation that simultaneously reflect and perpetuate underlying structural contradictions. When analysed through the lens of Meyer and Rowan's (1977) foundational work on institutional theory, these formal support structures are best understood as manifestations of myth and ceremony. In the highly regulated and scrutinised landscape of South African private higher education, institutions are compelled to demonstrate robust quality assurance mechanisms to secure and maintain essential accreditation from state bodies. Formal induction programmes are therefore primarily designed to satisfy these external regulatory gazes, functioning as performative signals of institutional

competence rather than substantive, transformative mechanisms of pedagogical development for the individual pracademic.

The analysis demonstrates a intense decoupling between ceremonial institutional compliance and the actual operational support required by transitioning pracademics. Formal onboarding and development programmes were experienced as heavily oriented towards administrative compliance, policy dissemination and technological platform familiarisation, while largely neglecting the more nuanced pedagogical and identity-related dimensions of transition (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Dunn et al., 2025). Participants repeatedly indicated that what they required was not simply procedural orientation, but discipline-specific pedagogical guidance, relational mentorship and support in translating professional expertise into academically legitimate practice. The generic character of formal support structures, therefore, reflects a fundamental institutional misreading of the pracademic profile. By positioning industry entrants as generic new employees rather than experienced professionals undergoing a complex epistemic and professional transition, the institution simultaneously underutilises prior expertise and fails to provide the specialised developmental support necessary for successful academic incorporation. In effect, the support architecture communicates that professional experience may be institutionally marketable, nonetheless pedagogically irrelevant within the operational logic of academic compliance.

Similarly, formal mentorship frequently became reduced to a symbolic rather than substantively developmental exercise. The effectiveness of mentorship structures was considerably constrained by broader structural realities of workload intensification and institutional time compression, which affect academic staff more generally (Raaper, 2023). Designated mentors often lacked the time, capacity or institutional conditions necessary to provide sustained pedagogical apprenticeship or meaningful relational guidance. As a result, mentorship was experienced less as an embedded developmental relationship and more as a procedural expectation attached to institutional onboarding. The formal support architecture, therefore, mediated transition by introducing pedagogical scaffolding, while leaving many pracademics operationally unsupported and professionally isolated within the classroom environment. Institutional support consequently became characterised by a misalignment between organisational provision and lived developmental need. The institution formally claimed responsibility for supporting transition, whilst the support itself remained structured primarily around institutional risk management, compliance and operational continuity rather than the deeper pedagogical and identity-reconstruction processes required for genuine pracademic flourishing (Wenger, 1998; Metz, 2011).

Faced with this structural failure of the formal institution, pracademics are forced to develop their own compensatory infrastructure. The findings highlight the critical, life-saving role of informal, horizontal peer networks as the primary mechanism for academic survival. These self-organised communities of practice provide the tactical pedagogical knowledge, emotional reassurance and navigational strategies that the formal institutional architecture consistently fails to supply (Ndlovu et al., 2024). Informal support operates in the shadows, occurring in hallway conversations, quick digital messages and shared resource folders. It is a testament to the collegiality and resilience of the academic staff, but must be theorised substantially. These networks do not merely supplement formal support; they entirely replace it.

The heavy reliance on informal networks exposes the deeply problematic nature of the institution's operational support model. The institution essentially outsources the heavy burden of transition support to the unremunerated, invisible labour of its existing teaching staff. This positions informal networks not merely as positive expressions of collegiality, but as direct, undeniable indicators of institutional underinvestment. By relying on peers' goodwill, the institution avoids the financial and temporal costs of providing structured, workload-adjusted mentorship. The persistence of these contradictions allows the institution to maintain its regulatory legitimacy through formal, documented policies while simultaneously protecting its profit margins. This analytical conclusion directly answers the study's second research question, establishing that the relationship between individual experiences and institutional support is defined by compensatory self-organisation in the face of ceremonial abandonment. It also directly addresses the third research question by showing that these structures persist because they serve the institution's economic and regulatory imperatives at the expense of the individual.

Prebble et al. (2004) provide relevant comparative evidence by reviewing the effectiveness of academic induction programmes across a range of institutional types and finding that the most effective programmes share three characteristics: they are sustained over a meaningful developmental period rather than confined to a single orientation event; they are contextually specific, addressing the particular challenges of teaching, assessment and scholarship in the institution's disciplinary and quality assurance context; and they combine formal learning with structured collegial support that allows participants to apply and reflect on new pedagogical knowledge in their actual teaching practice. None of these characteristics was consistently present in participants' descriptions of the academic onboarding programme, confirming the analysis that, while formally comprehensive, the programme falls short of the conditions the literature identifies as necessary for genuine pedagogical development. This finding is not simply critical of a specific institutional programme; it points to a

deeper structural challenge in how private higher education institutions conceptualise and resource academic staff development.

Matadi and Uleanya (2022) contextualise this challenge within the specific regulatory and resource environment of South African private higher education, noting that PHEIs face particular constraints in sustaining elaborate academic development infrastructure while meeting the financial and competitive demands of operating in a fee-dependent market. Their analysis suggests that the underinvestment in substantive staff development documented in the present study is not simply a matter of institutional neglect but reflects the structural pressures that shape institutional decision-making in the private sector. Acknowledging this structural dimension is not a defence of inadequate provision; rather, it is a necessary condition for designing realistic, institutionally feasible recommendations for improvement, such as those presented in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

6.5 Policy-practice disjunctures and organised hypocrisy in the PHEI context

The persistent and systemic divergence between the institution's public rhetoric of support and the lived reality of the pracademic is most effectively theorised through Brunsson's (1989) concept of organised hypocrisy. Within the fiercely competitive context of private higher education, institutions face fundamentally irreconcilable demands that constantly threaten their operational survival and market positioning. They face intense pressure from state regulatory bodies to uphold rigorous academic standards, an expectation which theoretically requires extensive faculty development, low student-to-staff ratios and deep pedagogical support structures. Concurrently, as private, market-driven entities operating entirely without the safety net of state subsidies, they face relentless economic imperatives to maximise student throughput, minimise overhead costs and maintain highly efficient, lean staffing models. The resulting tension between academic quality assurance and economic efficiency is the foundational conflict of the private higher education sector, shaping every aspect of the pracademic experience.

Organised hypocrisy provides the exact organisational mechanism for managing these conflicting environmental forces without resolving them. This concept must be understood not as an individual moral failing on the part of academic managers, but as a highly sophisticated, structural survival strategy deployed by the institution itself to secure legitimacy. The institution manages the external regulatory environment by talking extensively about support. It generates comprehensive policy documents, produces detailed induction manuals and designs the highly visible architecture of the academic onboarding programme. This visible action fully satisfies the external demand for accountability and pedagogical rigour, fulfilling the requirements of ceremonial compliance outlined by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and effectively shielding the institution from regulatory sanction. The production of policy becomes an end in itself, successfully decoupling the formal structure from the

daily work activities. The document, rather than the developmental outcome, becomes the metric of institutional success.

The document analysis reported in Section 4.6.2 makes this decoupling directly visible in the institution's own texts. Recruitment materials described incoming staff as "experts with real-world insights," a framing intended to reassure students and accreditors of teaching relevance, while the academic onboarding programme's internal materials positioned the same individuals as "novices needing training," a framing intended to satisfy quality-assurance expectations of structured development. These are not contradictory oversights but two ceremonial performances aimed at two different audiences, external legitimacy on one hand and regulatory compliance on the other, exactly as organisational hypocrisy theory predicts (Brunsson, 1989). The pracademic, moving between both textual worlds, is the one party required to reconcile them in practice.

Simultaneously, the institution manages its internal economic environment by making operational decisions that directly contradict these very policies. It enforces punishingly high teaching loads, maximises class sizes and systemically denies the temporal resources necessary for genuine mentorship or reflective pedagogical practice. The deliberate decoupling of talk from action allows the institution to satisfy both strict regulators and demanding shareholders simultaneously. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theory of institutional isomorphism further elucidates this dynamic, showing how the private institution mimics the bureaucratic structures of public universities to gain legitimacy, even when those structures actively impede the agile, practitioner-led teaching model they claim to champion. This isomorphic mimicry ensures that the institution appears to be a traditional university on paper, even while operating as a highly commercialised educational provider in practice.

The transitioning pracademic is caught precisely in the crossfire of this organised hypocrisy. They read the optimistic policy documents and logically expect a structured, developmental entry into the profession, only to be confronted with the immediate, overwhelming and unsupported demands of the academic shop floor (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Raaper, 2023). Analysing the transition through this theoretical lens shifts the academic gaze away from blaming the individual practitioner for failing to adapt or blaming the induction programme developers for poor instructional design. Instead, it reveals that the induction architecture operates exactly as intended. It symbolically succeeds in securing institutional legitimacy, while failing operationally to protect institutional financial efficiency.

The immense psychological, emotional and professional costs of this structural decoupling are borne entirely by the individual pracademic, who must privately reconcile the institution's public hypocrisy in order to survive the transition. The normalisation of this hypocrisy creates a deeply cynical institutional culture where policies are viewed with extreme suspicion. The pracademic quickly learns

that institutional rhetoric is decoupled from operational truth, leading to a rapid erosion of institutional trust (Wenger, 1998; Metz, 2011). This powerful theoretical insight provides the definitive answer to the third research question, explaining exactly why the relationship between individual experience and institutional structure takes its fractured form. The institution structurally necessitates the failure of its own support policies in order to remain financially viable in a neoliberal market (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

6.6 Pedagogical knowledge development: translating professional expertise into teachable academic practice

The central cognitive and intellectual challenge of the pracademic transition is located firmly in the complex domain of pedagogical knowledge development. The empirical findings unequivocally demonstrate that industry professionals do not lack subject matter expertise; rather, they lack the highly specialised cognitive architecture required to teach that expertise effectively within formal academic constraints. This phenomenon is best understood through a rigorous application of Shulman's (1987) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge. For the seasoned industry professional, decades of intense practical experience have rendered their knowledge deeply tacit, automated and embodied. They execute complex professional judgments intuitively, relying on heuristics and experiential pattern recognition without needing to explain or deconstruct the foundational steps of their cognitive processes. The academic teaching role, however, demands the exact opposite orientation. It requires that knowledge be unpacked, explicitly articulated, logically sequenced, abstracted from its immediate context and purposefully aligned with formal assessment rubrics to make it accessible to novice undergraduate learners.

This intensive process of epistemic translation is exceptionally difficult and represents a specific form of pedagogical labour unique to the industry entrant. Traditional early-career academics, particularly those transitioning directly from doctoral studies, often possess a strong implicit understanding of academic formatting, literature synthesis and theoretical frameworks, even if they lack practical industry application (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Shulman, 1987). Pracademics, conversely, exhibit an inverse trajectory of PCK. They possess the rich, applied context and the authentic real-world case studies, but are fundamentally disoriented by the mechanics of curriculum design, the precise phrasing of active learning outcomes and the intricate, often rigid demands of academic assessment literacy (Sarkar et al., 2024; Brogt, 2025). Transforming automated corporate action into carefully sequenced academic instruction requires a fundamental rewiring of how professionals relate to their own domain of expertise. They must relearn their profession not as practitioners, but as pedagogues.

The challenge of epistemic translation is compounded by learner diversity. In industry, communication typically occurs among peers or subordinates who share a common professional baseline and contextual understanding. In the South African private higher education classroom, pracademics must translate their expertise for a student body characterised by vast disparities in educational preparedness, socioeconomic background and linguistic proficiency (CHE, 2024b; Hlatshwayo, 2024). This requires a level of pedagogical scaffolding, patience and repetition that standard industry presentations do not involve. The analysis reveals that institutional induction programmes frequently fail to recognise the severity of this specific epistemological barrier. By treating teaching as a generic communicative skill rather than a complex, highly specialised process of de-automating expert knowledge, institutions leave pracademics to develop their PCK through highly stressful, experiential trial-and-error (Shulman, 1987; McCall et al., 2021).

The pracademic's early teaching experiences are therefore characteristically fraught with difficulty and defined by the marked novice-expert misalignment. Participants engage in extensive over-preparation, attempt to deliver unnecessarily complex, high-level industry content and frequently fail to recognise the cognitive load placed on diverse and unequal undergraduate learners. The theoretical implication here is profound. Without targeted institutional support specifically designed to assist in the translation of tacit professional expertise into explicit pedagogical structures, the pracademic’s greatest asset, namely, authentic industry knowledge, paradoxically becomes their greatest initial liability within the classroom environment (Hora & Lee, 2020; Sarkar et al., 2024).

The expectation that subject mastery naturally produces teaching efficacy is therefore revealed as a critical institutional fallacy. The development of PCK is a slow, iterative and cognitively demanding process requiring protected developmental time, pedagogical mentorship and sustained reflective practice, resources that institutions often fail to provide adequately during the early stages of transition (Shulman, 1987; Brogt, 2025). The institutional assumption that an industry expert is automatically a ready-made academic educator fundamentally underestimates the epistemological differences between practising a profession and teaching novices to enter it. It is only when the pracademic successfully navigates this process of epistemic reconstruction that genuine pedagogical legitimacy begins to emerge, enabling a move from industry expert to academically recognised educator.

6.7 Digital pedagogical adaptation and technological legitimacy

The transition from industry to academia is further complicated by the stringent and heavily monitored demands of digital pedagogical adaptation. In contemporary higher education, particularly within the private-sector model, teaching is inextricably linked to digital mediation. A superficial reading of the findings might suggest that industry professionals, coming from highly digitised,

globally connected corporate environments, would effortlessly adapt to academic learning technologies. However, a deeper theoretical analysis reveals a significant and highly stressful disjuncture between industry digital fluency and academic technological legitimacy. This tension extends the core principles of PCK (Shulman, 1987) directly into the digital realm, highlighting the vast difference between knowing how to use a software tool for corporate production and knowing how to teach effectively with a digital tool under strict academic regulation.

Participants consistently reported that their high-level mastery of advanced, discipline-specific corporate software did not seamlessly translate into competence with academic LMS. Corporate technology is generally designed to maximise operational efficiency, streamline workflows, foster collaboration and facilitate rapid, asynchronous communication across relatively flat organisational structures (Hora & Lee, 2020). Academic technology, by contrast, is heavily shaped by the demands of institutional governance, surveillance, assessment security and pedagogical regulation. The pracademic must therefore learn to use technology not merely to transmit information, but to carefully structure cognitive engagement, monitor student progress, ensure regulatory compliance and minimise opportunities for academic misconduct. This represents a fundamentally different orientation toward digital tools, shifting from technologies of production towards technologies of governance and institutional control (Raaper, 2023). LMS consequently operate as architectural embodiments of institutional policy, requiring pracademics to adapt to heavily surveilled digital environments in which uploads, assessment processes, moderation activity and student interactions become embedded within broader quality assurance and accountability systems (CHE, 2024b).

This technological tension became especially visible in participants' accounts of artificial intelligence and generative digital tools. Many pracademics transitioned from industries where generative AI technologies were aggressively adopted as essential tools for productivity enhancement, competitive responsiveness and rapid problem-solving. Upon entering academia, however, they encountered institutional environments that frequently approached these technologies through highly cautious, punitive frameworks centred on academic integrity, plagiarism prevention and assessment validity. Participants were therefore required to navigate a profound cultural and epistemological clash between industry-oriented technological pragmatism and the institution's regulatory orientation towards digital governance. In practical terms, this often meant unlearning industry habits of technological experimentation and adopting a more controlled, compliance-oriented digital posture expected in academic environments.

Theoretically, this dynamic reveals that the challenge is not simply technological difficulty or inadequate digital literacy. Rather, it demonstrates how institutional digital governance operates as a

form of isomorphic control. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify coercive isomorphism as the process by which regulated organisations adopt structures and practices required by powerful external actors to secure legitimacy and maintain compliance. Within the present context, the Learning Management System functions not merely as a pedagogical platform, but as a digitally embedded mechanism through which institutional norms, accountability practices and quality assurance expectations are operationalised. Every module upload, assessment submission and student interaction, therefore, becomes a pedagogical act and a compliance performance.

The pracademic's inability to navigate these systems fluently is consequently experienced not simply as a technical shortcoming, but as a visible marker of institutional illegitimacy that intensifies the broader expert-to-novice reversal already shaping transition experiences. This interpretation reframes digital adaptation from an individual skills deficit towards a manifestation of the broader structural dynamics governing the South African PHEI environment. Institutional systems are designed not primarily around pedagogical accessibility, but around regulatory accountability, standardisation and risk management. The findings therefore, suggest that institutions must recognise the governance burden embedded in academic digital infrastructures and provide explicit developmental support for the specific translation challenges faced by professionally experienced entrants whose prior digital competence does not naturally align with governance-oriented academic technologies.

6.8 Relational academic work: student engagement, recognition and emotional labour

The complex domain of student engagement emerges from the theoretical analysis as a critical, highly charged arena for the negotiation of academic legitimacy, an arena heavily reliant on complex relational dynamics and intense emotional labour. Deprived of immediate validation from formal institutional structures or established academic peers, transitioning pracademics increasingly turn to their students to secure a fragile sense of belonging and professional competence. To interpret this dynamic adequately, the analysis must move decisively beyond standard Western sociological frameworks and incorporate the profound African ethical and philosophical lens of Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011). Without this contextual grounding, the immense relational effort expended by the pracademic cannot be fully understood or properly evaluated within the South African private higher education landscape.

Ubuntu, with its core emphasis on human dignity, relational interconnectedness and the principle that personhood is realised through relationship with others, provides a vital explanatory framework for understanding how pracademics construct classroom authority within the South African higher education context (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011). The findings demonstrate a necessary and often extraordinarily difficult shift from the positional and transactional authority characteristic of corporate

hierarchies towards a deeply relational ethic-of-care pedagogy. In industry environments, authority is frequently conferred through formal organisational status, managerial hierarchy and performance accountability structures. Within the academic classroom, however, particularly in highly diverse and historically unequal South African educational settings, authority cannot simply be asserted through institutional position, disciplinary expertise or professional credentials alone. It must be relationally earned through mutual respect, empathy, accessibility and sustained pedagogical support (Radebe, 2025; Hlatshwayo, 2024). The pracademic is therefore required to transition from managing employees for immediate organisational output towards cultivating student development, confidence and human potential over extended periods of learning.

This relational pedagogy, while ethically significant and strongly aligned with Ubuntu, requires substantial emotional labour. Participants repeatedly described providing extensive pastoral support, responding to students' financial and personal difficulties and attempting to bridge deep socioeconomic, linguistic and educational inequalities that the institution itself was often structurally unable to resolve. In effect, pracademics frequently became frontline responders to student anxiety, vulnerability and systemic disadvantage. Although this Ubuntu-aligned engagement was often experienced as the most meaningful, validating and personally rewarding aspect of academic work, reinforcing the deeper motivations that initially drew participants into higher education, it also revealed important structural tensions within the institutional environment. Mutual recognition between lecturer and student became a primary source of professional legitimacy and identity affirmation, compensating for the relative absence of institutional recognition and relational support elsewhere within the organisation.

However, the findings demonstrate that this intensive emotional and relational labour remained largely invisible within formal institutional systems. The work of care, mentorship, accessibility and emotional support was seldom recognised within workload allocations, performance measurement systems or promotion criteria. As a result, pracademics found themselves in a particularly difficult institutional paradox. The relational work through which they achieved pedagogical legitimacy, enacted their ethical commitments and sustained student engagement simultaneously intensified workload strain and threatened long-term psychological sustainability. This exposes a significant disjuncture between the humanistic and relational practices required for meaningful teaching and the instrumental, metric-driven logics increasingly shaping neoliberal higher education institutions (Raaper, 2023).

The findings therefore suggest that institutions rely extensively on the emotional and relational resources of pracademics while failing to recognise, resource or structurally support this labour

adequately. Ubuntu, while ethically sustaining and pedagogically generative for participants themselves, becomes institutionally appropriated as an uncosted mechanism through which student satisfaction, retention and institutional stability are maintained. The relational humanity central to Ubuntu is therefore simultaneously affirmed in pedagogical practice and undermined in institutional structure. This reveals the extent to which contemporary academic environments may depend on forms of emotional and relational labour that remain organisationally invisible, yet essential to the functioning and legitimacy of the educational enterprise itself.

6.9 Innovation aspirations, institutional inertia and the limits of pracademic agency

A central, highly publicised rationale for the recruitment of pracademics in private higher education is their presumed capacity to drive rapid curriculum innovation and ensure that academic offerings remain dynamically aligned with rapidly evolving industry practices. However, the theoretical analysis of the empirical findings reveals a profound paradox that heavily limits pracademic agency and neutralises their innovative potential. This phenomenon is perfectly explicated by DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theory of institutional isomorphism. As private higher education institutions strive desperately to secure legitimacy in a highly regulated, inherently sceptical field of higher education traditionally dominated by established public universities, they undergo intense coercive and mimetic isomorphism. They adopt rigid bureaucratic structures, extended curriculum review cycles and hyper-risk-averse quality assurance protocols that deliberately mimic the slow, deliberative processes of legacy public institutions to signal academic credibility to external regulators.

When pracademics attempt to inject their industry-derived agility, rapid problem-solving frameworks and contemporary methodologies into the curriculum, they crash violently into this immovable wall of institutional inertia. The practitioner's deeply ingrained instinct to update a module immediately to reflect a new industry trend, incorporate a new technology, or alter an assessment strategy is fundamentally incompatible with an academic governance structure that requires extensive committee approvals, external moderation and lengthy accreditation cycles for even minor syllabus alterations. This intense structural friction heavily constrains the agency of the pracademic, rendering their most valuable innovative impulses structurally impotent and practically unexecutable. The very attributes they were hired for, namely speed, relevance and disruption, become sources of intense institutional conflict rather than strategic advantage.

The institution intensely desires the symbolic capital of industry relevance, routinely using the presence of expert practitioners as a primary marketing tool to attract students deeply concerned with future employability. The institution is structurally incapable of accommodating the agile practices necessary to actualise that promised relevance without threatening its own regulatory compliance.

This dynamic breeds deep professional cynicism among new academics and contributes significantly to the notable motivational erosion identified through Self-Determination Theory. The pracademic is rapidly reduced from an agent of systemic innovation to a mere deliverer of static, heavily governed content.

The theoretical significance of this finding extends beyond the individual pracademic experience to what it reveals about the structural logic of private higher education more broadly. Institutions that recruit practitioners for their innovation potential while simultaneously maintaining governance structures that suppress that potential are engaged in a form of institutional contradiction that Brunsson (1989) identifies as organisational hypocrisy at its most structurally embedded. The institution talks the language of industry responsiveness in its marketing and recruitment, yet acts through governance systems designed to minimise regulatory risk. This is not a correctable management failure; it is a structural feature of institutions that must simultaneously satisfy market demands for relevance and regulatory demands for standardisation. The analytical implication for understanding pracademic transition is that the innovativeness suppression experienced by participants is a systemic outcome rather than a personal failure and any meaningful institutional response must therefore address the governance conditions that produce it, not merely the individual's capacity to navigate them. Chapter 7 identifies specific structural interventions at the curriculum governance level that could create pathways for industry-relevant innovation within the constraints of the regulatory environment

6.10 Temporal restructuring, workload intensification and academic sustainability

The profound experience of temporal shock, boundary erosion and heavy workload intensification is a defining, near-universal characteristic of the pracademic transition. To theoretically ground this deeply damaging phenomenon, the analysis relies extensively on Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The transition from industry to academia requires a radical, often violent restructuring of the individual's temporal reality. In the corporate sector, despite long hours and intense pressure, work is generally bounded by physical presence, specific project deliverables and defined operational hours. Academic work, conversely, is characterised by entirely unbounded cognitive labour, the exhausting expectation of perpetual digital availability and vast amounts of hidden, unremunerated labour in the form of lesson preparation, detailed marking, moderation and ongoing student consultation (Moffitt & Bligh, 2024). The pervasive societal perception of academia as a relaxed, contemplative environment is shattered upon entry into the private sector.

The Job Demands–Resources Theory posits that occupational burnout emerges when persistent job demands exceed the resources available to manage them effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Within the present study, the demands confronting transitioning pracademics were acute, simultaneous and unrelenting. Participants faced exceptionally high teaching allocations, the emotional labour associated with intensive student engagement, the cognitive burden of developing PCK and the ongoing stress of navigating unfamiliar and often opaque institutional systems. At the same time, the resources necessary to meet these demands effectively, including workload-adjusted mentorship, protected time for curriculum development and sustained pedagogical training, were found to be gravely insufficient or absent. The findings therefore suggest that the imbalance between demands and resources was not incidental, but structurally embedded within the institutional environment itself. This absence of meaningful developmental support further reflects the organised hypocrisy discussed earlier, in which institutional rhetoric on staff development and support masks operational conditions characterised by austerity, efficiency pressures and intensified labour expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Raaper, 2023).

The stark imbalance between escalating demands and inadequate resources contributed directly to the erosion of boundaries between professional and personal life. Participants consistently described academic work extending aggressively into evenings, weekends and leave periods as they attempted to cope with teaching preparation, marking, administration and student communication. This temporal restructuring should not be interpreted as evidence of poor individual time management or as a temporary adjustment phase associated with initial onboarding. Rather, the findings indicate that workload intensification constitutes a structural feature of the neoliberal, teaching-intensive private higher education model itself (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Institutional financial viability depends heavily on maximising teaching productivity while minimising developmental and staffing overheads. Within such environments, overload becomes normalised not as an exceptional circumstance but as a routine organisational expectation embedded in the institution's operational logic.

The institution therefore, effectively subsidises its operational sustainability through the hidden and often unsustainable labour of academic staff. This structural reality carries serious implications for the long-term retention, motivation and psychological well-being of the pracademic workforce. Burnout consequently emerges not as an accidental by-product of transition, but as an occupational risk structurally produced through the interaction between excessive demands and chronically inadequate resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The result is a fragile and exhausted academic workforce struggling to sustain the hybrid identities, pedagogical adaptability and emotional labour demanded by the role.

The findings further demonstrate that when workload intensification becomes the dominant condition of academic work, the cognitive and temporal space necessary for deep pedagogical reflection, meaningful research engagement and genuine curriculum innovation becomes severely constrained. Participants frequently described operating in a state of continual operational survival rather than developmental growth. This suggests that structural workload intensification ultimately undermines the very educational quality, pedagogical responsiveness and innovation that institutions simultaneously claim to value and market within competitive higher education environments. The findings therefore, expose an important institutional contradiction: the organisational conditions designed to maximise efficiency and productivity may simultaneously erode the long-term sustainability and educational effectiveness of the pracademic workforce on which the institution depends.

6.11 Research and scholarship as a marginal but revealing dimension of transition

Among the empirical findings, the theme of research and scholarship had the lowest overall coding prevalence. However, in a theoretical analysis of doctoral depth, this absence must absolutely not be dismissed as a minor, peripheral, or irrelevant finding. The silence surrounding research is, in fact, highly analytically revealing. The structural marginalisation of research is a defining characteristic of the teaching-intensive private higher education sector and it deeply influences the trajectory of pracademic identity formation. Using Bourdieu's (1986) sociological framework, research output in the form of peer-reviewed publications, successful grants and citations constitutes the dominant, most highly prized form of symbolic capital in the global academic field. It is the primary currency for prestige, academic promotion and ultimate scholarly legitimacy.

However, pracademics entering the private higher education sub-field quickly learn that this universal academic currency is locally devalued in favour of teaching throughput, operational responsiveness and strict administrative compliance (Bourdieu, 1986; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). While institutions may rhetorically encourage research to satisfy regulatory expectations associated with maintaining a scholarly environment, the findings indicate that they provide minimal structural support, protected time, or material resources necessary to sustain meaningful scholarly development. Participants, already overwhelmed by intensive teaching loads and the demanding process of pedagogical translation, were frequently compelled to defer or abandon research ambitions altogether. Under such conditions, research becomes an unattainable luxury rather than a viable professional expectation. This reveals another significant manifestation of organised hypocrisy within the institutional environment, where institutional aspirations for scholarship remain fundamentally disconnected from the material conditions required to operationalise them (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The structural suppression of scholarship carries deep implications for pracademic identity formation and long-term professional development. Participants' inability to engage meaningfully in research constrained their movement towards fuller forms of academic legitimacy and restricted their professional identities primarily to teaching-focused facilitator roles rather than to contributing scholar roles. The findings therefore suggest that the institution values the pracademic principally as a mechanism for vocational instruction, student throughput and tuition revenue generation rather than as a participant in knowledge production or scholarly inquiry. In effect, pracademics are positioned to teach existing knowledge rather than to contribute actively to the creation of new knowledge within the academic field.

The inability to accumulate research capital creates longer-term structural disadvantage within the broader higher education sector. Participants recognised that limited research engagement severely constrained future career mobility, particularly movement into research-intensive or public university environments where scholarly productivity remains a dominant marker of academic legitimacy and advancement (Bourdieu, 1986). The findings therefore reinforce the hierarchical relationship between teaching-intensive private institutions and more research-oriented public institutions within the wider academic field. By limiting opportunities for research development, the institutional environment contributes to the continued marginalisation of pracademics within broader academic structures and recognition systems.

In this regard, the relatively low prevalence of research-related findings is analytically revealing rather than insignificant. It signals the structurally constrained and precarious nature of pracademic incorporation into academic life itself. Participants were granted entry into the pedagogical and operational dimensions of higher education but remained partially excluded from the scholarly dimensions through which full academic legitimacy is traditionally secured. The findings therefore, expose the limits of institutional incorporation within the South African PHEI environment, demonstrating that participation in teaching does not necessarily translate into full participation within the broader institution of scholarship.

6.12 Cross-cutting theoretical synthesis

The preceding sections have subjected the nine empirical themes to rigorous, targeted theoretical interrogation, yielding deep insights into specific, isolated phenomena. However, the true complexity of the pracademic transition can only be fully grasped by synthesising these significant insights across the entire conceptual framework. The transition cannot be understood as a linear sequence of isolated events, but must be analysed as a deeply recursive, interdependent architecture where every element constantly shapes and reshapes the others. Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Model, comprising

Situation, Self, Support and Strategies, provides the robust overarching architecture for this high-level synthesis. By mapping the theoretical findings onto this model, deep, recursive theoretical relationships between the various dimensions of the transition experience become vividly apparent. Rather than viewing identity, workload and pedagogy as separate challenges, this extensive synthesis demonstrates how they continuously interact to shape, constrain and define the trajectory of the second-career academic.

The Situation of the pracademic is defined by immediate ontological disruption, sustained liminality and severe temporal shock. This situation is not organically occurring; it is fundamentally engineered by the neoliberal labour conditions and coercive isomorphism of the private higher education institution (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The institutional drive for regulatory legitimacy and economic efficiency creates a high-pressure environment that demands immediate pedagogical performance while systematically stripping away the practitioner's established industry authority. The Situation is further complicated by the contradictory expectations placed upon the pracademic to be simultaneously an industry innovator and an academic conformist.

The institutional Support system, which should, in theory, mitigate this immense shock and stabilise the Situation, is heavily compromised by organisational hypocrisy (Brunsson, 1989). The institution provides ceremonial compliance through formal induction merely to appease external regulators, while systematically failing to deliver the temporal, mentorship and pedagogical resources necessary to balance the extreme job demands placed upon the transitioning professional (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The formal support structure, therefore, is an active component of the problem rather than the solution. It mediates the transition by institutionalising neglect, forcing the pracademic to navigate the complex translation of their expertise entirely unsupported.

Consequently, the entire burden of the transition falls heavily upon the *Self*. The individual practitioner must engage in exhausting identity work to negotiate the sudden, severe devaluation of their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Their intrinsic motivation is systematically eroded by severe expectancy violations regarding autonomy, agency and workload (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To gain any footing, they are forced into a difficult epistemic translation, struggling intensely to convert tacit, automated industry expertise into explicit, teachable PCK (Shulman, 1987) without adequate institutional scaffolding. The Self is therefore constantly under siege, battling impostor syndrome, considerable emotional exhaustion and the deep cognitive dissonance between their generative professional ideals and the highly transactional reality of the institution. The structural failure of Support directly triggers the crisis of the Self, demonstrating that individual psychological distress is a product of systemic environmental failure.

To survive this deeply hostile architecture, pracademics are forced to deploy complex, self-generated Strategies. They develop sophisticated identity bilingualism to code-switch between industry and academic cultures, maintaining their practical credibility while desperately securing academic legitimacy (Beijaard et al., 2004). They construct informal, horizontal peer networks to completely replace the failing formal mentorship structures, relying on shared trauma and collegiality to navigate bureaucratic obstacles. Most profoundly, they leverage the ethical principles of Ubuntu (Metz, 2011) to cultivate relational authority with their students, effectively using intensive, hidden emotional labour to secure the recognition and belonging that the formal institution callously withholds. They also engage in compliance mimicry, adopting the required digital and administrative postures to satisfy quality assurance while privately lamenting the loss of innovative agency and abandoning their scholarly research ambitions to survive the workload.

This extensive synthesis demonstrates irrevocably that the challenges of pracademic transition are not isolated incidents of individual failure, but interconnected, systemic symptoms of a structurally contradictory higher education model. Identity strain is caused by capital depreciation; motivation is destroyed by workload intensification; support failures hamper pedagogy; and innovation is crushed by institutional isomorphism. The intersection of these severe forces creates a uniquely perilous trajectory for the second-career academic. The analytical synthesis confirms that individual resilience cannot indefinitely compensate for structural deficiency. Without a fundamental realignment of institutional support, workload distribution and epistemological valuation, the pracademic transition will remain a site of considerable occupational hazard.

6.13 South African private higher education contextual specificities

The deep theoretical dynamics mapped throughout this chapter do not occur in an abstracted vacuum; they are inexorably shaped, constituted and significantly intensified by the specificities of the South African private higher education landscape. This vital context demands targeted analytical attention to understand how intense local pressures amplify the structural transition challenges identified previously. The South African higher education sector is characterised by a highly stringent regulatory environment, heavily overseen by powerful bodies such as the Council on Higher Education. This intense regulatory scrutiny drives the ceremonial compliance and coercive isomorphism that entirely define the institutional support structures, leaving minimal room for the agile curriculum innovation that pracademics are ostensibly recruited to provide. The institution's primary focus is operational survival through strict compliance, heavily limiting academic freedom and entrenching rigid bureaucratic control over pedagogical practice. The context itself breeds the organisational hypocrisy previously discussed.

The private sector in South Africa is overwhelmingly reliant on a robust employability discourse to attract fee-paying students in a fiercely competitive market defined by staggeringly high national unemployment rates (Khuluvhe, 2025). This market logic makes the recruitment of visible industry professionals a strategic, commercial necessity rather than a purely pedagogical choice. However, market demand for immediate industry relevance constantly collides with regulatory demands for traditional academic credentialism and theoretical rigour. This traps the pracademic in the centre of an unresolvable institutional paradox where they must simultaneously serve two entirely contradictory masters, acting as both the vanguard of industry disruption and the guardian of academic tradition. The pracademic is the commodified product of this specific employability discourse.

These challenging transitions occur within a post-apartheid society that is still grappling with significant historical inequalities and the urgent, ongoing imperatives of transformation. Academic legitimacy in South Africa is never a neutral, purely professional construct; it is continuously negotiated through the complex intersectional realities of race, class, gender and linguistic background. The transition from industry to academia requires professionals to navigate complex, often highly volatile societal currents in the classroom every day. In this charged environment, the deployment of an Ubuntu ethic is not merely a pedagogical tactic for student engagement. It is a vital, non-negotiable ethical imperative required to counter the transactional, dehumanising forces of neoliberal education and to foster genuine human dignity within a fractured social landscape (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011). A theoretical understanding of pracademic transitions in South Africa is fundamentally incomplete without acknowledging how these intense contextual pressures amplify the structural contradictions identified throughout this analysis, making the emotional and relational labour of the pracademic uniquely demanding and vital.

6.14 Integrative analytical conclusion

This chapter has successfully executed a comprehensive, theoretically driven analysis of the transition experiences of industry professionals moving into academic roles within a South African private higher education institution. By systematically applying an integrated conceptual framework encompassing Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory, PCK and Ubuntu, alongside critical sociological concepts from Bourdieu, Brunsson and institutional theory, the discussion has moved decisively beyond basic descriptive reporting (Schlossberg, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Shulman, 1987; Mbiti, 1969; Bourdieu, 1986; Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It has clearly explained the deep structural, cultural and epistemological mechanisms that govern the pracademic experience, demonstrating that this career shift is not a simple matter of skills acquisition, but a deep identity crisis inextricably linked to the contradictory imperatives of the neoliberal university (Raaper, 2023). The analysis confirms that pracademics are situated at the collision point

between industry pragmatism and academic traditionalism, forced to navigate severe structural tensions that the institution itself remains structurally unable to reconcile.

The rigorous analysis has firmly established that pracademics endure a sustained structural condition of liminality (Gourlay, 2011; Povilaitis & Jõgi, 2026). Upon entering the academic field, the extensive professional capital they have accumulated in industry depreciates rapidly (Bourdieu, 1986). To achieve legitimacy, they cannot rely on prior positional authority; instead, they must engage in ongoing, exhausting identity work (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). They are forced to develop a highly sophisticated form of identity bilingualism that allows them to navigate the symbolic boundaries of the institution while simultaneously preserving the value of their practitioner background (Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). This severe identity struggle is fundamentally entangled with the immense cognitive challenge of epistemological translation. The findings confirm that the primary pedagogical hurdle is not a lack of subject knowledge, but the complex task of de-automating tacit and embodied industry expertise and reconstructing it into explicit, carefully scaffolded PCK (Shulman, 1987; Sarkar et al., 2024). The systemic failure of generic institutional induction programmes to recognise and support this highly specialised epistemic labour leaves the pracademic intensely vulnerable, relying heavily on stressful experiential learning, informal peer support and exhausting pedagogical trial-and-error processes (McCall et al., 2021; Brogt, 2025).

The theoretical interrogation of motivational dynamics reveals a systemic pattern of expectancy violations that significantly threatens long-term career sustainability. The intrinsic motivations that initially attract professionals into academia, including aspirations towards autonomy, intellectual engagement and meaningful mentorship, are progressively undermined by the operational realities of teaching-intensive, highly regulated private higher education environments (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Through the application of Job Demands–Resources Theory, the analysis demonstrated how workload intensification, immediate temporal shock and the emotional labour associated with relational, Ubuntu-informed teaching practices rapidly erode the pracademic's psychological resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The institution effectively consumes the pracademic's intrinsic motivation to sustain its operational model, thereby increasing the risk of professional disillusionment, emotional exhaustion and occupational burnout. In this context, the promise of academic autonomy becomes increasingly displaced by systems of surveillance, compliance and performance management (Raaper, 2023).

The application of Brunsson's theory of organised hypocrisy and Meyer and Rowan's institutional theory has exposed the structural causes underpinning the support deficiencies identified throughout the empirical findings (Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The substantial disjuncture between

institutional rhetoric concerning staff development and the enacted reality of support structures is not merely a managerial oversight or implementation failure. Rather, it reflects deeper structural tensions within the operational logic of the contemporary PHEI environment. Institutions construct ceremonial induction and developmental architectures to secure legitimacy within a highly regulated higher education sector, while simultaneously constraining the temporal and material resources required to operationalise meaningful pedagogical support under conditions of market competition and financial pressure (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). The pracademic therefore, becomes positioned at the centre of this organised hypocrisy, increasingly dependent on informal and relational peer networks to compensate for institutional limitations. This dynamic is further reflected in the institution's approach to innovation and scholarship. While pracademics are recruited specifically for their industry agility and professional relevance, they frequently encounter coercive bureaucratic structures and restricted opportunities for scholarly development that ultimately constrain their upward mobility within the broader academic field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Bourdieu, 1986).

In synthesising these theoretical insights, the chapter provides a comprehensive response to the research questions guiding the study. The findings demonstrate that the transition experience is characterised by identity disruption, epistemological strain and temporal shock, thereby addressing the first research question (Schlossberg, 2011; Gourlay, 2011). In relation to the second research question, the analysis shows that the relationship between the individual pracademic and institutional structures is significantly shaped by organised hypocrisy, ceremonial compliance and limited pedagogical mediation (Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Finally, in addressing the third research question, the chapter demonstrates that these relationships emerge through the interaction of regulatory accountability, pedagogical demands and market-oriented institutional pressures and that the PHEI environment remains structurally unable to fully reconcile them (Raaper, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). The current model of pracademic integration therefore individualises broader structural contradictions, requiring transitioning professionals to absorb the cognitive, emotional and pedagogical costs generated through systemic institutional tensions.

These analytical conclusions represent an important turning point in the dissertation's trajectory. Having diagnosed the structural, pedagogical and cultural dynamics shaping pracademic transition, the chapter demonstrates that conventional onboarding paradigms and traditional models of academic induction remain insufficient for understanding or supporting this specific professional population. The theoretical insights generated throughout the discussion, particularly sustained liminality, epistemological translation, motivational expectancy violation and organised hypocrisy, provide a robust conceptual and empirical foundation for the final phase of the study. The following chapter,

therefore, builds directly upon these insights by developing a comprehensive framework designed to address the structural disjunctures identified throughout the analysis and to support more sustainable and contextually responsive pracademic transition within South African higher education institutions.

6.15 Chapter summary

This chapter has advanced a sustained theoretical analysis of the nine empirical themes reported in Chapter 5, interpreting them through a multi-framework conceptual architecture that moves significantly beyond individual description toward structural and institutional explanation. The analysis of identity and motivation demonstrated that the pracademic transition is not primarily a story of personal inadequacy but rather a story of structural expectancy violation. Drawing on Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the chapter showed that entry into academia is typically motivated by strong intrinsic drives, intellectual contribution, pedagogical purpose and mentorship of future professionals. These drives are not incidental; they constitute the psychological foundation for sustainable academic careers. The structural conditions of the PHEI, characterised by immediate full teaching loads, compressed timelines and an absence of developmental scaffolding, systematically erode precisely those motivational resources. The theoretical significance of this finding is that motivational failure among pracademics cannot be attributed to insufficient personal resilience; it is a predictable consequence of institutional arrangements that consume intrinsic motivation without replenishing it. The analysis of pedagogical development showed that the challenge facing pracademics is not a deficit of subject knowledge but an epistemological translation problem. Shulman's (1986, 1987) PCK framework explains that effective teaching requires the active transformation of expert knowledge into a form accessible to learners. For pracademics, this transformation is complicated by the tacit, embodied character of professional expertise, which is rarely already structured in the explicit, scaffolded form that pedagogical deployment requires. The absence of discipline-specific pedagogical coaching in the institution's induction model leaves this translation work entirely to the individual, rendering an already complex cognitive task unnecessarily precarious. The analysis of institutional support structures applied Brunsson's (1989) concept of organisational hypocrisy to explain a pattern that recurred consistently across the dataset: the gap between formal developmental commitments and material operational reality. Institutions that maintain documented induction programmes while simultaneously exposing new staff to full teaching loads from their first week are not simply under-resourced; they are managing conflicting institutional logics: legitimation toward accrediting bodies and efficiency toward market performance. Meyer and Rowan's (1977) institutional theory clarifies why this pattern persists: formal support structures are adopted primarily as legitimating signals rather than as operational guidance systems. The theoretical implication is that improving support for

pracademics requires not merely better programmes but structural change in the institutional logics that produce the gap between policy rhetoric and developmental reality. The chapter's cross-cutting synthesis, anchored in Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model, showed that the four transition resources, namely, Situation, Self, Support and Strategies, are not independent variables but deeply recursive. The inadequacy of Support does not merely inconvenience the Self; it actively destabilises it. When institutional Support is ceremonial, the burden of transition falls entirely on the Self and on self-generated Strategies. This structural loading of the Self explains the identity fragility, motivational erosion and pedagogical anxiety that participants described, not as incidental features of individual psychology, but as predictable outcomes of an institutional architecture in which support is proclaimed but not enacted. The Ubuntu lens, applied throughout the chapter, contributed a specifically South African ethical dimension to this analysis. It showed that the relational and communal conditions necessary for professional formation are not optional enhancements to a functional institutional model; rather, they are constitutive of academic belonging. When institutions replace collegial solidarity with compliance documentation, they deny the relational recognition that Ubuntu identifies as foundational to both personhood and professional identity. The result is not merely a developmental shortfall but a moral failure, one whose consequences extend from individual distress to the broader institutional mission of producing educationally excellent and socially responsive teaching. The theoretical insights developed in this chapter constitute the analytical foundation for the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework developed in Chapter 7. That framework is not an external imposition on the data; it is a direct institutional response to the structural patterns diagnosed here. Chapter 7 translates this diagnosis into prescriptive form, moving from analytical identification of what is wrong to constructive specification of what needs to change and how.

Chapter 7: Synthesis, integrated pracademic transition framework and recommendations for practice

7.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the study's empirical findings and theoretical discussions into a coherent, institution-facing analysis. It moves beyond isolated thematic reporting to construct an integrated account of how industry professionals navigate the transition into academic roles within the South African private higher education context. The synthesis connects nine interrelated themes into a unified explanatory account, provides direct, evidence-grounded answers to the three research questions and introduces the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF) together with eight practice recommendations. The chapter also articulates six original theoretical contributions and acknowledges the study's methodological limitations.

The three research questions that structure this chapter are: RQ1 - What are the industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the PHEI? RQ2 - How do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning to academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI? RQ3 - Why do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning into academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they do? These questions are addressed in sequence in Section 7.3, following the integrated thematic synthesis in Section 7.2.

The theoretical architecture drawn upon throughout the chapter comprises Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004), Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Ubuntu as a relational and ethical lens. These frameworks are held together by the critical perspectives of Brunsson's (1989) organisational hypocrisy, Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital and institutional logics theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which expose the structural contradictions embedded in the transition experience.

Central to the chapter is the IPTF, the study's primary theoretical and practical output. This framework maps the pracademic transition across four temporal phases and five support domains, offering institutions a diagnostic tool that can replace generic compliance-driven onboarding with targeted, phase-specific developmental support. The eight recommendations accompanying the IPTF are grounded directly in the empirical findings and arranged according to a practical hierarchy of institutional action.

7.2 Integrated synthesis of findings and analysis

The preceding chapters deconstructed the pracademic transition into nine distinct themes, from entry motivations and professional identity disruption through to research marginalisation. Doctoral

synthesis requires identifying meta-narratives that connect these discrete findings into a unified explanatory account. This section undertakes that integration, demonstrating how the nine themes coalesce to reveal a structural and existential transition that cannot be reduced to any single dimension.

The most consequential insight to emerge from the integrated analysis is that no single theme adequately explains the transition. Motivation cannot be understood apart from identity disruption. Identity disruption cannot be understood apart from failures in institutional support. Support failures cannot be understood apart from workload pressures, pedagogical demands and the organisational logics of private higher education. Research marginalisation is not a late-stage or isolated issue; it is the cumulative consequence of earlier structural arrangements that consume time, dilute confidence and delay academic legitimacy. Synthesis therefore, does not merely group findings together; it demonstrates how each theme modifies the meaning of the others.

This integrated reading sharpens the dissertation's central claim: that pracademic transition is a systemic rather than an individual problem. Participants exercised agency and reflexivity, but the dominant pattern across the dataset was that institutional conditions determined whether these qualities could translate into sustainable adaptation. Where the transition environment was opaque, standardised and under-resourced, resilience functioned largely as a survival mechanism. Where support was relational, intelligible and pedagogically specific, resilience was more likely to become developmental. This distinction is analytically significant because it locates adaptation within a structured field of unequal demands and variable supports, consistent with Schlossberg's (2011) framework and with the study's broader critique of neoliberal institutional arrangements.

The synthesis feeds directly into the three research questions addressed in Section 7.3. The thematic patterns answer RQ1 by providing a rich account of the transition experience at this PHEI. They answer RQ2 by showing how those experiences were continuously shaped by and expressed through the specific institutional structures and support systems in place. They answer RQ3 by explaining why the relationship took the particular form it did in this institutional setting: because the PHEI's organisational logics, compliance priorities and market orientation produced structural conditions that systematically constrained the developmental support transitioning practitioners required.

7.2.1 Professional identity as the central thread and liminal disruption

The synthesis of the first two themes confirms that the shift from industry to academia is not merely a change in employment but a profound ontological rupture. Participants entered the academic space carrying a complex interplay of push factors, such as industry burnout and pull factors, including the desire for intellectual contribution and legacy building (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Upon entry, however,

they experienced an immediate destabilisation of their established professional identities. Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) explains this as an expert-to-novice reversal: the cultural capital accumulated in industry (Bourdieu, 1986) was not seamlessly convertible into academic currency. This produced a prolonged condition of sustained liminality, a period of structural ambiguity lasting up to three years, in which the practitioner identity was being dismantled while an academic identity had not been formed.

This liminality was not inevitable. It was actively maintained by institutional failure to provide targeted pedagogical and identity support. The pracademic was left between an industry past that no longer fully applied and an academic future whose norms remained opaque and inaccessible. The solution is not the erasure of the practitioner self but the cultivation of what this study terms identity bilingualism: the capacity to move fluently between practitioner and academic registers in response to the specific demands of different professional contexts.

7.2.2 The support paradox and institutional hypocrisy

The synthesis of the themes relating to institutional support structures reveals a recurring paradox. Formal induction mechanisms exist on paper, whilst participants consistently described them as generic, front-loaded and misaligned with the actual chronology of transition challenges. This disjuncture between espoused policy and enacted practice constitutes what Brunsson (1989) terms organisational hypocrisy: institutions deploy induction documents and development frameworks to satisfy quality assurance bodies while enacting market-driven operational practices, such as full teaching loads from the first week, that directly undermine those very policies.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) help explain why this pattern persists. Institutions adopt ceremonial compliance structures to maintain external legitimacy without necessarily allowing those structures to govern operational decisions. The result, observed across the dataset, is that pracademics receive procedural orientation at the point of entry and are then expected to perform as already-formed academic professionals. Support fails not because institutions lack the language of development, but because that language is not backed by material resource allocation, protected time or structured accountability.

7.2.3 Pedagogical translation and the demands of Pedagogical Content Knowledge

A central finding of the synthesis is that industry expertise does not automatically translate into effective teaching. Participants understood their professional fields with considerable depth, but the challenge of converting tacit, experiential knowledge into scaffolded, assessable curricula proved consistently demanding. Shulman's (1987) concept of PCK captures this precisely: effective teaching

requires not only subject knowledge but a specialised capacity to select, sequence and represent that knowledge in forms accessible to learners at particular developmental levels.

For pracademics, this challenge is distinctive. The starting point is not academic disciplinary knowledge acquired through graduate study, but a practice-grounded expertise with its own epistemological characteristics. The study introduces the concept of PPCK to name this specific developmental task: the deliberate, institutionally supported process of reverse-engineering tacit workplace knowledge into explicit, theoretically coherent academic curricula. The evidence shows that PPCK development requires direct PCK training, moderation and norming processes and protected time for pedagogical experimentation. It does not occur spontaneously as a by-product of professional experience.

7.2.4 Digital adaptation, relational labour and ubuntu

Digital adaptation emerged as a specific and often underestimated dimension of transition difficulty. Participants reported significant anxiety about LMS and digital pedagogical expectations, which compounded their sense of competence erosion at precisely the moment of greatest vulnerability. Concurrently, building meaningful relationships with students generated substantial emotional labour.

Viewed through the Ubuntu lens, relational labour is not peripheral to academic work but constitutive of it. Ubuntu foregrounds mutual recognition, communal solidarity and human dignity as the conditions under which professional formation occurs. When institutions fail to quantify or acknowledge this relational dimension of teaching, pracademics carry its demands without support, contributing to emotional exhaustion that accelerates the temporal debt spiral described below.

7.2.5 Workload intensification and the temporal debt spiral

Time pressure emerged as the structural amplifier of all other transition challenges. Drawing on Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), the synthesis shows that the demands placed on new pracademics from the outset consistently exceeded the institutional resources provided. Because pracademics lack existing pedagogical templates, lesson planning and assessment design consume disproportionate time, forcing them to draw on personal reserves, research capacity and long-term professional development.

This compound effect is what the study terms the temporal debt spiral: an accumulating deficit of time that prevents the pracademic from stepping back to acquire the very pedagogical competencies that would eventually make them more efficient. The temporal debt spiral is not a failure of personal time management. It is a structural extraction of labour that ignores the cognitive and emotional load of professional transition. Without institutional intervention to protect developmental time, this spiral operates as the primary barrier to sustainable academic integration.

7.2.6 Research marginalisation and the stunting of academic legitimacy

Research development consistently emerged as the casualty of the transition ecology. The accumulated weight of full teaching loads, administrative requirements and the temporal debt spiral left participants with neither the time nor the psychological capacity to develop scholarly identities. This produced a further consequence beyond individual frustration: it denied pracademics access to the primary currency through which academic legitimacy is accumulated and recognised. Without research engagement, cultural capital eroded and the risk of permanent peripheral status within the institution increased.

The pattern observed here is consistent with that reported by Breier et al. (2019), who documented cases in which academics without doctoral qualifications remained in structurally liminal positions throughout their academic careers. The present study extends this insight to pracademic transition specifically, showing that research marginalisation is not an incidental outcome but a predictable consequence of institutional arrangements that prioritise immediate teaching productivity over long-term scholarly development.

7.2.7 Cross-thematic intersections and the trajectory of integration

Four cross-thematic intersections clarify the dynamics of integration. First, identity and time are interdependent: identity reconstruction requires protected time for observation, reflection and pedagogical experimentation and where operational demands consume that time, the development of academic selfhood is delayed. Second, pedagogy and legitimacy are inseparable: participants began to feel institutionally recognised as they developed teaching confidence and, conversely, continued pedagogical insecurity was experienced not as a skills gap but as a threat to academic worth. Third, support and institutional credibility are linked: participants evaluated support not by its formal existence but by whether it translated into experienced relief and intelligible guidance. When formal policies were not implemented in practice, the institution lost credibility in the eyes of new academics. Fourth, innovation and conformity exist in tension: practice-based pedagogical approaches were often symbolically celebrated at recruitment but, after appointment, operationally constrained by standardised templates and compliance cultures.

These intersections show that integration is not a single endpoint reached solely through accumulated experience. It is a negotiated trajectory shaped by the degree of alignment between realistic expectations, protected developmental time, pedagogical scaffolding, enacted support and the institutional recognition of practitioner expertise. The critical question is therefore not whether the pracademic is capable of adapting, but whether the institution creates the conditions under which adaptation can reasonably be expected.

7.3 Responding to the Research Questions

This section provides direct, evidence-grounded answers to the study's three research questions. Each answer draws on the synthesised findings and the theoretical architecture established in the preceding chapters.

7.3.1 RQ1: What are the industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the Private Higher Education Institution?

The experiences of industry professionals transitioning from industry to academic roles at the PHEI were characterised by a cluster of interrelated and often painful realities that together constituted what this study describes as sustained liminality. Participants described entering the institution with substantial professional credentials, strong motivations to contribute to student development and curriculum relevance and a genuine commitment to teaching. These strengths, however, did not protect them from the immediate destabilisation of professional identity that followed entry. The experience at this PHEI was one of acute expert-to-novice reversal: practitioners who had been recognised authorities in their fields found themselves unable to take for granted the competencies required by academic work.

The dominant experiential qualities reported across the dataset included imposter syndrome, vulnerability, isolation, workload shock and the erosion of the professional confidence that had been central to self-concept in industry. Participants experienced deep uncertainty about their right to occupy academic space. They described the PHEI's pedagogical expectations, administrative systems, curriculum structures and assessment frameworks as unfamiliar and often opaque, requiring substantial effort to learn without adequate guidance or protected time. The academic onboarding programme and other formal support mechanisms were experienced as procedural rather than developmental, addressing compliance obligations rather than the lived cognitive and emotional demands of transition.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) helps frame the experiential arc. Intrinsic motivation was high at the point of entry: participants were driven by purpose, a desire to give back to their professions and the intellectual appeal of academic work. Structural realities at the PHEI rapidly depleted this drive. Full teaching loads from the outset, administrative obligations, unfamiliar moderation demands and the absence of substantive mentoring transformed the experience from purposeful contribution into managed survival. Moments of intrinsic reward, typically associated with successful student engagement, punctuated but did not displace the overarching experience of strain.

Schlossberg's (2011) 4S framework provides the most analytically productive structure for describing these experiences. The Situation of entry at this PHEI was defined by a combination of genuine aspiration and structural unpreparedness: participants were strongly motivated but frequently arrived

with unrealistic expectations about the demands of academic work. The Self that each participant brought was rich in professional expertise and vocational credibility but fragile in academic legitimacy and pedagogical confidence, precisely because the PHEI's recognition systems had not been designed to value or convert the resources that practitioners carried. The Support available was formally documented but substantively inadequate, offering procedural orientation rather than the sustained developmental engagement that complex professional transition requires. The Strategies that participants developed were largely self-generated, drawing on peer networks, classroom trial and error and the selective retention of professional identity as a navigational resource.

The experience was not static across time. The earliest stage at the PHEI was dominated by operational shock: learning systems, understanding institutional expectations and managing a full teaching load simultaneously. A middle stage brought deeper pedagogical struggle, questions about curriculum design and the realisation that subject knowledge and effective teaching are not the same thing. Only later did questions of research identity, long-term career trajectory and scholarly belonging come into view. The answer to RQ1 is therefore best understood as a phased experiential pattern rather than a single description. Participants at this PHEI did not experience one transition; they experienced a sequence of layered transitions, each reshaping the meaning of those that preceded it. Myers et al. (2025) confirm this pattern as characteristic of second-career academic transition more broadly, while noting that its intensity and duration vary substantially depending on the quality of institutional response.

7.3.2 RQ2: How do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning to academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI?

The experiences described in answer to RQ1 were not independent of the PHEI's institutional arrangements. They were produced, shaped and, in several cases, intensified by the specific structures and support systems in place at this institution. The relationship between experience and institutional structure was not incidental; it was constitutive. The PHEI's structural conditions determined the form that the transition experience took.

The most direct structural influence was the PHEI's workload model. New pracademics were assigned full or near-full teaching allocations from the outset, without the workload remission that would allow time for pedagogical preparation, mentored observation or gradual acclimatisation to the demands of academic practice. The temporal debt spiral that characterised the transition experience at this institution was therefore not an unfortunate coincidence; it was the direct experiential consequence of a structural decision to treat newly appointed practitioners as immediately productive academic labour. The experience of overload, identity fragility and pedagogical anxiety was mediated through this structural reality.

The PHEI's induction and support infrastructure bore a similarly direct relationship to the experiences reported. The academic onboarding programme provided participants with formal orientation to teaching frameworks and institutional expectations, however, its design was generic, front-loaded and disconnected from the specific developmental challenges that emerged over the first two semesters. Participants' experiences of feeling unprepared, isolated and unsupported in the months following initial induction reflected the structural gap between what the programme offered and what the transition actually required. The programme's design served the institution's quality assurance obligations. Its relationship to the participants' lived experiences was largely incidental.

Matadi and Uleanya (2022) provide essential context for interpreting this pattern in the South African PHEI setting. They demonstrate that institutions in this sector face structural incentives to invest in demonstrable quality indicators, including formal staff development programmes, while potentially underinvesting in the less visible and less easily audited dimensions of academic culture, collegial support and developmental community. The academic onboarding programme at this PHEI exemplifies this dynamic: it was comprehensive enough to satisfy accreditation review while insufficiently substantive to address the deeper pedagogical and identity challenges of transition. The relationship between the programme's design and participants' experiences of inadequacy is therefore explicable by reference to the institutional logic that produced it.

The relational dimensions of the PHEI's support systems also shaped the experience in specific ways. The most consistently valued support that participants described came not from formal institutional mechanisms but from informal peer relationships: colleagues who shared resources, provided reassurance and offered discipline-specific guidance on an ad hoc basis. This finding reveals a structural asymmetry at the PHEI. The formal support architecture was oriented toward institutional compliance and generic pedagogy. The actual developmental support participants relied on was informal, unrecognised by the institution and unevenly distributed across departments. Ndlovu et al. (2024) document an equivalent pattern in South African academic settings, noting that informal peer networks often function as the primary sites of substantive professional learning precisely where formal development infrastructure has not been designed with practitioners' actual needs in mind.

The relationship between experience and institutional structure also operated through the PHEI's performance management and evaluation systems. Participants experienced these systems as misaligned with their developmental phase: assessment and moderation demands, teaching quality evaluations and research expectations were applied through frameworks designed for already-established academics rather than for staff in the earliest stages of transition. The experience of feeling simultaneously surveilled and unsupported directly reflected this structural mismatch. The institution's recognition systems did not create space for the phased development that the transition

required; they imposed standardised productivity expectations onto a population whose most pressing need was developmental scaffolding.

The answer to RQ2 is therefore that the experiences of transitioning pracademics at this PHEI related to institutional structures and support systems in a pattern of structural constitution: the nature, intensity and trajectory of the transition experience were substantially determined by what the institution's structures made available, required and withheld. The workload policy produced a temporal debt spiral. Induction design produced the experience of procedural support without developmental substance. Performance management led to an experience of evaluation without appropriate developmental support. Informal peer relationships compensated for the formal structural absences, but at a cost: their availability was accidental and their adequacy was uneven. The relationship between experience and structure at this PHEI was therefore not coincidental but causal, not external but constitutive.

7.3.3 RQ3: Why do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning into academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they do?

The relationship between experience and institutional structure described in RQ2 did not arise by accident or through administrative oversight. It took the particular form it did because of specific institutional logics, structural priorities and organisational dynamics that are explicable through the theoretical frameworks established in this dissertation. RQ3 asks for the causal and explanatory account of why the relationship between experience and structure at this PHEI operated as it did.

The most powerful explanation lies in the concept of organisational hypocrisy (Brunsson, 1989). Private higher education institutions operating in a fee-dependent market face demands from multiple audiences simultaneously: accrediting bodies that require evidence of staff development, quality assurance frameworks that expect compliance with developmental policies and operational management that requires teaching throughput. Brunsson (1989) demonstrates that organisations facing contradictory demands characteristically respond not by resolving those demands but by decoupling talk from action. Institutions speak in the language of support and development to secure external legitimacy, while enacting operational decisions driven by market efficiency. This is why the PHEI in this study could simultaneously maintain a formal induction programme and expose newly appointed academics to full teaching loads from week one: the programme satisfied regulators while the workload served throughput. The relationship between experience and structure at this PHEI took the form it did because the PHEI's structures were designed to manage institutional appearances rather than to address the developmental reality of transition.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) provide a complementary explanation. Institutional theory demonstrates that organisations in regulated fields adopt formal structures, such as staff development programmes

and quality assurance procedures, primarily to achieve external legitimacy rather than to govern internal operations. Once adopted, these ceremonial structures are systematically decoupled from the organisation's technical core. At this PHEI, the academic onboarding programme and associated induction documentation functioned as legitimating artefacts that satisfied regulatory expectations without materially altering the operational conditions experienced by transitioning pracademics. The structures that shaped experience were not the formal ones designed for external audiences but the operational ones driven by market logic: staffing ratios, workload allocation, moderation requirements and productivity expectations. This gap between the symbolic and the operational explains why participants' experiences consistently diverged from what the institution's formal commitments implied they should be.

The specific character of the South African private higher education sector provides a third explanatory layer. Matadi and Uleanya (2022) demonstrate that South African PHEIs face financial pressures that create strong structural incentives to minimise the real cost of staff development while maintaining their symbolic presence. The fee-dependent revenue model, the regulatory architecture of the CHE and the market positioning of PHEIs around employability and vocational relevance all create conditions in which market logic is likely to prevail over academic developmental logic when the two conflict. This context explains why the relationship between experience and structure at this specific institution took the form documented in the study: the same market pressures that made pracademic appointments attractive for their industry currency also made sustained developmental investment in those pracademics financially and operationally costly.

The Ubuntu critique adds a fourth explanatory dimension. Current institutional models are rooted in transactional, Western conceptions of employment onboarding that treat entry into a new role as a technical transfer of skills and information. These models are structurally inadequate for the kind of transition that pracademics at this PHEI were undergoing, because they do not recognise the relational, communal and identity-forming dimensions of professional formation. Ubuntu foregrounds the principle that personhood and, by extension, professional identity, are constituted through relationships of recognition and mutual accountability. When institutional structures reduce transition support to online modules, compliance documentation and generic workshops, they deny the relational conditions that academic belonging requires. Experiences of isolation, imposter syndrome and identity fragility at this PHEI were therefore not simply emotional responses to difficulty; they were the predictable consequences of an institutional architecture that had not been designed to provide the human recognition and communal solidarity that formation requires.

The answer to RQ3 is therefore that the relationship between experience and institutional structure at this PHEI took the form it did because the institution's structures were shaped by competing logics

that systematically prioritised external compliance, market efficiency and throughput over the developmental, relational and temporal demands of professional transition. These priorities were not arbitrary; the regulatory, financial and market conditions of South African private higher education produced them. The consequences were equally systematic: an institution that recruited industry professionals for their vocational capital while providing structural conditions that prevented that capital from being converted into pedagogical competence, academic legitimacy and scholarly contribution. This is why the transition experience and the institutional structure related to each other as they did, not through individual failure or administrative negligence, but through a structural logic whose effects were predictable, observable and, the IPTF argues, addressable.

Brunsson (1989) provides the most analytically powerful account of this systematic pattern. His concept of organisational hypocrisy explains how institutions can simultaneously espouse strong commitments to staff development while failing to adequately resource them, without experiencing this contradiction as a problem. The function of hypocrisy in this context is not simple deception; it is the management of conflicting expectations from multiple stakeholder audiences. Accrediting bodies expect evidence of staff development; operational management expects teaching productivity; and the institution satisfies both sets of expectations through the symbolic provision of induction programmes that meet auditors' requirements without disrupting production targets. For pracademics at this PHEI, this institutional logic had direct consequences: the support they received was shaped by what the institution needed to demonstrate to external audiences rather than by what they needed to develop into effective and sustainable academic contributors.

7.4 The integrated pracademic transition framework (IPTF)

The primary conceptual contribution of this study is the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework. The IPTF translates the synthesised findings and theoretical insights into a coherent, diagnostic and prescriptive model designed to address the systemic failures identified in the research. It maps the pracademic transition across two intersecting axes: four temporal phases on the horizontal axis and five support domains on the vertical axis. This matrix identifies 20 critical intervention points at which institutions can assess whether support is present, adequate and appropriately timed.

The value of the IPTF lies in its rejection of a generic or event-based approach to transition support. It recognises that transition is longitudinal, that the nature of need changes as experience accumulates and that the same intervention may be essential in one phase but inadequate or counterproductive in another. Basic systems orientation is indispensable at entry but insufficient during the development phase, when deeper pedagogical coaching is required. Emotional validation is most urgent during induction but remains incomplete unless followed by opportunities for scholarly growth and career

recognition. Timing matters as much as content and institutions do not merely need more support; they need the right support in the right domain at the right phase.

Figure 7.1 presents the full Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework, mapping the 20 critical intervention points arising from the intersection of four temporal phases and five support domains.

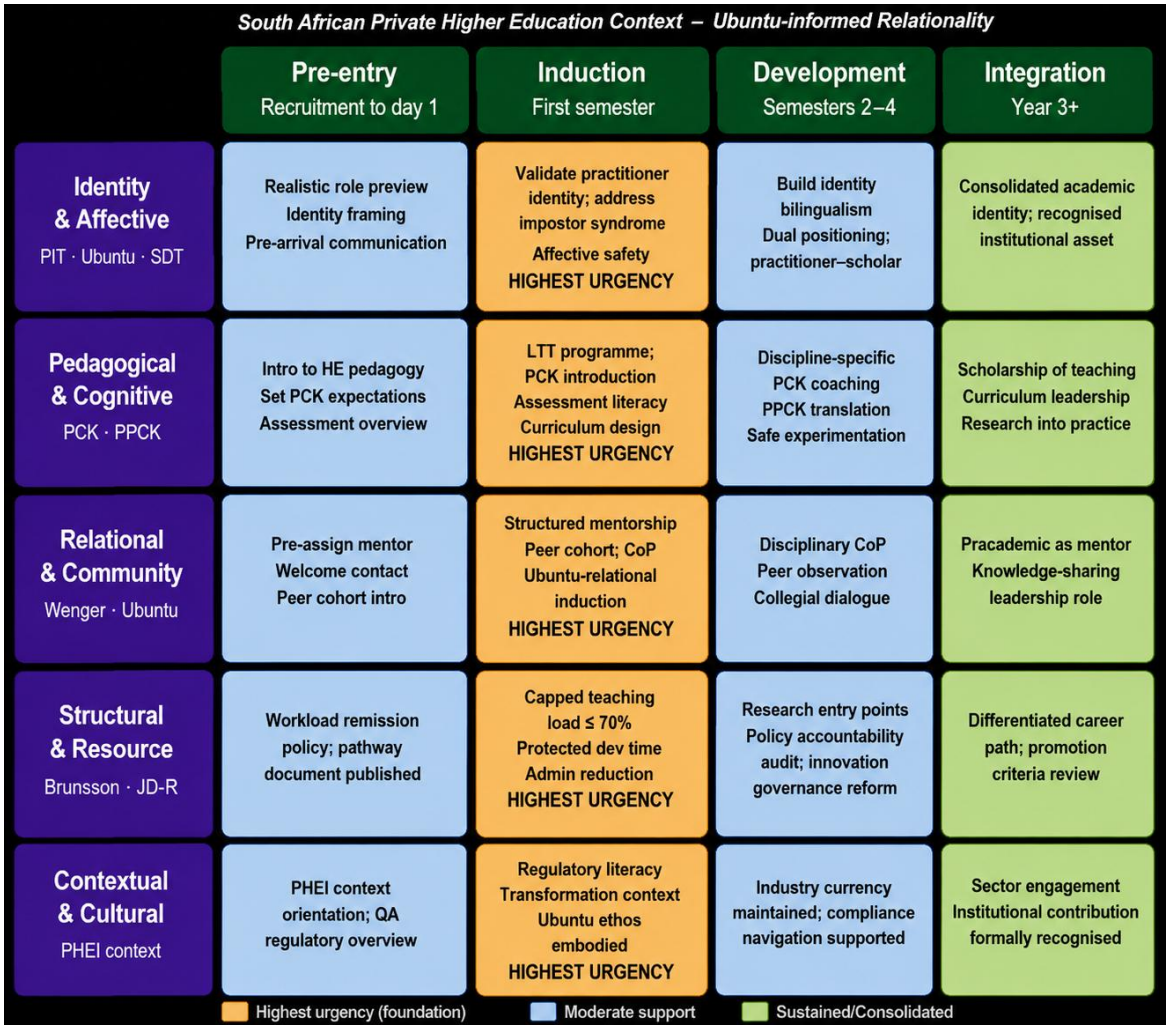


Figure 7.1 : Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF)

Note. The IPTF maps pracademic transition across four temporal phases (Pre-Entry, Induction, Development, Integration) and five support domains (Identity and Affective, Pedagogical and Cognitive, Relational and Community, Structural and Resource, Contextual and Cultural), creating twenty critical intervention points. Theoretical frameworks informing each domain are shown. Adapted from the study's empirical and theoretical analysis.

7.4.1 The four temporal phases

Phase 1: Pre-Entry. This phase spans the period between recruitment and the assumption of teaching duties. It is characterised by anticipation and the formation of expectancy. The institutional priority here is the transparent communication of workload, academic culture and transition expectations.

Hora and Lee (2020) demonstrate that unclear role expectations at the point of recruitment are among the most consistently cited sources of early attrition among newly appointed staff in professionally oriented programmes. Expectancy violations that begin before formal induction are structurally preventable.

Phase 2: Induction. The first semester constitutes the period of highest vulnerability. The acute shock of the expert-to-novice reversal, the immediate digital and administrative demands and the onset of the temporal debt spiral mark it. Interventions in this phase must focus on survival logistics, immediate relational scaffolding and the early validation of practitioner identity as a legitimate academic resource. Ubuntu-informed relational support is most urgently required here.

Phase 3: Development. Spanning the second to fourth semesters, this phase involves the deep cognitive work of pedagogical translation. The pracademic moves beyond immediate survival to active curriculum design, assessment literacy and the deliberate conversion of industry capital into academic practice. This is the phase in which PPCK construction occurs, requiring discipline-specific coaching, moderation support and protected time for pedagogical experimentation.

Phase 4: Integration. Typically beginning after approximately three years, this phase is characterised by identity bilingualism: the capacity to operate fluently across practitioner and academic registers without experiencing identity dissonance (Beijaard et al., 2004). The institutional focus shifts to research development, career progression, scholarly identity formation and the recognition of the pracademic as an institutional asset rather than a developmental project.

7.4.2 The five support domains

Identity and Affective Domain. Guided by Professional Identity Theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) and Ubuntu, this domain addresses the emotional labour of transition. It requires interventions that validate practitioner expertise while providing psychological safety during the vulnerability of novicehood. Without explicit institutional attention to imposter syndrome, identity disruption and the emotional dimensions of the expert-to-novice reversal, the affective costs of transition are borne entirely by the individual.

Pedagogical and Cognitive Domain. Rooted in Shulman's (1987) PCK framework, this domain focuses on the explicit training required to convert tacit professional knowledge into structured curricula, assessment instruments and instructional designs. It demands a shift from generic teaching skills workshops to discipline-specific pedagogical development that takes the epistemological characteristics of practice-based expertise as its starting point.

Relational and Community Domain. Counteracting isolation through structured communities of practice, this domain requires a shift from accidental collegial support to formalised, accountable

mentorship. Wenger (1998) demonstrates that the norms, standards and unwritten rules of academic practice are not effectively transmitted through documentation alone; they are communicated through sustained participation in collegial activity. Access to functioning mentoring relationships is therefore a necessary condition for developing the academic literacy that institutional legitimacy requires, not a supplementary benefit.

Structural and Resource Domain. Confronting organisational hypocrisy directly (Brunsson, 1989), this domain requires material changes to policy: workload remission in the first year, administrative simplification and accountability mechanisms that ensure espoused developmental values are enacted in practice. Without structural change in this domain, all other support remains rhetorically attractive but practically hollow.

Contextual and Cultural Domain. This domain focuses on integrating the pracademic into the specific logics of the South African private higher education sector, helping practitioners align practice-relevant pedagogical innovations with quality assurance mandates. It acknowledges that vocationally oriented institutions operate under distinctive conditions that Western onboarding templates do not address. Contextual localisation is not an optional refinement; it is a structural necessity for meaningful transition support in this setting.

The intersection of these phases and domains creates a matrix of twenty critical intervention points. By adopting the IPTF, institutions can move from compliance-driven onboarding toward a targeted developmental ecology. Each phase is temporal, meaning that support must evolve as the pracademic's experience accumulates. Each domain is diagnostic, meaning that when difficulties arise, the framework directs inquiry toward the specific type and location of institutional failure rather than assuming a generalised individual deficit. If a new academic is overwhelmed in the first semester, the framework asks whether the difficulty is primarily affective, pedagogical, relational, structural or contextual. If difficulty persists into the development phase, the framework asks whether the institution has updated its interventions, as the nature of the transition has changed. In this way, the IPTF functions simultaneously as a design framework and an evaluative instrument.

7.5 Recommendations for practice

The eight recommendations presented below are derived directly from the empirical findings, the synthesised meta-narratives and the IPTF architecture. They form a prioritised, institutionally actionable model in which closely related proposals have been integrated, enabling decision-makers to identify the most consequential levers for reform without dispersing attention across a larger number of discrete actions.

The recommendations are arranged to reflect a practical order of significance. The first two address foundational strategic conditions: the transparency of the pracademic pathway and the protection of developmental time. Without these conditions, the remaining interventions are likely to remain symbolic rather than effective. The middle four address the operational architecture of transition support, including induction, mentorship, pedagogical development and industry currency. The final two address longer-term performance management and individual agency. Read as a set, they form a coherent reform model in which institutional responsibility remains primary and individual agency is recognised as a necessary but insufficient complement.

The recommendations that follow (Table 7.1) should not be interpreted as isolated operational interventions. Rather, they emerge from the integrated theoretical and empirical analysis developed throughout the dissertation and are intended to function as mutually reinforcing institutional conditions necessary for sustainable pracademic transition.

Table 7.1: Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation	Level of Application	Supporting Evidence	Implementation Suggestion	Rational
Recommendation 1: Establish a transparent pracademic pathway from recruitment to promotion	Strategic	The study found that expectancy violations began before formal induction, particularly where recruitment narratives understated academic workload, administrative intensity and the demands of scholarly legitimacy. Pracademics were also disadvantaged when compared with conventional, research-dominant career tracks that undervalued practice-based expertise (Themes 1, 2 and 9).	Redesign recruitment materials, interview protocols, induction briefings, probation criteria and promotion frameworks into a single pracademic pathway document. This document should provide realistic workload previews, explicit transition expectations and a differentiated career progression route that recognises industry-engaged pedagogy, curriculum innovation, professional consulting and phased scholarly development as legitimate forms of academic contribution.	Expectancy violations that begin before entry are structurally preventable. Hora and Lee (2020) demonstrate in their study of faculty in professionally oriented programmes that unclear expectations about the balance between teaching, service and scholarship were among the most consistently cited sources of professional dissatisfaction and early attrition among newly appointed staff. Institutions that invest in clear, realistic and differentiated communication from the point of recruitment significantly reduce the incidence of early psychological contract breaches. In the South African PHEI context, this requires a frank review of recruitment materials and probation criteria to ensure they accurately reflect the demands and opportunities of academic work, rather than projecting an idealised image designed primarily to attract candidates.
Recommendation 2: Protect developmental time through formal workload remission and policy accountability	Strategic	The temporal debt spiral emerged across the dataset as the central structural barrier to successful transition. Immediate teaching loads, administrative requirements and marking demands prevented new academics from developing pedagogical confidence, research momentum and a sustainable sense of institutional belonging. Participants also reported a severe gap between institutional claims of developmental support and the material reality of resource allocation (Themes 3 and 8).	Introduce a formal first-year remission model that caps teaching at no more than 70 per cent of the standard allocation, ring-fences time for pedagogical development and mentored observation and links this remission to an annual institutional audit of whether induction and support policies are being materially enacted rather than merely documented.	Without protected time, all other support remains aspirational. This recommendation addresses both the temporal debt spiral and the organisational hypocrisy identified in the study's theoretical analysis. A workload remission model without an accountability mechanism will reproduce the existing pattern of espoused support without enacted practice. The audit mechanism is therefore not an administrative addition; it is the instrument through which the policy-practice gap is closed.

Recommendation 3: Replace generic onboarding with staged, phase-specific induction and integrated systems support	Operational	Participants consistently reported that front-loaded orientation was cognitively overwhelming, too generic and poorly aligned to the actual chronology of transition challenges. Digital systems, administrative processes and compliance tasks added avoidable friction at precisely the moment when new academics were already managing identity disruption and pedagogical uncertainty (Themes 3, 4 and 5).	Replace single-event induction with a year-long staged programme mapped to the IPTF. The programme should begin with survival logistics and systems navigation, then progress into assessment literacy and curriculum design, then into digital pedagogy and medium-term academic development. This staged programme should be supported by a centralised digital repository of resources and a dedicated administrative contact for first-semester operational queries.	**:** Transition is longitudinal, so support must be temporally sequenced rather than delivered as a single compliance event. New pracademics do not need everything at once; they need the right information at the right developmental moment. A year-long staged programme, explicitly mapped to the IPTF's temporal phases, provides the structural coherence that once-off induction cannot.
Recommendation 4: Institutionalise accountable mentorship and communities of practice	Operational	The most reliable support in the study came not from formal structures but from informal peer relationships. Dependence on accidental collegiality is, however, unsustainable, inequitable and variable across departments and academic units. Participants needed both discipline-specific mentoring and a broader community of horizontal solidarity with other early-career academics (Themes 3 and 6).	Pair every new pracademic with a trained senior mentor from the same or a closely aligned discipline. Formally recognise mentoring as a valued contribution within workload models and establish monthly communities of practice for first and second-year academics to share resources, compare challenges and build collective pedagogical confidence.	Wenger (1998) demonstrates that the norms and unwritten rules of academic practice are communicated through participation in collegial activity, not through formal documentation or procedural training. Access to functioning mentoring relationships and communities of practice is a necessary condition for the development of academic literacy, not a supplementary benefit. This recommendation translates Ubuntu from an abstract institutional value into an enacted support architecture, ensuring that professional belonging is structurally cultivated rather than left to circumstance. Mentoring arrangements must address not only formal structure but the conditions under which genuine developmental engagement is likely: adequate protected time for mentors, appropriate disciplinary matching and institutional recognition of mentoring as a distinct academic contribution.

Recommendation 5: Build an integrated pedagogical development pathway centred on PCK, assessment literacy and safe experimentation	Operational	A consistent finding across the data was that industry expertise did not automatically translate into teachable knowledge. Participants struggled to convert tacit professional experience into scaffolded and assessable curricula. Marking was excessively time-consuming in the early stages and many participants reported significant fear of pedagogical failure or the consequences of poor student evaluations (Themes 4, 7 and 8).	Develop a sequenced pedagogical development stream that includes explicit PCK training, moderation and norming sessions, co-marking of early assessments with experienced colleagues and protected spaces for low-risk pedagogical experimentation. During the first year, student evaluations should be used formatively rather than as performance data, to encourage experimentation rather than defensive teaching.	Pedagogical confidence develops through scaffolded practice, feedback and institutional permission to learn. Generic teaching skills workshops are insufficient because the developmental challenge for pracademics is not simply about technique but about PPCK construction: the conversion of tacit professional expertise into explicit, theoretically coherent academic content. Sarkar et al. (2024) confirm that this conversion is domain-specific and context-dependent and cannot be addressed through generic training. The recommendation creates the structured conditions under which PPCK development can occur at a sustainable pace.
Recommendation 6: Create structures that preserve industry currency while translating innovation into compliant academic practice	Strategic and Operational	The distinctive value of the pracademic lies in the capacity to connect curriculum content to contemporary professional realities. This value eroded when industry knowledge became dated or when practice-based teaching approaches were blocked by rigid compliance and moderation cultures. Participants described institutional structures that symbolically celebrated industry expertise at recruitment while operationally suppressing its expression (Themes 2 and 7).	Introduce periodic return-to-industry opportunities, professional engagement leave or structured industry partnerships. Alongside these, create a curriculum innovation support mechanism that helps pracademics translate authentic workplace tasks into institutionally and regulatorily acceptable assessment instruments, reducing the tension between pedagogical authenticity and compliance requirements.	Industry expertise has a demonstrable half-life. If the institution does not create conditions for that expertise to be renewed and pedagogically translated, the cultural capital for which pracademics were recruited depreciates, producing mutual dissatisfaction. This recommendation ensures that the institution does not merely recruit industry expertise as symbolic positioning but actively maintains and harnesses it. It also addresses the innovation-conformity tension identified in the cross-thematic synthesis, providing a structured channel through which practice-based innovation can be developed into academically legitimate form rather than being suppressed by compliance structures.
Recommendation 7: Reframe research development and performance management through an Ubuntu-informed developmental model	Strategic and Operational	Research development was systematically marginalised across the dataset by teaching intensity, administrative overload and performance cultures that treated the transitioning academic as an already-formed productive	Rework performance management frameworks to recognise relational labour, phased scholarly development and varied forms of academic contribution appropriate to the pracademic's phase of transition.	An Ubuntu-informed performance model replaces punitive productivity assumptions with communal accountability, developmental pacing and humane expectations. Pracademics cannot develop scholarly identities under workload conditions designed for already-established academics with full research infrastructure. The structured entry

		unit. Participants also experienced performance management as transactional and insufficiently attentive to the relational, affective and developmental dimensions of their transition (Themes 2, 8 and 9).	In parallel, create structured entry routes into scholarship: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning projects, practice-based case writing, collaborative publication teams and reduced first-year research expectations tied to developmental milestones rather than standardised output quotas.	routes proposed here create manageable pathways into scholarship that are proportionate to the pracademic's developmental phase rather than demanding immediate parity with research-active colleagues.
Recommendation 8: Support individual agency through reflective identity work, identity bilingualism and peer solidarity	Individual	Although the dissertation locates primary responsibility for transition quality at the institutional level, participants who adapted more successfully also engaged in deliberate identity reflection, consciously drew on both practitioner and academic repertoires, maintained temporal boundaries around personal and professional life and cultivated emotionally supportive peer relationships (Themes 2, 6 and 8).	Encourage new pracademics to maintain reflective journals documenting their identity development and pedagogical learning. Promote the deliberate practice of identity bilingualism in classroom and faculty settings. Provide guidance on establishing temporal boundaries to protect recovery time and personal sustainability. Actively facilitate cross-departmental support networks with other second-career academics so that horizontal solidarity does not depend on geographical or departmental accident.	Institutional reform remains the primary lever for improving transition quality and individual agency cannot substitute for structural change. This recommendation does not relocate responsibility to individuals but acknowledges that agency, when equipped and supported, is a genuine developmental resource. Reflective practice accelerates the consolidation of identity bilingualism. Temporal boundaries reduce burnout risk. Peer solidarity reduces isolation and provides the lateral support that formal mentoring may not fully replicate. Supporting individual agency at this level complements, rather than replaces, the structural reforms described in the preceding seven recommendations.

Read as a set, the eight recommendations form a coherent reform architecture rather than a list of isolated actions. The first two create the foundational conditions without which all other interventions remain symbolic. Recommendations three to six address the operational delivery of support across induction, mentorship, pedagogy and industry engagement. Recommendations seven and eight address the longer-term sustainability of the transition by reframing performance expectations and strengthening individual agency. Institutions operating under resource constraints may not enact all eight recommendations simultaneously. The model is therefore structured to communicate a hierarchy: foundational reforms must precede developmental ones if the latter are to be effective rather than ceremonial.

The recommendations collectively support the dissertation's core argument: that sustainable pracademic integration depends on structural, pedagogical, relational and cultural support that unfolds across time. Where institutions treat transition as a matter of individual resilience or operational compliance, the support paradox identified in the study will persist. Where they adopt these recommendations as an integrated reform agenda, they begin to replace ceremonial support with enacted developmental practice.

7.6 Theoretical contributions

This study advances the discourse on professional transitions in higher education through six distinct and analytically related theoretical contributions. These contributions are not independent propositions; they form a cumulative architecture. Sustained liminality names the temporal condition. Identity bilingualism refers to the desired yet difficult identity outcome within that condition. PPCK names the specialised pedagogical work required if practitioner expertise is to become academically generative. Cultural capital erosion and temporal debt name the mechanisms that obstruct this work. Organisational hypocrisy explains why institutional support often remains performative rather than material. The reframing of the pracademic as an institutional asset, combined with the insistence on contextual localisation, provides the normative direction for institutional redesign to begin.

7.6.1 Sustained liminality

Sustained liminality differs from Schlossberg's (2011) original formulation, in which liminality is a transitional phase expected to resolve; here it is reconceptualised as a structurally maintained condition. This study extends Transition Theory by reconceptualising liminality as a prolonged structural condition rather than a brief phase of discomfort that resolves once technical orientation is complete. In the context of South African private higher education, liminality was found to persist for up to 3 years, actively maintained by inadequate pedagogical support and a lack of identity validation. This finding is consistent with Breier et al. (2019), who documented cases in which academics without doctoral qualifications remained structurally liminal throughout their careers, never transitioning

from the status of practice-experienced outsiders to institutionally recognised academic insiders. The present study extends this insight to the specific pracademic context, where high teaching load, inadequate mentoring, limited research infrastructure and compliance-oriented induction combine to maintain rather than resolve liminal status.

7.6.2 Identity bilingualism

Identity bilingualism differs from Beijaard et al.'s (2004) account of identity negotiation, which theorises movement toward a single reconstructed professional self; here, both registers are retained and deployed selectively rather than resolved into one. The concept of identity bilingualism constitutes the most original and theoretically generative contribution of the research. Rather than viewing successful transition as a linear shedding of the practitioner identity in favour of an academic one, the study demonstrates that integration requires the developed capacity to move fluently between practitioner and academic registers in response to the specific demands of different institutional contexts. Yusoff (2025) provides empirical support for this concept, documenting how second-career academics who achieved integrative identity outcomes developed a contextual sensitivity that allowed them to recognise when professional narrative was most effective for student engagement, when academic framing was necessary for collegial credibility and when the deliberate combination of both registers best served curriculum design or scholarly reflection. Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) similarly identify dual fluency as the defining characteristic of the mature pracademic. Identity bilingualism directly refutes the deficit narrative that demands the erasure of the industry self as a condition of academic legitimacy.

7.6.3 Pracademic pedagogical content knowledge (PPCK)

PPCK differs from Shulman's (1987) PCK in its starting assumption: PCK presumes disciplinary knowledge built through graduate study, while PPCK addresses the conversion of tacit, experiential workplace knowledge. The study reconceptualises Shulman's (1987) PCK framework to account for the pracademic's distinctive starting point. Traditional PCK assumes a foundation of academic disciplinary knowledge acquired through formal graduate study. PPCK describes the specific developmental task of converting tacit, experiential workplace knowledge into explicit, scaffolded and theoretically grounded academic curricula. This conversion is not naturally occurring; it requires deliberate, mediated institutional intervention. Sarkar et al. (2024) confirm, in their systematic scoping review, that the transformation of expertise into pedagogical form is domain-specific and context-dependent and cannot be addressed through generic teacher training. PPCK fills a gap in the existing literature by naming the epistemological distinctiveness of the pracademic's starting point and specifying the institutional conditions under which this conversion can be supported.

7.6.4 Cultural capital erosion and temporal debt

Cultural capital erosion and temporal debt differ from Bourdieu's (1986) and Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) separate accounts in treating capital depreciation and workload strain as a single, mutually reinforcing spiral rather than two independent pressures. By layering Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital framework with Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), the study introduces two connected concepts: cultural capital erosion and the temporal debt spiral. Industry expertise has a strict half-life in the academic context. Where the institution does not provide protected time for converting industry capital into academic capital through pedagogical translation and research development, the initial value of the pracademic depreciates, leading to mutual dissatisfaction and potential early exit. These concepts link workload policy directly to the ontological survival of the transitioning practitioner.

7.6.5 Organisational hypocrisy in academic onboarding

This contribution differs from Brunsson's (1989) general organisational account by locating the mechanism specifically in academic onboarding documents, where it is made visible through the recruitment-versus-induction contradiction identified in Section 4.6.2. Applying Brunsson's (1989) theory to the specific context of higher education transitions, the study theorises the systemic policy-practice disjuncture in academic onboarding as a form of organisational hypocrisy. Institutions construct induction frameworks and development policies for ceremonial compliance and external legitimacy while enacting operational practices driven by neoliberal efficiency that directly undermine those policies. This contribution shifts the analytical lens from individual inadequacy to structural contradiction and provides an explanatory framework for the support paradox that recurred throughout the data.

7.6.6 The pracademic as institutional asset and contextual localisation

This differs from deficit-oriented accounts of second-career academics, which treat prior professional identity as a barrier to be overcome; here it is reframed as a developmental asset conditional on institutional support. The study challenges the prevailing deficit model of second-career academics by reframing the pracademic as a primary institutional asset whose value depends on developmental conditions rather than symbolic recruitment alone. An Ubuntu-informed critique grounds the argument for contextual localisation: Western transition models designed for research-intensive academic cultures are inadequate for the South African private higher education sector, which is defined by vocational relevance, relational pedagogy and a specific quality assurance architecture. Institutions must adapt their structural logics to accommodate the pracademic rather than demanding conformity to an academic archetype that does not serve their own institutional purposes.

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesised the empirical and theoretical insights developed throughout the dissertation into the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF), providing a contextually grounded framework for understanding and supporting the transition of industry professionals into academic roles within South African private higher education institutions. Building on the findings and theoretical interpretation presented in Chapters 5 and 6, the chapter demonstrated that pracademic transition is not a singular onboarding event or temporary adjustment process, but a sustained and institutionally mediated experience shaped by the interaction between identity reconstruction, pedagogical translation, relational belonging and structural conditions within the higher education environment.

The chapter responded directly to the research questions by demonstrating that transitioning pracademics experience significant identity disruption, epistemological strain and workload intensification as they attempt to negotiate legitimacy within unfamiliar academic systems (Schlossberg, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004). The analysis further established that institutional support structures frequently remain symbolically visible but operationally insufficient, producing a persistent disjuncture between formal developmental rhetoric and the lived realities of academic transition (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Brunsson, 1989). Through the application of Pedagogical Content Knowledge, the chapter also showed that the movement from industry expertise to academic teaching requires a demanding process of epistemic translation that institutions often underestimate or fail to support (Shulman, 1987) adequately.

The Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework proposed in this chapter conceptualises sustainable transition as dependent upon four interconnected domains: structural alignment, relational incorporation, pedagogical formation and professional sustainability. These domains position transition as a developmental, relational and institutionally embedded process rather than an individualised responsibility borne solely by the transitioning pracademic. The framework, therefore, shifts attention away from deficit understandings of industry entrants towards a more critical interpretation of the institutional architectures, organisational logics and support systems shaping pracademic incorporation within contemporary higher education environments.

The chapter further articulated the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions of the study. Conceptually, the dissertation advances understanding of pracademic transition as a condition of sustained liminality and hybrid identity negotiation within teaching-intensive higher education environments (Gourlay, 2011; Dickinson & Griffiths, 2023). Empirically, it provides contextually

grounded insight into the experiences of pracademics within South African PHEIs, an area underexplored in existing scholarship. In practice, the IPTF provides institutions with a theoretically informed framework for designing more sustainable, relationally responsive and pedagogically supportive transition structures for industry professionals entering academia.

The chapter demonstrates that meaningful pracademic transition cannot be achieved through generic induction practices or isolated support interventions alone. Rather, sustainable incorporation requires integrated institutional approaches capable of addressing the structural, pedagogical, relational and professional dimensions of academic transition simultaneously. The final chapter now concludes the dissertation by reflecting on the broader implications, limitations and future directions emerging from the study.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and future directions

8.1 Introduction

This dissertation examined what industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the Private Higher Education Institution were, how those experiences related to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI and why those experiences related to institutional structures and support systems in the way that they did. In doing so, the study addressed three interrelated research questions. The first asked about the experiences of industry professionals transitioning into academic roles at the PHEI. The second question asked how those experiences related to the PHEI's institutional structures and support systems. The third asked why those experiences related to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they did. These questions were addressed through an interpretivist qualitative case study drawing on PCK, Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Professional Identity Theory as the primary theoretical frameworks, with additional interpretive support from scholarship on liminality, cultural capital, organisational hypocrisy, institutional logics, Self-Determination Theory, Job Demands-Resources theory and Ubuntu-informed relationality (Beijaard et al., 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Brunsson, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011; Shulman, 1986, 1987).

Across the dissertation, the central argument has been that the transition from industry to academia is not a simple occupational shift, nor a technical onboarding problem. It is a complex developmental process in which professional identity, pedagogical competence, institutional belonging, workload, temporal demands and scholarly expectations converge. Participants entered the institution with substantial professional credibility and strong motivations to contribute to student development, curriculum relevance and social impact. These strengths did not automatically translate into confidence, legitimacy or pedagogical fluency in academic spaces. Instead, the transition often involved an expert-to-novice reversal, identity disruption, expectancy violations regarding workload and autonomy and a prolonged effort to reconcile prior professional expertise with the demands of academic teaching and institutional performance.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 showed that this transition was shaped through nine interrelated themes: Evolution of Professional Identity in Transition; Transition Motivations and Career Change Drivers; Institutional Support Structures and Gaps; Pedagogical Knowledge Development and Alignment; Technology Integration and Digital Transformation; Student Relationships and Engagement Strategies; Innovation and Change Management Capabilities; Time Management and Work-Life Integration; and Research and Scholarship Development. Transition Motivations and Career Change Drivers emerged as the most heavily coded theme, indicating that motivation, aspiration and subsequent expectancy violations were central rather than peripheral features of

participants' transition trajectories. Chapters 6 and 7 then interpreted these findings through a stronger theoretical lens, showing that what initially appeared to be individual adjustment difficulties were more accurately understood as structurally mediated experiences shaped by workload regimes, uneven support, institutional logics and the gap between formal policy rhetoric and lived organisational practice (Bourdieu, 1986; Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

This concluding chapter does not repeat the analytical work of Chapters 6 and 7. Rather, it consolidates the dissertation by drawing out the implications of the study for policy, practice and professional development; reflecting on the methodological and epistemological conditions of the research; restating the study's contribution in bounded and defensible terms; and outlining a future research agenda capable of extending, testing and refining the arguments advanced here. In doing so, the chapter seeks to close the dissertation in a way that is both analytically proportionate and aligned with expectations of conceptual clarity, critical reflexivity and defensible scholarly contribution.

8.2 Revisiting the Study and Research Questions

This dissertation set out to explore the transition experiences of industry professionals entering academic roles within a South African private higher education institution. The study was guided by the recognition that, although pracademics are increasingly central to contemporary higher education systems, particularly within teaching-intensive and employability-oriented institutions, relatively little research has examined how these professionals experience the transition from industry to academia in the South African PHEI context. The study therefore, sought to understand how participants navigated identity reconstruction, pedagogical adaptation, institutional incorporation and the pursuit of academic legitimacy within environments simultaneously shaped by market responsiveness, regulatory accountability and educational expectations.

The findings demonstrated that pracademic transition is not experienced as a straightforward occupational adjustment or technical onboarding process. The transition emerged as a prolonged, multidimensional and institutionally mediated experience characterised by identity disruption, pedagogical uncertainty, relational negotiation and workload intensification. Participants consistently described moving from environments in which professional authority and expertise were well established into academic contexts governed by unfamiliar symbolic hierarchies, pedagogical expectations and institutional norms. Transition into academia, therefore, involved not only learning new professional practices, but also reconstructing legitimacy and belonging within a fundamentally different organisational and epistemological environment (Beijaard et al., 2004; Schlossberg, 2011).

In relation to the first research question, the study demonstrated that participants experienced the transition into academia through sustained liminality, epistemological strain and identity renegotiation. Professional expertise remained valuable, however, it did not automatically translate into pedagogical legitimacy or institutional recognition. Participants were required to transform tacit industry knowledge into explicit teaching practice while simultaneously adapting to academic assessment systems, digital technologies and diverse student learning needs (Shulman, 1987; Gourlay, 2011). The transition, therefore, involved a complex process of epistemic translation through which professionals relearned their expertise from a pedagogical rather than workplace performance perspective.

The second research question focused on the relationship between individual transition experiences and institutional structures. The findings revealed a persistent disjuncture between formal institutional support and the operational realities participants encountered. Although institutions projected developmental commitment through induction programmes, mentorship structures and staff development initiatives, participants frequently experienced these systems as procedurally visible but practically insufficient (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meaningful support emerged less through formal institutional architectures and more through informal collegial relationships, peer guidance and relational forms of belonging consistent with Ubuntu-informed understandings of community and recognition (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011).

The third research question examined the broader institutional and structural dynamics shaping pracademic transition within the PHEI environment. The study demonstrated that many of the challenges experienced by participants were not isolated organisational shortcomings but reflected deeper structural tensions associated with neoliberal higher education systems, workload intensification, regulatory accountability and teaching-intensive institutional models (Raaper, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024). Participants were expected to achieve pedagogical competence, institutional compliance and relational incorporation simultaneously, often under conditions of severe temporal compression and limited developmental support. The findings, therefore, shifted analytical attention away from deficit understandings of the transitioning practitioner towards a more critical interpretation of the institutional conditions shaping pracademic incorporation.

The study demonstrated that the interaction between identity reconstruction, pedagogical formation, institutional mediation and relational belonging fundamentally shapes pracademic transition. Becoming academic emerged not as a singular event marked by formal appointment, but as an uneven and ongoing process of negotiating legitimacy within complex institutional environments. These insights formed the basis for the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework developed in Chapter

7 and provide an important foundation for rethinking how contemporary higher education institutions support professionals entering academic work.

8.3 Broader Higher Education and Sectoral Implications

The implications of this study operate across three interrelated levels: the higher education sector, the institution and the individual. This layered approach reflects the study's core argument that pracademic transition is not produced by personal motivation alone, nor resolved by isolated institutional interventions. It is shaped by the interaction among policy signals, organisational practices and the strategies individuals use to build competence, legitimacy and belonging. The findings therefore, point not to a single solution but to a set of implications worth investigating, adapting and contextualising.

8.3.1 Higher education sector policy implications

At the sector level, the study points to the need for closer scrutiny of how higher education policy frameworks recognise, evaluate and support industry professionals entering academic roles. Contemporary higher education policy already places considerable emphasis on employability, teaching quality, responsiveness and accountability, particularly within systems influenced by market-oriented reform and quality assurance regimes (CHE, 2024a; DHET, 2021; Raaper, 2023). The findings suggest that these aspirations are not always accompanied by a sufficiently differentiated understanding of the labour required to translate professional expertise into effective academic practice.

One implication concerns quality assurance and programme accreditation. The study indicates that industry experience contributes meaningfully to curriculum relevance, authenticity of examples, student engagement and the strengthening of links between learning and professional practice. However, sector frameworks do not always make sufficiently explicit how such expertise should be recognised alongside more conventional indicators of academic preparedness. This does not mean that professional experience should replace pedagogical development or scholarly capability. Rather, it suggests that quality frameworks should more clearly acknowledge that academically effective teaching in professionally oriented programmes may draw on multiple forms of expertise, provided that institutions also create conditions for those forms of expertise to be pedagogically developed and mediated.

A second implication concerns the development of teaching and academic professionalisation. Much academic development work remains structured around assumptions of a relatively standard academic pathway. Participants' accounts suggest that such assumptions do not always serve staff entering from industry, whose development needs frequently include not only generic induction but also structured

support in curriculum design, assessment literacy, digital pedagogy, feedback practice and the interpretation of academic norms. Scholarship on professional transition similarly suggests that entry into academia is not simply about occupying a role, but about learning the tacit rules, symbolic expectations and pedagogical routines of a new field (Beijaard et al., 2004; Myers et al., 2025). Sector conversations about academic development may therefore need to consider more carefully how differentiated pathways can be supported without fragmenting standards.

A third implication relates to academic career pathways and promotion frameworks. The study suggests that the value of industry-informed teaching may be institutionally affirmed at the recruitment stage while becoming less visible in promotion and performance systems that privilege conventional academic outputs. This tension has consequences for motivation, legitimacy and retention. The implication is not that research expectations should be abandoned, but that the sector may need to explore more balanced models through which teaching, curriculum innovation, professional engagement and scholarship are recognised in ways that better reflect the diversity of academic roles, especially within professionally oriented institutions.

A fourth implication concerns transformation, equity and inclusion. In the South African context, these concerns cannot be separated from questions of staff composition, epistemic legitimacy and educational access. Industry professionals may bring diverse experiences that enrich academic cultures and expand students' exposure to different pathways into professional life. The study also shows that inclusion is not secured merely by recruitment. Without adequate support, pracademics may be incorporated instrumentally while remaining structurally marginal. Policy conversations about transformation may therefore benefit from examining not only who enters academic spaces, but also how differently positioned entrants are enabled to participate, develop and remain.

8.3.1.1 The pracademic contribution to quality teaching: evidence from the study

The empirical findings support the view that practitioner expertise can strengthen teaching quality, especially in institutions and programmes that emphasise vocational relevance. Participants consistently described drawing on professional experience to make disciplinary knowledge concrete, to illustrate abstract concepts through real-world cases and to help students understand the expectations of contemporary workplaces. This contribution matters because it connects teaching to students' future professional contexts in ways that may enhance relevance, motivation and applied understanding.

At the same time, the study cautions against romanticising professional experience as though it were pedagogically self-sufficient. Participants' accounts showed that the value of their industry expertise depended on their capacity to translate it into teachable form. That translation was often difficult and

time-consuming. It involved deciding what to simplify, what to foreground, how to sequence knowledge, how to assess learning and how to respond to students with diverse levels of readiness. This aligns with Shulman's argument that content expertise alone is not enough; what matters educationally is the transformation of knowledge into forms accessible to learners (Shulman, 1986, 1987). The contribution of pracademics to quality teaching, therefore, lies not in expertise alone, but in expertise that has been pedagogically mediated.

8.3.1.2 Cross-cutting policy synthesis: towards a national pracademic development framework

One of the more far-reaching implications of the study is the possibility that the transition of industry professionals into academia may warrant more coherent sector attention than it currently receives. This should not be framed as a definitive policy prescription. Further comparative, longitudinal and implementation research would be required before any national model could be justified. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the challenges participants faced were neither wholly idiosyncratic nor reducible to individual inadequacy. They reflected recurring tensions between institutional expectations, uneven support and the under-recognition of transition as a developmental process.

For this reason, the idea of a broader pracademic development framework is best understood at this stage as an implication worth investigating rather than as a settled recommendation. Such a framework could potentially articulate common principles for differentiated induction, pedagogical support, mentoring, workload design and career development for staff entering from professional practice. Its value would lie less in standardisation for its own sake than in creating a shared basis for institutional reflection and minimum developmental provision. Whether such an approach is feasible, desirable or adaptable across different institutional types remains an empirical question for future research.

8.3.2 Institutional practice implications

If the policy implications identify broad structural questions, the institutional implications speak more directly to the organisational conditions under which pracademic transition becomes either unnecessarily difficult or more productively scaffolded. The study suggests that many of the most consequential features of transition are shaped at this level: how recruitment is framed, how induction is sequenced, how workload is allocated, how teaching is supported, how performance is interpreted and how belonging is cultivated.

The first implication concerns recruitment and onboarding. Participants' experiences suggest that institutions should be clearer from the outset about what academic work entails, what new staff are expected to learn and what forms of support will and will not be available. Where recruitment

messaging emphasises professional relevance but underplays the pedagogical, administrative and scholarly demands of academic work, entrants may arrive with expectations that are difficult to sustain. More realistic pre-entry socialisation would not discourage strong candidates. Rather, it could help align expectations and reduce the shock of role transition.

The second implication concerns induction. The findings indicate that front-loaded orientation is insufficient for a transition that unfolds over months and, in some cases, years. Participants needed support at entry, but also guidance once initial uncertainty gave way to more complex pedagogical, relational and performance-related pressures. Institutions may therefore need to reconsider induction as a phased process rather than a once-off event. This implication aligns with transition scholarship, which treats adjustment as temporally dynamic rather than administratively complete upon entry (Schlossberg, 2011). It also resonates with the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework (IPTF), which maps transition across four temporal phases: Pre-Entry, Induction, Development and Integration and five support domains: Identity and Affective, Pedagogical and Cognitive, Relational and Community, Structural and Resource and Contextual and Cultural.

The third implication concerns workload and time protection. A recurring theme in the study was the tension between developmental need and immediate performance demand. Participants were often expected to learn to teach, understand systems, design materials, manage students and, in some cases, begin building research capacity, all under substantial time pressure. This pattern helps explain why transition frequently felt exhausting and precarious. It also helps explain the expectancy violations reported by participants who had anticipated better work-life balance but instead encountered more diffuse and cognitively unbounded forms of labour. Institutions may therefore need to consider whether developmental time is being treated as an optional luxury rather than as a condition for quality. Protected time for preparation, observation, mentoring and reflection may not remove transition difficulty, but it can reduce preventable forms of overload.

The fourth implication concerns mentorship and community. The findings showed that informal support networks were often significant, but also uneven and dependent on chance. Where colleagues were generous and approachable, participants navigated challenges more successfully. Where support was absent or inconsistent, individuals relied heavily on self-teaching, trial and error and what some participants experienced as a sink-or-swim logic. This suggests that institutions should not assume that collegiality alone will produce effective developmental support. More intentional mentoring structures, peer observation, discipline-specific dialogue and communities of practice may help translate goodwill into dependable support. In this respect, an Ubuntu-informed orientation is useful, not as a rhetorical flourish, but as a reminder that professional formation is relational and that belonging is built through mutual recognition and shared responsibility (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011).

The fifth implication concerns pedagogical development. Participants' accounts confirm that industry expertise does not automatically yield the capacity to teach effectively in higher education. Institutions that appoint practitioners to strengthen programme relevance should therefore treat pedagogical development as integral to, rather than separate from, the value those appointments are meant to bring. This includes support in assessment literacy, curriculum design, student engagement, feedback practice, digital pedagogy and the adaptation of workplace examples into academically robust learning experiences. The concept of PPCK developed in this study is particularly useful here because it captures the specialised work of translating tacit, context-rich professional knowledge into structured educational form. Institutional support frameworks that take PPCK seriously would sequence pedagogical development around the specific translation challenge, rather than providing generic teaching skills training that does not address the epistemological starting point of practice-based expertise.

A sixth implication concerns performance management and career development. The study suggests that misalignment between institutional rhetoric and evaluative practice can undermine transition. When staff are told that their professional experience matters but are assessed primarily against norms for which they have had limited developmental preparation, a credibility gap emerges. This is one of the areas in which organisational hypocrisy in academic onboarding becomes analytically significant. Institutions may publicly value support, teaching quality and professional relevance, while operationally reproducing performance logics that prioritise immediacy, compliance and efficiency (Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutions may therefore need to review how expectations are staged, how appraisal systems account for transition and how developmental rather than purely compliance-oriented performance conversations can be conducted.

A final implication concerns research capability development. Many participants entered academia on the strength of professional expertise rather than developed research identities. Academic careers, especially over the longer term, require some engagement with scholarship. The implication is not that every pracademic must become a traditional research-intensive academic. It is that institutions should consider how research can be introduced as part of a developmental trajectory rather than as a sudden additional demand layered onto teaching-heavy workloads. Support in writing, supervision, scholarship of teaching and learning and manageable entry points into scholarly participation may be especially valuable if institutions wish to reduce the research marginalisation identified in the findings.

Dunn et al. (2025) provide the most recent and comprehensive empirical support for the institutional practice implications outlined in this section, reporting that second-career academics who experienced well-designed and substantively implemented institutional support across the first three years of

appointment demonstrated suggestively stronger measures of pedagogical confidence, scholarly engagement and professional identity integration than their peers who received only generic or compliance-oriented induction. Their findings confirm that the quality of institutional support is not incidental to the success of second-career academic transition; it is one of the strongest predictors of whether the distinctive educational contribution that pracademic appointments are intended to deliver is actually realised. For South African PHEIs, which stake significant institutional credibility in the employability relevance of practitioner-academics, failing to invest adequately in the conditions for transition success is not merely a staff development failure; it is a strategic risk to the educational quality and institutional reputation on which student recruitment and regulatory standing depend.

Myers et al. (2025) complement this argument by showing that institutional investment in the conditions for transition success generates returns that extend beyond the individual pracademic to the institution as a whole. Institutions that successfully support the development of integrated pracademic identities benefit from more pedagogically confident and innovative teaching, more authentic curriculum-industry connections, better student engagement outcomes and stronger professional networks that can be mobilised for curriculum relevance, industry partnerships and graduate employability. The institutional case for investing in pracademic transition is therefore not primarily altruistic; it is strategically rational, because the educational and reputational dividends of effective transition support outweigh the costs of the investment required to achieve them.

8.3.3 Individual professional development implications

Although the study emphasises organisational conditions, it also points to several implications for individuals navigating the transition into academia. These are not offered as a way of shifting responsibility from institutions to newcomers. Rather, they acknowledge that while transition is structurally shaped, individuals still make strategic choices about learning, support-seeking and self-positioning.

A first implication concerns identity work. Participants' experiences suggest that transition is eased when individuals accept that prior professional competence and current academic novicehood can coexist without negating one another. This is one reason why the concept of identity bilingualism remains useful. It captures the possibility of learning the languages, norms and practices of academia without disavowing the value of prior professional formation. For individuals, this means that transition may be more sustainable when approached not as the abandonment of one identity in favour of another, but as the gradual negotiation of a more complex professional self.

A second implication concerns pedagogical learning. New academics entering from industry may benefit from treating teaching as a field of expertise in its own right rather than as an extension of

disciplinary knowledge or workplace experience. Participants who adopted a learning orientation towards teaching, sought feedback, observed colleagues and reflected on student responses appeared better able to develop confidence over time. This aligns with wider scholarship suggesting that becoming an academic teacher involves more than the possession of content; it requires deliberate engagement with pedagogy, assessment and student learning (Shulman, 1987).

A third implication concerns networks and support utilisation. The findings suggest that transition can become isolating, leading individuals to assume that uncertainty should be managed privately. Those who sought collegial advice, informal mentoring and peer support often found more manageable routes through difficulty. New pracademics may therefore benefit from actively cultivating support relationships rather than waiting for all structures to be formally put in place.

A fourth implication concerns boundary management and sustainability. Participants' accounts showed that the moral commitment many brought to teaching could slide into unsustainable overwork when institutional demands were unclear or excessive. Individuals may therefore need to develop strategies for pacing, prioritisation and time protection, especially during the early stages of transition. This is not simply a matter of personal resilience. It is part of learning how to sustain oneself in an environment whose demands can expand without an obvious limit. The concepts of Cultural Capital Erosion and Temporal Debt developed in Chapter 7 are useful here because they show how time pressures not only exhaust individuals but also limit the conversion of professional expertise into durable academic value.

A final implication concerns career ownership. Transition into academia may be easier to navigate when individuals develop a clearer sense of how they wish to position themselves over time: as teaching-focused academics, as educators who maintain professional links, as scholar-practitioners or as some combination thereof. While institutions shape the opportunities available, individuals who reflect strategically on their developmental direction may be better placed to make use of those opportunities as they emerge.

Schlossberg (2011) identifies the development of intentional strategies as one of the most significant resources available to individuals navigating professional transition, noting that those who reflect deliberately on their coping behaviours and adapt them in response to feedback are meaningly more likely to achieve sustainable adjustment than those who rely on habitual or reactive responses. For pracademics, the cultivation of deliberate strategic awareness about how to navigate the demands of academic transition is not a supplementary skill; it is a core developmental competency that institutions can actively support through structured reflection, mentoring conversations and communities of practice that provide both emotional sustenance and strategic learning. Myers et al.

(2025) confirm that practitioners who reported access to structured opportunities for deliberate strategic reflection were more likely to report sustained motivational engagement and progressive identity consolidation than those for whom reflection remained an entirely private, unstructured activity. The implication is that while individual agency is genuinely imperative in navigating transition, the expression of that agency depends on institutional conditions that either enable or constrain the reflective practices through which strategic self-awareness develops.

8.4 Reflexive and Methodological Reflections

This dissertation was grounded within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm that positioned knowledge as socially constructed, contextually situated and relationally interpreted rather than objectively discovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2000). The methodological and reflexive dimensions of the study were therefore not treated as peripheral technical considerations, but as central to how meaning was generated, interpreted and represented throughout the research process. The study required ongoing engagement with questions of interpretation, positionality, representation and knowledge production, particularly given the researcher's embeddedness within the higher education environment under investigation and the broader South African context within which the study was situated.

8.4.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Interpretive Inquiry

The study employed RTA as the primary analytical approach because of its capacity to facilitate deep interpretive engagement with participants' lived experiences while recognising the active role of the researcher in knowledge construction (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Rather than treating themes as objective categories waiting to be discovered within the data, the analysis understood themes as interpretive constructions generated through sustained interaction among participant narratives, theoretical frameworks and the researcher's interpretation.

This methodological orientation proved particularly valuable for examining pracademic transition, as the phenomenon under investigation involved complex and overlapping dimensions of identity, pedagogy, institutional culture and relational belonging. RTA enabled the study to move beyond surface-level description towards the identification of deeper structural patterns, contradictions and symbolic tensions shaping participants' experiences. The iterative nature of the analysis further allowed themes to evolve gradually through repeated engagement with the dataset, supporting richer conceptual integration across the findings and discussion chapters.

RTA aligned closely with the interpretivist orientation of the dissertation by acknowledging that analysis is always theoretically informed, contextually mediated and shaped by the researcher's interpretive positioning. The analytical process, therefore, involved continual reflexive engagement with assumptions, interpretations and emerging conceptual insights rather than attempts to achieve detached objectivity or mechanical coding neutrality (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

8.4.2 Researcher Positionality and Insider Interpretation

The researcher's positionality formed an essential dimension of the interpretive process. As a senior academic leader within the broader PHEI environment, the researcher possessed prior familiarity with many of the institutional structures, pedagogical pressures and organisational dynamics discussed by participants. This insider positioning created both opportunities and methodological complexities within the study.

On the one hand, insider status enhanced contextual sensitivity. It facilitated a subtle interpretation of institutional language, academic practices and transition experiences that may have been less visible to an external researcher (Berger, 2015). Participants frequently engaged openly with the researcher regarding the emotional, pedagogical and institutional challenges associated with transition, partly because the researcher was familiar with the broader academic environment in which those experiences occurred. This familiarity supported deeper interpretive engagement and strengthened the researcher's ability to recognise subtle institutional meanings and relational dynamics embedded within participant narratives.

Insider positioning required sustained reflexive awareness regarding the potential influence of prior assumptions, professional experience and institutional proximity on interpretation. Reflexivity, therefore, became an ongoing methodological commitment throughout the study rather than a singular procedural statement. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting interpretive decisions, emotional responses, analytical uncertainties and evolving conceptual understandings across the research process (Dodgson, 2019). Peer debriefing, iterative coding and sustained engagement with participant voice were further used to strengthen interpretive rigour and minimise the risk of over-identification or premature analytical closure.

Rather than attempting an artificial performance of value neutrality, the study recognised positionality as an inevitable and potentially productive dimension of interpretive qualitative inquiry. The aim was therefore not to eliminate subjectivity, but to engage reflexively and transparently with how meaning was co-constructed throughout the research process.

8.4.3 Knowledge Production in Southern Contexts

The study also required reflexive consideration of the politics of knowledge production within Global South higher education contexts. Much of the existing scholarship on academic transition, professional identity and university socialisation remains heavily shaped by Euro-American public university settings, often assuming institutional conditions, academic trajectories and organisational cultures that differ substantially from those characterising South African private higher education environments (Hlatshwayo & Moloi, 2024).

Positioning the study within a South African PHEI context, therefore, carried epistemological significance beyond simple geographic location. The dissertation sought not simply to apply established Northern theories to a local setting, but to interpret pracademic transition through the realities of teaching-intensive, market-responsive and resource-constrained higher education environments characteristic of many Global South contexts. In this regard, the inclusion of Ubuntu within the integrated theoretical framework was especially vital because it introduced relational and ethical dimensions of institutional life that are often marginal within more individualised Western accounts of professional transition (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011).

The study, therefore, contributes to broader efforts to diversify higher education scholarship by foregrounding contextually situated forms of academic labour, institutional experience and identity negotiation that remain underrepresented in the dominant higher education literature. This does not imply the rejection of established theoretical frameworks, but rather their contextual reinterpretation and integration within Southern institutional realities.

8.4.4 Ethical Representation and Participant Voice

Ethical representation extended beyond formal procedural ethics approval and informed consent processes. Because the study explored experiences of vulnerability, uncertainty, institutional strain and identity disruption, ethical responsibility also involved careful consideration of how participant voices were interpreted, organised and represented throughout the dissertation.

The study sought to preserve the complexity, nuance and emotional texture of participant experiences while avoiding reductionist or extractive representation. Participant quotations were therefore incorporated not simply as illustrative examples, but as valuable interpretive anchors through which the relational, emotional and institutional dimensions of transition could remain visible within the analysis. Particular care was taken to ensure that participants were not represented as deficient, resistant or individually responsible for the structural tensions identified throughout the study.

Instead, the analysis consistently situated participant experiences within the broader institutional, pedagogical and organisational conditions shaping pracademic transition.

The study recognised that participant narratives do not exist independently of interpretation. The process of selecting, organising and theorising participant accounts inevitably involved researcher mediation. Ethical representation, therefore, required ongoing reflexive awareness of whose voices were amplified, how experiences were framed and how institutional critique was balanced against participant complexity and contextual nuance. In this sense, ethical qualitative inquiry involved not only protecting participants' confidentiality but also engaging responsibly with the interpretive power that transforms lived experience into scholarly knowledge.

8.5 Contributions of the study

The contribution of this dissertation should be stated carefully. It does not provide a universal theory of pracademic transition, nor does it claim that the framework developed here can simply be applied across all higher education contexts without modification. Its value lies instead in offering a conceptually informed, empirically grounded and contextually specific account of how industry professionals transition into academic roles within a South African private higher education institution and in showing why that transition is more complex than institutional discourse sometimes assumes.

8.5.1 Empirical contributions: documenting pracademic experiences

Empirically, the dissertation contributes one of the first in-depth qualitative accounts of pracademic transition within a South African private higher education context. It brings analytical visibility to an increasingly significant group of academics whose professional backgrounds are central to institutional missions of employability, applied learning and curricular relevance, but whose developmental experiences have often been taken for granted.

The findings show that transition is not adequately understood as a narrow matter of induction or technical skill acquisition. It is a layered process in which identity, pedagogy, legitimacy, motivation, time, digital adjustment and institutional recognition interact. By documenting these interactions across nine themes, the study extends empirical understanding of what pracademic transition actually entails in lived and organisational terms. It also shows that industry expertise retains clear educational value while not functioning as an automatic substitute for pedagogical knowledge, institutional fluency or scholarly confidence. This is an important corrective to assumptions that practice expertise alone is sufficient preparation for academic work.

This empirical contribution is significant for several reasons. First, it provides qualitative specificity to a pattern of transition challenges that has been described in more general terms in the international

literature, showing how the structural features of the South African PHEI context, including its market orientation, quality assurance architecture and staffing model, interact with the personal and professional characteristics of transitioning practitioners to produce specific forms of difficulty and specific coping strategies. Second, it documents the experiences of a group of professionals whose transition has been largely invisible in South African educational research, contributing a body of participant voice that can inform institutional policy and practice in ways that generic international literature cannot. Third, by focusing on a single institutional site in sufficient depth to trace how institutional conditions shape individual experiences, the study demonstrates the value of case study methodology as a vehicle for generating contextually anchored knowledge about complex educational phenomena.

Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that the empirical contribution of qualitative case study research is best evaluated in terms of its thick description: the richness and contextual specificity with which it renders the phenomenon under study intelligible to readers in other settings. The present study's detailed account of how fourteen industry professionals navigated the transition into academic roles at a South African PHEI provides precisely this kind of thick description, enabling readers in similar institutional contexts to assess the transferability of the findings to their own situations and to draw practical and theoretical insights that are grounded in a contextually specific but analytically generalisable account of the transition experience.

8.5.2 Theoretical contributions: advancing scholarly understanding

Theoretically, the dissertation contributes by showing that no single framework adequately explains the transition from industry to academia. The study therefore brought Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Professional Identity Theory and PCK into conversation with additional concepts such as liminality, cultural capital, organisational hypocrisy, institutional logics, Self-Determination Theory, Job Demands-Resources theory and Ubuntu. The purpose of this integration was not theoretical excess, but explanatory adequacy (Beijaard et al., 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Brunsson, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011; Shulman, 1986, 1987).

Within that broader architecture, six more focused contributions remain especially significant. The first is the argument that pracademic transition is often better understood as Sustained Liminality than as a short passage from one stable role to another. The second is the conceptualisation of Identity Bilingualism as a way of naming the dual work of learning academic norms while retaining the value of professional identity. The third is the extension of PCK into a specifically pracademic register through PPCK, capturing the work of translating tacit, applied expertise into structured learning. The fourth is the identification of Cultural Capital Erosion and Temporal Debt as a way of explaining how industry expertise can lose value when institutions fail to create time and support for its educational

conversion. The fifth is the use of Organisational Hypocrisy in Academic Onboarding to explain the gap between supportive rhetoric and uneven material support. The sixth is the reframing of The Pracademic as Institutional Asset, challenging deficit-oriented assumptions and insisting that the value of practitioner appointments depends on developmental conditions rather than symbolic recruitment alone.

These contributions should be understood as propositions that sharpen scholarly discussion, not as closed concepts immune to revision. Their value lies in how they help name recurring patterns in the data and connect this study to wider debates about transition, identity, academic labour and institutional change.

The integration of these multiple theoretical frameworks does not produce theoretical incoherence; it reflects the genuine complexity of the phenomenon under study. Pracademic transition is simultaneously a process of individual adjustment, a pedagogical transformation, a negotiation of institutional recognition and a relational and ethical challenge that cannot be reduced to any single explanatory register. Each of the frameworks mobilised in this study addresses a different dimension of this complexity and the strength of the theoretical contribution lies in the integrated architecture's capacity to hold all these dimensions in view simultaneously rather than treating each in isolation. Moffitt and Bligh (2024) and Myers et al. (2025) similarly argue that the theoretical underdevelopment of the pracademic literature lies precisely in its tendency to address these dimensions separately, with identity studies neglecting pedagogy, pedagogical studies neglecting institutional structure and structural studies neglecting the lived experiential dimensions of transition. The present study's theoretical contribution is therefore not only the generation of six specific conceptual contributions but the demonstration that a genuinely multidimensional theoretical architecture can produce more analytically powerful insights into pracademic transition than any single-framework approach.

Placed against the wider literature, these contributions help bridge conversations that are often treated separately. Research on transition has tended to focus on adaptation, role change or early-career socialisation. Research on professional identity has often explored tensions of legitimacy and belonging. Research on pedagogy has typically foregrounded teaching expertise without always attending to how professional knowledge is pedagogically converted. Institutional theory, meanwhile, has traced contradictions between organisational rhetoric and practice, but has less often been applied to the onboarding of industry entrants into academic work (Beijaard et al., 2004; Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

By bringing these strands together, the dissertation contributes not by displacing existing scholarship but by clarifying a specific intersection within it. It suggests that pracademic transition sits at the junction of identity reconstruction, pedagogical translation and institutional mediation and that wider structural conditions shape each. In this sense, the study offers a more integrated language for analysing a transition that has often been described in partial terms.

Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) provide a useful anchor for contextualising these theoretical contributions within the broader development of pracademic scholarship. Their definitional and conceptual work on the pracademic as a professional with dual identities provides the foundation on which the present study builds and the theoretical contributions summarised above can be read as extensions and deepenings of their conceptual framework rather than departures from it. Where Dickinson and Griffiths (2023) establish the basic conceptual language of dual professional positioning, the present study provides a detailed empirical and theoretical account of how that dual positioning is actually lived, negotiated and institutionally shaped in the specific context of South African private higher education. The six theoretical contributions are therefore not simply academic propositions advanced in abstract; they are empirically grounded specifications of a broader conceptual framework whose explanatory potential the present study has sought to realise in a contextually specific and analytically rigorous way.

8.5.3 Practical contributions: enabling institutional improvement

The study's principal practical contribution is the Integrated Pracademic Transition Framework. The IPTF offers a structured way of thinking about transition across four temporal phases and five support domains. Its value lies not in prescribing a single institutional solution, but in helping institutions diagnose where support is fragmented, mistimed or absent. It directs attention to the fact that transition needs differ before entry, during induction, during developmental consolidation and in longer-term integration and that these needs are not only pedagogical but also affective, relational, structural and contextual.

The framework is accompanied by the eight-recommendation model developed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 does not repeat those recommendations in detail. Instead, it underscores their practical significance as an integrated response to the patterns identified in the data. Their collective force lies in showing that isolated interventions are unlikely to be sufficient. Institutions may need more coherent approaches that link recruitment, induction, mentoring, workload, pedagogical development, industry currency, performance management and reflective agency.

8.5.4 Transformative contributions: advancing educational justice

The dissertation also makes a broader transformative contribution by foregrounding questions of epistemic recognition, inclusion and educational justice. Industry professionals entering academia bring forms of knowledge that are often rhetorically valued but unevenly institutionalised. By making their transition visible as a site of struggle and possibility, the study encourages a more inclusive understanding of who can become an academic and what kinds of expertise matter in higher education.

This contribution should not be overstated. The dissertation does not claim to resolve questions of transformation or to provide a complete decolonial model of academic formation. What it does offer is an empirically grounded basis for arguing that the support of pracademics is not only an operational matter, but also part of wider concerns about legitimacy, representation and the democratisation of academic space. In this sense, its transformative significance lies in making visible a category of academic workers whose role in widening the forms of knowledge present within higher education deserves more serious attention.

Within South Africa, the relationship between pracademic integration and transformation warrants explicit recognition. Transformation is not exhausted by demographic change or by policy declarations alone. It also concerns the extent to which institutions can recognise, support and sustain diverse routes into academic life. Industry entrants may contribute to this project by bringing different professional histories, forms of social knowledge and modes of engagement with students. Yet that contribution remains conditional. If institutions recruit for diversity of experience while evaluating and supporting only narrow forms of academic legitimacy, transformation remains incomplete. The study, therefore, makes a modest but significant contribution by connecting pracademic support to the broader challenge of building more inclusive and credible institutional cultures.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides significant theoretical, empirical and contextual insight into pracademic transition within South African private higher education, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations do not invalidate the dissertation's findings but rather establish the contextual and methodological boundaries within which the study should be interpreted.

The first limitation concerns the single-site case study design. The research was conducted within one South African PHEI and therefore reflects the organisational culture, operational structures and institutional conditions specific to that context. Although the study generated substantial contextual depth and interpretive richness, the findings cannot be assumed to be universally representative of all private higher education institutions, public universities or international higher education systems.

Institutional conditions across the higher education sector remain highly differentiated in terms of governance structures, teaching intensities, resourcing models, research expectations and organisational cultures. The study therefore prioritised analytical and conceptual transferability over statistical generalisability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Findings that are closely tied to the specific policies, staffing model and market position of this PHEI, for example particular workload figures and the precise architecture of the AOP, should be read as institution-specific. Findings that recur across the transition literature reviewed in Chapter 2, such as identity disruption and the expert-to-novice reversal, are more plausibly transferable, though this cannot be confirmed without comparative data. The study did not include a public university comparator, so no direct claim is made about how these dynamics differ between private and public institutions; that comparison is identified in Section 8.7.2 as a priority for future research. The findings should consequently be understood as contextually grounded insights into the dynamics of pracademic transition within a bounded institutional environment rather than universally applicable conclusions concerning all industry professionals entering academia.

A second limitation concerns the temporal scope of the study. The research captured participants' transition experiences at a particular moment within their professional trajectories and institutional contexts. Pracademic transition, however, is an evolving, longitudinal process that may shift significantly over time as individuals accumulate pedagogical experience, institutional familiarity, scholarly confidence and professional legitimacy. The study was therefore unable to examine how participants' identities, coping strategies, research trajectories or institutional relationships may continue to evolve across longer academic careers. Some participants may eventually achieve greater identity consolidation and institutional incorporation, while others may leave academia altogether. Because accounts were gathered retrospectively, participants' descriptions of their early transition may have been shaped by how they have since settled into, or continued to struggle with, the academic role, rather than offering an unmediated record of that period. Longitudinal research following pracademics over extended periods, from the point of appointment onward, would therefore provide valuable additional insight into how transition experiences develop, stabilise or fragment across time, and would reduce the retrospective distortion inherent in the present design.

The interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry itself also limits the study. The findings emerged through RTA grounded in participants' narratives and the researchers' interpretations, rather than through claims to objective neutrality or universal truth (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As such, the themes and theoretical interpretations developed throughout the dissertation are inevitably shaped by the researcher's interpretive lens, the relational dynamics of the interviews and the theoretical frameworks

guiding the analysis. While extensive reflexive practices, iterative coding, peer engagement and methodological transparency were used to strengthen interpretive rigour, alternative researchers may potentially emphasise different dimensions of the dataset or generate alternative conceptual interpretations from the same material. The study, therefore, makes no claim to singular or exhaustive interpretive authority.

Relatedly, the researcher's positionality as a senior academic leader within the broader PHEI environment introduced both methodological strengths and limitations. Insider positioning enhanced contextual sensitivity and facilitated an understanding of institutional language, organisational dynamics and pedagogical pressures that may have been less visible to an external researcher (Berger, 2015). At the same time, institutional familiarity created the possibility of interpretive over-identification, selective emphasis or unconscious assumptions shaping aspects of analysis. Although sustained reflexive engagement and methodological safeguards were implemented throughout the research process, complete detachment from institutional context was neither possible nor consistent with the interpretivist orientation of the study. The findings should therefore be understood as co-constructed interpretations emerging from the interaction between participant narratives, the institutional context and the researcher's interpretation.

Another limitation concerns the composition of the participant sample itself. Participation in the study was voluntary, meaning that individuals who agreed to participate may have been more willing to reflect critically on their transition experiences or more engaged with questions of identity, pedagogy and institutional support than those who declined to participate. It is therefore possible that alternative perspectives, including those of individuals who exited academia rapidly, disengaged institutionally or experienced transition in substantially different ways, remain less visible within the dataset. Although the sample size was appropriate for an interpretivist qualitative study focused on depth rather than breadth, the research does not claim to capture the full diversity of all possible pracademic experiences across disciplines, institutional types or demographic contexts.

The dissertation is further bound by its primary focus on teaching-intensive pracademic transition within a South African PHEI environment. While the findings generated valuable insights into workload intensification, pedagogical translation and institutional mediation, less attention was given to research-intensive academic environments, disciplinary variation, or the experiences of pracademics within highly specialised professional faculties. Similarly, the study foregrounded transition into academia rather than long-term academic career progression, leadership trajectories or institutional mobility. These dimensions remain focal areas for future scholarly investigation.

A further limitation relates to the broader structural conditions within which the research was conducted. The higher education sector continues to experience rapid transformation driven by digitalisation, artificial intelligence, changing student expectations, economic instability and evolving models of academic work. Consequently, some institutional conditions shaping pracademic transition may continue to shift over time. The findings, therefore, represent an interpretation of transition within a particular historical and institutional moment rather than a permanently fixed model of academic incorporation.

Despite these limitations, the study generated substantial conceptual depth and analytical insight into an underexplored dimension of higher education scholarship. The qualitative and interpretivist design enabled the dissertation to explore the emotional, pedagogical, relational and institutional complexities of pracademic transition in ways unlikely to emerge through more narrowly operational or quantitatively oriented approaches. The limitations identified above should therefore be understood not as weaknesses undermining the value of the study, but as boundaries that clarify the scope, contextual specificity and interpretive orientation of the research.

8.7 Future research agenda: building on this foundation

If the dissertation has clarified the complexity of pracademic transition within one institutional context, the next task is not simply to repeat the same study elsewhere, but to build a cumulative research agenda that can test, refine and extend its claims. A credible future research agenda should remain proportionate, methodologically feasible and conceptually connected to the limits of the present inquiry. The studies proposed below are therefore framed as specific directions rather than as an unlimited list of possibilities.

8.7.1 Longitudinal transition studies

As noted in Sections 4.11.1 and 8.6, the present study relies on retrospective, single-timepoint accounts that may be reshaped by participants' subsequent adjustment to the academic role. It offers a rich account of transition at a particular point in time, but it cannot show how identities, practices and support needs evolve across longer professional trajectories, nor separate lived experience from retrospective reconstruction. Longitudinal research is therefore a clear priority. Such studies could follow newly appointed pracademics over two to five years, using repeat interviews, reflective journals and selected institutional data to explore how identity disruption, pedagogical confidence, institutional belonging and research engagement change over time.

A key question for such work would be whether the conditions described here as sustained liminality persist, deepen or gradually resolve. Longitudinal research would also help identify whether specific institutional interventions make a measurable difference across phases of transition and whether

certain forms of difficulty are temporary features of entry or more enduring consequences of structural under-support.

8.7.2 Comparative institutional studies

Because the present dissertation is based on one PHEI, the IPTF should be regarded as requiring testing in other institutional settings before it is applied beyond this case. Comparative institutional research is therefore necessary, both to determine which findings are context-specific and which may reflect broader patterns and to establish the limits of the framework's applicability. Future studies could compare multiple private institutions, or examine similarities and differences between private and public universities, especially in relation to workload, induction, pedagogical support, performance expectations and pathways for career progression.

Such work would be especially valuable for testing the IPTF's contextual reach. A comparative analysis could show whether the framework's phases and domains are widely recognisable, whether additional domains are required in other settings and whether the balance between structural and relational support differs meaningfully across institutional types.

A particularly useful extension of comparative work would be to operationalise the IPTF as a research instrument. This could involve developing interview protocols, survey scales, diagnostic audit tools or institutional self-assessment templates based on its temporal phases and support domains. Doing so would allow researchers to examine not only whether institutions claim to support transition, but where and how support is actually experienced. It would also create opportunities for more systematic comparison across settings and for iterative refinement of the framework itself.

8.7.3 Mixed-methods and quantitative studies

The qualitative depth of this dissertation is one of its strengths, but a fuller field of pracademic transition research will also require studies capable of establishing pattern prevalence, institutional distribution and broader associations. Mixed-methods research could therefore provide an important next step. Sector-wide or multi-institutional surveys might examine the prevalence of transition difficulties, the uptake of support structures, job satisfaction, retention intentions, confidence in teaching, research participation and perceptions of institutional belonging.

Quantitative work would not replace interpretive inquiry, but could complement it by identifying broad trends and highlighting which variables appear most strongly associated with positive transition outcomes. Follow-up qualitative components would then remain necessary to interpret what those patterns mean in lived terms.

8.7.4 Intersectionality and Equity Studies

The pracademic category should not be treated as internally uniform. The present study offers a valuable account of shared transition patterns, but its design and sample cannot support claims about how these patterns differ by race, gender, age, class, language, disability or prior educational pathway. Future research needs to examine, through purposive intersectional sampling, how these dimensions shape differential experiences of entry into academia. Intersectional inquiry is particularly central in South Africa, where higher education remains marked by unequal histories, uneven resources and ongoing struggles around belonging and legitimacy.

Research in this area could examine whether some groups are more likely to experience misrecognition, heavier emotional labour, slower confidence development or reduced access to informal support. Such work would deepen the equity dimension of pracademic scholarship and prevent the category from being treated as if it were socially neutral.

8.7.5 Student learning and outcomes research

As noted in Section 1.16, this study did not collect student-facing data and therefore makes no claim about the effect of pracademic teaching on student outcomes. A significant institutional rationale for employing industry professionals is nonetheless the claim that they enhance the relevance and quality of teaching and this assumption remains under-examined from the student perspective. Future research should therefore investigate how students experience the teaching of pracademics and whether industry-informed teaching influences engagement, perceived employability, confidence in practice and forms of learning that matter in professionally oriented programmes.

This line of inquiry would be especially useful if designed carefully enough to avoid simplistic causal claims. Multiple factors shape student learning. However, mixed-methods studies combining student surveys, focus groups, classroom observation and analysis of teaching artefacts could help clarify what kinds of educational contribution pracademics make and under what conditions that contribution is most effective.

8.7.6 Implementation and evaluation studies

The IPTF and the eight recommendations now require empirical testing in practice. Implementation studies could examine what happens when institutions adopt selected elements of the framework over time. Such work might involve phased interventions, action research, or developmental evaluation approaches, depending on the institutional context and research capacity.

The key contribution of implementation research would be to shift the field from concept development to practical testing. It could show which interventions are feasible under resource constraints, which domains of support produce the greatest benefit, what forms of resistance or

institutional slippage occur and how frameworks such as the IPTF need to be revised when they encounter organisational reality.

8.7.7 Research capability development studies

The study identified research as one of the most fragile areas of pracademic transition, especially for teaching-focused staff entering academia with limited research socialisation. Future work should therefore examine how research capability can be developed in ways that are realistic, developmental and context-sensitive. This may include studies on scaffolded writing programmes, mentoring for scholarship, communities of inquiry, scholarship of teaching and learning pathways and differentiated expectations for emerging academic staff.

Such research would be valuable because it would address a persistent tension in the current study: institutions rely on pracademics for teaching relevance while often expecting research development without comparable investment in research formation. Better evidence on effective pathways into scholarship would therefore strengthen both institutional practice and academic career sustainability.

8.7.8 Comparative global south studies

A further future direction lies in comparative work across Global South contexts. Many higher education systems face related pressures around expansion, employability, digital transition, professional relevance and resource constraint. The literature remains disproportionately shaped by Euro-American assumptions. Comparative studies across African and other Southern settings could investigate how pracademic transition is configured under different policy regimes, institutional histories and labour conditions.

Such work would help determine which aspects of this study reflect specifically South African conditions and which may resonate across comparable contexts. It would also support a more balanced international literature in which Southern experiences are theorised on their own terms rather than treated only as applications of external models.

8.7.9 Technology and digital pedagogy research

Digital teaching formed an important, though not isolated, dimension of participants' transition. Future research should therefore explore more closely how pracademics learn to teach in digitally mediated environments and how technological expectations interact with pedagogy, confidence, student access and workload. This area is especially relevant in institutions that rely heavily on blended or distance modalities.

Research here could examine digital pedagogical development, the pressures created by educational technologies and the extent to which industry professionals' prior technological confidence supports

effective online teaching. It could also explore how digital demands intersect with equity concerns, given uneven student access and varying staff preparation.

8.7.10 Practitioner-researcher collaboration: co-producing transition knowledge

Finally, future scholarship would benefit from more participatory forms of inquiry. Practitioner-researcher collaboration offers one way of ensuring that research on pracademic transition remains grounded in the realities it seeks to understand and improve. Participatory action research, collaborative inquiry groups, or institutional co-design projects could involve pracademics not only as participants but also as contributors to the generation, interpretation and application of knowledge.

The value of this approach lies in two areas. First, it strengthens the practical relevance of research by embedding it in lived institutional processes. Secondly, it aligns with the study's broader epistemic argument that practitioner knowledge should not merely be studied, but also recognised as a resource in the production of educational understanding.

These future directions suggest that the field is only beginning to take shape. The present dissertation offers a platform, not a final word. Its most useful future lies in generating further research that is cumulative, comparative, critical and capable of informing institutional change without oversimplifying the phenomenon under study.

8.8 Closing reflections: honouring practitioner knowledge in academic spaces

The broader significance of this dissertation lies not only in what it reveals about transition difficulties but also in what it suggests about the place of practitioner knowledge within higher education. Industry professionals do not enter academia empty-handed. They bring histories of work, judgement, problem-solving, ethical decision-making and lived familiarity with the contexts into which many students hope to graduate. When these forms of knowledge are thoughtfully integrated into teaching, they can deepen curricular relevance, enhance student engagement and strengthen the relationship between higher education and the worlds beyond it.

The study also shows that valuing practitioner knowledge requires more than recruiting those who hold it. It requires institutions to create conditions under which such knowledge can be translated, refined and situated within academic practice. Without that work, practitioner expertise may be invoked symbolically while leaving the individuals who embody it to manage transition alone. The real challenge is therefore not whether practitioner knowledge matters, but whether institutions are willing to invest in the labour required to make that knowledge educationally productive.

8.8.1 Epistemic enrichment: valuing multiple forms of knowledge

One of the clearest conclusions of this dissertation is that higher education benefits when multiple forms of knowledge are recognised as legitimate. The traditional privileging of abstract, formalised

and disciplinary knowledge has valuable intellectual foundations, but it does not exhaust what students need in professionally oriented educational settings. Practice-based knowledge, embodied judgement and experiential understanding can also enrich learning, especially when they are subjected to reflection, critique and pedagogical framing.

The argument here is not anti-academic. It is an argument against narrow epistemic hierarchies that fail to see the educational value of practice-based expertise. The study suggests that pracademics occupy a distinctive position precisely because they can mediate between knowledge traditions. Their value lies not in replacing theory with practice, but in helping students understand the relationship between them.

Ubuntu adds an crucial dimension to this argument. Its relevance to pracademic transition lies in how it foregrounds relationality, interdependence and shared responsibility. Within this dissertation, Ubuntu has functioned as more than a moral reference point. It offers a way of thinking about academic becoming that resists excessively individualised accounts of professional transition. If one becomes through others, then institutional responsibility for transition cannot be reduced to formal induction or bureaucratic compliance. It includes creating relational conditions in which newcomers are recognised, guided and enabled to develop (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011).

This perspective is particularly valuable in the South African context, where imported models of transition may understate the significance of institutional culture, mutual recognition and social belonging. Ubuntu does not eliminate difficulty, nor does it provide a simple programme for reform. What it does offer is a sharper critique of organisational arrangements that depend on newcomers' labour while neglecting the relational work through which membership is formed.

8.8.2 Pedagogical transformation: learning from practice

The dissertation also points to the pedagogical possibilities created when practice and teaching are brought into closer conversation. Participants' professional experience often enabled them to make learning concrete, situate concepts within occupational realities and respond to students' questions with forms of authenticity not easily produced through abstraction alone. In this sense, pracademics have the potential to contribute to a pedagogy that is both intellectually grounded and experientially resonant.

However, this potential depends on support. Practice does not automatically become pedagogy. It must be translated, structured and aligned with curriculum goals and student developmental levels. The lesson here is therefore not that institutions should recruit more practitioners and expect teaching quality to improve. If institutions value the pedagogical gains associated with professional expertise, they must also value the developmental work needed to realise those gains.

8.8.3 Democratic imperative: diversifying academic communities

The study further suggests that pracademic integration carries a democratic significance. Higher education is shaped by who is recognised as capable of teaching, whose knowledge counts and what forms of experience are considered intellectually valuable. By opening academic spaces to those whose professional pathways differ from traditional academic trajectories, institutions can diversify not only staff profiles but also the horizons of possibility available to students.

This matters particularly for students who may not identify easily with inherited images of academic authority. Pracademics may widen students' sense of who belongs in higher education and how professional life can connect with academic contribution. Yet this democratic potential depends on more than presence. If pracademics remain under-supported, marginal or symbolically included without substantive belonging, the promise of diversification is weakened. Democratic inclusion therefore, requires institutional practices that move beyond access towards sustained participation.

8.8.4 Organisational resilience: adapting to changing contexts

Higher education institutions operate in changing social, technological and labour-market environments. In such conditions, integrating practitioner expertise may support organisational responsiveness, especially in professionally oriented programmes where curricula must remain connected to evolving occupational realities. The dissertation therefore, suggests that pracademics can contribute to institutional resilience by helping programmes remain current, relevant and credible.

Even here, caution is needed. Organisational resilience should not become another instrumental justification for extracting value from pracademics without attending to their development. If institutions wish to benefit from the currency and relevance that practitioner expertise offers, they must also consider how to sustain it. Opportunities for ongoing industry engagement, reflective updating and structured renewal may therefore be as key as initial recruitment.

8.8.5 Humanising academic work: recognising emotional labour

One of the more significant moral insights of the study is that transition into academia involves emotional labour as well as cognitive and technical learning. Participants were not merely adapting to new procedures. They were negotiating uncertainty, legitimacy, self-doubt, workload pressure and, in some cases, a sense of reduced competence after years of professional expertise elsewhere. To ignore this affective dimension is to misunderstand the human reality of transition.

Humanising academic work, in this context, means recognising that developmental support is not only about efficiency or performance. It is also about how institutions treat the people whose labour they rely on. This does not require sentimentality, nor does it deny that academic work includes high

expectations. It does, however, suggest that institutions should be attentive to the relationship between support, dignity, belonging and sustainable professional growth.

8.8.6 The affirmative case: why pracademic integration benefits higher education

Taken together, the dissertation supports an affirmative case for the thoughtful integration of practitioner knowledge into academic life. This case is epistemic because it broadens what counts as educationally valuable knowledge. It is pedagogical because it can enrich teaching and strengthen students' connection to practice. It is democratic because it widens routes into academic participation and diversifies academic communities. It is organisational because it can help institutions remain responsive in changing environments. It is human because it challenges higher education to treat transition as a developmental process rather than as an immediate test of performance.

That affirmative case should remain qualified. Not every practitioner appointment will succeed and not every institution is equally positioned to provide strong support. The value of pracademic integration therefore, lies not in recruitment alone, but in the degree to which institutions align expectations, development and recognition. The study's contribution is to show that where such alignment is weak, transition becomes unnecessarily difficult; where it is stronger, the potential gains for students, staff and institutions are more likely to be realised.

8.9 Final Reflective Conclusion

This dissertation began from a concern that the growing movement of industry professionals into academic roles was receiving less scholarly and institutional attention than its significance warranted. It concludes by showing that this concern was justified. For the participants in this study, transition into academia was neither incidental nor administratively routine. It was a consequential professional and personal process shaped by identity reconstruction, pedagogical learning, institutional support, structural contradiction and sustained emotional and intellectual effort.

The study has sought to make this process more visible and more intelligible. It has done so by engaging closely with participants' lived experiences, interpreting them through an integrated theoretical framework and developing the IPTF as a contextually grounded response to the complexities identified throughout the research. The contribution of the dissertation is therefore best understood as integrated across empirical, theoretical, practical and transformative dimensions. Empirically, it provides a detailed and contextually situated account of pracademic transition within a South African private higher education institution. Theoretically, it advances a more integrated conceptual language for understanding the interaction between identity, pedagogy, institutional structure, workload, time and relational belonging. Practically, it offers the IPTF and its associated intervention domains as tools for institutional reflection and developmental redesign.

Transformatively, it contributes to broader debates concerning epistemic recognition, academic inclusion and the place of practitioner knowledge within contemporary higher education.

The broader scholarly significance of the dissertation lies in its reorientation of the analytical gaze. Existing literature has frequently approached pracademic transition primarily as a matter of individual adaptation, resilience or professional adjustment. The findings of this study, instead, demonstrate that the quality and sustainability of the transition are fundamentally shaped by the structural conditions of the receiving institution. South African PHEIs and comparable higher education environments increasingly recruit industry professionals for their vocational expertise, employability relevance and practical credibility, but often underinvest in the developmental, pedagogical and scholarly conditions required for that expertise to become a sustainable academic contribution.

By making pracademic transition visible as both a site of institutional possibility and structural tension, the study challenges the assumption that professional expertise alone constitutes sufficient preparation for academic work. The pracademic embodies a form of dual knowledge increasingly necessary within contemporary higher education: the ability to connect theory and practice, translate abstract concepts through lived occupational experience and model professional identity for students aspiring towards industry participation. This capacity, however, does not disappear under institutional pressure; rather, it becomes constrained when transition is managed primarily as procedural compliance rather than as developmental formation. The findings therefore, suggest that institutions seeking educational relevance and professional responsiveness cannot treat transition as a private struggle or individual responsibility. Development matters. Timing matters. Support matters. Recognition matters.

The concept of identity bilingualism developed throughout the dissertation captures the broader aspiration towards which institutional support should aim. An identity bilingual pracademic does not choose between practitioner and academic selfhood. Rather, both forms of identity remain active and productive, enabling the individual to move strategically between professional and academic modes of knowing in ways that enrich teaching, curriculum development and institutional contribution. The IPTF was proposed precisely to support the conditions under which this form of dual fluency may emerge at a sustainable pace rather than through exhaustion, overwork or symbolic assimilation.

At its core, the study argues that pracademic transition is a developmental, relational and structurally mediated process. It is developmental because new forms of pedagogical, institutional and scholarly competence must be acquired over time. It is relational because belonging, mentorship, collegial recognition and student engagement shape whether transition becomes sustainable. It is structurally

mediated because workload intensification, induction design, institutional priorities and organisational logics determine what forms of academic becoming are materially possible within teaching-intensive higher education environments. Seen in this light, the transition of industry professionals into academia is not simply a staffing matter. It is a window into how institutions understand expertise, support educational labour and enact their commitments to quality, transformation and inclusion.

The findings further suggest that the future of vocationally oriented higher education in South Africa may depend substantially on whether institutions are able to create cultures capable of holding professional duality rather than erasing it. Institutions that continue to recruit for industry expertise while evaluating against narrowly traditional academic templates may continue to reproduce cycles of frustration, symbolic inclusion and premature exit. Institutions that engage more seriously with the relational, pedagogical and structural dimensions of transition may instead find that pracademics become key carriers of curriculum relevance, experiential depth, professional responsiveness and pedagogical innovation within the sector.

These contributions remain necessarily provisional. They invite further refinement, comparison and future investigation rather than claims of finality. They matter because they identify a form of academic transition that is becoming increasingly common while remaining insufficiently understood within higher education scholarship and institutional practice. Ultimately, the dissertation's final contribution may be less a fixed answer than a reframed question: what would it mean for higher education institutions to take pracademic transition seriously as a site of professional formation, institutional responsibility and educational possibility? The chapters that precede this conclusion have offered one grounded response to that question. In this sense, the dissertation closes not with a definitive ending, but with an invitation to institutional imagination: a call for higher education environments in which transition is understood, professional expertise is honoured and practitioner knowledge is given the developmental recognition and pedagogical mediation required to become transformative educational practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

11 August 2025

Razack Sheriff Uddin (204400477)
School of Education (Prior Restructuring)
Edgewood Campus

Dear R Sheriff Uddin, [redacted]

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00008985/2025
Project title: Navigating the transition: Industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at a private higher education institution.
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 14 July 2025 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 11 August 2026.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
Doctor Shamila Naidoo (Interim Chair)

/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics
Founding Campuses: Edgewood | Howard College | Medical School | Pietermaritzburg | Westville
INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B: Gatekeeper Letter



13 February 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT MANCOSA

Dear Sir/ Madam

This is to confirm that **Razack Sheriff Uddin** has been granted permission to conduct research at MANCOSA. As we have been informed, he is registered on the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD in Higher Education) programme at the School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal (student number 204 400 477) and the topic of the research is: ***Navigating the Transition: Industry Professionals Experiences of Transitioning from Industry to Academic Roles at a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI).***

I can be contacted on [redacted] should you require additional information.

Regards

[redacted]

Dr Nisha Singh
Head of Research

Appendix C: Data Collection Tool (Interview Schedule)

Interview Schedule

My interview questions will align with the **three research questions** as well as the theoretical frameworks I adopted for this study, namely, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Identity Theory and Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory to explore industry professionals' experiences, their interactions with institutional structures and the reasons behind these experiences.

Rationale for designing my Interview Questions are as follows:

- **Schlossberg's Transition Theory** informs questions about personal and institutional support, challenges and adaptation strategies.
- **Identity Theory** guides questions on role conflicts, evolving professional identity and credibility in academia.
- **Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)** informs questions on how industry professionals develop and apply teaching skills.
- **My Research Questions** ensure a structured exploration of **what** industry professionals experience, **how** institutional structures affect them and **why** these experiences relate to institutional support

  The Research Questions are fully addressed:
  - **RQ1** → Transition experiences and challenges
  - **RQ2** → Institutional structures and support
  - **RQ3** → Why the transition experiences relate to institutional structures

Section 1: Background and Transition Experience
(*Aligns with Schlossberg's Transition Theory & Identity Theory*)

1. What motivated you to transition from an industry role to an academic position at this institution?
2. How did you perceive the role of an academic before making the transition?
3. How would you describe your professional identity before joining academia?
4. Since becoming an academic, how has your professional identity evolved, have you moved from a position of authority (in previous role) to one of a lecturer?
5. Can you describe your experiences during your first few months in this academic role?
6. What aspects of academic work did you find easiest to adapt to? What aspects were the most challenging?
7. Were there any specific moments when you realized the key differences between working in industry and working in academia?
8. Have you experienced conflicts between your industry identity and your new academic identity? If so, how have you navigated them?

9. Have you felt pressure to conform to traditional academic norms? How has this influenced your teaching and work?

Section 2: Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Teaching Experience
(*Aligns with PCK and Research Question 1 on transition experiences*)

10. Before joining academia, how would you describe your understanding of teaching and pedagogy?
11. How did you initially approach teaching, and how has your approach evolved over time?
12. What strategies have you used to help students understand complex concepts in your field?
13. Do you see a difference between knowing a subject well and knowing how to teach it effectively? Can you provide an example?
14. How have you adapted your industry expertise to align with curriculum and academic requirements?
15. What teaching techniques have you found to be most effective in engaging students?
16. How do you balance theoretical knowledge with practical, industry-based applications in your teaching?
17. How do you assess whether students truly understand the subject matter?
18. What challenges have you encountered in designing assessments compared to industry-based performance evaluations?
19. How do you provide feedback to students, and how does this compare to feedback practices in industry?

Section 3: Institutional Structures and Support Systems
(*Aligns with Schlossberg's Support Factor, Identity Theory, and Research Question 2*)

20. What types of support (formal or informal) did you receive from the institution when you transitioned into academia?
21. Did you undergo any training, mentorship, or induction programme (eg. LTT) to help you adjust to your academic role? If so, how useful was it?
22. How did the institution prepare you for responsibilities beyond teaching, such as assessment, curriculum development, or research?
23. Were there specific policies (recruitment guideline doc) or structures in place to help you integrate into the academic environment? If so, how effective were they?
24. What challenges have you faced in adapting to academic policies (CHE, QA, QAF, Programme Submission, Programme review), procedures, and expectations?
25. How easy or difficult has it been to navigate the academic culture of the institution?
26. Have you encountered resistance from students, faculty, or administrators due to your industry background? How have you managed this?

27. Have you received ongoing professional development related to teaching and learning? If so, what has been most beneficial?
28. What additional support do you think the institution should provide to help industry professionals succeed as academics?

Section 4: Institutional Influence on Experience (Why the Transition Occurs as It Does)

(*Aligns with Research Question 3 on why institutional structures shape experiences the way they do*)

29. How would you describe the institution's culture regarding the recruitment and integration of industry professionals into academic roles?
30. Do you feel that the institution values your industry experience within the academic environment? Why or why not?
31. How do institutional expectations (e.g., research, assessment methods, student engagement) compare to your experiences in industry?
32. What institutional practices or policies do you believe contribute to the challenges faced by industry professionals transitioning into academia?
33. Have you observed differences in how long-serving academics and industry professionals experience academic work? If so, what do you think explains these differences?
34. In your opinion, do the institution's structures and support systems adequately address the challenges faced by industry professionals transitioning into academic roles? Why or why not?
35. If you could recommend one major change to the institution to improve the transition experience for industry professionals, what would it be?

Appendix D: Document Analysis structure

Analysis Structure for Onboarding Programme – Academic Onboarding Programme (AOP)

To use the **"[PHEI] Academic Onboarding Programme" programme** as a **document analysis source** to answer the research questions on industry professionals transitioning into academic roles, I will analyze it through the lens of the **three research questions** and the **three theoretical frameworks** (Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Identity Theory and Pedagogical Content Knowledge). Below is a structured approach to what I will look for in the document:

Research Question 1: What are the industry professionals' experiences of transitioning from industry to academic roles at the Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI)?

What to Look for in the Onboarding Programme:

1. **Course Content Coverage of Transition Challenges**
   - Does the course explicitly address the challenges that industry professionals may face when moving into academia (e.g., pedagogical skills, academic expectations, research requirements)?
   - Does it acknowledge the shift from industry practices to academic practices?
2. **Support for Role Identity Shifts (Identity Theory)**
   - Does the programme help industry professionals understand their new identity as academics?
   - Does it guide them in balancing their industry expertise with academic expectations?
3. **Adaptation Strategies (Schlossberg's Transition Theory - Coping Mechanisms)**
   - Does the programme provide strategies for coping with the transition, such as mentorship, reflective practice or networking?
   - Are there structured activities to bridge the gap between industry expertise and teaching pedagogy?
4. **Personal Reflections & Assessments**
   - Does the course require academics to reflect on their transition experience?
   - How does it assess their preparedness to teach and engage with students?

Research Question 2: How do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning to academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI?

What to Look for in the Onboarding Programme:

1. **Institutional Induction and Support**
   - How does the institution onboard new academics from industry?
   - Are there structured supports (e.g., mentorship, workshops, peer observations) to assist in the transition?
   - Is the role of the institution in supporting new academics clearly defined?
2. **Alignment with Institutional Expectations**
   - Does the programme set clear expectations for teaching, assessment and student engagement?

- Does it train industry professionals on how to align their industry knowledge with curriculum requirements?
- Are the institutional policies, governance structures and assessment guidelines explained in a way that helps new academics understand their role?

3. **Professional Development Opportunities**
   - Does the programme encourage continued professional development in teaching methodologies?
   - Is there ongoing learning and upskilling available beyond the initial induction?
4. **Institutional Culture and Integration (Identity Theory - Socialization Process)**
   - Does the course mention or prepare industry experts for collaboration with academic colleagues?
   - How does it help them integrate into the institution's teaching and research culture?
   - Are there specific strategies for helping them engage with students who may not have industry experience?

Research Question 3: Why do industry professionals' experiences of transitioning into academic roles relate to institutional structures and support systems at the PHEI in the way that they do?

What to Look for in the Onboarding Programme:

1. **Institutional Rationale for the Programme**
   - Does the document explain why [PHEI] developed this programme for new academics?
   - Does it acknowledge the unique challenges faced by industry professionals moving into academia?
   - What institutional gaps or needs does this programme aim to address?
2. **Structural Barriers and Facilitators (Schlossberg's Transition Theory - Institutional Support & Barriers)**
   - Are there any explicit institutional barriers mentioned in the programme that new academics need to overcome?
   - Does the programme suggest that [PHEI] recognizes the differences between industry expertise and academic teaching?
3. **Institutional Priorities & Long-Term Strategy**
   - Are the institution's expectations of new academics realistic given their industry background?
   - Does the programme suggest any structural changes that have been made to improve the transition for industry experts?
4. **Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Development**
   - Does the programme ensure that industry experts develop core teaching competencies such as lesson planning, assessment design and curriculum understanding?
   - How does it address the shift from industry-based assessment methods (e.g., performance evaluations) to academic assessments (e.g., formative and summative assessments)?

Next Steps: How this Programme will be used in my Study

- **Compare the Programme to Interview Findings**
  - Analyse whether the support systems in the programme match what industry professionals say about their transition experience.
  - Identify gaps between the training provided and the real challenges faced by new academics.
- **Look for Implicit Messages in the Document**
  - Does the programme assume that industry experts automatically understand academic teaching or does it actively support them?
  - Are industry professionals expected to adapt quickly or is the transition recognised as a learning process?
- **Identify Strengths and Weaknesses of the Programme**
  - What best practices does the programme introduce?
  - What areas are missing that could better support industry professionals in their transition?

Conclusion: How this Programme Addresses the Research Questions

Research Question	How the document helps answer It
RQ1: Experiences of Transition	Provides insight into how the institution prepares industry professionals for academic roles, their initial challenges and how the programme frames their transition.
RQ2: Relationship to Institutional Support	Helps analyse whether institutional structures (training, mentorship, assessment practices) are effectively supporting new academics.
RQ3: Why These Experiences Occur in This Way	Explores institutional priorities, expectations and gaps that shape the experiences of industry professionals transitioning into academia.

Appendix E: Editor Confirmation

CONFIRMATION OF EDITING

5 June 2026

Client: Razack Sheriff Uddin
University of KwaZulu-Natal

PhD submission: Professional Language editing, layout & format
Title: Navigating the Transition: Industry Professionals' Experiences of Transitioning from Industry to Academic Roles at a Private Higher Education Institution

The editing was limited to language and presentation and did not involve any alteration of the academic content, structure, or argumentation of the work. The following aspects were addressed during the editing process:

- Correction of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure
- Standardisation of language usage and academic style
- Improvement of clarity, coherence, and readability
- Identification of queries and suggestions, which were indicated through comments for the author's consideration
- No raw data/interview quotations were edited

With regard to referencing, the following were undertaken:

- Standardisation of references and in-text citations in accordance with the prescribed referencing style
- Identification and highlighting of missing or incomplete references, where applicable

I confirm that the responsibility for the final content of the dissertation remains with the author.

Editor's name: Professor Ara Mansingh

Qualifications: PhD (UKZN)

Professional Membership: Professional Editors Guild MAN010

Signature: [redacted]

Date: 5 June 2026

Prof. Ara Mansingh Ph.D (UKZN)
Professional Editors Guild (MAN010)
[redacted]