

Translational Academic Capital: Why Do Some Industry Professionals Become Knowledge Producers in Academia, While Others Do Not?

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Abstract

This study examines a critical question in higher education: why do some industry professionals effectively transition into knowledge producers in academia, while others with comparable expertise do not? Existing literature emphasises the value of practitioner involvement in academia but largely assumes that experiential knowledge can be readily translated into academic output. This paper challenges that assumption by introducing Translational Academic Capital (TAC), defined as the capability to transform experience into abstract, generalisable, and institutionally recognised knowledge. The study develops an integrated framework combining a three-stage translational process (extraction, abstraction, formalisation) with three corresponding filters (cognitive, epistemic, institutional) that govern progression at each stage. An illustrative case analysis demonstrates how variation in filter passage produces differentiated academic outcomes. The model is further extended by incorporating institutional context as a moderating condition and recognising disciplinary variation in the demands of knowledge translation. The findings reconceptualise the industry-to-academia transition as a capability-dependent and context-sensitive process and provide a foundation for future empirical research through operationalisation and testable propositions.

Keywords: knowledge translation, industry–academia transition, academic knowledge production, practitioner–scholar, academic legitimacy, knowledge transformation

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The increasing shift of industry professionals into academia is a key trend in today's higher education, especially in business, engineering, finance, and technology. Universities are hiring individuals with significant professional experience to make teaching more relevant, enhance industry connections, and close the gap between theory and practice (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004). This movement aligns with the demand for graduates who possess practical skills and research that have real-world applications (Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

Notwithstanding these developments, much of the current discussion assumes that industry experience automatically enhances academic contributions. Previous research highlights the advantages of involving practitioners in academia, such as experiential teaching, applied research, and knowledge transfer (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Rousseau, 2006). However, this view often overlooks the specific ways in which industry experience can be recognised as legitimate academic knowledge.

Recent studies show that, despite ongoing efforts, it remains inconsistent, particularly in policy and practice contexts (WHO, 2023). Knowledge translation research has uncovered challenges in coordinating efforts, aligning incentives, and using evidence in policy and practice (e.g., WHO, 2023). While there are increasing calls for collaboration between academia and industry, improvements in knowledge integration have not consistently followed, with evidence indicating uneven and inconsistent patterns of engagement across sectors (Purnell, 2025).

Much of the existing literature focuses on institutional structures and system-level factors, offering little insight into how individuals convert experiential knowledge into recognised academic outputs. This has created a significant gap: although the need for successful knowledge translation is acknowledged, the reasons some individuals excel at it while others do not remain poorly understood. This study aims to address that gap through the concept of Translational Academic Capital (TAC).

This paper argues that while industry experience is necessary for academic knowledge production, it is not enough on its own. Some industry professionals can translate their experience into publishable research and effective teaching, while others struggle to do more than share anecdotal insights. The varying outcomes of these transitions indicate a selective mechanism that influences how experiential knowledge is integrated into academic systems.

We present the concept of Translational Academic Capital (TAC). TAC refers to the ability to transform practical, experience-based knowledge into abstract, generalizable academic outputs that are recognised by institutions. Instead of assuming that all industry professionals contribute equally to academic knowledge, TAC highlights the differences in their ability to translate experience into knowledge. It focuses on who effectively makes this translation rather than simply who enters academia.

The paper presents a three-stage translational process (extraction, abstraction, formalisation) controlled by three corresponding filters (cognitive, epistemic, institutional) to explain the uneven distribution of Translational Academic Capital (TAC) among industry professionals. It argues that failure at any stage of this process hinders the conversion of experience into academically recognised knowledge. This approach redefines the industry-to-academia transition as a selective, contingent process influenced by individual skills and institutional contexts, rather than a simple enhancement of academic capacity.

This study moves beyond existing practitioner–scholar literature by introducing a capability-based explanation for the uneven conversion of experiential knowledge into academically legitimate outputs. The main contributions are: First, it introduces TAC as a theoretical construct that differentiates between having experience and the ability to transform that experience into knowledge. Second, it develops a model that explains the uneven distribution of TAC, addressing a gap in the literature on practitioner-scholars and engaged scholarship. Third, it provides a framework for categorising academic actors by their translational capacity, laying the groundwork for future empirical research.

2. From Experience to Knowledge: The Missing Translational Mechanism

2.1 Practitioner–Scholar Literature and Its Limits

The role of practitioners in academia has been discussed under terms like practitioner–scholars, engaged scholars, and practice-based researchers (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Rousseau, 2006; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). This research emphasises the importance of connecting theory with practice, noting that practitioners offer valuable insights that can improve the relevance of academic work. Engaged scholarship promotes collaboration between academics and practitioners to produce knowledge that is both rigorous and applicable (Van de Ven, 2007).

However, much of the literature assumes that involving practitioners is always beneficial, focusing on their contributions rather than on how these contributions translate into legitimate academic knowledge. It presumes that industry experience inherently enhances knowledge production without examining the specific conditions that facilitate or hinder this process.

2.2 Knowledge Production and the Theory–Practice Divide

Research on knowledge production distinguishes between Mode 1 (theory-driven) and Mode 2 (application-oriented) knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). Subsequent studies show that universities face pressure to produce socially relevant and impactful research (Linder et al., 2003). While this literature captures macro-level shifts in knowledge production, it does not explain the micro-level mechanisms through which experiential knowledge is transformed into academically legitimate outputs. It does not clarify why some people successfully transition from context-specific to generalizable knowledge, while others remain stuck in theoretical or practical limitations.

Studies on knowledge transfer and boundary spanning highlight individuals' roles in bridging different areas of expertise (Carlile, 2004; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981), but these approaches frame translation primarily as an organisational process, missing its variation as an individual capability.

2.3 Academic Legitimacy and Epistemic Authority

There is a body of literature that focuses on how knowledge is legitimised in academic institutions. Legitimacy is linked to adherence to disciplinary norms, methodological rigour, and publishing in respected outlets (Bourdieu, 1988; Lamont, 2009). These standards determine what is considered valid knowledge and who is recognised as a legitimate contributor. Recent discussions on research evaluation emphasise how institutional criteria influence notions of valid knowledge (Hicks et al., 2015).

Experiential knowledge often holds a complicated status within this framework. It is valued for its practical relevance but typically lacks the formal structure required for academic recognition, creating a conflict between experiential authority and epistemic legitimacy, especially for those moving from industry to academia.

While existing research acknowledges this tension, it does not thoroughly examine how some individuals gain legitimacy despite non-traditional knowledge backgrounds. The literature outlines the importance of legitimacy but does not clarify how it is achieved by those with experiential knowledge.

2.4 The Missing Link: From Presence to Translation

The literature on practitioner–scholar research, knowledge production theory, and academic legitimacy has a notable gap: it acknowledges the importance of industry experience and the need to connect theory with practice, but it does not explain how experience converts into knowledge.

Furthermore, it overlooks the inconsistency in outcomes. If experience alone were enough, we would see similar results among professionals moving into academia. However, results vary widely; some produce impactful research and strong conceptual frameworks, while others are limited to personal anecdotes and struggle with academic standards. This variation highlights that the real issue is not just having experience, but the ability to translate it effectively.

2.5 Toward a Capability-Based Perspective

This paper presents a capability-based perspective focusing on Translational Academic Capital (TAC) to address the existing gap. TAC differentiates the ability to convert industry experience into academically valid knowledge as a unique capability, rather than viewing industry experience as a uniform resource.

This perspective refines our analysis in three key ways. First, it shifts from a resource-based view (having experience) to a capability-based view (transforming experience). Second, it explains how this translation process works rather than just assuming it. Third, it highlights differences among individuals in their ability to translate experience.

By combining these elements, the concept of TAC offers a crucial link between practitioner involvement, knowledge production, and academic legitimacy. The next section elaborates on this concept and introduces a model that explains its uneven distribution.

3. Conceptual Framework: Translational Academic Capital and the Filter Mechanism

3.1 Defining Translational Academic Capital

The Translational Academic Capital (TAC) is a new concept that clarifies why industry experience does not always translate into academic knowledge.

Definition:

Translational Academic Capital refers to the capacity to convert context-specific, experience-based knowledge into abstract, generalisable, and institutionally recognised academic outputs.

Translational Academic Capital (TAC) consists of three key aspects. The first is that it involves transforming experiences into new knowledge by identifying broader patterns beyond specific situations. Second, it requires reconfiguring knowledge so that insights align with academic standards through engagement with theoretical frameworks and conceptual clarity. Third, TAC relies on institutional recognition, meaning knowledge must meet disciplinary standards to be accepted within academic circles.

These aspects are distinct yet interdependent: transformation without academic alignment leads to non-academic outputs, while academically aligned knowledge that is not recognised remains unacknowledged. Together, they define TAC as a capability that spans cognitive, epistemic, and institutional dimensions.

3.2 The Translational Process

Transforming experience into academic knowledge is a multi-stage process, not a straightforward conversion. It involves gradual changes in the form, structure, and legitimacy of knowledge.

○ Stage 1 — Extraction

Industry knowledge starts as tacit and context-specific, shaped by unique organisational environments and decision-making situations. Extraction means finding patterns, insights, or common occurrences within this experience.

○ Stage 2 — Abstraction

Extracted Insights should be decontextualised and generalised. This step involves conceptual thinking to transform specific experiences into broader categories, relationships, or mechanisms.

○ Stage 3 — Formalisation

Abstracted Insights are transformed into academic formats, including theoretical models, conceptual frameworks, or testable propositions. This process ensures that the knowledge meets disciplinary standards and methodological requirements.

The translational process explains how experiential knowledge is converted into formal academic output, but not everyone successfully progresses through these stages. To address this variability, the subsequent section presents the Translational Filter Model, which acts as a selective mechanism at each stage. In this sense, the process outlines the transformation

pathway (extraction, abstraction, formalisation), while the filters (cognitive, epistemic, institutional) influence individuals' success in navigating each stage.

3.3 The Translational Filter Model

The Translational Filter Model enhances the process described in Section 3.2 by incorporating selective conditions that control movement through each stage. Each filter marks a critical point in the translational process, and failure at any filter halts the transformation pathway. The Model is designed to explain the uneven distribution of TAC within the existing process framework. It posits that individuals must successfully navigate through three critical filters, each associated with specific capability requirements.

a) Cognitive Filter: Abstraction Capacity

The initial criterion pertains to the capacity to transition from experiential learning to conceptual comprehension. Individuals must be capable of:

- Identifying underlying patterns in complex situations.
- Generalisation beyond specific cases.
- Thinking in terms of models, relationships, and mechanisms.

Failure at this stage leads to anecdotal knowledge, limiting insights into specific experiences and preventing generalisation.

b) Epistemic Filter: Adaptation to Academic Logic

The second filter pertains to conformity with the epistemic standards of academia. This includes:

- Engagement with theoretical reasoning
- Acceptance of ambiguity and critique
- Familiarity with scholarly discourse

Individuals who do not meet this filter may struggle with academic expectations, leading to a mismatch between practical knowledge and academic standards.

c) Institutional Filter: Encoding and Legitimation

The final filter relates to the ability to encode knowledge in forms that institutions recognise. This requires:

- Translating insights into publishable formats
- Designing structured curricula
- Navigating peer review and evaluation systems

Failure at this stage results in latent knowledge, where insights are present but not formally acknowledged or shared.

TAC is only achieved when individuals successfully navigate all three filters. Figure 1 presents the Translational Filter Model, illustrating the sequential and conditional nature of the translation process from industry experience to academic knowledge.

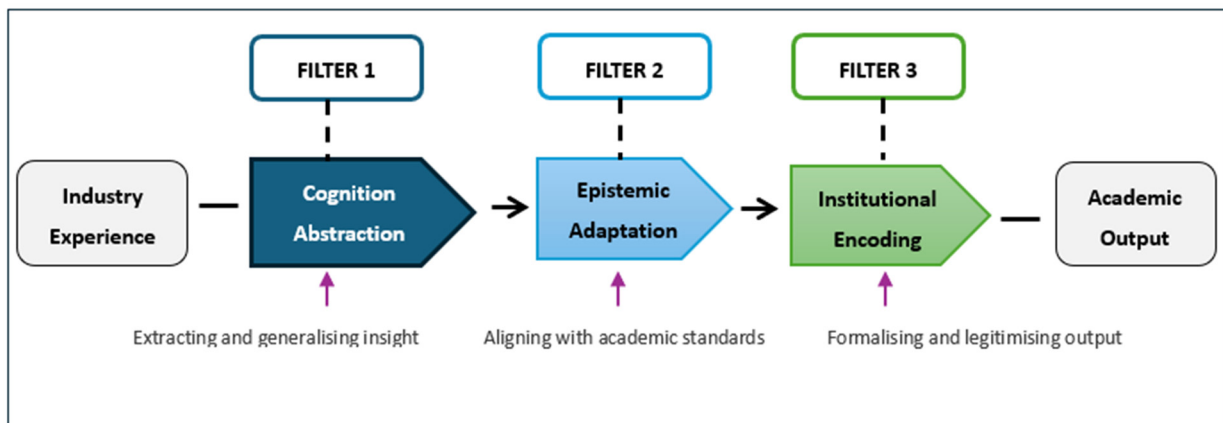


Figure 1. The Translational Filter Model of Translational Academic Capital (TAC)

The figure shows how industry experience becomes recognised academic knowledge through three filters: cognitive abstraction, epistemic adaptation, and institutional encoding. Successfully passing through all stages results in Translational Academic Capital (TAC), which supports the production of academic knowledge. TAC is not a fixed

characteristic; it develops through sequential changes. If any stage fails, it disrupts the translational process and hinders TAC formation. Specifically, cognitive abstraction operates on the transition from extraction to abstraction, epistemic adaptation governs the alignment of abstracted knowledge with academic logic, and institutional encoding determines whether formalised knowledge is successfully translated into recognised academic outputs.

Figure 2 illustrates how the translational process relates to the filtering mechanism by mapping the transformation pathway and the filters used at each stage.

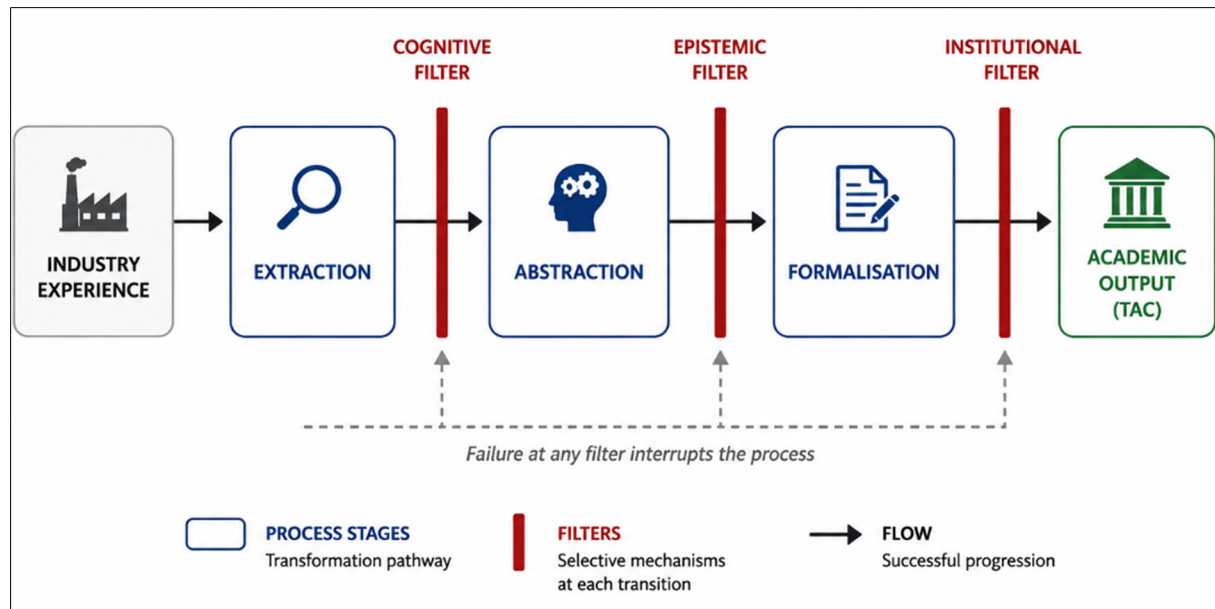


Figure 2. Integrated Translational Process and Filter Model of Translational Academic Capital (TAC)

Figure 2 clearly outlines the difference and interaction between the translational process and the filtering mechanism. The process dimension illustrates how knowledge transforms from experience to formal academic output, while filters create conditionality at each transition. This perspective shows that progress is not automatic; each stage depends on meeting specific cognitive, epistemic, and institutional criteria.

The figure also indicates that variations in academic outcomes stem from how individuals navigate these filters, not just from differences in experience. People may start the translational process similarly, but can diverge significantly based on where interruptions occur. This model shifts the focus from mere experience to the mechanisms that influence its transformation, providing a solid basis for the typology in Section 4, which links different academic actor categories to points of filter success or failure.

3.4 Illustrative Case Study: Applying the Translational Filter Model

Mini-cases provide needed examples to demonstrate operational logic, interpretive steps, and decision-making processes (Yin, 2018). The following case analysis serves as an illustrative example of the Translational Filter Model in practice. It is based on a carefully selected group of professionals who have transitioned from industry to academic roles. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate how the three translational filters function within real-world contexts, rather than pursuing statistical generalisation.

Case Selection and Approach

A sample of six professionals who moved from finance, consulting, and engineering to academia was analysed using publicly available profiles, publication records, and teaching materials. The cases were chosen to show differences in academic outcomes despite similar industry backgrounds. Each case was evaluated against the three filters: (1) Cognitive abstraction (ability to generalise experience), (2) Epistemic adaptation (alignment with academic reasoning), (3) Institutional encoding (production of recognised outputs)

Case Analysis

Case 1 — Full Translation (High TAC)

A former investment banker has successfully transitioned into academia, publishing peer-reviewed papers that integrate practical market experience with theoretical frameworks.

- Filter 1 (Cognitive): Successfully identified recurring patterns in market behaviour
- Filter 2 (Epistemic): Engaged with existing literature and theoretical positioning
- Filter 3 (Institutional): Published in ranked journals and developed structured courses

Outcome: Translational Academic (High TAC)

This case illustrates successful navigation through all evaluation filters, thereby confirming the model's capability for comprehensive translation.

Case 2 — Cognitive Failure (Anecdotal Practitioner)

A senior consultant transitioned into academia with a primary emphasis on teaching grounded in his extensive personal experience.

- Filter 1: Limited abstraction; insights remained context-specific
- Filter 2 and 3: Not meaningfully engaged

Outcome: Anecdotal Practitioner

Despite possessing considerable experience, the inability to pass the initial filter has impeded the generalisation of knowledge.

Case 3 — Epistemic Misalignment

An industry engineer has contributed valuable conceptual insights while opting to set aside traditional academic frameworks and methodological standards.

- Filter 1: Strong abstraction
- Filter 2: Weak alignment with academic discourse
- Filter 3: Limited publication success

Outcome: Epistemically Misaligned Actor

This case demonstrates that relying solely on abstraction is inadequate without incorporating epistemic integration.

Case 4 — Institutional Failure (Latent Knowledge Holder)

The risk manager demonstrated strong conceptual thinking and theoretical knowledge but has limited publication output.

- Filter 1 and 2: Successfully passed
- Filter 3: Failed to encode knowledge into recognised formats

Outcome: Latent Knowledge Holder

This underscores the essential importance of institutional navigation in transforming knowledge into recognised outputs.

Case 5 — Partial Translation

A technology executive contributed to practitioner journals and teaching but lacked engagement with academic theory.

- Mixed performance across filters

Outcome: Borderline between Epistemic Misalignment and Latent Knowledge.

Case 6 — Traditional Academic Benchmark

An individual without industry experience demonstrated strong theoretical and methodological output.

Outcome: Traditional Academic (Non-TAC baseline)

This confirms that TAC is distinct from conventional academic capability.

Cross-Case Insights

The analysis reveals three key patterns that support the Translational Filter Model. First, it confirms that the filters operate sequentially; failure at an earlier stage limits advancement in later stages. Individuals unable to abstract experiences at a cognitive level did not engage with epistemic or institutional requirements, showing that the translational process is cumulative. Second, outcomes among professionals with similar industry backgrounds are non-linear. Despite comparable experience, individuals followed different academic paths, indicating that variation in translational capability, rather than experience alone, drives these differences. Lastly, the cases validate the proposed typology, with each actor category from Table 1 observable in practice. This alignment between theory and observed patterns reinforces the idea that translational outcomes are structured and that Translational Academic Capital is a key differentiator in the transition from industry to academia.

Implications for Model Validation

The case analysis, while limited in scope, supports the validity of the Translational Filter Model. The alignment between theoretical predictions and real-world cases indicates that the model effectively represents how experiential knowledge transforms into academic output. The distinct translational pathways associated with different filter outcomes suggest that the model's staged logic reflects actual processes rather than mere abstract ideas. Additionally, the distribution of cases among different actor types supports the notion that Translational Academic Capital is unevenly distributed and influences academic outcomes. This analysis does not claim generalizability but shows that the model is empirically valid and usable in real contexts. It lays the groundwork for future research to systematically test the model's robustness, refine its dimensions, and explore its distribution across various disciplines and institutions.

3.5 Institutional Context as a Moderating Condition

The Translational Filter Model is framed as an individual capability process, but analysis shows that success is influenced by institutional context, especially departmental culture. This context can either help or hinder the translation process, echoing findings on how academic fields and evaluative norms affect knowledge production (e.g., Bourdieu, 1988; Lamont, 2009).

Departmental cultures differ in their openness to practical knowledge, acceptance of nontraditional academic paths, and expectations for research output. In departments that prioritise theoretical rigour and established methods, individuals may encounter greater barriers, regardless of their cognitive abilities. In contrast, departments that support applied research and interdisciplinary work may help address the challenges of knowledge adaptation and provide stronger institutional support.

The moderating effect varies across three filters. At the cognitive stage, exposure to diverse environments enhances the ability to learn from experience. At the epistemic stage, departmental norms determine what is considered valid knowledge, influencing alignment with established theoretical frameworks and scholarly discussions (Lamont, 2009). At the institutional stage, mentoring, publication support, and evaluation criteria directly impact the ability to convert knowledge into recognised outputs.

This viewpoint emphasises that while individual capability matters, it exists within a larger organisational context. The same individual might achieve different outcomes depending on their institutional environment. This variation helps explain why similar professionals' divergent experiences across institutions can reinforce the idea that Translational Academic Capital relies on both individual capability and context.

By adding institutional context as a moderating factor, this model offers a more comprehensive explanation that integrates knowledge production, academic legitimacy, and organisations' impact on scholarly outcomes.

4. Typology of Academic Actors Based on Translational Academic Capital

The Translational Filter Model (see Figure 1) shows that converting industry experience into academic knowledge is a selective, nonlinear process with multiple failure points. This section categorises academic actors based on the uneven distribution of Translational Academic Capital (TAC).

Instead of viewing industry professionals as a uniform group, the typology distinguishes them by their ability to navigate various cognitive, epistemic, and institutional filters. This approach shifts the focus from simply entering academia to understanding the outcomes of knowledge translation, highlighting differences in academic performance among individuals with similar professional backgrounds.

Building on Figure 2, Table 1 categorises academic actors according to their progression through the translational process and their success or failure at each corresponding filter.

Table 1. Typology of Academic Actors Based on Translational Filter Outcomes

Translational Pathway (Figure 2 Link)	Filter Outcome	Actor Type	Level of TAC	Core Capability Profile	Knowledge Form	Typical Academic Output
Extraction ► Abstraction ► Formalisation (Pass Cognitive, Epistemic, Institutional)	Full successful progression across all filters	Translational Academics	High	Strong abstraction, epistemic alignment and institutional encoding	Integrated (experiential and theoretical)	Conceptual frameworks, applied theory, policy-relevant research, structured teaching
Failure at Cognitive filter (between Extraction ► Abstraction)	Breakdown at cognitive stage	Anecdotal Practitioners	Low	Limited abstraction capacity: experience remains context-bound	Experiential (non-abstracted)	Anecdotal teaching, descriptive insights
Pass Cognitive ► Failure at Epistemic filter (between Abstraction ► Formalisation)	Breakdown at epistemic stage	Epistemically Misaligned Actors	Low–Moderate	Partial abstraction but weak theoretical integration	Semi-abstract (misaligned)	Practitioner commentary, non-theoretical outputs
Pass Cognitive, Epistemic ► Failure at Institutional filter (after Formalisation)	Breakdown at institutional stage	Latent Knowledge Holders	Fragmented	Strong abstraction and epistemic alignment but weak institutional encoding	Abstract (uncoded)	Unpublished insights, informal teaching contributions
Outside translational pathway	No industry-to-academia translation	Traditional Academics	Non-TAC baseline	Strong theoretical capability, limited experiential input	Fully abstract (theory-driven)	Theoretical and methodological research

Table 1 highlights that variation in academic outcomes is systematically structured rather than incidental. Differences across actor types correspond directly to failure or success at specific filter stages, indicating that Translational Academic Capital operates as a selective mechanism governing knowledge transformation. This reinforces the shift from a resource-based view of experience to a capability-based understanding of academic contribution.

4.1 Translational Academics (High TAC)

Translational Academics are individuals who successfully navigate all three filters of knowledge and possess high levels of Translational Academic Capital (TAC). They extract insights from their experiences, generalise them into concepts, and produce recognised academic outputs.

Their work combines practical experience with theoretical frameworks, leading to applied models, policy-relevant research, and effective educational materials. Rather than simply transferring experiences to academia, they create new forms of knowledge that extend beyond their original contexts.

In academic institutions, these individuals serve as essential connections between practice and theory, enhancing the relevance of research and the legitimacy of institutions.

4.2 Anecdotal Practitioners (Failure at Cognitive Filter)

Anecdotal Practitioners have significant industry experience but struggle to abstract concepts from specific situations. Consequently, their contributions are mostly anecdotal, relying on personal stories instead of broader insights. While they may excel in experience-based teaching, they are limited in producing academic research due to a lack of analytical transformation. Their knowledge remains tied to specific cases and lacks the necessary structure for wider application or theoretical contributions.

This underscores that experience alone is insufficient for knowledge production and highlights the importance of abstraction for the formation of transferable academic content.

4.3 Epistemically Misaligned Actors (Failure at Epistemic Filter)

Epistemically Misaligned Actors have some ability to abstract ideas but do not adhere to academic norms. This may result in their resistance to theoretical frameworks, limited participation in scholarly discussions, or challenges with methodological standards. Their work tends to straddle the line between practice and academia, often lacking full legitimacy in either area.

While their insights can be useful to practitioners, they are generally not considered academically rigorous or suitable for publication. This highlights the need for knowledge not only to be abstract but also to meet institutional validation standards.

4.4 Latent Knowledge Holders (Failure at Institutional Filter)

Latent Knowledge Holders can effectively navigate cognitive and epistemic filters, but they struggle with institutional

encoding and legitimisation. They can generate valuable insights, but often fail to produce formal academic outputs, such as publications or structured curricula. This may be due to a lack of understanding of academic publishing, insufficient institutional support, or time and incentive constraints.

As a result, their knowledge remains unarticulated and underutilised, representing potential rather than a recognised contribution. This shows that even when cognitive and epistemic conditions are met, the lack of institutional support hinders the realisation of tacit knowledge.

4.5 Traditional Academics (Benchmark Category)

The primary focus of this paper is on industry-derived knowledge; however, it is essential to incorporate Traditional Academics as a benchmark category. These individuals possess robust theoretical and methodological expertise but typically lack direct industry experience. Their approach to knowledge production is characterised by disciplinary depth and analytical rigour, although it may be less applicable in practical contexts. By including this category, we can facilitate a clearer comparison between translation-based and theory-based knowledge production, thereby highlighting the distinct contributions of TAC without conflating it with established academic expertise.

4.6 Integrative Implications of the Typology

The typology shows that industry experience does not lead to uniform outcomes in academia. Instead, variations in translational capacity create distinct categories of actors, each with different knowledge and levels of integration into institutions.

As indicated in Table 1, industry professionals do not converge on a single academic outcome; instead, they assume differentiated roles within academic systems.

This differentiation has key implications. Firstly, universities should prioritise translational capability over mere industry experience in their recruitment strategies. Secondly, it points to potential institutional tensions, as different categories of actors operate under distinct epistemic assumptions and expectations.

Overall, the typology supports the main argument: Translational Academic Capital shapes knowledge production in higher education. By clarifying these distinctions, this framework lays the groundwork for both theoretical development and empirical research.

5. Implications: Rethinking Knowledge Production and Academic Practice

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study directly contributes to knowledge production, the practitioner–scholar role, and academic legitimacy. First, it shifts the focus from resource possession to capability formation. While past research viewed industry experience as a key asset (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Rousseau, 2006), this paper demonstrates that experience alone is inadequate; it requires Translational Academic Capital to be effective.

The Translational Filter Model provides a clear process for how experiential knowledge becomes recognised in academia. Previous studies have noted the link between theory and practice (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) but often lack detailed explanations of how this translation actually happens.

The typology in Section 4 offers essential differentiation among academic actors, addressing the need for nuanced understandings of knowledge production beyond the Mode 1/Mode 2 distinction (Gibbons et al., 1994; Linder et al., 2003). Ongoing conversations about methodological transparency and knowledge credibility highlight the importance of how knowledge is constructed and validated in academic settings (Aguinis et al., 2018).

The concept of Translational Academic Capital enriches discussions on academic legitimacy and knowledge authority (Bourdieu, 1988; Lamont, 2009), clarifying the conditions that enable experiential knowledge to gain institutional recognition.

5.2 Institutional and Policy Implications

The findings bear significant implications for how universities approach the recruitment, evaluation, and support of faculty members with industry backgrounds. Recruitment strategies should evolve beyond perceiving industry experience as uniformly advantageous. Instead, institutions ought to assess candidates’ translational capabilities, aligning with increasing calls for harmonising academic roles with societal impact (Rynes et al., 2001; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014).

Faculty development programmes should facilitate the formation of TACs, with particular emphasis on conceptual thinking, academic writing, and curriculum design. This approach aligns with prior research emphasising the necessity for capacity-building in engaged scholarship and practice-based research (Van de Ven, 2007).

The framework highlights potential sources of institutional tension, arising from divergent epistemic assumptions among

various stakeholders. Such tensions are indicative of broader debates concerning evaluation and recognition processes within academic systems (Lamont, 2009). The model has significant implications for performance evaluation systems, which frequently prioritise publication output over applied or translational contributions. This concern echoes critiques of narrow performance metrics within academia (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005) and aligns with broader criticisms of research evaluation practices that emphasise limited performance indicators over diverse modes of knowledge dissemination (Hicks et al., 2015).

5.3 Implications for Research and Empirical Investigation

The framework presents several opportunities for future research. Firstly, Translational Academic Capital (TAC) needs a clearer definition and a more robust measurement, building on insights from knowledge transfer and boundary-spanning processes (Carlile, 2004). Recent studies highlight the role of structured engagement and co-creation in improving knowledge translation between research and policy (Mäkelä et al., 2024).

Secondly, the typology developed in this research supports comparative studies across disciplines and institutions, contributing to discussions of knowledge production systems (Linder et al., 2003). It allows for the analysis of how disciplinary norms and organisational contexts affect translational outcomes. Future research should consider contextual factors, such as institutional culture and disciplinary expectations, that shape the legitimacy of knowledge (Lamont, 2009).

Thirdly, the propositions from the Translational Filter Model provide a foundation for empirical research using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These propositions facilitate an examination of how individuals navigate the translational process and identify where breakages occur across cognitive, epistemic, and institutional stages.

The Translational Filter Model also lays out a framework for operationalising TAC at three levels. At the cognitive level, assess TAC by examining an individual's ability to generalise experiences and identify mechanisms, indicated by conceptual framing in teaching, use of practical models, and abstraction skills.

At the epistemic level, focus on alignment with academic reasoning by engaging theoretical literature, established methods, and scholarly discourse. This can be observed through publication analysis, citation patterns, and integration of theory in applied research.

At the institutional level, TAC can be measured through outputs demonstrating recognition and encoding success, such as peer-reviewed publications, structured curricula, participation in research funding, and involvement in academic evaluations.

The paper proposes propositions based on the Translational Filter Model that can be empirically tested.

- P1: Individuals with higher cognitive abstraction are more likely to produce generalisable academic outputs from experiential knowledge.
- P2: Alignment with academic epistemic norms positively influences the likelihood that abstract knowledge will be recognised as academically legitimate.
- P3: Institutional support and familiarity with academic systems enhance the likelihood of successfully encoding epistemically aligned knowledge into recognised outputs.
- P4: Failure at any stage of the translational process significantly reduces the overall level of Translational Academic Capital.
- P5: The accumulation of Translational Academic Capital is positively associated with the integration of experiential and theoretical knowledge in academic outputs.

These dimensions view TAC as a multi-level construct, offering a structured approach for future empirical research on transforming experiential knowledge into academically recognised outputs.

5.4 Disciplinary Variation in Translational Academic Capital

The requirements for Translational Academic Capital (TAC) vary by discipline due to differences in knowledge, abstraction, and validation norms, reflecting established distinctions in disciplinary epistemologies and cultures (Tony Becher & Paul Trowler, 2001; Anthony Biglan, 1973). In applied sciences like engineering, experiential knowledge is often organised around established models, standards, and problem-solving approaches, allowing for less restrictive cognitive frameworks. However, these fields still require adherence to specific methodological and validation standards, with a strong focus on tangible outputs like prototypes, patents, or validated experimental findings.

In social sciences like management, experiential knowledge is often context-dependent and rooted in specific organisational settings. This means individuals need to translate personal experiences into broader concepts and theories, which can be challenging. Epistemic adaptation in these fields is complex because it requires interacting with various, often conflicting, theoretical frameworks. Additionally, contributions must fit within ongoing academic discussions and adhere to standards of clarity and methodological rigour.

These differences persist even under changing institutional conditions, as disciplinary norms continue to shape how knowledge is produced, evaluated, and legitimised (Trowler, 2009). TAC should be seen as a context-sensitive capability shaped by individual traits, institutional factors, and the field's epistemic characteristics. This view clarifies why similar industry backgrounds can lead to differing academic outcomes across disciplines and underscores the need for future research on TAC across fields.

5.5 Broader Implications for Higher Education

The paper demonstrates the changing role of universities in knowledge production amid rising expectations for societal relevance, highlighting the increasing importance of industry experience (Gibbons et al., 1994). The involvement of industry professionals in academia does not guarantee improved knowledge production; it creates a landscape where only a few can effectively connect practical experience with theory. Understanding this complexity is crucial for developing academic systems that integrate various knowledge forms while upholding standards of rigour and legitimacy.

6. Conclusion

This study questions the assumption that industry experience directly enhances academic knowledge production. While higher education institutions hire professionals to connect theory and practice, the findings show that experiential knowledge does not consistently lead to academic output. The shift from industry to academia is selective and depends on individual capabilities.

To explain this variation, the paper introduces the concept of Translational Academic Capital (TAC), defined as the ability to convert experience into abstract, generalisable, and recognised knowledge. The study develops a framework that separates the translational process—extraction, abstraction, and formalisation—from the filtering mechanism—cognitive, epistemic, and institutional—that influences progression at each stage. This distinction clarifies how knowledge transformation occurs and why it may succeed or fail.

The model, backed by a case analysis, reveals that differences in academic outcomes stem from varying success in navigating these filters, rather than from differences in experience alone. It emphasises the role of individual capability and institutional context, including departmental culture and disciplinary validation of knowledge, making TAC both capability-based and context-sensitive.

Key contributions of the study include advancing knowledge production research with a new mechanism for explaining uneven translation outcomes, enhancing discussions on academic legitimacy regarding the recognition of experiential knowledge, and providing a structured typology of academic actors.

The framework also presents a pathway for empirical research by operationalising TAC across its cognitive, epistemic, and institutional dimensions and developing testable propositions. Future research can explore TAC distribution across disciplines, institutional settings, and career paths, and develop measurement approaches to systematically test the model.

The value of industry professionals in academia lies not just in their experience but in their ability to translate that experience into knowledge. Recognising this distinction is essential for creating academic systems that effectively incorporate diverse expertise while maintaining rigorous standards.

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No additional data are available.

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