

# Pracademics: Facilitating smooth transition from industry to academia

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**Abstract** The decision to move from an established industry career to academia is, in most cases, one that is not taken lightly, and the factors that contribute to this decision vary from person to person. In a world with an increasing demand for universities to produce professionals that are industry-ready, and able to make positive contributions in the workplace and wider sector, having educators with industry experience who understand the needs of the sector can be invaluable. This is particularly so in practice-oriented disciplines, such as Technology. However, in most cases, for those trying to make the transition, it is not a straightforward process. There are often stumbling blocks and factors that stand as deterrents to making this transition. Drawing on practical experience, this chapter will discuss how transitions into academia can be eased by starting with part-time or visiting academic roles whilst still in industry, prior to taking up full-time academic positions. Additionally, the chapter will explore how the undertaking of a relevant doctorate whilst still working in industry can help to smooth the transition. Finally, the author makes recommendations for how HEIs can assist in mitigating some of the deterrents to the transition process.

**Keywords** Pracademic · Professional identity · Academic Practitioner ·

Career transitions · Barriers

## Box [At a Glance] starts

- Draws on practical experience to discuss how transitions into academia can be eased by starting with part-time or visiting academic roles whilst still in industry, prior to taking up full-time academic positions.
- Explores how undertaking a relevant doctorate whilst still working in industry can help to smooth the transition to an academic role.
- Suggests how Higher Education institutions (HEIs) can assist in mitigating some of the barriers to the transition process.

## Box [At a Glance] ends

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## 1 Introduction

The term 'pracademic' was first used over three decades ago (Hollweck et al., 2022; Owens, 2016). It has since been given various definitions, mainly all in the context of industry and academia (Chaaban et al., 2022; Dickfos, 2019). Posner used the term 'broker' to describe the role of pracademics, and speaks of them as 'breath[ing] life into networks' and 'serv[ing] as the glue that holds networks together' across practice and academia (2009, 16).

The gap between academia and practice has been widely discussed (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Hollweck et al., 2022; Panda, 2014). Several proposals have been made over the years for bringing these two realms more closely together. These include promoting research for practice, and exploring the role that intermediaries can play to convene, facilitate, and support the bridging of the gap between research and practice (Bansal et al., 2012; Treby & Shah, 2005). The championing of both research-informed teaching and practice-informed research further illustrate that this could be a two-way process (Joseph-Richard et al., 2021; Chynoweth, 2013).

There continues to be an increasing demand on universities to produce graduates from both traditional degree courses and non-conventional academic programmes, who are industry-ready, for example through the UK Government's Levelling Up initiative (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022) and the Bridging the Digital Skills Gap programme (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021). First, the Levelling Up initiative is one of the UK Government's flagship priorities and aims to address inequality with a focus on a number of key areas for change. These include education, and universities are said to have a crucial role to play here. This is likely to involve implementing some non-traditional ways of educating and engaging with communities, and pracademics could play an important part in developing these initiatives (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Second, the Bridging the Digital Skills Gap programme aims to increase digital and technical skills in areas where there is a gap in these skillsets. Various universities are involved in the development of short courses, apprenticeships, work-based learning, and so on, to further this government agenda and pracademics who previously worked in technical roles in industry are well-equipped to make meaningful contributions here. Pracademics can also support the employability requirements within HEIs due to their proximity to industry. Clearly, the pracademic can add value by bringing together both disciplinary theory and practical application within teaching and research. However, for those who want to transition from industry to academia, the journey is not always smooth. For the purposes of this chapter, I define the 'pracademic' as an academic who has industry experience prior to moving into academia. Within this chapter, I will explore some of the barriers to making the transition from industry to academia and suggest ways to mitigate against them. These include undertaking relevant doctoral studies and taking up part-time or visiting academic roles prior to making the transition. I will conclude this chapter with several additional recommendations to help ease the career move from industry to academia.

## 2 Methodology

This chapter is a conceptual exploration that builds on existing literature within the field. It also draws on the experiences of both the author and ten other academics who completed an in-depth survey about their experiences. Adopting a purposive sampling method to source a broad range of views (Campbell et al., 2020), I invited academics with practitioner experience from three HEIs in the UK to participate. These HEIs are all post-92 universities<sup>2</sup> with strong practice-focussed cultures.

In terms of demographics, there were six male and four female participants. Two were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and the others were White (except for one who declined to provide this information). Six participants had more than 20 years of industry experience whilst the rest had between 11 to 20 years. The participants' disciplines included Information Systems (4 participants), Marketing (1 participant), Computer Science (2 participants), Operational Management and Entrepreneurship (1 participant), Engineering (1 participant), and Accounting (1 participant). More detailed demographic information about the participants is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Participants' demographics

Pseudonym	Sex	Ethnic group	Industry years	Industry level of experience	Transition period	Discipline
P1	Female	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	11 to 20	Senior or executive level	between 2016 and 2020	Information Systems
P2	Male	White	> 20	Senior or executive level	between 2016 and 2020	Marketing
P3	Male	White	> 20	Senior or executive level	between 2016 and 2020	Computer Science
P4	Male	Prefer not to say	> 20	Mid-level	between 2000 and 2009	Computer Science

<sup>2</sup> Former polytechnics, central institutions or colleges of HE that were given university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

P5	Male	Black/African /Caribbean/ Black British	11 to 20	Mid-level	between 2016 and 2020	Information Systems
P6	Male	White	> 20	Senior or executive level	between 2000 and 2009	Operational Management and Entrepreneur ship
P7	Male	White	> 20	Intermediat e	between 1990 and 1999	Engineering
P8	Female	White	11 to 20	Mid-level	between 2010 and 2015	Accounting
P9	Female	White	11 to 20	Mid-level	between 2000 and 2009	Information Systems
P10	Female	White	> 20	Mid-level	between 1990 and 1999	Information Systems

The survey instrument consisted of 25 multiple choice and short answer questions. The questions covered seven main areas, starting with the participants' demographic information. The next category focused on their industry experience. This was followed by questions on: motivations for making the transition from industry to academia; barriers to the transition; mechanisms that helped with the transition; experiences during the transition; and finally, occurrences after the transition had been made. I used thematic analysis to draw out reoccurring and relevant themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), have reported on these in the subsequent discussion.

In terms of the data and research, it is useful to explain my positionality. I am a pracademic with 18 years of industry experience, primarily in the Technology/Health sector prior to moving into full time academia. In the last 3 years prior to this transition, I worked as a part-time lecturer in parallel with my industry role as a senior manager. In academia, I have been able to bring together both theoretical aspects of Technology and their practical applications in teaching and research.

De Montfort University Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved this research. I also obtained informed consent from all individual participants involved in the study.

### 3 Findings

The analysis of the survey data revealed the following three key themes: the rationales for making the move from practice into academia; some of the barriers that may be faced; and the benefits of pracademia for various stakeholders. Each of these will be explored in turn.

#### 3.1 Rationales for Making the Move from Practice into Academia

The decision to make the transition from a well-established industry career to academia is taken by people for various reasons. Some of these have been covered extensively in the existing literature and include, for example, the desire to: teach, undertake a lifestyle change, conduct research, be able to plan ahead, and also reduce stress (Garrison, 2005, Reitbauer et al., 2022). Table 2 (below) cites the reasons that the participants included in this study gave for making the transition from industry into academia.

**Table 2:** Participants' reported reasons for making the transition from industry to academia

Reasons for making the transition from industry to academia	Participants who selected this statement
'To give back to society/younger generation'	(P1, P2, P3, P5, P6 and P7)
'For a sense of purpose/fulfilment'	(P1, P2, P3, P5, P7 and P8)
'To teach'	(P1, P2, P4, P7 and P9)
'For a better work – life balance'	(P1, P3, P6, and P7)
'For the flexibility'	(P1, P3, P5 and P7)
'For the autonomy'	(P1, P3, P7 and P10)
'For the stability'	(P4 and P7)
One free-text response to 'Other': 'to have a wider influence in the industry beyond one employer'.	

These findings align with the existing literature that examines the motives for making this career change, including Mouratidou (2020) who discovered that some perceive teaching as a calling.

#### 3.2 Barriers

For those who want to move careers from practice to academia, whatever their reason for doing so, there are some reported barriers. Examples that have been identified in the literature: include changes in professional identity, differences around organisational culture, feelings of alienation, and lack of support (Herman et al., 2021). A summary of participants' responses on the issue of barriers is included in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Participants' reported barriers to making transitions from industry to academia

'Remuneration. Industry experience not fully taken into account with starting point in academia' (P1)
'Better work life balance' (P6)
'Lack of knowledge of and trust in the academic institution. Lack of IT and software skills and knowledge' (P7)
'commuting distance, pay, academic qualifications' (P8)
'There were no deterrents. However, my industrial experience was ignored when setting my initial grade, but my skills gained in industry was used. I went for a job where I could fit in with my children's holidays' (P9)
'to be able to have a wider influence in the industry through research and consultancy' (P10)

As outlined in Table 1, all participants (except one) had been at either mid-level or senior/executive level in industry prior to making their transition into academia. However, they revealed (and this again aligned with findings from the literature) that this did not necessarily correspond to the level that they were placed at after moving into academia. Mabry et al. (2004) discuss how the most difficult part of the move for one of their author's was the switch to starting over on the career ladder, one which included a lower salary and loss of some autonomy. Overall, the participants did seem to have a more positive experience in terms of the extent to which their industry experience was taken into account than is generally demonstrated by much of the existing literature that touches on this issue (Wilson, 2014; Garrison, 2005). Most participants reported that their industry experience was either 'considered' or 'partially considered' by the recruiting HEI. Future research could explore what is meant by a HEIs' 'consideration' of prior practitioner experience, and some recommendations are also made in the concluding section of this chapter around this aspect.

As seen in Table 1, all of the participants in this study had spent between 11 and 20 years in industry before moving into academia. These are substantial lengths of time and if the value of such prior experience is not recognised, this could present a significant barrier to making the career transition, particularly for those in senior roles. As one participant noted:

a mindset change is needed amongst non-industry academics; there is a feeling that many view practitioners as inferior if they do not have research credentials. When I applied for a senior role, I was

openly informed by a colleague that he had applied to stop me, a non-researcher, getting the role. He also said there had been a discussion 'amongst the researchers' as to who should stand against me to have a better chance of success. Aside: I got the role, so senior management did not have the same mindset. (P8)

In this case, although colleagues who were career academics did not seem to appreciate the value that this pracademic brought to the role, fortunately the management did.

Another participant reflects on other potential challenges with making this career transition:

Academia needs to value and set initial grades that reflect industrial experience and skills. A mentoring scheme should be in place to support transitioning to academia. When transitioning from industry you do not know things like how to develop new modules, or student learning styles or even your own teaching style. I was dumped into teaching with no experience and limited support, just two weeks after I had started - it was a case of sink or swim. (P9)

Figure 1 summarises the participants' answers to the question '*Was your industry experience considered doing the recruitment process?*'. The answers are grouped by the year range in which the participants made the transition from practice into academia.

Participant	Was your industry experience taken into account?	What year did you transition to an academic role?
P1	Partially	between 2016 and 2020
P2	No	between 2016 and 2020
P3	Yes	between 2016 and 2020
P4	Yes	between 2000 and 2009
P5	Partially	between 2016 and 2020
P6	Partially	between 2000 and 2009
P7	Yes	between 1990 and 1999
P8	Yes	between 2010 and 2015
P9	No	between 2000 and 2009
P10	Yes	between 1990 and 1999

**Fig. 1:** Participants' responses around whether their industry experience was taken into account doing the recruitment process? (Grouped by year range of transition from practice into academia)

The table demonstrates how the year of transition had no influence on participants' perceptions as to whether their industry experience was considered by their HEI during the recruitment process into academia. Two participants who had moved into academia between 1990 and 1999 believed that it had been considered. More recently, a participant, who had made the transition between 2016 and 2020, perceived that their industry experience was taken into consideration. Based on this sample, it does not appear that much has changed in this area in the past decade. However, there are other factors to be considered and this could be an area for further exploration.

There is more consistent evidence that students value the real-life experience that pracademics can bring to their teaching. This has been experienced first-hand by the author for many years and is also widely reported in extant literature (see, for example, Massie,

2004). From their survey completed by 15,221 students in UK universities, Neves and Hillman (2016) found that 47% of the students said that it was very important that teaching staff have relevant industry or professional expertise.

In terms of remuneration, all of the participants recorded a reduction in salary after moving from practice into academia that was either 'greatly reduced' or 'reduced'. Again, this is in line with what is seen in the literature. Garrison (2005) found that 75% of pracademic participants experienced a reduction in salary.

Another barrier for some who want to make the transition is the need to have a higher degree, typically a doctorate. This is not the case in all disciplines but is becoming increasingly common across many fields and universities (Baker, 2018). An illustrative search on an academic jobs site like jobs.ac.uk shows that for many roles, even in highly practice-based ones like Computer Science, a doctorate is necessary. There is continued discussion over whether such a higher degree should be required for certain disciplines, particularly for practice-based subjects (Dann, 2019; Baker, 2021). However, where it is essential, this can be a barrier to a professional who may have many years of practical, hands-on industry experience in the sector but who does not have a doctorate. A final barrier, raised by one participant in the survey, is the lack of HEI teaching experience. On the other hand, for a number of those who chose to make the transition, as seen in the responses to the question '*what motivated you to make the move*', a desire to teach is seen as an impetus and not a barrier. This was also the case for the author.

In the next section 3.3, I consider some of the benefits of pracademia for stakeholders before exploring potential ways to mitigate against the various barriers raised above to help smooth the transition.

### **3.3 Benefits**

Pracademics add significant value to academia and its programmes (Dickfos, 2019). As mentioned earlier, this is easily-recognised by students. Pracademics bring unique skillsets and knowledge that, if leveraged in academia, would benefit all stakeholders. In the study, participants were asked if the industry/practitioner experience they had was relevant to their academic role, and all participants answered 'yes'. Furthermore, when asked if they believed that their industry experience had contributed positively to their impact as academics, again all of the participants agreed. Table 4 highlights a selection of particular responses:

**Table 4:** Participants' responses around how their industry experience has contributed positively to their academic career

'Helps me teach relevant and up to date material. Helps me in developing my students to be well rounded industry relevant professionals' (P1)
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“The ability to understand exactly what is needed in teaching marketing subject area, and the relevance of marketing assessments. Also, employability” (P2)

“Taught how to manage and organise in a non-academic environment. This is translatable to an academic environment, not convinced the reverse would be true” (P4)

“Being able to connect with business and business leaders taking post graduate qualifications at the university. Being able to tell real life stories to under graduates how the real world works and how they can best make a success for their future career in industry” (P6)

“Able to encourage students and point them along ways of working and thinking that will assist their careers” (P7)

“my management experience has led to rapid promotion within academia; my practical experience assisted greatly in making my teaching come to life” (P8)

‘I gained a lot of transferrable skills in industry such as project management, leading a team and blue-sky research where you could see the positive impact of your work. I could write reports, plan projects and handle project finances. I would always recommend that students gain industrial experience before moving into academia’ (P9)

‘can talk from personal experience, have lots of examples to use. know what really happens in practice beyond the simplicity of textbook’ (P10)

There is increasing demand for universities to produce graduates that are industry-ready and able to make meaningful contributions in the workplace and wider sector. Pracademics bring with them skillsets, experience, and knowledge bases that they can draw on to support students’ development, as they have first-hand insight into industry and understand the needs of the sector. When it comes to universities’ standing in league tables, student employability can be a key factor. Graduate career prospects is an important metric. For instance, in the Complete University Guide league table, one of the factors is ‘Graduate Prospects’ which is based on the HESA graduate outcomes survey (Oliver, 2022). In addition to student employability, pracademics are generally also able to leverage industry connections to bring in guest lecturers, and organise sessions that bring professionals and academics together to further students’ knowledge and understanding of industry. An example of this is an annual event that I organise for students called ‘A Day in the Life of a Data Professional’ where alumni who work as data professionals and industry experts are invited to speak at a session with students. During the event, they share key industry insights with the students, followed by a question-and-answer session. It is always extremely popular and student feedback demonstrates perceptions that they gain immensely from it. Pracademics, particularly those who stay in contact with industry after transitioning to academia, are also invaluable when it comes to keeping curricula relevant both currently and for the future (namely maintaining alignment of curricula with industry requirements). Pracademics also bring in diverse, but needed, perspectives. At times, these perspectives are

sought in other ways, for example through periodical industry liaison committees, which have a remit to help ensure that curricula are relevant to current and future industry needs. However, the in-house pracademic is even more valuable. If empowered, the in-house pracademic may help by developing well-rounded graduates who meet industry expectations and workforce needs. This is buttressed by a quote from one of the survey’s participants:

there is a lot that academia can learn from industry to help student employability’ (P10)

In the UK HEI system, as mentioned in the introduction, there are also some areas which are increasingly being prioritised as a result of Government initiatives. These include, Levelling Up, Bridging the Digital Skills Gap programme, and accreditation of programmes by professional bodies. These are areas where pracademics are well suited for supporting HEIs.

### 3.4 Smoothing the Transition

Having discussed some of the barriers to transitioning from industry to academia, this section makes recommendations for facilitating smoothing the transition. These are considered under three main headings: Before, During and After the transition.

#### 3.4.1 Before

For disciplines that require a doctorate, this may be something for the potential pracademic to consider undertaking alongside their industry role before they make the transition into academia. This is the route that I took and I found that it helped immensely years later when I made the decision to transition into a full-time academic role. 50% of the survey participants revealed that they had similarly completed doctorates prior to transitioning into academia, and all of them described it as helpful for the transition process. A summary of all of the participants’ responses is provided in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Participants’ responses to the question: *Would you recommend acquiring a PhD prior to moving into full time academia?*

‘Yes, it’s a great foundation to build an academic career on’ (P1)
‘Not necessarily. A strong level of industry experience can provide wider academic team with the reality of what skills are needed in business. 1% of students will progress to be an academic researcher, and 99% go to university to get a job.’ (P2)
‘Yes. An important part of the role is supervising PhD students, so it helps to have been in that position.’ (P3)

'Not relevant within my particular area, which provides almost vocational training with little research focus.' (P4)

'Facilitate some common grounds with colleagues in academia.' (P5)

'Business Schools need practitioners with experience as much as people with PHDs. Other qualifications might be more relevant.' (P6)

'Possibly although the PhD is rarely central to what is going on in industry.' (P7)

'no; entering academia can provide access to obtaining a PhD without having to self-fund' (P8)

'Yes - it is essential because you will not be given enough time to complete your PhD as the time taken for teaching is underestimated.' (P9)

'yes. there is not time to do a PhD when in a full-time academic role.' (P10)

The responses highlighted a few interesting and important points about completing a doctorate prior to making the career move and how it can help smooth the transition:

- It is not applicable to all disciplines but, for disciplines where a doctorate is a requirement, it can help the transition process; participants P1 and P5 alluded to this.
- P3 mentioned how it would help in the role in terms of supervising doctorate students, this also applies to research-heavy roles.
- Part of the smoothing process could be that it immediately gives common ground with colleagues in academia (P5)
- Combining studying for a doctorate with an academic role (after transitioning) can be challenging timewise. This was mentioned by two of the ten participants (P9 and P10)
- Finally, there was the comment by participant P7 who observed that the doctorate is rarely central to what is going on in industry. In some sectors, such as the one that I worked in, this is very true and the decision to complete doctoral studies must be an intentional and strategic one, particularly when a person decides that at some point in the future that they are likely to make the transition to academia.

Another way to smooth the transition from practice to academia, and perhaps to even sense-check the decision to do so, is to take up part time or visiting academic roles whilst still in industry but recognising that this may not necessarily result in a higher starting position (Garrison, 2005). Such partial involvement in academia may provide the professional with first-hand insights into the role to help support their decision-making around a career transition. It can also help to gradually build up their experience of teaching and learning at a more comfortable pace, and to build and further develop networks. This would likely translate to a less steep learning curve when the practitioner eventually makes the transition to a full-

time role. In my case, I held a part time role for three years prior to transitioning to a full-time role. The result was that the career change went smoothly and, in terms of the actual tasks and work entailed in the role, the move was a very pleasant process.

In terms of responses from the survey, seven (70%) of the participants took on part time or visiting academic roles prior to transitioning. When asked how this helped smooth the transition, the majority (n=5) of those who had part time/visiting academic roles prior to transitioning cited gaining experience as something that had helped smooth the transition for them (see table 6).

**Table 6:** Participants’ response to question: *If taking on a part-time or visiting academic role helped your transition, how did it help?*

Responses	Number of Participants
Helped provide impetus to make the transition	3
Building networks	2
Gaining experience	5
Not applicable	3

When asked whether they would advise others who may be looking to make the transition from industry into academia to consider undertaking a part time or visiting academic role, all but one of the participants who had done so selected ‘yes’ that they would. One participant selected ‘maybe’.

Finally, when participants were asked how they would rate their overall experience of transitioning from industry to academia, choosing from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very difficult), the average value over the ten participants was 2.6. Facilitating smooth transition through adopting the recommendations outlined at the end of this chapter, and through similar processes, is likely to result in a positive shift in the experiences of those transitioning.

### 3.4.2 During

This sub-section focuses on the application and interview process. If a part time or visiting academic role has been undertaken, the professional would already have networks in place that can potentially help in terms of putting together applications, references, and ultimately lead to successful recruitment. It may also be that those professionals are best- placed to apply for any full-time role that becomes available in their university where they are already known. To smooth the transition, the candidate needs to map their skillsets to the

requirements of the person specification. Even though their skills, experience, and knowledge might not align directly with the requirements (which may be written with a career academic in mind), the professional needs to be remember that they still have a very rich and valuable experience that they bring from industry. There is a need for this to be similarly recognised during the recruitment process by the HEI, and in the section on recommendations, this is discussed further.

### **3.4.3 After**

To smooth the process after the transition, the university needs to have in place on-boarding processes that are tailored to the needs of staff who do not have a traditional academic background but do have significant industry experience. One of the participants from the survey mentioned how:

When transitioning from industry you do not know things like how to develop new modules, or student learning styles or even your own teaching style. I was dumped into teaching with no experience and limited support, just two weeks after I had started – it was a case of sink or swim. (P9)

This is particularly important for those who have previously never worked in academia and who did not take on a part time or visiting role prior to transitioning. It may be very easy for institutions to assume that everyone who comes into academia has knowledge about the relevant systems and processes (as mentioned by P9 in the quote above); for example the development of new modules, student learning styles, and teaching. There should be processes in place for those who need this additional support, and it should be visible and easily accessible to the new staff member. Additional recommendations are made in the final section below.

## **4 Conclusion**

To help mitigate against the various barriers discussed in this chapter, maximise the benefits for HEIs in embracing pracademics, and to generally smooth the transition process for those seeking to move from industry to academia, several recommendations are offered.

In terms of recognising the benefits of engagement and collaboration with industry, some progress has been made over the years. For instance, a search on jobs.ac.uk for academic roles, which include industry experience as a criterion, brought up several opportunities.

The impact of this can also be seen in the additional career pathway that increasing numbers of universities have already introduced or are introducing. Traditionally, universities have always had alternative career progression pathways; teaching and learning, research pathway, or a hybrid of these two. Now, universities are beginning to introduce the enterprise pathway, which focusses on collaboration, impact, and engagement with industry. Whilst this is a major headway, it is interesting to note that for all of the participants in the survey, the enterprise career pathway was not available in any of the universities when they were recruited. Those universities that do have this essential new route are to be celebrated, but arguably more still needs to be done. This leads us to the first recommendation.

For disciplines where the recruitment and retention of pracademics present a clear advantage, formal models should be developed to help map industry skillsets and experiences to pay grades. This would help to ensure that practitioner backgrounds are considered during the recruitment process in a non-subjective manner. For example, in recruiting into practice-oriented disciplines such as computer science and information systems, the model would map years of industry experience to pay grades that also consider technical certifications and other relevant skillsets. When it comes to the mapping of skillsets from academia to industry, there are numerous examples available (Talboy, 2020; Shankararaman & Gottipati, 2016; Gehr et al., 2020). However, the same does not appear to hold true for the reverse. This implies a clear area of development for HEIs that are interested in recruiting from industry.

The next recommendation focuses on the provision of HEI-support for those who transition to academia from industry. This career move can represent a significant change in terms of culture, identity, and expectations (Herman et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). Having a strong support network in place, which ideally includes academics with previous/current practitioner experience who can relate to their new colleague, could be invaluable. If applicants were made aware of the support system in place, this could serve as a potential impetus for deciding to make the transition. Making this support available to prospective applicants, where feasible, would go a long way in smoothing the transition. In this study, participants were asked what would have helped in smoothing the transition. A few (P1, P8 and P9) mentioned that a buddy system, for example where 'academic staff in similar situations previously, provide informal help network' (P8), would have been useful, but none of their HEIs had one.

Based on existing literature, and the experiences of the survey participants, this does not appear to be happening on a large scale. In HEIs where buddy systems are in place, or where mentors are assigned to new members of staff, thought may not have been given as to who pracademics are allocated as buddies. Having a mentor who has taken the same career path can be truly invaluable and could reduce assumptions, the potential for miscommunication, and provide tailored support.

Another recommendation is that HEIs should actively promote a culture that values pracademics, and their contributions, as part of a diverse academic community. Any change in culture and mindset of an organisation needs to be driven from the top down (Muls et al., 2015). For change to occur, it must become a priority for the leadership team who should proactively embed the message across the entire organisation. This could include championing examples of pracademics who make valuable contributions to the university in, for example, the holistic development of graduates.

The final recommendation is that HEIs should put in place systems and processes that encourage and empower pracademics to draw on their unique skillsets and industry knowhow in: their teaching, mentoring of both students and colleagues, continued industry engagement through schemes (such as knowledge transfer partnerships and industry liaison committees), enterprise lead roles, short courses, and continuing professional development. A quote by the late Steve Jobs helps to illustrate further why this important: “It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do” (Lipman, 2018). With regards to industry skillsets and knowledge, universities should ensure that they give those with the knowhow the freedom and required support to leverage them.

The results of this research demonstrate that there are ways to smooth the transition for those who make the choice to move from industry to academia. In terms of remuneration, those who decide to make the transition may find that they need to accept a reduction in salary. However, as reported, there are mitigating factors such as opportunities to give back to society/younger generation, developing a sense of purpose/fulfilment, and to teach. In time, as universities continue to build on industry engagement in areas like the enterprise career pathway, this might cease to be a barrier. Other challenges, such as the mapping across of industry experience, are ones that HEIs should address urgently. There is a strong need for pracademics in the sector, and if the pathway from industry to academia is not smoothed it would be detrimental to universities, students and ultimately society as a whole.

### **Box [Reflective Questions] starts**

- In this chapter, Obembe identifies how the recruitment of pracademics can offer potential benefits for stakeholders. Reflecting on your own context, what do you consider could be a primary advantage of engaging pracademics in higher education, and why?
- Some of the barriers that pracademics may face in making their career transition from practice into academia are highlighted in this chapter. Which of these challenges might be the most significant, and why? Can you think of any others?
- In drawing the chapter to a close, Obembe proposes recommendations that could help those who may be looking to make a career transition from industry to academia. Reflecting on your particular context, which of these do you believe could make the most impact, and why? Can you identify any other steps that could be taken?

### **Box [Reflective Questions] ends**

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