Academic Intrapreneurship in Higher Education, 2010–2025: A PRISMA-Guided Systematic Literature Review

Arun Kumar Waghchoure [1]

[1] Fellow Program in Management Scholar, Chetana's Institute of Management & Research

waghchoure.arun23@student.cimr.in | arunkw@gmail.com | ORCiD: 0000-0002-5047-2546

Abstract

Academic Entrepreneurship covers entrepreneurship that emanates from universities through students, faculty, and staff. This review focuses on faculty who carry out internal entrepreneurship, that is academic intrapreneurship, within higher education institutions. Initiatives may be faculty initiated or institution sponsored provided faculty remain the primary agents; projects led only by professional or administrative staff are out of scope. A PRISMA guided review of peer reviewed studies for 2010 to 2025 included sixteen studies spanning qualitative cases, surveys, mixed methods, and bibliometric analyses. The review addresses definition and operationalisation, antecedents at individual and organisational levels, mechanisms and processes, and outcomes and barriers. Incubators and clear internal governance including performance indicators, recognition in promotion, and intellectual property and process clarity enable engagement, while ambiguous mandates and role overload suppress it. Measurement is heterogeneous with limited use of validated scales and internal indicators. A synthesised model and agenda emphasise construct clarity, causal identification, and comparable measurement across disciplines and institution types.

Keywords: Academic Intrapreneurship, Faculty Entrepreneurship, Higher Education Institutions, Intrapreneurial University, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), PRISMA

JEL Classification: I23 L26 M13 O31 O32 J24

Introduction

Universities strive to remain competitive while renewing teaching, research, student services, and public value within resource and accountability constraints. *Academic intrapreneurship* is faculty centred internal innovation inside higher education institutions. It is distinct from academic entrepreneurship that creates external ventures such as spin offs, start ups, and external licensing.

Initiatives may be faculty initiated or institution sponsored such as seed grant calls and incubator programmes, provided faculty remain the primary agents. Consulting projects led only by professional or administrative staff are excluded. This boundary supports construct clarity and relevant measurement. Adjacent work on external academic entrepreneurship maps motivations and pathways and is used here for conceptual contrast (Miller et al., 2018; Blaese et al., 2021; Yu & Lu, 2023).

The review has four questions. RQ1: How is academic intrapreneurship defined and operationalised in higher education institutions. RQ2: Which individual and organisational antecedents are associated with engagement. RQ3: Through what mechanisms and processes does intrapreneurship unfold, and what outcomes and barriers are reported. RQ4: How has intrapreneurship been measured and where are the gaps?

Methods: PRISMA

Design and reporting: The review follows PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA S. Thematic synthesis draws on established guidance for narrative and thematic synthesis (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021; Rodgers et al., 2009).

Eligibility: Time window: 2010 to 2025. Language and type: English; peer reviewed journal articles and reviews that analyse internal innovation. Setting: faculty centred intrapreneurship inside higher education institutions. Exclusions: studies on external venture creation without an internal institutional component; projects led only by professional or administrative staff; theses, editorials, commentaries, conference abstracts, grey literature.

Information sources and search: Scopus, EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage, ScienceDirect, with forward citation chasing and backward reference checks. Search limits and the Boolean strategy are depicted in the **figure 2** to meet PRISMA S transparency.

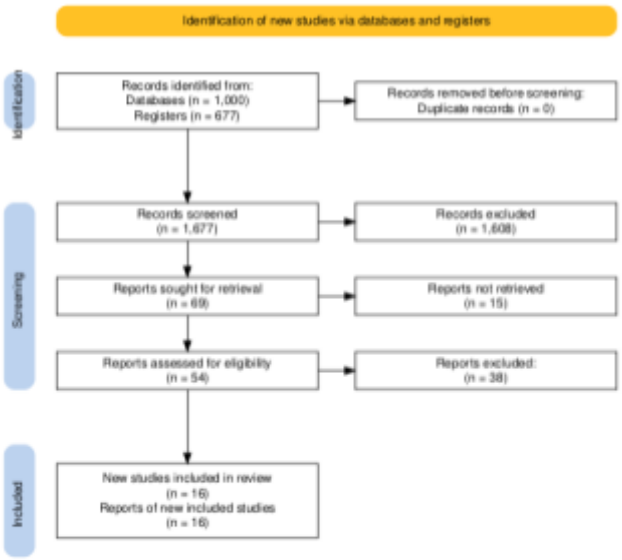

Fig.1. *PRISMA flow*

Standards cited: PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021); PRISMA-S (Rethlefsen et al., 2021); Narrative synthesis (Rodgers et al., 2009); MMAT (Hong et al., 2018; 2022).

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(
 "academic intrapreneur*" OR
 "university intrapreneur*" OR
 "institutional entrepreneur*" OR
 "faculty intrapreneur*" OR
 "academic entrepreneur*" OR
 "entrepreneurial universit*" OR
 "university-based entrepreneur*" OR
 "intrapreneurship in education" OR
 ("internal venturing" AND ("universities" OR "higher education")) OR
 ("knowledge transfer" AND ("university" OR "academic")) OR
 ("technology transfer" AND ("university" OR "academic")) OR
 ("corporate entrepreneurship" AND ("academia" OR "higher education")) OR
 ("university-industry collaboration") OR
 "university spin-off*" OR
 "intrapreneurial universit*" OR
 "corporate entrepreneurship in universit*" OR
 "university innovat*" OR
 "higher education innovat*" OR
 "academic change agent"
)
AND
(
 "literature review" OR
 "systematic literature review" OR
 "systematic review" OR
 "scoping review" OR
 "review article" OR
 "meta-analysis" OR
 "bibliometric analysis" OR
 "research synthesis" OR
 "SLR" OR
 "PRISMA"
)
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Fig. 2. *Search Query*

Selection: Records were managed in Zotero and screened. Titles and abstracts were screened against eligibility, followed by full text assessment. Reasons for exclusion were recorded.

PRISMA flow: Records identified from databases (n = 1000); other sources (n = 677); duplicates were preemptively removed (n = 0); records screened (n = 1677); records excluded (1608); reports sought (n = 69); not retrieved (n = 15); assessed (n = 54); excluded with reasons (n = 38); included (n = 16). **Figure 1** presents the flow.

Data extraction: A piloted template captured bibliographic details; setting and level; design and methods including surveys, structural equation modelling, case studies, mixed methods, and bibliometric or systematic reviews; sample and evidence; focal constructs including intrapreneurial orientation, psychological capital, incubator roles, governance and

incentives, and institutional logics; mechanisms and processes; outcomes including innovation outputs, capability and culture; barriers; and measurement approaches including scales and indicators.

Quality appraisal: Methodological quality was appraised with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies. For bibliometric and systematic reviews, clarity of aims, search transparency, selection criteria, and synthesis approach were evaluated with adapted items from the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool and Joanna Briggs Institute checklists. Appraisal informed narrative weighting and was not converted to a composite score (Hong et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2019).

Synthesis: Thematic synthesis was organised by the review questions. Vote counting was avoided. Directions of effect and areas of convergence and divergence were noted. Appraisal judgements informed the weighting of evidence in the thematic synthesis.

Results

Study selection: Studies (n = 16) were included after screening (n = 1677) records and assessing (n = 54).

Study characteristics: The corpus spans 2010 to 2025, with most publications after 2018. Designs include qualitative cases and interviews, surveys, mixed methods, and bibliometric and systematic reviews. Units of analysis include individual faculty, intrapreneurial projects and teams, incubators and innovation centres, and institution level transformation initiatives. Samples range from small case evidence to large multi institution surveys. Bibliometric work maps terminology and co-citation structure (Gregán et al., 2024). Most studies address internal innovation rather than external spin offs.

Thematic synthesis

Definitions and operationalisations: Academic intrapreneurship is internal opportunity creation and innovation inside higher education institutions, distinct from external venture formation. Studies analyse institution anchored programmes, services, platforms, and process innovations led by faculty, often supported by incubators and related infrastructure (Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022; Shekhar et al., 2023). Bibliographic mapping shows growing use of

intrapreneur terminology in transformation discourse, alongside drift with entrepreneurial university framings (Gregán et al., 2024; Coşkun et al., 2022).

Antecedents individual: Intrapreneurial orientation and related dispositions are associated with engagement in internal innovation (Abidi et al., 2022). Psychological capital that includes hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism is positively associated with innovative intentions, while role conflict and role overload are negatively associated; these mechanisms are consistent with intrapreneurial behaviour inside higher education institutions (Liao et al., 2022). Qualitative work highlights identity work and navigation of multiple institutional logics that reconcile research and teaching with innovation and public value (Engzell et al., 2024).

Antecedents organisational: Incubators and innovation units act as boundary spanners that scout ideas, broker resources, provide intellectual property and legal guidance, legitimise projects, and connect teams to sponsorship pathways (Shekhar et al., 2023; Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022). Governance clarity and incentives including key indicators, internal seed grants, protected time, recognition in promotion and tenure, and transparent intellectual property policies are associated with higher engagement. Digital infrastructure reduces coordination costs and broadens participation (Klofsten et al., 2024).

Mechanisms and processes: Mechanisms include incubation pipelines that comprise idea scouting, mentoring, intellectual property and feasibility assessment, cross unit brokering, and institutional sponsorship; programmatic pathways such as internal calls, seed grants, and living lab pilots; and cross boundary teaming that involves faculty, students, administrators, and industry partners. Navigation of institutional logics uses bridging that reframes projects as core to teaching, research, and service, and buffering that provides protected time and space (Engzell et al., 2024; Crighton and Shepherd, 2024).

Outcomes: Innovation outputs include new or revised academic programmes, microcredentials, research platforms, and improvements to student services and internal processes, with occasional institution anchored intellectual property as projects mature. Capability outcomes include faculty skill development, stronger networks, and greater student engagement

and experiential learning (Henry and Lahikainen, 2024; Moraes et al., 2024). Cultural and strategic outcomes include movement toward an *intrapreneurial university* where internal venturing and continuous improvement become routine and are evaluated (Gregán et al., 2024; Klofsten et al., 2024).

Barriers: Barriers include bureaucracy and procedural opacity, misaligned incentives in which promotion criteria privilege publications and teaching, time scarcity and role overload, and siloed decision rights that create high coordination costs. Qualitative studies describe reluctant intrapreneurs who advance innovations despite penalties or ambiguous mandates, which highlights the roles of climate and leadership sponsorship (Crighton and Shepherd, 2024; Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022).

Measurement: Measurement remains heterogeneous. Surveys often use intrapreneurial orientation scales and organisational climate constructs (Abidi et al., 2022). Measures from adjacent entrepreneurship such as psychological capital and role conflict are informative but not applied consistently to intrapreneurship (Liao et al., 2022). Few studies report internal indicators such as proposal and pilot counts, process changes, and institution owned intellectual property events. Bibliometric work maps the field rather than behaviour (Gregán et al., 2024). Clearer constructs and shared indicators would improve comparability.

Discussion

Principal findings: Academic intrapreneurship is faculty centred internal innovation. Evidence converges on two pillars. The first is individual dispositions and role dynamics that include intrapreneurial orientation, psychological capital, and role conflict and role overload. The second is organisational design that includes incubators and innovation units, governance clarity, incentives, and digital infrastructure (Abidi et al., 2022; Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022; Shekhar et al., 2023; Gregán et al., 2024; Klofsten et al., 2024). Navigation of institutional logics shows bridging and buffering practices that support internal projects (Engzell et al., 2024).

Implications for policy and practice: (i) Governance clarity: publish indicators, decision rights, stage gates, and transparent intellectual property policies and procedures (Klofsten et al., 2024). **(ii) Aligned incentives:** recognise internal

innovation in workload, promotion and tenure criteria, and awards; provide seed grants and execution budgets (Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022). **(iii) Incubator capability:** resource incubators to scout, coach, triage legal issues, broker across units, and open sponsor access (Shekhar et al., 2023). **(iv) Time and space:** offer course release or micro sabbaticals and create sandboxes and living labs for testing internal solutions (Crighton and Shepherd, 2024). **(v) Digital infrastructure:** use collaboration platforms and rapid prototyping tools to widen participation (Klofsten et al., 2024). **(vi) Measurement:** track proposals and pilots, process changes, and institution owned intellectual property alongside survey constructs to enable evaluation and learning (Abidi et al., 2022; Gregán et al., 2024).

Limitations of the evidence: Terminology and operationalisation vary. Case samples are small. Surveys are largely cross sectional and rely on self report with inconsistent constructs and indicators. Bibliometric and systematic reviews enrich field mapping but provide limited behavioural measurement (Gregán et al., 2024; Coşkun et al., 2022).

Limitations of the review: The scope covers 2010 to 2025, English language, peer reviewed articles, and a single reviewer process. Heterogeneity precluded meta analysis, so the synthesis is thematic. The figure presents search restrictions and the Boolean strategy consistent with PRISMA S.

Agenda for research: (i) Construct clarity and shared indicators: adopt a common operational definition of academic intrapreneurship as internal faculty centred innovation and co develop an Academic Intrapreneurship Index with individual scales, organisational supports, and internal output indicators. **(ii) Causal designs:** apply controlled before and after designs, interrupted time series, synthetic control, regression discontinuity, and event study models for staggered adoption to evaluate policy and incentive changes and phased incubator rollouts. **(iii) Process evidence:** deepening tracing of incubation pipelines, sponsorship pathways, and navigation of institutional logics inside institutions (Engzell et al., 2024; Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022). **(iv) Comparative studies:** test how discipline norms and institution types condition behaviour (Henry and Lahikainen, 2024; Moraes et al., 2024; Kanısoy et al., 2024). **(v) Equity and participation:** assess access to sponsorship and recognition and test whether barriers from the broader entrepreneurship stream translate to internal innovation contexts (Halilem et al., 2022).

Overall interpretation: Faculty capability and institutional design together drive intrapreneurial activity. Institutions that clarify rules and incentives and resource boundary spanning incubators are better positioned to convert dispersed ideas into scalable internal innovations, while bureaucratic opacity and misaligned workload and promotion criteria suppress promising efforts (Burkholder and Hulsink, 2022; Crighton and Shepherd, 2024; Klofsten et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The review synthesises evidence from sixteen peer reviewed studies and delineates academic intrapreneurship as faculty centred internal innovation. Two themes explain engagement: individual dispositions and role dynamics, and organisational design. Mechanisms centre on incubation pathways, cross boundary teaming, and navigation of multiple institutional logics. Outcomes include programme, service, and process innovations, capability development, and cultural movement toward an intrapreneurial university. Persistent barriers include bureaucracy, misaligned promotion and workload criteria, and time scarcity. A shared definition, disciplined measurement that couples survey constructs with internal indicators, and stronger quasi experimental and process tracing designs will support evaluation and policy relevant learning.

Appendix

Table 1: *Characteristics of included studies*

Citation	Design	Setting	Focus	Key note
Abidi 2022	Survey	Faculty multi institution	Intrapreneurial orientation and climate	Orientation linked to internal innovation
Blaese 2021	Survey	Academics and postdocs	Career mobility and intentions	External entrepreneurship context
Burkholder and Hulsink 2022	Qualitative cases	Faculty and administrators	Internal innovation conditions and incentives	Barriers and enablers inside institutions
Coşkun 2022	Review	Entrepreneurial university	Governance and change frames	Background for transformation discourse
Crighton and Shepherd 2024	Qualitative	Faculty innovators	Climate and role overload	Reluctant intrapreneurs and sponsorship

Table 1: *Characteristics of included studies*

Citation	Design	Setting	Focus	Key note
Engzell 2024	Qualitative process	Faculty intrapreneurs	Navigation of institutional logics	Bridging and buffering tactics
Gregán 2024	Bibliometric	Scopus and Web of Science	Intrapreneurship in transformation discourse	Co citation clusters and field mapping
Halilem 2022	Quantitative	Academics	Equity in entrepreneurship	Equity lens relevant to participation
Henry and Lahikainen 2024	Mixed or survey	Multi institution	Intrapreneurial activity in entrepreneurial contexts	Links to engagement and learning
Kanısoy 2024	Survey	Faculty multi institution	Determinants of intrapreneurial behaviour	Drivers and correlates identified
Klofsten 2024	Conceptual or synthesis	Institution level	Governance and digital infrastructure	Intrapreneurial university design
Liao 2022	Survey	Academics	Psychological capital and role conflict	Mechanisms consistent with intrapreneurship
Miller 2018	Review	Academic entrepreneurship	Motivations and pathways	External venturing background
Moraes 2024	Quantitative	Multi institution	Faculty intrapreneurship and outcomes	Capability and engagement links
Shekhar 2023	Qualitative case	Incubator and teams	Incubator roles and process	Resource brokering and sponsorship
Yu and Lu 2023	Meta analysis	Academics	Motivations for entrepreneurship	Background for contrast

Data Availability: Export of the records are maintained in the safe repository on github link

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