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Making Expertise Visible: Professional Identity, Tacit Knowledge, and the Development of Transferable Methods

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Abstract

Professional expertise is often recognised through outcomes rather than through an explicit understanding of how those outcomes are produced. Experienced practitioners may know what to do, when to adapt, and which signals to prioritise, yet struggle to articulate the reasoning that guides their decisions. This creates challenges for professional development, succession, training, collaboration, and the preservation of specialised knowledge.

This paper presents Build Your Systems™ as a framework for examining how practitioners transform tacit expertise into an explicit and transferable professional method. The framework focuses on the relationship between knowledge externalisation and professional identity. It explores how practitioners identify recurring patterns in their work, distinguish core principles from personal habits, articulate decision criteria, define exceptions, and organise their expertise into a coherent system that can be communicated to others.

The paper argues that method development is not merely a technical process of documenting procedures. It is also a process of professional meaning-making in which practitioners reinterpret their experience, clarify the value of their contribution, and establish the boundaries of their expertise. This process may strengthen professional agency while reducing dependence on intuitive, person-specific delivery.

Drawing on concepts from tacit knowledge, reflective practice, professional learning, and knowledge management, the paper proposes a multidimensional model of method development based on visibility, coherence, transferability, adaptability, and practitioner ownership. The model contributes to discussions on how expert knowledge can be preserved and shared without removing the contextual judgement that makes professional practice effective.

Keywords: Tacit knowledge; Professional identity; Reflective practice; Knowledge transfer; Method development