

How can academic-policy collaboration be more effective? A stewardship approach to engaged scholarship in the case of SME internationalization

Margaret Fletcher, Pavlos Dimitratos and Stephen Young*

In response to calls for more policy-relevant academic research, this paper undertakes a stewardship approach to examine an engaged scholarship policy programme targeted at supporting the internationalization of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Scotland, namely the Global Companies Development Programme (GCDP). The study was undertaken by academics and included a combined formal evaluation and research study, a follow-up workshop and group interviews over a ten-year-period. This study extends the stewardship approach to the engaged scholarship context. The findings suggest that stakeholders view their collaboration as a “supra-organizational” formation through which they can identify and empathize with its objectives; require skilful boundary spanners who consistently promote the objectives of the collaboration in the participating organizations; and, accentuate effective knowledge generation and transfer to SME internationalization activities that reflect the outcomes of their collaboration. We discuss policy implications for the development of private-public and inter-agency partnerships.

Key words: Engaged Scholarship, Stewardship Theory, Global Companies Development Programme, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Internationalization, Scotland.

1. Introduction

In response to calls for more policy-relevant academic research, this paper provides an examination of how an engaged scholarship policy programme that supported the internationalization of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Scotland, namely the Global Companies Development Programme (GCDP) rendered successful outcomes for the stakeholders involved. In this project, the participating

* All authors are affiliated with the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom. Margaret Fletcher (corresponding author) is Senior Lecturer in International Business. Contact: Margaret.Fletcher@glasgow.ac.uk. Pavlos Dimitratos is Professor of International Business. Stephen Young is Emeritus Professor of International Business.

GCDP stakeholders comprised a three-person academic team, Scottish Enterprise policy makers and GCDP-participating SMEs. Scottish Enterprise is the chief policy organization in Scotland, which supports economic development, enterprise, internationalization and innovation. This was a successful collaboration since all three stakeholder groups effectively attained their pursued objectives, namely generation of research knowledge (academics), promotion of SME internationalization support measures (policy makers), and enhanced enterprise international growth and performance (SMEs).

The rationale behind this paper draws upon the debate regarding the need for more academic research to be more practically relevant, with pleas for greater engagement between researchers and practitioners in a learning community (e.g. Rynes, Bartunek and Daft, 2001; Thorpe, Eden, Bessant and Ellwood, 2011). We posit that the existing engaged scholarship literature is rather descriptive in nature and devoid of the partnership processes and mechanisms that influence engaged scholarship. In other words, although there is agreement on the necessity of stakeholders to closely work together in an engaged scholarship context, there is a lack of research on how such a close collaboration can be achieved. In this paper, we seek to apply the stewardship theory to our understanding of how these processes and mechanisms influence effective, engaged scholarship in a collaborative project involving academics, policy makers and business practitioners. The stewardship theory is a robust theoretical framework that may advance our understanding of how effective collaborations involving stakeholders that have common, but also sometimes conflicting, objectives in the partnership can work effectively (Davis, Schoorman, Donaldson, 1997). The contribution of the current study is to show how stewardship theory is extended into the engaged scholarship setting, by advancing three propositions. The implementation of this theory adds to its validity since engaged scholarship transcends the distinct organizational boundaries within which stewardship relations have customarily been applied.

We adopt Van De Ven's definition that engaged scholarship is "a participative form of research for obtaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders" in studying complex problems; and thereby "produc[ing] knowledge that is more penetrating and insightful than when scholars or practitioners work on the problems alone" (Van De Ven, 2007:9). The learning community "jointly produces knowledge that can both advance the scientific enterprise and enlighten a community of practitioners" (2007:7). We respond to calls for empirical investigations into how useful successful cooperation can be advanced and provide insights into how knowledge transfer between collaborators may take place (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman and Scherer, 2010).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the literature on engaged scholarship and stewardship theory. Following that we provide the context of the GCDP and explain the process of this engaged scholarship collaboration. In the subsequent part we elaborate on this collaboration in the light

of the stewardship theory and develop three related propositions. The concluding section discusses the implications of this research for theory and public policy, and offers suggestions for future research.

2. Research background

2.1. Academic-practitioner engaged scholarship

Calls from the academic community for greater engagement between researchers and practitioners include leading proponents such as Pettigrew (1997) in the United Kingdom and Van de Ven (2007) in the United States. Since Pettigrew's initial prompt, there has been a growing interest in the generation of policy-relevant academic research in the United Kingdom (Atherton, 2008; Ram, Jones, Edwards, Kiselincev, Muchenje, Woldesenbet, 2013). There is debate in the field of management research as to the apparent marginality of business school academics in the production of management knowledge and the lack of academic engagement in developing and conducting research with practitioners, and communicating the results to this audience. This has been identified as a rigour-relevance gap (Fincham and Clark, 2009).

In an early review of the literature on the use of organizational research, Beyer and Trice (1982) conclude that researchers and practitioners belong to separate communities with different values and ideologies. More recently, Keiser and Leiner (2009) claim that these communities operate according to completely separate sets of institutional logic, with the consequence that communication of knowledge cannot be absorbed from one to the other rendering collaboration futile. Starkey, Hatchuel, and Tempest (2009) support the idea that as a result of the proliferation of different modes of enquiry there is a range of versions of science, but that management research has pursued rigour over relevance. However, in order to improve knowledge creation and dissemination, academia needs to better reflect user interests (Starkey and Madan, 2001).

In contrast, other researchers argue that there are examples of successful collaborations that engender superior research and outputs, which provide high-quality scholarship and social usefulness, while not compromising the needs of academics and practitioners (Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009). In addition, Paton, Chia and Burt suggest that by pursuing advanced levels of scholarship, academics can contribute to practice by presenting "counterintuitive perspectives" (2013:1) that challenge conventional business wisdom. Bridging the gap between the two groups is likely to lead to cross-fertilization and richer understanding of organizations. It also provides credibility to researchers in the wider community (O'Brien and Pizmony-Levy, 2016). By obtaining different perspectives from stakeholders regarding

complex problems, engaged scholarship has the potential to “produce knowledge that is more penetrating and insightful” (Van de Ven, 2007:265). In order for this to happen, Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009) highlight the necessity for appropriate training in theory and research methods, and deep partnership between academics and practitioners. Although there are difficulties in creating successful collaborative research teams, Amabile, Patterson, Mueller, Wojcik, Odomirok, Marsh and Kramer (2001) find that related success can be influenced by team, environment and process characteristics. Designing an academic-practitioner team includes careful selection of team members, clarification of roles, regular communication, development of trust and allocation of time to reflect on the process and relationship conflicts.

Elaborating on forms of engaged scholarship research, Van de Ven (2007) proposes that this addresses complex problems and surpasses the relevance and rigour issue as it studies problems with and for practitioners and other stakeholders. Recognizing that there are many ways of practising engaged scholarship, Van de Ven presents four alternative forms, namely informed basic research with stakeholder advice, co-produced knowledge with collaborators, design and evaluation studies for professional practice, and action research for a client. He proposes that the specific approach will depend on the purpose of the study and degree to which a researcher performs an “extension” role as a detached, external observer; or an “intension” role as an attached, internal participant. Informed basic research and evaluation forms are extension approaches, whereas collaborative and action research are viewed as intension roles (see also Struminska-Kutra, 2016). According to Van de Ven, collaborative basic research, which is of interest to the present study, comprises insiders and outsiders, whereby the complementary skills of research teams support a collective learning experience through repeated meetings and jointly sharing in activities, for example, to develop the research questions. A potential problem concerns the sharing of proprietary findings.

Van de Ven (2007:283) admits that “in practice, there are many variations and overlap” in his four-dimensional model of engaged scholarship, and that one form may lead to transition into another. The model of Van de Ven (2007) is based on the question of how scholarship that is engaged *with* practitioners can advance knowledge, rather than focus on the relevance of academic research *for* practice. This presents challenges, which require researchers to reconcile different viewpoints, establish and maintain relationships, be reflexive about their role and spend time in the research field. It appears that Van de Ven’s (2007) approach is a good attempt to portray different forms of engaged scholarship involving academia and practice.

However, in general the engaged scholarship literature fundamentally represents a rather phenomenological body of work because it largely lacks in the portrayal of processes and mechanisms that can influence effective engaged scholarship. This absence may primarily be linked to the scarcity of theoretical frameworks that are likely to illuminate how fruitful engaged scholarship works over time. Such a limitation

potentially obstructs the development of the engaged scholarship literature and cultivation of effective relations between the stakeholders involved. We propose that the stewardship framework is likely to provide an effective theoretical lens on which engaged scholarship practice can be analyzed.

2.2. Stewardship theory

The stewardship perspective supports the argument that stakeholders view long-term utility in focused pro-social behaviour rather than in self-serving, short-term opportunistic behaviour (Davis et al., 1997). In the words of Hernandez (2012:174), “[s]tewardship reflects an ongoing sense of obligation of duty to others based on the intention to uphold the covenantal relationship”. Instead of emphasizing motivation on individual goals, it argues that stakeholders share aligned motives. It assumes that stakeholder relations are based on trust, goal alignment and long-term links (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003). Stewards strongly believe they are morally obligated to pursue organizational interests (Caldwell, Bischoff and Karri, 2002). The stewardship approach has been used in several aspects of contractual behaviour such as executive corporate governance (Cho, Huang and Padmanabhan, 2014), board leadership organizational structure (Zona, 2014) and angel-backed company financing (Collewaert and Manigart, 2016), among others. Its approach to governance is sociological and psychological in nature, contrasting the economic approach of agency theory that sees stakeholders as rational actors who seek to maximize their self-interest (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). According to agency theorists, both principals and agents tend to maximize their own utility at minimum cost. Agency costs are realized when the interests of principals and agents diverge as agents seek to maximize their own utility. The agency-principal relationship is characterized by goal conflict, distrust, discipline and monitoring.

Therefore, the stewardship theory puts forward the argument that the steward focuses on cooperation rather than defection. Essentially the steward’s motivation overlaps with the success of the collaboration (Davis et al., 1997). According to the stewardship theory, the motives of stewards are aligned with the objectives of the collaborators rather than individualistic goals. Stewards can be regarded as trustworthy guardians who are granted considerable discretion without the need for onerous external monitoring (Bradley, MacGregor, Stuebs and Thomasson, 2015). Stewardship behaviours are likely to form an organization’s conduct as reflected in its mission, practices and shared meanings (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2009). However, this occurs only when stewardship behaviours are fully fused and institutionalized in the organization (Pearson and Marler, 2010).

Numerous psychological factors such as motivation, identification and power can account for the cases in which stewardship may predict behaviour better than its agency counterpart. Similarly, contextual factors such as stakeholders’ managerial

philosophy, culture and power distance are likely to explain the choice and use of one versus the other framework (Davis et al., 1997). Previous (high or low) levels of organizational performance may favour one over the other type of behaviour (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003). Hence, stewardship and agency theories should not be viewed as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. It has been found, for instance, that when stewardship is used in juxtaposition with agency theory it can extend the principal-agent predictability when it comes to accountability for professionals (Mansouri and Rowney, 2014).

Elaborating on antecedents to stewardship behaviour, Hernandez (2012) further identifies shared leadership practices, collective responsibility for outcomes, mutual work towards a valued end, and self-efficacy and self-determination between stakeholders as influences on psychological factors. These psychological factors can be an altruistic perspective, a long-term orientation and affective commitment through mutual social exchange. In turn, this collection of psychological factors positively affects psychological ownership and, ultimately, the stewardship behaviour of stakeholders. Stewards work persistently to accomplish the organization's goals when they think their work is important.

Also, a "stewardship climate" in the organization stems from a combination of personal motivations of the leader and the associated contextual conditions of the organization (Neubaum, Thomas, Dibrell and Craig, 2017). The characteristics of a stewardship climate are intrinsic motivation, organizational identification, employment of personal forms of power, collectivism, low power distance and involvement orientation (Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012; Neubaum et al., 2017; Vallejo, 2009). Consequently, the stewardship theory approach identifies several motivations, mechanisms, and reward and monitoring processes that may exist between stakeholders in order for the collaboration to generate successful outcomes for all parties concerned. However, to the best of our knowledge the stewardship approach and its constituents have not been employed hitherto in an engaged scholarship context, which is a gap upon which we aim to fill with some evidence in this study.

3. The empirical setting: Global companies' development programme

The background to this study draws on the significance of SME internationalization for the economic performance of developed nations, which is evident in the public policy support literature on export and internationalization promotion (Bell, McNaughton, Young and Crick 2003; Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Katy Tse, 1993; Wright, Westhead and Ucbasaran, 2007). Policy-related studies (e.g. Blackburn, 2016; UKTI, 2006) have further identified deficiencies in support

measures for the internationalization needs and capabilities of indigenous SMEs. Hence, the context of this engaged scholarship collaboration refers to the evaluation of internationalization support programmes in Scotland to ensure policy programme effectiveness and evaluate the need for SME internationalization assistance.

The GCDP was designed to address a broad range of market failures that inhibited the internationalization of Scottish SMEs, including facilitating access to information, enhancing the scale and pace of international activity, improving access to public goods – especially R&D – and stimulating positive externalities such as networking. This ambitious and high-profile public policy initiative was an outcome of the findings of earlier research enquiries that highlighted the limited extent of “globalization of Scottish SMEs” (Scottish Enterprise, 1999a; Scottish Enterprise, 1999b). The GCDP was launched in 2000 by Scottish Enterprise with the aim of enabling Scottish firms to achieve a significant “global presence” (Scottish Enterprise, 2003; Raines and Brown, 2001). From the outset, the objective was to recruit a cohort of between 15 and 20 SMEs per year to the programme. Seminars, workshops and peer group networking events were held regularly to stimulate information exchange and learning among participating firms. In 2002 a formal evaluation and research study of the GCDP broader programme was commissioned to a three-person academic team, namely the authors of the present paper. This evaluation and research project involved longitudinal case studies of the first two cohorts of firms participating in the programme, comprising 27 firms. The evaluation and research study was initiated by an approach from the lead GCDP executive at Scottish Enterprise to the authors as a result to earlier collaboration on cognate research. This client-researcher relationship was interactive from the outset since this evaluation and research was a new approach to Scottish Enterprise and reflected the objectives of the GCDP, which were concerned with longer-term and sustainable SME internationalization development. The initial discussions also focused upon the need to investigate potential new innovations in SME support provided by the GCDP and generated the sponsorship of a doctoral study as part of the evaluation and research project. Scottish Enterprise funded both the evaluation and research, and the related doctoral study. The approach in both studies was agreed collaboratively with Scottish Enterprise and involved a longitudinal, case study approach, spanning from 2002 to 2008 and providing deep insights into SME internationalization policy support.

Other than the three academics and the Scottish Enterprise policy makers, the study comprised participant GCDP SMEs and their Scottish Enterprise account managers. Pre-interview access to Scottish Enterprise records, interviews with SMEs and pilot evaluation reports assisted the stakeholders to develop trust, and probe and confirm expectations (cf. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). The academics had access to GCDP executives within Scottish Enterprise, programme archival data and external consultants’ reports on the firms, as well as internal policy

evaluation documentation. The evaluation and research study additionally involved regular meetings with GCDP executives and evaluation teams at Scottish Enterprise to ensure that ideas and feedback formed part of the development of the evaluation and research study. This supported the engaged scholarship objective of co-production of knowledge between research and policy makers (Van de Ven, 2007) and ensured that findings were based on credible evidence that the stakeholders perceived as trustworthy and relevant (Donaldson et al., 2009). The longitudinal approach further required a succession of in-depth interviews with GCDP firms and involved “regional” Scottish Enterprise account teams. In addition, there was favourable response from SMEs on what they perceived as “annual reviews” as well as ad-hoc interfaces between the academics and these firms at the “peer events” sponsored by Scottish Enterprise to promote networking. Moreover, considerable stakeholder feedback occurred, which involved evaluation and research findings presented to stakeholders, and regular focus group discussions to test the findings from the research on SME internationalization processes. Although the GCDP was funded by Scottish Enterprise, it was considered essential that the researchers were independent in order to establish the credibility of the study. SMEs were further assured that their responses were confidential.

Apart from this, after the main evaluation and research study period, a workshop and two extra focus groups, comprising the researchers, Scottish Enterprise policy makers and executives, and SMEs were held in 2008 to provide feedback on the evaluation and research findings, and explore in more depth issues that emerged from the case studies. This was supported by ESRC-funded post-doctoral research. The workshop was promoted to the firms as one of the GCDP peer group events, entitled “learning for internationalization”. The focus group interviews were undertaken, with the aim of gaining additional insights into the implications of the research findings for policy (cf. Huxham, 2002). The GCDP review additionally involved semi-structured interviews with four Scottish Enterprise executives and policy makers three years after the conclusion of the evaluation and research study (i.e. in 2012-13).

4. The stewardship approach: Key findings

In line with the tenet of stewardship theory, a high level of engagement was pursued throughout the GCDP at different levels, involving academics, Scottish Enterprise officials and SMEs. An early decision by the research team and policy makers was that the evaluation should be longitudinal in nature so as to be able to understand and respond to the strategic changes that participating SMEs had to follow. Close engagement between the lead Scottish Enterprise executives and the research team was particularly crucial to the successful co-production of knowledge pertaining to

the project's dual objectives of policy evaluation and academic research. This was also in agreement with the engaged scholarship literature arguing in favour of a close interaction between policy and academia (Van de Ven, 2007). Also engaged scholarship authors such as Rynes et al. (2001) and Schein (2001) suggest that in this collaboration good social relations and a common research agenda with practitioner involvement are required, which was the case in the examined GCDP. Policy makers needed to engage in the evaluation and research methods of this programme (Smallbone and Baldock, 2002). In the words of Romme, Avenier, Denyer, Hodgkinson, Pandza, Starkey and Worren (2015), such an effective engaged scholarship approach involved identifying common ground and trading zones between stakeholders.

The processes in the collaboration between academics and policy makers strongly reflected a stewardship theory approach. All stakeholders sought to actively engage and empathize with the GCDP rather than own or control it. To illustrate, the timings and methods of the SME interviews were regularly revised to better facilitate both academic and Scottish Enterprise needs. In addition, academics responded quickly to ad-hoc reporting needs of policy makers. According to stewardship theory, the partners sought affective commitment through mutual social exchange (Hernandez, 2012). This kind of behaviour is illustrative of the high-involvement approach observed in stewardship collaboration (Davis et al., 1997). It is noteworthy that over the duration of this project, the three academics and Scottish Enterprise officials thought of this collaboration as an arrangement that transcends the boundaries of their University and policy-making organizational boundaries. Indeed, they were intrinsically motivated to identify predominantly with a 'supra-organizational' engaged scholarship formation for the purposes of this long-term collaboration. To this end, they employed their personal forms of influence and power within their own organizations to achieve the objectives of engaged scholarship and induce their organizational member activities to make GCDP succeed. This finding not only supports the stewardship theory as to the stewardship climate constituents (Hernandez, 2012; Neubaum et al., 2017; Vallejo, 2009), but also adds to it since it suggests that the aspects of this climate concerns an imperceptible supra-organizational formation that participants refer to and empathize with rather than their own organizations. This finding brings the engaged scholarship stewardship area close to the organizational identity literature because such identity appreciation in modern network formations has different manifestations than that in traditional firms (Whetten, 2006). Consequently, we advance the first research proposition.

Proposition 1: An effective academic-policy collaboration involves member identification and empathy with the objectives of supra-organizational engaged scholarship formation that surpasses their palpable organizational structures, facilitating interaction and communication between the stakeholders.

Another key finding of this research has to do with the roles of the senior academic and the lead policy maker who were the GCDP programme key players in their respective organizations. Both acted as high-value commitment persons seeking to maximize their shared objectives confirming the premise of stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997). Largely thanks to them, an atmosphere of close collaboration at senior levels of both the academic team and Scottish Enterprise emerged, which “has changed the minds of how people think”, to quote the lead Scottish Enterprise executive involved. They were the “project champions” at both academic and policy levels. On the academic side, this was an academic who had an expertise of SME internationalization issues and a tradition of successfully working with Scottish Enterprise for over two decades. On the practitioner side, the lead Scottish Enterprise policy maker for evaluation and research was an Honorary Research Fellow at the academics’ affiliated University who had an interest in academic research and participated in research workshops.

Both project champions performed three roles, including, first, collaborative leadership in the University team and the evaluation and research design, respectively, adding to the value of applied academic research in the SME internationalization area in their organizations. The second role included policy intermediation, a knowledge broker role (ESRC, 2009; Pettigrew, 2011) that embraced promoting and interpreting the GCDP for University and Scottish Enterprise colleagues, involving regional Scottish Enterprise account managers. The third role included policy making through the production and presentation of board papers to justify continued funding for the GCDP. Following Van de Ven (2007), the academic project champion had an “intension”-oriented role as an “attached insider” but also undertook an “extension”-oriented role to reflect on the academic outputs of this project, when needed. Similarly, the Scottish Enterprise policy-maker had an “intension”-oriented role, periodically reporting on the findings from the evaluation and research back to different units and levels of his organization.

Therefore, both project champions served as effective boundary spanners between the two organizations (cf. Zhao and Anand, 2013) working harmoniously to minimize misunderstandings and avoid conflicts. They regularly acted as efficient knowledge transfer bridges that were of paramount importance to the success of a stewardship approach. In accord with Williams (2012), they grasped the idiosyncrasies of each other’s organizational contexts, deployed political skills as required, and engaged in diplomatic and persuasive modes of behaviours. They further crossed intra- and inter-organizational boundaries, seeing the big picture and orchestrating the collaboration agenda (Kaplan, Milde and Cowan, 2017). Because of these roles, they contributed to the mechanism of psychological ownership that both teams offered to the GCDP project since through time they believed their outputs were common and became “theirs”. This is a main attribute that the stewardship theory views as indispensable to the success of collaboration (Hernandez, 2012).

Therefore, we advance the second research proposition.

Proposition 2: An effective academic-policy collaboration involves adept boundary spanners who successfully transcend organizational boundaries sponsoring the stewardship collaboration and contributing to the shared ownership of its outputs.

The third main finding referred to the successful knowledge transfer that took place during the process of the GCDP within and across participating academic and policy organizations. Knowledge in this setting referred to SME internationalization-specific routines and learning practices, involving academic concepts and policy-making tools generated and accumulated over time. When it came to knowledge dissemination, the partners chose to make regular small investments in options that were favourable to the collaboration, which is in alignment with the tenet of stewardship theory (Tosi et al., 2003). Such small investments, for example, referred to the Scottish Enterprise team initially sharing their expertise with academics over frequent, structured briefing meetings. Likewise, the academics presented their interim findings regularly to various Scottish Enterprise officials providing convincing evidence pertaining to their research with internationalized SMEs. As time went by and enhanced levels of trust were built between the stakeholders, knowledge transfer between parties became more regular and undeterred. This increasing stakeholder involvement, based on credible evidence and open communication, was deemed to be relevant and trustworthy by the stakeholders (cf. Donaldson et al., 2009). Such an ongoing and growing transfer of knowledge added to appreciation of the benefits of engaged scholarship, namely a mutual learning mentality and stakeholder-collective responsibility. The observed knowledge transfer referring to “best SME internationalization processes” has not had any association with rigid dissemination control schemes, often used in formal consulting projects. If the study had been undertaken by consulting firms, not only would the costs have been substantial, but it might have been difficult to get continued uninterrupted knowledge transfer. This knowledge transfer aspect proved to be a major element of success to this engaged scholarship study since it relates to the wider debate concerning the knowledge provider role of academic advisers versus consultants (Bouwmeester, 2010).

The continual knowledge transfer that was built over time contributed to the development of an effective socialization process (Tsai, 2001) whereby academic and policy stakeholders interacted as a team with one another over a lengthy period of time. In turn, this has facilitated the quality of the communication between collaborators and induced a common understanding of each other’s knowledge domain, whereby, for instance, Scottish Enterprise officials were becoming more prepared to grasp the “academic terminology” of presentations and reports. All this reinforced the collectivist orientation in which teamwork in knowledge co-production was essential. Both academics and Scottish Enterprise officials viewed that they generated important knowledge into the activities that SMEs could pursue

in international markets. Moreover, this process had strengthened the involvement orientation concerning knowledge generation because both academic and policy-making partners felt they were equally important in developing and transferring knowledge within the two organizations. This collectivist and pro-involvement orientation distinguishes effective stewardship relationships (Davis et al., 1997; Neubaum et al., 2017). Hence, we advance the third research proposition.

Proposition 3: An effective academic-policy collaboration involves uninterrupted knowledge transfer and dissemination between organizations, which encourage successful group and engaged knowledge generation by both academics and policy makers.

Table 1 below illustrates further empirical examples related to the three propositions of this study.

Table 1: Empirical examples related to the propositions of this study

Propositions	Case Example: Academic	Case Example: Policy
<p>Proposition 1</p> <p>An effective academic-policy collaboration involves member identification and empathy with the objectives of a supra-organizational engaged scholarship formation that surpasses their palpable organizational structures, facilitating interaction and communication between the stakeholders.</p>	<p>Academics made interim presentations of findings to promote the programme internally to Scottish Enterprise business account managers and help with GDP external consultant recruitment.</p>	<p>Policy makers accepted a more innovative firm-specific case study methodological approach to the evaluation study recommended by the academic team.</p>
<p>Proposition 2</p> <p>An effective academic-policy collaboration involves adept boundary spanners who successfully transcend organizational boundaries sponsoring the stewardship collaboration and contributing to the shared ownership of its outputs.</p>	<p>The lead academic fully engaged with both the evaluation and research aspects of the project. For example, he chaired all meetings with the Scottish Enterprise team, at the University and on location at Scottish Enterprise head office for the whole duration of the project.</p>	<p>The lead policy maker attended the University research seminars, contributing to the discussion of policy implications for research in the field of academic study.</p>
<p>Proposition 3</p> <p>An effective academic-policy collaboration involves uninterrupted knowledge transfer and dissemination between organizations, which encourage successful group and engaged knowledge generation by both academics and policy makers.</p>	<p>The academic team reported on an ongoing basis issues arising from the CEO interviews, for example the need for 'aftercare', as firms implemented their internationalization strategies following the initial foreign market entries.</p>	<p>The Scottish Enterprise evaluation team ran a dedicated workshop for the academic team on their in-house evaluation processes and objectives, and reviewed drafts prepared by the academics of interview protocols.</p>

5. Conclusions

This research has important implications for theory and policy practice. In line with Quelin, Kivleniece and Lazzarini (2017), we contribute to the literature on how diverse and hybrid forms of collaboration can create social value and propose three inter-related mechanisms. The GCDP project stresses the importance of following a stewardship approach in an engaged scholarship context through a long-term approach (Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012). This has important implications for governments promoting private-public partnerships (see Yeung, 2017) and other inter-agency relationships (Sun & Cao, 2018). The findings of the current study attest to the value of a long-term, involvement-oriented, trustworthy and performance-enhancement collaboration, which is in accord with the premise of the stewardship theory. The three propositions advanced further refine the stewardship theory as they suggest that in this engaged scholarship context stakeholders perceive the collaboration as a supra-organizational arrangement, identifying and empathizing with its objectives. Boundary spanners in both academic and policy sides are crucial to support the merits of this collaboration and overcome communication and coordination complexities. Frequent and undeterred knowledge generation and transfer add to the trust and appreciation of the outcomes of this engaged scholarship collaboration. All these findings enhance the stewardship theory by advancing our knowledge on how engaged scholarship processes and mechanisms can work effectively. Engaged scholarship provides another setting whereby stewardship theory may appropriately be used and illuminate the relations between the stakeholders involved.

As to the engaged scholarship literature, the findings suggest that academia needs to move the greater distance and reflect user interests as closely as possible over a long-run horizon to overcome the rigour-relevance gap (Starkey and Madan, 2001). The view that academics and users belong to separate communities with different values (Beywer and Trice, 1982) is distant from the findings of this research. The rather phenomenological engaged scholarship literature benefits from the application of the stewardship approach that illuminates the merits of the collaboration as reflected in the three research propositions advanced in this paper.

Moreover, it clearly pays for policy makers to value and use academic research through a closely collaborative enduring process in which stakeholders take collective ownership of the outcomes of their cooperation (Newman, Cherney and Head, 2016). In that sense, the academic-policy engaged scholarship collaboration studied in this paper may serve as a valuable case study that policy makers can implement to inspire and enhance SME internationalization and growth. For instance, the constituents of the GCDP analyzed can illuminate UNCTAD's "Entrepreneurship Policy Framework and Implementation Guidance" programme in its provision of effective policy monitoring and evaluation. Apart from this, even though this

research has taken place in Scotland, notably a small EU nation, the findings might serve as a reference guide for similar collaborative projects between academia and policy makers in developing countries. Although operating in different institutional and cultural environments, organizations in developing countries can be advised that a rivalistic relationship between academics and policy makers is very likely to undermine the objectives sought to enhance knowledge and practices supporting the internationalization of indigenous SMEs.

With regard to future research, only one long-term case of successful engagement was examined, therefore, further study would benefit from the existence of a “control group” whereby the engaged outcomes of cooperation might not necessarily have been successful. Essentially the examined GCDP on SME internationalization represents a best-case scenario against which outcomes from a less effective collaboration may be compared. In addition, the Scottish setting of this study can restrict the generalizability of the findings to other economy contexts in which engaged scholarship activities occur. Thus, future research should investigate engaged scholarship relationships in settings, particularly in developing countries, where home governments promote outward internationalization to their domestic enterprises (Alcaraz & Zamilpa, 2017) or where the profile of such firms is changing (Pradham, 2017). Furthermore, while the three research propositions advanced illuminate three aspects of processes and mechanisms related to an effective engaged collaboration, future study can possibly elaborate and inform other constituents of a successful academic-policy collaboration.

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