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Engaged scholarship: encouraging interactionism in entrepreneurship and small-to-medium enterprise (SME) research.

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Abstract

Purpose

This article introduces a multi-layered theoretical framework to enable engaged scholarship to develop as a practice in entrepreneurship and small business research. To do so, it illuminates the salient features of engaged scholarship, collaborative learning and actor-network theory.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The article follows a narrative or traditional literature review design. Specifically, it adopts a thematic approach for summarising and synthesising a body of literature on engaged scholarship, collaborative learning and actor-network theory with the view to developing a new multi-layered theoretical framework.

Findings

Applying the theory of engaged scholarship to pivot entrepreneurship/SMEs research provides scholars with an opportunity to unlock the theory vs. practice paradox. Moreover, engaged scholarship offers valuable instructions for encouraging interactionism between entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners as well as reconcile their polarised views. Co-production and co-creation of knowledge addresses the concerns often raised by the practitioner community regarding the relevance and applicability of academic research to practice.

Practical implications

The proposed multi-layered framework provides entrepreneurship researchers, and the practitioner community with a taxonomy to use for encouraging joint approach to research. Developing deep partnerships between academics and practitioners can produce outcomes that satisfy the twin imperatives of scholarship that can be of high quality as well as value to society.

Originality and value

The article advances the theory and practice of engaged scholarship in new ways that are not common in entrepreneurship/SME research. This enables engaged scholarship to develop as a practice in entrepreneurship and small firms research. Through applying the proposed multi-layered framework in research, academics can deliver fully developed solutions for practical problems. The framework is useful in the theory vs. practice and entrepreneurship researchers vs. practitioner debates.

Key words: entrepreneurship, engaged scholarship, theory/practice gap, SMEs, collaborative learning, actor-network theory, interactionism, practitioners.

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Engaged scholarship: encouraging interactionism in entrepreneurship and small-to-medium enterprise (SME) research.

Introduction

It has been more than three decades following Susman and Evered's (1978) observation that research in scholarly management journals was remotely related to the real world of practicing managers. Since then, other scholars (e.g. Bartkus and Holland, 2010; Cohen, 2007; Empson, 2013; McKelvey, 2006; Pettigrew, 2001; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Rynes *et al.*, 2001; Sandmann, 2008) have echoed the same sentiments highlighting the disparity between academic research and practice. The theory and research academics provide has also been criticised for its limitations in terms of informing practice, influencing the way organizations operate, and policy development (Barge and Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Bansal *et al.* 2012). Some have argued that the content of academic research is too theoretical and often method-driven, and thus, too abstract for practitioners to apply, and most of the research questions are too narrow and trivial to managerial practice (Li, 2011; Starkey and Madan, 2001). Others have suggested that the actual problem of academic research is not so much about its relevance or applicability but, it is more about style, and design they claim is too academic, obscure, inaccessible and boring (Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Rynes *et al.*, 2001).

The presumption that academic research is of little value when dealing with the complexities of managerial situations clearly permeates the practitioner community (Aram and Salipante, 2003; Romme *et al.*, 2015; Tranfield and Starkey 1998). This impasse on the relevance of academic research perhaps requires that researchers reconsider the way they design and structure their inquiries about the social world. What is also clear in all of this is that academics and practitioners inhabit different worlds (Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009; Martin, 2010). On the one hand, practitioners navigate the complex socio-economic issues, and on the other hand, academics enjoy a degree of autonomy and many have no interest in addressing 'real world' problems (Martin, 2010; Starkey and Madan, 2001).

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3 The gap between theory and practice in academic research presumably has to do with the
4 epistemological and ontological incongruence often exacerbated by the polarised views of
5 academics and practitioners. Considering this, it is however worth noting that the process for
6 reducing the theory/practice gap and for reconciling the polarised views of academics should not
7 be one-dimensional. For a start, it requires researchers to re-assess the way they engage in
8 research. Likewise, this reflective approach to research should extend to practicing managers
9 who often apply theoretical solutions and simulated business models to resolve complex issues
10 in business (Antonacopoulou, 2010; O'Hare *et al.*, 2010; Starkey and Madan, 2001).
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18 Instrumental and pragmatic arguments advance the idea that resolving the
19 theory/practice gap is in the self-interest of practitioners and researchers as each will be better
20 able to accomplish their purposes (Mohrman and Lawler, 2011). Thus, in trying to minimise the
21 theory/practice gap as well as reconcile the polarised views of academics and practitioners, there
22 is a greater need for encouraging mutual respect while developing shared approaches in problem
23 solving (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Bartunek, 2007; Jordan, 1991; Miller and Stiver, 1997; Pearce *et*
24 *al.*, 2008; Romme *et al.*, 2015; Santini *et al.*, 2016).
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31 Like other academic disciplines the tension between practice and theory has also been
32 recorded in entrepreneurship/SME research (Steffens *et al.* 2014). Academic research can almost
33 never deliver fully developed solutions to any practical problems, and entrepreneurship research
34 is no exception (Davidsson, 2002). Notwithstanding the improvements reported in
35 entrepreneurship research and the theory about entrepreneurship and small business
36 management, entrepreneurship is still considered to be of limited topical concern and value to
37 practising managers (Aldrich and Baker, 1997; Bansal *et al.* 2012; Santini *et al.*, 2016). Maybe
38 entrepreneurship research is yet to reach full potential as a field with substantive managerial
39 application (Brazeal and Herbert, 1999; Lee and Hassard, 1999; Thatcher *et al.*, 2016). This might
40 mean that it is about time entrepreneurship scholars considered different approaches to research
41 as a way of increasing its relevance and applicability and consequently addressing concerns
42 practitioners might have about their research.
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3 Considering the above, this research turns to engaged scholarship for inspiration. It
4 utilises this inclusive research approach to provide the basis for addressing questions about the
5 relevance and applicability of academic research to practice (see, Bartunek and Rynes, 2014;
6 Cummings, 2007; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). In doing so we argue that when academic
7 researchers engage with practitioners in their communities to jointly develop theory and
8 research, the probability of asking the right questions that have relevance to their managerial
9 problems is increased (Barge and Shockley-Zalabak, 2008). Indeed, interactions between the
10 practitioner community and academic researchers can produce results that have relevance to
11 practice (Franz, 2009; Martin, 2010; Shani *et al.*, 2007). Drawing on this, we declare that
12 proposals for improved managerial or business performance originating from practitioner-
13 researcher interactions will have more practical relevance and applicability (Li, 2011) to
14 practicing managers. In keeping with this debate Leitch (2007, p.144 in Neergaard and Ulhøi,
15 2007) explained that, “introducing alternative perspectives to knowledge production that
16 combine theoretical content and practical relevance, may help alleviate some commentators’
17 concerns about the applicability of entrepreneurship research in a practical context”.

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29 From that perspective, this article also seeks to introduce a multi-layered framework we
30 consider to be a useful toolkit for encouraging researcher-practitioner interactions in
31 entrepreneurship and small business management research. Specifically, the article engages in
32 theory vs. practice and academic research vs. practitioner debates offering unique insights
33 inspired by the idea of engaged scholarship. The theoretical constructs contained in the our
34 newly proposed multi-layered framework presents entrepreneurship researchers with fresh
35 knowledge and alternative arrangements for designing and structuring studies making them
36 worthwhile and informative to entrepreneurship practice.

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44 To produce the multi-layered framework, we comprehensively discuss collaborative
45 learning, and action-network theory in the context of engaged scholarship – a concept
46 commonly used in science and clinical studies. The contribution the research makes to
47 entrepreneurship, a discipline which is still developing, is the multi-layered framework for
48 developing engaged scholarship as a practice in entrepreneurship/SME research. In the article,
49 we conceptualise engaged scholarship as an integral theoretical paradigm providing the necessary
50 framework for reducing the tension between theory and the practice, while contributing valuable
51 insights for reconciling the polarised views of entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners.
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Engaged scholarship

Engaged scholarship is concerned with resolving and blending intellectual assets and academic questions with expertise and public-related issues that include the community, social, cultural, human and economic development (Holland, 2005; O'Hare *et al.*, 2010). As such, its ability to blend academic inquiries with know-how and experience justifies our rationale for using it to comprehend entrepreneurship/SMEs research. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006 p. 80) provided a more refined description of engaged scholarship as the “collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to co-produce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world”. Conceptualising engaged scholarship in this way is insightful in that it offers social scientists in general, and entrepreneurship researchers in particular, the opportunity to create space for interaction. Clearly, practises that embrace co-production or co-creation (O'Hare *et al.*, 2010) of knowledge provide the necessary steps for addressing questions often raised by practitioners about the rigour, relevance and the applicability of academic research.

Furthermore, Welsh and Krueger's (2012) interpretation of engaged scholarship is useful in the theory/practice gap debate. Welsh and Krueger described its manipulating potency, emphasising its ability to bring together research and practice. Contributing to the same dialogue about the theory/practice tension Schön (1995, p.34) discussed engaged scholarship as “practice knowledge or actionable knowledge”. He stressed that engaged learning and scholarship provide appropriate know-how necessary for generating space for practitioners to contribute their expertise and experience in research. Appropriate epistemology must account for and legitimise both academic knowledge and actionable knowledge often originating from practitioners (Sandmann *et al.*, 2008; Schön, 1995).

Questions about the legitimacy of research have been a major issue for entrepreneurship researchers for a long time. Walshok (1995) explained that legitimised knowledge regularises intellectual, analytical, and symbolic materials with working knowledge, a component of experience, and hands-on practice knowledge. In the same way Martin (2010) qualified the idea of legitimising research when he described practitioners as endorsers and co-researchers in a research project. He explained that in ensuring that research is relevant to policy development, for example, researchers and practitioners must work alongside each other at almost all stages during its design phase.

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5 Based on the analyses above, we confirm that the opportunity to use engaged scholarship
6 as a lens for reconciling the divergent views of academics, policy-makers and practitioners in
7 entrepreneurship/SME research exists. But, as much as this might be the case, it can also be
8 argued that for it to become a reality entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners must engage
9 in high level collaborations. That is, engaging in cross-cutting activities from co-participation in
10 the knowledge creation process (research) to its consumption and dissemination. More
11 importantly, researchers and practitioners should take a genuine interest in providing practical
12 solutions (Bartkus *et al.*, 2016; Landon *et al.*, 2012). Bjarnason and Coldstream (2003, p.323)
13 commented that, “knowledge is being keenly pursued in the context of its application and in a
14 dialogue of practice with theory through a network of policy-advisors, companies, consultants,
15 think-tanks and knowledge brokers as well as academics”. So, to encourage close cooperation
16 between the practitioner community and academic researchers Davidsson (2002) Franz (2009)
17 Sandmann and Weerts (2006) advise that academic scholars must adopt an engaging approach to
18 research. They should prioritise membership in practitioner communities. Related to this, Boyer
19 (1996) explained that engaged scholarship should be used as a conduit for connecting various
20 functional units in an academic and community setting. He identified four types of scholarship,
21 namely; scholarship of discovery, integration, sharing knowledge, and application. With respect
22 to the scholarship of discovery, Boyer (1996) specifically challenged universities to champion
23 knowledge creation through research.
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37 As Boyer elaborated on various types of scholarships he highlighted the scholarship of
38 integration stressing the need to place discoveries from university research into a wider context.
39 This can be accommodating in entrepreneurship and small business research because of its focus
40 on engaging the wider society which may lead to meaningful dialogue between practitioners and
41 academic researchers. Focussing on connecting various stakeholders and the functions of
42 research, teaching, and outreach in academic research, Franz (2009) underlines the importance of
43 engaged scholarship (Van de Ven and Jing, 2012) as a conduit for bridging the gap between
44 theory and practice. Indeed, establishing such connections can provide knowledge that
45 potentially succours the process of reducing the tension between theory and practice in small
46 business research. Boyer (1990, p.16) explained this more fully when arguing that the work of the
47 scholar can be enhanced by stepping back from one’s own investigation to look for connections,
48 build bridges between theory and practice, and communicate one’s knowledge effectively. This
49 can also be about building relationships that involve negotiations and collaborations between
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3 entrepreneurship scholars and the practitioners through communities of learning (Bartunek,
4 2007; Ladkin, 2004; Leitch, 2007).

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6 According to Van de Ven and Jing (2012, p.127) practitioners interacting in a learning
7 process “jointly produce knowledge that can both advance the scientific enterprise and enlighten
8 an indigenous community”. There is substantive evidence showing that the civic and academic
9 health of any culture is vitally enriched when scholars and practitioners speak and listen carefully
10 to each other (MacIntosh *et al.*, 2012). This can be related to Boyer’s (1996) scholarship of
11 knowledge sharing, which he declared a communal act. Clearly, when entrepreneurship
12 researchers engage with practicing entrepreneurs in their studies, such acts will result in the
13 creation of knowledge that reflects academic theory and field practice. This will significantly
14 enhance the rigour and relevance of knowledge to practice thereby increasing its use (Romme *et*
15 *al.*, 2015).

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17 The point about utilising knowledge generated through research raised above resonates with
18 Boyer’s notion of knowledge application. His idea advances the school of thought that for
19 research to be useful to both scholars and practitioners it must represent their combined views.
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23 Drawing on Boyer’s views, a type of research that could perhaps increase the probability
24 of representing these combined visions is participatory action research whose principles are
25 associated, in this article, with the idea of engaged scholarship. This method of seeking to
26 explore an occurrence in business management encourages full and active engagement of both
27 the researcher and the participants. More importantly, it allows a critical reflection and analysis of
28 a society and its dynamics (Dover and Lawrence, 2010; MacIntosh *et al.*, 2012). According to
29 Reason and Bradbury (2001, p.1) participatory or action research is “a participatory process
30 concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes,
31 grounded in a participatory worldview”.

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33 From that perspective, we affirm that incorporating diverse views in research can
34 influence reconciliation, action, and reflection between entrepreneurship researchers and
35 practitioners (Latour, 2005). This can be a fundamental undertaking in advancing
36 entrepreneurship research. Moreover, it would make entrepreneurship-related research outputs
37 relevant and valuable to practicing entrepreneurs as they seek to solve social problems that often
38 conspire to influence their psychosocial circumstances. Kemmis *et al.* (2013) clarified
39 participatory action research by stressing that it is practical and collaborative. Clearly, it engages
40 people and it helps them to examine the social practices that links them with others in social
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3 interactions (Kemmis, 2008). Most importantly, adopting the principles of participatory action
4 research approaches in entrepreneurship encourages researchers to reflect on their practices of
5 communication, production, and social organization.
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8 **Collaborative learning**

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10 The idea of actively engaging in collaborative networks when dealing with world
11 problems and for research purposes is well-established in the science industry (see March, 1991;
12 Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996; Powell, 1990; Sen and MacPherson, 2009; Tolstoy and
13 Agndal, 2010; Simba, 2013). An integral part of a joint problem-solving or research initiative is
14 the co-participation of the main stakeholder groups. One would expect to find academics,
15 industry experts, government and public-sector organisations to be the main stakeholders in a
16 typically collaborative network (Cooke, 2002) regardless of the industry or sector.
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24 According to O'Hare *et al.* (2010) engaging in collaborative activities has many benefits
25 including knowledge creation and its sharing, and most of all it offers unique and informative
26 insights into theory, policy and practice. Extending their views on collaborative working, Taylor
27 and Thorpe (2004) explained that in such an arrangement learning is not isolated from socio-
28 cultural and historical factors. Looking at this from an engaged scholarship perspective it is
29 conceivable that academics who often take interest in exploring the social world of small
30 businesses for example, are presented with the opportunity to understand, as participants, the
31 socio-cultural problems militating against their circumstances.
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39 Social constructionist and activity theorists conceptualise learning as a developmental
40 process which often occurs within the relationships or networks in which a person is engaged
41 (Holman *et al.*, 1996; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004). The importance of network-centred learning is
42 well-rehearsed in the literature (see for example, Birley, 1985; Blundel and Smith, 2001; Cope,
43 2003; Hills *et al.*, 1997; Gibb, 1997). Specifically, the link between engaged scholarship and
44 network-centred learning or collaborative form of research was established in Van de Ven and
45 Johnson (2006). Van de Ven and Johnson agreed that real-world problems are too complex to be
46 captured by any one perspective. A combination of diverse views can provide robust solutions
47 that can be relevant to various stakeholders. It therefore follows that developing learning
48 networks or collaborative research communities to function as a stage for knowledge sharing and
49 its exchange (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) can be
50 the panacea for bridging the theory/practice gap while increasing the acceptance of proposed
51 solutions. Consistent with this, Jack *et al.* (2008) considered that collaborating in networks
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3 provide a forum for investigating the “social” in entrepreneurship and prescribe
4 relevant/practical solutions.
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8 Within the networking literature there is a near universal agreement that engaging in
9 collaborative activities is one of the most effective ways of enabling the exchange and the sharing
10 of knowledge among various stakeholder groups (Balestrin, Vargas and Fayard, 2008; Corno *et*
11 *al.*, 1999; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Provan and Sebastian, 1998). Relevant to this study,
12 Bartkus and Holland (2010); Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) offer some insights into the
13 academic/ practitioner divide debate. Van de Ven and Johnson share the view that engaging in
14 collaborative activities that comprise research design including carrying out and implementing
15 research to understand a social problem increases the relevance and practicality of the knowledge
16 generated.
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19 Based on this understanding, one can assume that in order to reduce the theory/practice gap
20 knowledge must be co-produced between academics and practitioner communities (Van de Ven
21 and Johnson, 2006) through joint research and research based on set goals (Latham, 2007).
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24 25 26 27 28 29 **Actor-network theory**

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31 Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was originally developed in the early 1980s to describe
32 the creation of socio-technical networks of aligned interests (Callon, 1986; Latour (1987). The
33 idea of alignment of interest was further extended to focus on the dynamics of relationships
34 (Law, 2000). ANT’s emphasis on alignment of interest attracted its use in this research and
35 particularly its ability to provide developmental steps needed in the process of reducing the
36 theory/practice gap. Also, in informing entrepreneurship practice about the importance of
37 developing shared commitment between entrepreneurship/SME researchers and practitioners,
38 ANT was deemed valuable. Insofar as that is concerned, ANT’s underlying ideology provides
39 knowledge about the relational dimensions of actors in a network. This was recognised to be
40 relevant for this study in that it presents entrepreneurship researchers with an opportunity to
41 understand the importance of connecting with practitioners when carrying out research.
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51 Related to the above, Latour (2005) described ANT as an important instrument for
52 exploring a series of interacting networks in science and society. Actors in a network are known
53 to perform an important role (Cooke, 2001) in developing relationships that enable knowledge
54 creation and its sharing (Smith *et al.*, 2016; Simba, 2013). This focus on actors as key elements is
55 fundamental to the debate engaged in this article, which is concerned with finding ways of
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3 getting entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners to interact in a meaningful way and to
4 jointly participate in creating new knowledge.
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8 To further clarify the term *actor*, Callon and Latour (1981, p. 286) explained that, “actors
9 are individuals who influence elements occupying space around them”. Effectively, they translate
10 their will into their own language (Boyer, 1996). This means that actors develop networks of
11 aligned interest or actor-networks (Sidorova and Kappelman, 2011). Callon (1986) provided a
12 detailed explanation of how actor-networks are created. He clarified that actor-networks are
13 created by focal actors through the process of translation. Callon conceptualised translation as a
14 process which is driven by negotiations from the point of view of the focal actor. The primary
15 goal underpinning the notion of translation is to align the interests of other actors and the actor-
16 network with the interests of the focal actor (Sidorova and Kappelman, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2016).
17 The actor-network theory assumes a radical relational approach in the way it defines actors in a
18 network. In so doing, it advances the idea that actors in a network cannot accomplish their goals
19 alone but, they can do so in relation to others (Law, 2000). Drawing on the notion of engaged
20 scholarship, one can interpret that researchers who have an interest in understanding the social
21 world inhibiting small business operations for example, they must reach out to the practitioners.
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32 Since its (ANT's) original intended use was to explore interactions in science and the
33 society, it has also been applied in several other disciplines ranging from cultural studies, social
34 geography, clinical studies and in organisational studies (Law and Hassard, 1999). For example,
35 in Greenhalgh and Stones (2010) ANT was used to explore the development of IT programmes
36 in healthcare with the view to proposing theoretical perspectives arising from the question about
37 what happens at macro-, meso- and micro-level when a government tries to modernise a health
38 service with the help of big IT. Lee and Hassard (1999) applied ANT to develop arguments for
39 organizational analysis, focussing on shifting from structural prescription to processual
40 deconstruction, the associated political dimension concerning where and for whom boundaries
41 are produced/consumed. While Smith, *et al.* (2016) used ANT to understand entrepreneurial
42 leadership learning.
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52 Clearly, ANT has been applied across several disciplines to highlight the procedures for
53 network formation, network maintenance and how networks sometimes develop and
54 disintegrate (Brown and Duguid, 1994; Cooke, 2002; Breschi and Malebra, 2005). In much of the
55 literature on networks scholars have differentiated them according to their durability and stability
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3 (Burt, 1992; Powell, 1990). These network distinguishing factors form the foundations of the
4 relational dimensions of its key stakeholders (Cooke, 2001).
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8 According to Powell and Grodal (2005) networks vary from short-term projects to long-
9 term relationships and the different temporal dimensions have important implications for
10 governance. Some are hierarchical in structure with a central authority (main actor) monitoring
11 social activities (Ahuja, 2000; Powell, 1990). Others are what Powell and Grodal (2005) termed
12 *heterarchical* because of their common features including: distributed authority and strong self-
13 organisation. The later form of network structure (Ahuja, 2000) which considers its main actors
14 equal may be relevant in facilitating co-research and effective dialogue in entrepreneurship
15 research. Distributed authority and strong self-organisation may also help them (the main actor)
16 to realise the importance of diverse and varied experiences, skills and knowledge. Based on this,
17 there is ground for declaring that understanding ANT provides useful insights that can inform
18 entrepreneurship practice especially about the need for co-operation and coordination in
19 research. According to Smith, Rose and Hamilton (2010) the process of establishing a network
20 involves simplifying heterogeneous entities into a 'system of association' which is called an actor-
21 network. Smith *et al.* (2016) explained this more fully using Callon's (1986) idea of translation.
22 They confirmed that the process of translation involves negotiations among human and non-
23 human actors serving to define their interests and actions in the network.
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36 From the above, it is clear to see that ANT is particularly accommodating in terms of
37 engaging with the dynamic and contentious aspects of knowledge networks (Alferoff and
38 Knights, 2009) either human or non-human. Given its ability to accommodate divergent views,
39 ANT can be useful in reconciling the polarised views of entrepreneurship researchers and
40 practitioners as well as for breaking down the boundaries between theory and practice (Latour,
41 1987). This is particularly relevant for this research which is aimed at developing a multi-layered
42 framework for narrowing the theory/practice gap while reconciling the polarised views of the
43 academics and the practitioner community. Moreover, ANT provides essential ingredients that
44 contribute to the development of engaged scholarship as a practice in entrepreneurship/SME
45 research because it accepts human and non-human interactions as fundamental to knowledge
46 creation. ANT refuses to give credence to the boundaries between knowledge and application
47 that, by default Mode 2 (transdisciplinary research, problem-based, immediate and judged by its
48 utility in practical situations) reproduces by arguing for their reconciliation (Alferoff and Knights,
49 2009; Knights and Scarbrough, 2007). In Mode 2 of ANT, knowledge is produced in a context
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3 of application involving a much broader range of perspectives; it is transdisciplinary being
4 characterised by heterogeneity of skills. . . . It is more socially accountable and reflexive”
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6 (Gibbons, 2000, p. 160).
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9 **Research approach**

10 This research follows a traditional or narrative literature review method (Cronin *et al.*,
11 2008) unlike a systematic literature review which requires detailed secondary data collection
12 procedures and the specific period within which data for analysis was selected (Gough *et al.*,
13 2012; McCabe, 2005; Parahoo, 2014). The principles of a traditional or narrative literature review
14 which emphasises the need to focus on a specific subject area (Aveyard, 2010) helped this
15 research to summarize and synthesise (Cronin *et al.*, 2008) a body of literature relevant to engaged
16 scholarship. To achieve this, we used three stands namely: engaged scholarship, collaborative
17 learning and actor-network theory which we deduced from our main research aims and the
18 extant literature. The procedure for sifting through secondary data was mainly guided by the
19 three strands described above. We used them to closely examine the literature which yielded
20 interaction as a common factor connecting the themes we mentioned above.
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30 Adopting the principles of a selective approach to literature search directed us to studies
31 whose dialogue was centred on theory/practice and practitioner vs. academic research. After
32 gathering relevant literature sources both authors were involved in its analysis, evaluation and
33 interpretation (Gray, 2013). This allowed the study to make solid suppositions emphasising the
34 importance of interactions between scholars and practitioners in research on
35 entrepreneurship/SMEs. From these inferences, we were able to develop a nuanced framework
36 for encouraging entrepreneurship researcher and practitioner interactions in
37 entrepreneurship/SME research. In so doing, we were able to address the aims of this study.
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45 The research design we followed in this article was jointly informed by Coughlan’s *et al.*
46 (2007) and Cronin’s *et al.* (2008) step-by-step guide and advice for doing literature review based
47 studies. Their guide and advice highlighted that reviewing a body of literature consisting of the
48 relevant studies and knowledge to address a specific topic can be useful in developing conceptual
49 or theoretical frameworks.
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Discussions

The promise engaged scholarship brings to entrepreneurship research as a foundation for reducing the so-called rigor/relevance gap between academic scholars and practicing professionals (Bartkus *et al.*, 2016; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) is useful. A great deal of literature concerning bridging this gap calls for academic researchers to develop deeper relationships with practitioners and for active practitioner involvement in research design and its implementation (Bartunek, 2007; Mohrman and Lawler, 2010). Clearly, this is about academic researchers establishing common ground in entrepreneurship research whereby the practitioner community participates by contributing its experience and expertise (Steffens *et al.*, 2014). In doing so, an ecosystem can be established enabling the co-creation and co-production of knowledge between entrepreneurship researchers and the practitioner community (Bansal *et al.*, 2012). Clearly, co-production and co-creation of new knowledge enhances open and integrative research processes in social and natural sciences and across research/science, practice and policy interrelationships (Page *et al.*, 2016). Such integrative knowledge production processes allow academic researchers and practitioners to work collaboratively to develop solutions to problems in the world of practice, thereby creating insights for the world of theory (Beech *et al.*, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007). The literature is clear about the implications of co-production. It acknowledges that regardless of the form or type of research, ignoring co-production will only ever produce a partial perspective on a problem (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Bartunek, 2007). Thus, entrepreneurship research needs to acknowledge and build on these principles.

Related to the above, Chen *et al.* (2013) explained that the epistemological argument for engaged scholarship is that knowledge is situated and pluralistic, which implies that in undertaking research multiple forms of knowledge from multiple perspectives must be engaged. In other words, knowledge production in research must be multi-disciplinary involving researchers and practitioners. The interactive space promoted in the new multi-layered framework illuminating engaged scholarship as the anchor provides a genuine platform to co-produce relevant and applicable business management solutions to practicing entrepreneurs and business managers in general. Similarly, Cerf and Hemidy (1999) showed that effective co-operation between farmers and their advisors was fundamental to solving farm management problem. They first highlighted the discrepancies between farmers then proposed the establishment of a multi-disciplinary advisory body for decision-making and support to

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3 overcome identified incongruities. The support they proposed was in the form of an operative
4 frame of reference to increase the rigour and relevance of farm-management solutions.
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6 Based on the above, it is clear to see that the process of engagement declared as a
7 “communal act” in Boyer (1996) underpins the rigour and relevance of management solutions
8 generated in diverse teams and/or *heterarchical* networks. It therefore means that academic
9 researchers should aim to modify their research mentality by promoting methods of human and
10 non-human interactions as they design their research (Callon, 1986; Brydon-Miller and Maguire,
11 2003) contrary to relying only on the rigor of research methods and their engagement with
12 theory. Gulati (2007) advised that in situations where there is ambivalence on the part of
13 academics about the value of mutually beneficial academic-practitioner relationships, attempts to
14 create such relationships will likely require the efforts of boundary spanners. In relation to this
15 Bartunek (2007) envisaged a situation where the academic-practitioner relationships happen as
16 matter of course.
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24 He conceptualised this as a process that will enliven research and practice by helping academic
25 researchers and management practitioners enter each other’s worlds without needing to cast their
26 own worlds aside. Developing deep partnerships between academics and practitioners often
27 results in outcomes that satisfy the twin imperatives of scholarship that can be of high quality as
28 well as value to society (Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009). Pettigrew (1997) highlighted that such
29 deep partnerships could also be of mutual benefit for both academics and practitioners without
30 compromising the needs of either party in the relationship.
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39 Building on the idea of developing deep relationships, Schiele and Krummaker (2011)
40 discussed the scholar–practitioner collaborations consortium in which the practitioner
41 participates as a “co-researcher” contributing to the research process at every stage. This is
42 consistent with the debate in this article which emphasises dialogic relationships between
43 academics and practitioners (Beech *et al.*, 2010) in a deliberately established interactive space
44 (*heterarchical* network). Representing the views of academics and practitioners in a research design,
45 strategy and implementation legitimises the findings of the research and in doing so makes them
46 relevant and applicable in the practitioner community. Gulati (2007) provided a five-point plan
47 for narrowing the theory/practice gap. Gulati’s five steps of a normative model of management
48 research highlighted the need for researchers to be sensitive to managerial practice when shaping
49 their research questions, testing theory in the classroom, building theory, appreciating and
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3 synthesizing the dialectic between theory and phenomenon, and becoming “bilingual
4 interpreters” for and active collaborators with practitioners.
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8 In contrast, Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) pointed out that involving practitioners in
9 formulating research questions may steer the questions in a narrow, short-term or pluralistic
10 direction. Contributing to the same discourse others have downplayed the paradoxes of
11 academic–practitioner relationships. For example, Bartunek and Rynes (2014) did not attempt to
12 reconcile the polarised views of academics and practitioners but encouraged ways of working
13 with the dichotomies between them, arguing that doing so fosters healthy research and theory
14 building. In the same way, Kieser and Leiner (2009) argued that researchers and practitioners
15 cannot collaboratively produce research, they can only irritate each other. Related to this
16 Kimberly (2007), were also cautious and they stressed that sometimes the quality of management
17 research can be seriously compromised in cases where researcher–manager interactions unfold
18 under conditions of role confusion or role ambiguity. Furthermore, Kimberly (2007); Rynes and
19 McNatt (1999) confirmed that collaborative research endeavours can also be affected when there
20 is no clarity about whether an academic is operating as a researcher or consultant in solving
21 social issues of management.
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32 Notwithstanding the above, the novelty of the research reported here lies in the
33 application of engaged scholarship, often used in science and clinical studies, to advance
34 entrepreneurship/SME research. We argue that engaged scholarship has the potential to turn the
35 irritations or provocations (Kieser and Leiner, 2009) that arise when practicing managers and
36 academic researchers collaborate in research into inspiration.
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42 In that regard, the multi-layered framework presented in Figure 1 is instructive. It
43 provides new guidelines for both academics and practitioners as they seek to resolve
44 entrepreneurial-related issues in business. Specifically, the framework offers a toolkit which can
45 be applied to reduce the theory/practice tension while promoting ways of reconciling their
46 polarised views. Most importantly, it informs entrepreneurship researchers and the practitioner
47 community about the best posture to take in designing entrepreneurship research (Bartunek,
48 2007).
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55 Engaged scholarship is used, in the framework, to anchor the interaction process
56 between entrepreneurship practice and research, and to reduce the entrepreneurship
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3 researcher/practitioner and theory-practice tensions (Davidsson, 2002). It (engaged scholarship)
4 is presented as a moderating variable in the process of developing *heterarchical* networks
5 represented as the interactive space (Smith *et al.*, 2016) in Figure 1. Clearly, the multi-layered
6 framework emphasises engagement, involvement and interaction (Van de Ven and Johnson,
7 2006).

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11 It advances the idea that researchers and practitioners must jointly investigate complex
12 entrepreneurship issues by participating at all the stages of the research process including;
13 formulating problems, building theory, designing research, and solving problems (Bansal *et al.*,
14 2012; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998).

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21 The interactive space (*heterarchical* networks) illustrated in Figure 1, also advances the
22 ideas of co-production and co-creation that are conceptualised as components of engaged
23 scholarship. Within this interactive space entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners can
24 engage in various activities. These activities may include soliciting advice, and feedback from
25 practitioners during the research process, sharing power in collaborative researcher–practitioner
26 teams, and jointly evaluate policies and programs (Van de Ven, 2007).

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32 Arguably, if the knowledge generated by entrepreneurship researchers is to be considered
33 relevant and useful to entrepreneurship practice, it is imperative that practitioners have a direct
34 input into the research process (Aram and Salipante, 2003). In other words, academics should
35 create actor networks (Callon, 1986) by finding ways of establishing working relationships within
36 the practitioner community (Davidsson, 2002). As explained already this view originates from
37 the idea of co-production, which is a modest form of engagement offering a rather neat way of
38 beginning to reconcile the tension between safeguarding academic freedom and increasing
39 utilization of research (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Martin, 2010).

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47 Furthermore, the interactive space acts as an invitation to entrepreneurs and
48 practitioners, encouraging them to be reflective about their respective research practices
49 (Antonacopoulou, 2010) through meaningful exchanges. The assumption is that through
50 interacting they each can expose the incompleteness of their research practices. Based on that
51 hypothesis, engaged scholarship can provide an avenue for creating relevant, applicable and
52 legitimate knowledge while reducing the paradoxical tension (Smith and Lewis, 2011) between
53 the researcher and the practitioner community. The issue of relevance and applicability of
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3 research is not necessarily distinct. As such, the proposed framework recognises this
4 complementarity and the underlying message is that scholarship that does not attempt to
5 accomplish both could be harmful for both entrepreneurship/SME research and
6 entrepreneurship practice (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014; Gulati, 2007).
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11 In addition, the framework illustrates that for academic research to influence
12 entrepreneurship and small business management both the practitioner community and
13 entrepreneurship researchers must be implicated in the research. Co-design between researchers
14 and practitioners, cycling back and forth between each other's knowledge and experience, is an
15 important mode of knowledge development (Romme, 2003; Van Aken, 2005). Undoubtedly,
16 incorporating the views of all the parties involved in its creation increases its relevance,
17 applicability and legitimacy. In that regard, it can be argued that co-ownership transcends beyond
18 current conventional research approaches in entrepreneurship/SME and business management.
19 The emphasis is on association (Latour, 1986). That is, the connections that have been
20 established between collaborating parties. The idea of association between entrepreneurship
21 researchers and the practitioner community is an important facet of their knowledge, actions,
22 theories and practices (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Such interrelationships provide a balance
23 between theory and practice and they ultimately reconcile the incongruent view of academics and
24 practitioners.
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36 The new multi-layered framework can also be useful in entrepreneurship and business
37 studies in several ways. It can be applied to management research in general, in science and art,
38 and more specifically in entrepreneurship/SME research. But to validate its moderating effect in
39 the theory/practice and scholar-practitioner debate, we invite other scholars to empirically test
40 the framework by exploring the casual relationships of the variable it contains.
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45 **Conclusions**

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47 The framework proposed in this article is the main contribution the article makes to
48 entrepreneurship/SME research. We demonstrated that the proposed multi-layered framework is
49 an effective instrument for informing entrepreneurship/SME research because of its theoretical
50 and practical dimensions. The model neatly brought together theoretical constructs presented in
51 the wider literature (e.g. from Bansal *et al.* 2012; Bartunek, 2007; Kenworthy-U'ren *et al.*, 2005;
52 Kor *et al.*, 2016; Van de Ven, 2007; Van de Ven and Jing, 2011) in new ways that are not
53 common in entrepreneurship/SME research. This was a clear demonstration that the nuanced
54 multi-layered framework can advance entrepreneurship/SME research in a meaningful and
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3 powerful way. It can enable members of the scholarly and practitioner communities to
4 appreciate the essence of working alongside each other at almost all the stages of developing,
5 designing and implementing research (Barge and Shockley-Zalabak, 2008).
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11 The implications of research are three-fold. Firstly, academic scholars will become aware
12 of the importance of combining ‘inquiry from the outside’ e.g. research models from researchers
13 with ‘inquiry from inside’ e.g. knowledge and experience from entrepreneurship practitioners,
14 and policy-makers (Evered and Louis, 1981; Kor *et al.*, 2016; Mahoney and Sanchez, 2004).
15 Secondly, when academics partner with practitioners in research, it legitimises the research
16 outcomes from the perspective of practicing managers. Thereby overcoming their concerns
17 about the relevance and the applicability of academic research in solving the social problems
18 militating their entrepreneurship practice. Thirdly, academic researchers and practitioners will be
19 challenged to reconsider their research approaches. In fact, they will be convinced to establish a
20 space for interacting with each other and engage in a meaningful dialogue. Moreover, they will be
21 influenced to respect each other’s point of view, which will be helpful in reconciling their
22 divergent worlds.
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32 Finally, the study concludes by recommending that both academic researchers and
33 practitioners must recognise that resolving the theory/practice gap requires a multi-disciplinary
34 approach and it is in their self-interest as each will be better able to accomplish their purposes.
35 So, time and effort must be invested in developing research syndicates involving academics,
36 policy-makers and practitioners. Specifically, *heterarchical* networks characterised by distributed
37 authority and strong self-organisation must be established at individual and institutional levels.
38 Doing so will facilitate meaningful dialogue while developing engaged scholarship as a practice in
39 entrepreneurship/SME research.
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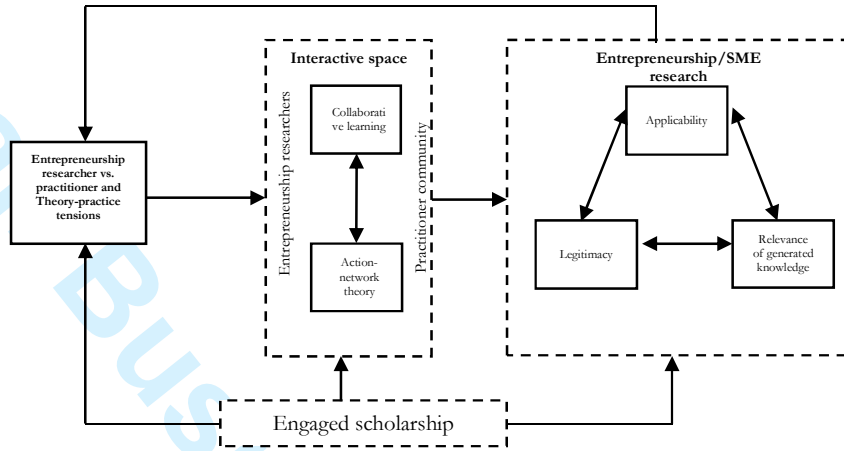
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Figure 1: A framework for encouraging entrepreneurship researcher/practitioner interactions



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