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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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STRATEGIC NETWORKS OF
GROWTH-ORIENTED MANUFACTURING FIRMS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STRUCTURES AND OUTCOMES

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Organizations facing competitive environments increasingly adopt collaborative strategies for competitive advantage. This study examined the growing phenomenon of purposeful interorganizational relationship, or strategic networks, of independent, small and medium size manufacturers. These networks provide a membership-based group of “designated collaborators” that focus on increasing competitive advantage for member firms. Firm-level outcomes and interorganizational relationship structures related to network involvement were investigated.

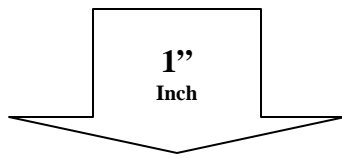
A comparative approach was adopted for this inductive, theory building research project and utilized a two-stage research design incorporating multiple data sources, including interviews, surveys, on-site visits, and secondary documents. Qualitative interview data from network member firms and non-network firms in the secondary wood products industry and survey data from samples of two same-industry network firms was also compared. Finally, extensive network narratives were developed to provide a comprehensive case-based understanding of the network phenomenon.

Through the use of text coding and pattern searches, network analyses techniques and relationship graphing (sociograms), a proposed model of network structures and firm-level outcomes was developed. Results from this project suggest that firm characteristics and network structures are associated with specific outcomes member firms achieve from network participation. Network administrative is characterized by degree of coordination such as frequency and regularity of member meetings. Network interactive structure is characterized by centralization or decentralization of the network members influences whether member firms interact in a decentralized or centralized structure. Further, results suggest that although firms in both centralized and decentralized networks achieve positive outcomes, the widest range and types of firm-level outcomes are achieved by similar member firms in decentralized structures. Finally, results indicate that firm-level outcomes related to network participation are facilitated when network centralization and degree of network coordination are appropriately

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matched. For example, a high degree of coordination facilitates outcomes in a centralized network structure.

KEYWORDS: Interorganizational Relationships, Strategic Networks, Manufacturing, Networks Structures, Manufacturing Networking (*Include exactly 5 keywords or phrases*)

