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**THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS  
IN SUPPLY CHAIN INTEGRATION**

A THESIS BY PUBLICATIONS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** –This research aims to explore the role of inter-personal relationships within a supply chain integration context. Firstly, it proposes a conceptual model addressing the inter-relationships between interpersonal relationships, inter-organizational relationships, and supply chain integration. Secondly, it investigates the influence of interpersonal relationships on supply chain integration. Lastly, it examines how interpersonal relationships influence inter-organizational relationships to enable supply chain integration.

**Methodology/approach** – Based on a comprehensive literature review, the study first proposes a series of propositions and establishes a conceptual framework to illustrate the relationship between interpersonal relationships, inter-organizational relationships, and supply chain integration. Then, the study applies an exploratory/investigational approach of multiple case studies and empirically examines how interpersonal relationships affect inter-organizational relationships and supply chain integration.

**Findings** – The study proposes that interpersonal relationships can indirectly and positively influence supply chain integration, mediated by inter-organizational relationships. Personal affection acts as a relationship initiator, and personal credibility serves as a gatekeeper while personal communication works as a facilitator and plays more important roles than personal affection and credibility. Also, interpersonal relationships can initiate and enhance inter-organizational relationships to enable supply chain integration. In the formative stage of supply chain integration, personal affection and credibility play key roles, whereas personal communication becomes more significant during the operational stage.

**Originality/value** – The study advances supply chain integration literature by extending the focus from that of firm level to the level of individuals, and introduces interpersonal

relationship dimensions to explore inner mechanisms of supply chain integration. It demonstrates that interpersonal relationships are able to initiate and motivate firm level integration, which modifies the presumption that firm level relationships are predominantly established first in Western cultural contexts. It also sheds light on applying theoretical lenses in supply chain integration. It extends social exchange theory from relationships between parties that are on the same level to different levels of interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships. Meanwhile, it applies resource dependency theory by addressing how interpersonal relationships influence dependence levels on supply chain partners to form firm level relationships. Furthermore, it extends resource orchestration theory by suggesting that inter-organizational relationships and interpersonal relationships can be orchestrated to achieve supply chain integration capabilities.

**Implications** –The study provides insights for practitioners who have limited “hard” firm level resources. Managers should be aware of the significance and characteristics of interpersonal relationships, and decide when and how to deploy both interpersonal and interorganizational relationships as resources during the integration process. In the formative stage, managers should utilise boundary spanners with good personal credibility. More physical contact with counter-partners should be encouraged to foster personal affection, thus initiating the formation of inter-organizational relationships. In the operational stage, personal communication should be strengthened to facilitate the supply chain integration process. On the other hand, managers should mitigate the conflict between primary business interests and subordinate interpersonal friendships.

## **Author's Declaration**

This thesis was produced according to Massey University's "PhD thesis by publication" requirements: it is based on research that has either been published, in revision following reviewers' comments, in review, or in preparation to be submitted. Each individual chapter is set out according to the stylistic requirements of the journal to which it has been submitted. Consequently, some of the submitted chapters are relatively succinct, there is some repetition (particularly in the literature review and methods sections) and there are small stylistic differences between chapters.

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My time undertaking a PhD was made enjoyable as a result of the philosophy that one is “*never too old to learn*”. I had previously started my PhD studies during 2000-2003 but I suspended because I immigrated to Auckland. After five years physical, nightshift labouring work in the new country, I returned to academic area. Again, I restarted my PhD in my late 40s and felt a little embarrassed from the viewpoint of my culture. But recently a popular short verse (author unknown) in social media has comforted me (with minor adaptations by me):

*“Harvard is three hours ahead of Stanford, but that doesn’t make Stanford slow.*

*Someone became a leader at 25 while another being 50 became a CEO.*

*Obama retired at 55, but Trump became President when he was 70-year-old.*

*Yes, everyone in this world works based on his own time zone.”*

So, I am happy to accept my late coming “time zone”.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for all their love and encouragement. For my illiterate (even in Chinese) parents, Fuying Xia (mum), and Jianhuai Wang (dad) in China who always urged me to pursue further study (sadly my mum passed away in 2008). I am also grateful for the support from my parents-in-law, Jinju Lin and Quanyun Fang. And for the understanding of my elder son, George (in Harvard College), and younger son, Albert (in Takapuna Normal Intermediate School), during their formative years. And most of all for my loving, supportive, encouraging, and patient wife Maggie whose faithful support during the all stages of this PhD is so appreciated and valued. Yes, love from family is always the most in our life.

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## Abbreviations and Terms

ABDC	Australian Business Dean Council
ABS	Association of Business Schools
C+F	Contract farmers
EI	External integration
GDP	Gross domestic product
II	Internal integration
INGOs	International non-governmental organizations
IORs	Inter-organizational relationships
IPRs	Inter-personal relationships
LNGOs	Local non-governmental organizations
RBV	Resource-based view
RDT	Resource dependence theory
ROT	Resource orchestration theory
SC	Supply chain
SCI	Supply chain integration
SCM	Supply chain management
SSCI	Service supply chain integration
SET	Social exchange theory
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises