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The Formation and Implementation of Interorganizational Relations in the Experiences of Managers

Furkan Amil Gur
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

THE FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE EXPERIENCES OF MANAGERS

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Furkan Amil Gur
Doctoral Candidate
B.A., Marmara University, 2005
M.A., Marmara University, 2009
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To my wife Serap and my daughter Mehtap Sare…

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ABSTRACT

Relations between organizations are vital for firms and their strategies. A common approach organizes interorganizational relationships into competition, cooperation, and coopetition. To contribute to this research, in this dissertation I focused on how managers interpret competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relations with other organizations. Specifically, I studied managers' interpretations of the characteristics of their interorganizational field and relationships, how they identify their competitors and cooperators, and their accounts of the practices and aspects involved in the planning and implementation of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relations. To capture managers' interpretations, in this study I chose a grounded theory approach, selected the seafood processing industry in a Southern US state as the empirical setting, and interviewed the executives of seafood processors and representatives of other key organizations in this context.

My findings capture the characteristics of the interorganizational field and relationships between organizations; the aspects that managers identify as key to making decisions regarding the classification of cooperators and competitors; and the aspects that managers' interpret to be important for competition, cooperation, and coopetition. In doing so, the findings of my study contribute to research on interorganizational relationships by studying how managers' interpretations of the interorganizational field and its characteristics shape relations with other organizations. Moreover, my findings contribute to this research by exploring the characteristics of interorganizational relations and the way managers make decisions and the aspects and practices they interpret to be important for competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships with certain other organizations. I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of

these contributions to the literature on interorganizational relationships, areas for future research, and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations are embedded in their social contexts and all organizational actions occur in relation to other organizations in these contexts (Granovetter, 1985). Therefore, forming relations with other organizations and adjusting the nature of these relations is important for organizational strategy (Miles, Snow, & Pfeffer, 1974; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Interorganizational relations have been studied from a variety of perspectives (Grandori & Soda, 1995; Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). A vital approach to research on interorganizational relationships organizes these relations into competition, cooperation, and coopetition (simultaneous competition and cooperation) (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Ketchen, Snow, & Hoover, 2004; Padula & Dagnino, 2007). To contribute to this research, in this dissertation I focus on how managers experience competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relations with other organizations. A focus on managers' experiences of interorganizational relations can provide important insights regarding the way decisions about relations with other organizations are made and resources are exchanged between organizations as well as about the factors that lead firms to compete and/or cooperate.

In this study, I follow a stream of research that starts from the premise that economic activity is embedded in a social environment (Granovetter, 1985). Starting from this premise, the so-called embeddedness perspective assumes that relations between organizations are contextualized in a complex environment that includes the social and cultural context, and a network of relations with various organizations in this environment (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999). To conceptualize the complexity of the environment in which interorganizational relations are embedded, in this dissertation I utilize the concept of interorganizational fields, which are defined as the areas of a shared system of interpretations jointly formed by social and economic

interactions among organizations (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). An interorganizational field consists of organizations that offer similar products, government agencies, suppliers, customers, financial actors, industry associations, and the general public who interact with each other more frequently than organizations outside of the group (Barnett, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001; Warren, 1967).

The key decision makers in organizations are managers (Barr, 1998) and their decisions are the basis for organizations' actions, including those that shape interorganizational relationships (Van de Ven, 1976). Managers' interpretations of their environment drive their decisions and the courses of action related to forming and implementing organizational strategies (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Sharma, 2000). Managers' interpretations and decisions are also impacted by their interactions with other organizations in their field, including for example industry organization representatives, customers, and suppliers (Bengtsson, Eriksson, & Wincent, 2010; Fuller & Lewis, 2002). Despite their vital role, little attention has been paid to managers' interpretations in the interorganizational relationships literature (Cropper et al., 2008b; Hibbert et al., 2008). Therefore, more research from an embeddedness perspective is needed to shed light on how managers interpret the interorganizational field in which their organizations operate and how they accordingly make decisions regarding their organizations' relations with other organizations. Research on managers' interpretations of interorganizational fields and relations with organizations is important because it may inform us about how organizations engage in and maintain relations with other organizations, including how resources are exchanged and conflicts are resolved (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Van de Ven, 1976).

To address this gap in the literature, I study how managers interpret interorganizational relationships in the field. To do so, in this dissertation I rely on managers' own explanations of

how they interpret their interorganizational field and the organizational practices involved in carrying out relations with other organizations. Therefore, this study contributes to a recent stream of research that conceptualizes strategy not as a property of organizations, but rather as something that managers do (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). Specifically, I identify and examine managers' interpretations of the practices that are relevant to relations with organizations, including for example meeting with managers of other organizations, identifying organizations to compete and/or cooperate, and starting relations with other organizations through various interactions (Provan & Sydow, 2008). In doing so, in this study I aim to answer the following research questions: (1) how do managers' interpretations of their interorganizational field and its characteristics shape relations with other organizations? (2) what are managers' interpretations of the characteristics of interorganizational relations and how they choose which other organizations to compete, cooperate, and coopete with? (3) what are the key aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships in the experiences of managers?

To address these research questions and study their interpretations of the interorganizational field and interorganizational relationships, I interviewed managers based on the assumption that they would be willing and able to communicate their interpretations of relations with other organizations as well as their experiences of how these relations are planned and implemented in their practices (Fuller & Lewis, 2002). As context for my study, I selected the seafood processing industry in a Southern state and I interviewed the top-level managers of seafood processing companies who are the decision-makers for their organizations to collect data about their interpretations of their industry, the relationships among processors and other key organizations in the industry. I also interviewed representatives of trade associations,

government agencies, fishermen, and distributors to capture their interpretations of the interorganizational field and relations between processors.

This study offers important contributions to the literature on interorganizational relations. First, it contributes by combining the literature on interorganizational relations with research on interorganizational fields as well as on managers' interpretations and practices to conceptualize their role in studying relationships between organizations. Second, it contributes by studying how managers' interpretations of the interorganizational field and its characteristics shape relations with other organizations; a role theorized but only limitedly studied empirically. Third, it explores the characteristics of interorganizational relations and how managers make decisions regarding relations for competition, cooperation, and coopetition with certain other organizations by focusing on managers' accounts of what they do to plan and implement relations with organizations. Finally, it contributes by studying the key aspects that managers interpret to be important for competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships in their experiences.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I discuss the study's theoretical background; specifically, I synthesize the literature by reviewing relevant research on interorganizational fields, on interorganizational relationships and the types of relationships between organizations, and on the roles of managers' interpretations and practices for these relationships. In Chapter 3, I present my research design, including methodology, data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings of my study and in Chapter 5, I highlight the contributions of my study to the literature on interorganizational relationships, present the limitations of my study, and provide suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to understand how managers interpret the formation and implementation of interorganizational relationships by answering the research questions posed in Chapter 1: (1) how do managers' interpretations of their interorganizational field and its characteristics shape relations with other organizations? (2) what are managers' interpretations of the characteristics of interorganizational relations and how they choose which other organizations to compete, cooperate, and coopete with? (3) what are the key aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships in the experiences of managers? In this chapter, I connect the literature on interorganizational relationships and on types of relationships with other literature streams, including research on interorganizational fields, managers' interpretations, and practices to develop my study's theoretical background. I note here that by managers I refer to decision makers in their respective organizations.

Research on the central phenomenon of this study, interorganizational relationships has been synthesized in a number of reviews over the years (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Cropper, Ebers, Huxam, & Ring, 2008a; 2008b; Galaskiewicz, 1985; Grandori & Soda, 1995; Parmigiana & Rivera-Santos, 2011; Whetten, 1981). These reviews broadly organized the literature under economics- and sociology-based approaches (Grandori & Soda, 1995; Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1997; Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Economics-based approaches, such as resource-based view and transaction cost perspectives, conceptualize interorganizational relationships as interactions between companies based on the evaluations of benefits when conducting an activity against or in collaboration with other organizations regardless of the social context. This approach predominantly focuses on how organizations can identify appropriate resources and how they can maximize their benefits

in interorganizational relationships. In sociology-based approaches, such as embeddedness and network perspectives, relations between organizations are considered to be part of a broader social context and they are assumed to be impacted by factors such as legitimacy, status, and reputation. Additionally, this approach is concerned with relational issues such as trust, prior relations and histories between organizations (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). As noted in Chapter 1, in this study I focus on a sociology-based approach referred to as the embeddedness perspective, the basic premise of which is that all economic actions, including relations between organizations, are embedded in a socioeconomic environment that consists of social and economic interactions between many actors (Dacin et al. 1999; Hagedoorn, 2006; Uzzi, 1997).

In the following sections, I start by reviewing the literature on interorganizational fields that all organizational actions are embedded in and highlighting important features and elements of interorganizational fields for relations between organizations. Then, I continue by defining interorganizational relationships and by reviewing the literature on relations between organizations in the embeddedness perspective. Next, I discuss a way to organize interorganizational relations as conceptualized in the literature (i.e., competition, cooperation, and coopetition), and define each type and review related research. Based on this dissertation's focus on managers' interpretations, I then review the literature on managerial interpretations because they constitute the basis for forming and implementing relations with organizations. Finally, I touch on the literature on strategy-as-practice because managers' interpretations of their practices as well as the practices of the managers of other organizations in the interorganizational field are also important for the formation and implementation of relationships between organizations.

Interorganizational Fields

An organization's strategies and actions are embedded in a broader social context. One conceptualization of this social context refers to it as an 'interorganizational field', which is defined as a group of organizations that have a shared system of interpretations and whose members interact with each other more frequently than the organizations outside of the field (Scott, 2001; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). An interorganizational field is comprised of a network of organizations, including firms that offer similar products, organizations along the supply chain such as suppliers and buyers, financial institutions, government agencies, industry associations, and the general public, which all have varying levels of influence on a focal organization (Barnett, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Therefore, the conceptualization of interorganizational fields builds on the concept of industry, defined as groups of organizations who offer similar products and services (Nightingale, 1978: 36), "but adds to this focal population those other and different organizations that critically influence their performance" (Scott, 2001, 56).

Interorganizational fields are created by organizations' interactions with each other and with other fields to form shared interpretations about the members, dynamics, rules, and routines of the field (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Different organizations may have varying levels of impact on the initial formation and transformation of an interorganizational field. For instance, sizeable firms with large investments may be more interested in influencing a field and its key dynamics. The regulatory agencies overseeing a field's rules and regulations may have a more important impact as coercive forces (Oliver, 1990). Research on interorganizational fields evolved into an embedded view that conceptualize fields as 'relational spaces' for organizations (Wooten & Hoffmen, 2008: 138). These relational spaces, however, are not assumed to be homogeneous and

might consist of organizational groups such as industry segments, which may pursue various purposes (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008).

Interorganizational field is key for the embeddedness perspective because it is the social environment that organizations are contextualized. Similar to other organizational actions and strategies, relationships between firms are also embedded in and are a vital constitutive part of an interorganizational field. Hence, the type and nature of relationships are impacted by the interorganizational field while in turn impacting the field itself. Therefore, an understanding of the interorganizational field can contribute to theory of interorganizational relationships by informing research about the conditions and elements that facilitate or limit relationships (Cropper et al., 2008a). While some roles of interorganizational fields are identified and studied (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000) there is a call for more research that treats a field as a platform that sets the stage for relations between organizations (Cropper et al., 2008b; Marchington & Vincent, 2004; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008).

In the interorganizational field, customers, suppliers, and industry associations are among the important elements for relationships between competitors, i.e., firms that have similar processes, satisfy similar customer needs by offering similar products or services, and compete with each other (Ingram & Yue, 2008). These competing organizations often also become suppliers and customers of each other as they may exchange resources or cooperate for other issues leading to coopetitive relationships within the field. Industry organizations such as associations and government agencies are vital to initiate relations among organizations by providing the platforms of communication and by facilitating the formation of key relationship characteristics such as trust by facilitating steady and transparent relations (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008; Brass et al., 2004). Because the field and its constituents serve as the platform for relations

between organizations, building on this discussion I review the literature on interorganizational relationships in the following section.

Interorganizational Relations

Interorganizational relations are defined as "relationships between and among organizations" (Cropper et al. 2008a: 1), and they are important for acquiring necessary resources, reducing uncertainty, increasing organizational legitimacy, and achieving interorganizational objectives (Brass et al., 2004; Galaskiewicz, 1985). Relationships may be between various types of public, private, and/or non-profit organizations. They also may involve relations among only a few or many organizations, including relations among organizations co-located in geographic clusters or large international networks of organizations. Therefore, the umbrella term interorganizational relationships describes a broad array of research across different perspectives and streams of literature (Bergenholtz & Waldstrom, 2011; Cropper et al., 2008a; 2008b; Whetten, 1981).

As noted above, the theoretical perspective of interorganizational relations that informs this dissertation is the sociology-based approach referred to as the embeddedness perspective. The rich conceptualization of context in the embeddedness perspective offers a midway explanation between over-socialized approaches that attribute the control of interorganizational relationships to the external environment and under-socialized approaches that attribute this control to the organization's internal structure (Uzzi, 1997). By combining these approaches, the embeddedness perspective suggests that interorganizational relationships occur as part of and in relation to the external environment, and they are planned and implemented by key actors within an organization (Hagedoorn, 2006). As Dacin and colleagues (1999) masterfully explained, prior research on embeddedness predominantly focuses on presenting various boundaries for the

rationality of organizational actors by identifying and testing different factors that constitute the embeddedness framework. Accordingly, organizations and their interorganizational relationships are embedded in their international and national environment, and the social contexts of the industry including segments, industry groups, and interorganizational fields.

Relations between organizations are embedded in the interorganizational field because these relations occur as part of a larger network of relations with all the organizations in the field and are shaped by interorganizational, organizational, and intra-organizational characteristics. In the field, horizontal interdependencies originate when organizations with similar operations that offer the same or similar products rely on each other for acquiring or sharing resources for example through alliances and trade associations. Vertical interdependencies, on the other hand, emerge from supply chain relations linking suppliers and customers through ‘resource-transfers’ (Grandori & Soda, 1995).

Because relationships are embedded, factors such as organizations’ previous interactions and their shared interpretations of the interorganizational field are important for subsequent relations between organizations. Accordingly, scholars identified a number of key factors that are vital for relations between organizations, including trust (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008; Brass et al., 2004; Vangen & Huxam, 2003), reciprocity (Cropper et al., 2008b; Uzzi, 1997), and reputation (Marchington & Vincent, 2004). Trust has been argued to be an essential factor in interorganizational relationships and it has also by far been the most commonly studied. Trust is defined as an organizational actor’s readiness to accept its vulnerability to opportunistic behavior in a relationship, especially non-contractual ones, based on an understanding of a relationship partner would be reliable and fair and not act opportunistically at the expense of their benefit (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008; Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). Trust is important in the

embeddedness perspective because Granovetter (1985) based his arguments of continuous relations between organizations on trust and the lack of constant opportunism. Previous research suggests that organizations form trust based on their previous positive interactions with others as these interactions imprint strong interpretations on partners (Vangen & Huxham, 2003; Vlaar et al., 2007).

Trust in relationships between organizations is developed through a process: initially partners have limited information about each other, but over time they learn about each other and develop routines and processes that may be idiosyncratic to their particular relationship and they may start to more extensively share information, which may lead to developing positive expectations, and eventually to trusting one another (Zhong, Su, Peng, & Yang, 2014). In this regard, trust building is a continuous process that is strengthened or weakened by every interaction between organizations. Therefore, when organizational actors know each other or when organizations have been interacting for a long period of time and are heavily invested in the relationship, they will likely avoid actions that would potentially harm their trustworthiness (Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

An important factor for trust building in interorganizational relationships is reciprocity (defined as "a pattern of mutually contingent exchange of gratifications"; Gouldner, 1960: 161) as managers respond by trusting a partner when they are being trusted: "I trust you because you trust me" (Vangen & Huxham, 2003: 9). In addition to its role in building trust, reciprocity also is an important factor in relations between organizations as it helps to control and maintain relations without relying on contracts because organizational responses to strategic actions are mostly similar (in nature and content) to the response they received in the previous interaction with the same partners (Uzzi, 1997). This is because a majority of organizational actors are

‘reciprocators’ as opposed to being self-interested and they like to see fairness in their relations with other organizations (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008).

Before trust between partners is established, an important factor that organizational actors pay attention to in selecting potential partners and engaging in relations with organizations is reputation. Reputation is defined as the shared interpretation of actors in the marketplace regarding another actor’s reliability and willingness to engage in and maintain relationships (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). An organization’s reputation about its trustworthiness can lead to trust in interorganizational relationships in the field (Grandori & Soda, 1995). Therefore, reputation impacts and is impacted by the trust towards partners in a relationship. The uncooperative actions of an organization within a relationship may also be noticed in the organization’s field and thus, may have important implications for this organization’s relationships with other organizations (Brass et al., 2004).

Types of Interorganizational Relations

Research on interorganizational relationships deals with interactions between organizations and as noted above, interdependence between organizations can lead to different types of relations. Therefore, to review these relations, I follow previous research and accordingly organize and discuss interorganizational relationships under three basic types: competition, cooperation, and coopetition (Dowling et al., 1996; Padula & Dagnino, 2007). Competition is defined as the interactions between organizations driven by each organization’s motive to more efficiently acquire limited resources and opportunities compared to others in the environment and to obtain superior performance (Porter, 1980). Cooperation is defined as interorganizational relations aimed at deriving mutual benefit by co-utilizing the organizations’ complementary resources, skills, and capabilities (Combs & Ketchen, 1999; Thompson &

McEwen, 1958). Finally, coopetition is defined as relations in which firms simultaneously pursue competition and cooperation with each other (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996).

However, there may only be a fine line between competition and cooperation depending on the context of interorganizational relationships because the same structural conditions that shape competition may also lead to cooperation (Ingram & Yue, 2008). For instance, firms are likely to compete and cooperate with organizations that have similar resources and structures because they are often interdependent with each other when they share a resource base (Barnett, 2006). Therefore, interrelationships between structurally similar firms are not limited to competition, but may also include cooperation and these relationships can co-exist in an interorganizational field (Ingram & Yue, 2008). Therefore, a comprehensive examination of relations between organizations should pay attention to these relationships together as this may lead to a broader synthesis of interactions between different forms of relations and factors that impact all these relationships (Cropper et al., 2008b; Dacin et al. 1999). In the following, I provide a review of important theoretical advancements for each type of relationship and discuss empirical findings for each category.

Competition in Interorganizational Relations. Competition in interorganizational relationships occurs when organizations that satisfy the same customer needs in a market (i.e., competitors) seek to acquire scarce resources and/or limited customer demand (Ingram & Yue, 2008: 276). Specifically, competitive relations take place when groups of firms in an interorganizational field have strategic and structural similarities, and when locations, customer preferences, or firm resources overlap (Chen & Miller, 2012; Hutzschenreuter & Israel, 2009; Ketchen, Snow, & Hoover, 2004). Competition occurs both in the supply market where firms compete to acquire limited resources that other organizations also rely on and at the customer

market where firms try to satisfy same limited customer needs at a higher profit by offering superior products or services relative to their competitors.

Because organizations are embedded in the interorganizational field, competitive relations emerge due to conflicting interests of organizations to acquire limited resources available in the field and to gain advantages over competitors (Padula & Dagnino, 2007). Oliver (1997) argues that the context that organizations are embedded in and relations with other organizations also are key for managers to recognize and utilize the sources of superior performance. Organizations' embeddedness in their interorganizational field that consists of the historical, political, cultural, and institutional dimensions of linkages among organizations shapes competitive relationships (Dacin et al., 1999). To combine these arguments, firms' success in competitive relationships compared to their competitors will depend on the dimensions that constitute their interorganizational field as well as their efficiency in acquiring limited resources in the field (Uzzi, 1997).

Organizational managers play important roles in competition, such as interpreting the field and deciding on and implementing strategies targeted at achieving an efficient cost structure or offering value-added products. Because competition is embedded in the interorganizational field, previous interactions and factors that have implications for partner selection and cooperation such as trust, reputation, and reciprocity are also likely to impact competitive relations among organizations (Lado et al., 1997). While the literature on competitive relationships is predominantly built on an assumption of conflicting interests between organizations, most of the time relations between organizations are not simply limited to competition but also include cooperation as will be discussed in detail below.

Cooperation in Interorganizational Relations. Cooperation in interorganizational relationships occurs when organizations exchange resources and capabilities or utilize them together for a joint benefit (Lado et al., 1997). Cooperation can be between organizations and their cooperators, including suppliers, customers, competitors, and other organizations in a field. Also, similar to competition, cooperative relations occur either as vertical relationships at the supply market where firms try to acquire limited resources from suppliers and at the customer market where firms try to reach their customers or as horizontal relationships between organizations that offer similar products to exchange information and other resources or for the overall advancement of the industry. In synthesizing the literature, Ingram and Yue (2008: 281) organize various explanations to cooperative relationships under three categories. First, a category of 'symbiosis' describes relations in which firms cooperate when they require different resources or when they are not really competitors due to being in distinct industry segments or geographic locations. Second, the category 'growth commensalism' captures relations in which firms cooperate when they try to jointly grow a shared resource such as customer demand for a product category that all the organizations in the industry would benefit from. The final category of 'exclusion commensalism' includes relations in which firms cooperate with other similar firms for the purpose of excluding other parties interested in the same resources.

According to reviews on cooperative relationships, previous research under the embeddedness perspective focuses on the attributes of partners such as age and experiences, organizations' centrality in the network, resources that are exchanged in relationships, governance mechanisms, and the political, institutional, and economic dimensions of an interorganizational field (Cropper et al., 2008a; Grandori & Soda, 1995; Hibbert, Huxam, & Ring, 2008). Regarding the forms of cooperative relationships, prior research has shown that

cooperative relationships can be based on formal contracts such as in mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, franchising agreements, subcontracts such as contractual supplier relations; alternatively, they can also be based on non-contractual relations such as in consortia, alliances, and trade associations (Lawrence et al., 2002; Marchington & Vincent, 2004).

Identifying potential partners is key for cooperative interorganizational relations (Cropper et al., 2008b; Grandori & Soda, 1995). Managers' experiences of previous interactions with other organizations and the reputations of these organizations serve as the basis for defining these partners. In addition to prior interactions, reputation, trust, and reciprocity are also shown to be important for deciding on partners and implementing cooperative relationships (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Brass et al., 2004). Along these dimensions of cooperation, firms can simultaneously compete with some of these horizontally or vertically interdependent organizations which is referred to as 'coopetition' in the literature (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996) and discussed in detail below.

Coopetition in Interorganizational Relationships. Coopetition in interorganizational relationships occurs when firms that compete with each other also cooperate (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Compared to the literatures on competitive and cooperative relationships, coopetition is a relatively a more recent area of research, and thus there is relatively limited scholarly progress regarding the investigation of this phenomenon (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). Similar to competition and cooperation, coopetition can occur among organizations and suppliers, customers, and organizations that offer similar products and services in an interorganizational field. Specifically, coopetition can be between suppliers and customers as vertical relations or with rivals (firms that offer same/similar products and services) and complementors (firms that

possess or control resources that can complement each other for mutual benefit) as horizontal relations (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Lacoste, 2012).

Prior research on coopetitive relationships under the embeddedness perspective focused on topics such as the motives, interactions, processes, and outcomes of coopetition at the actor, organizational, and interorganizational levels of analysis (Padula & Dagnino, 2007; Peng, Pike, Yang et al., 2012). In this research, learning and innovation development have been shown as important motives (and, therefore, outcomes) of coopetitive relationships (Van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008). Because external factors and other motives for competition and cooperation may fluctuate, it is challenging for managers to find a balance between these two types of relationships when they are interacting with other organizations in the field (Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson, & Kock, 2014). Thus, another stream of research deals with ways to balance competitive and cooperative relations, suggesting that managers' interpretations of other organizations' trustworthiness as a factor that can contribute to maintaining this balance (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). Organizational choices between competitive and cooperative relationships are based on managers' interpretations of whichever type of relationship they interpret to be necessary for their firms' benefit and to be fitting with the requirements of their organization's interorganizational field. For example, while managers' interpretations of market commonalities with competitors tend to increase the instances of competition, their interpretations of resource asymmetries between competitors tend to boost instances of cooperation in the same field (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

Competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships are rooted in the interorganizational field, but how relationships are conceptualized and implemented are based on managers' interpretations of the field and its constituents as well as their interpretations of

practices for carrying out relationships. Therefore, in the following sections of this study, I look at managers' interpretations of the interorganizational field in addition to their interpretations of practices for implementing relations with organizations in the field.

Managers' Interpretations of Interorganizational Relations

In this study I focus on how executive managers in their respective organizations interpret and manage interorganizational relations. These managers continuously collect information about their organization as well as its environment and they interpret this information based on their understanding of the interorganizational field and their own organization (Stubbart, 1989). Interpretations are defined as managerial processes "of developing models for understanding, of bringing out meaning, and of assembling conceptual schemes" (Daft & Weick, 1984: 286) of a variety of factors, events, the capabilities of their own and other organizations, and interactions within the organization and in the interorganizational field. Norms, institutions, and the resulting characteristics of the field may be interpreted differently by the managers of various organizations (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). As managers' interpretations form the basis for developing strategies and actions including relations with other organizations, a comprehensive understanding of interorganizational relationships requires close attention to managers' interpretations (Baum & Lant, 2003; Kaplan, 2013).

Examples from previous research highlight the importance of managers' interpretations for organizational strategies and interorganizational relationships. Barr (1998) showed that managers' interpretations of regulatory changes in the pharmaceutical industry varied and that accordingly their responses to these changes vary as well. Porac and colleagues (1989) found that based on their interpretations of their industry, managers in the knitwear industry in Scotland defined a group of local competitors that also shaped interorganizational relations; moreover,

their interpretations of other organizations in their interorganizational field (competitors, suppliers, customers) focused managers' attention on some transactional partners and not on others (Porac et al., 1989). Research on competitive relations highlighted factors that influence the attention of top managers in interpreting the moves of competitors and planning their responses to them (Marcel et al., 2010). Research on cooperation has shown that managers' interpretations and resulting evaluations of issues, such as trust and reciprocity, shape their interpretations of the benefits and costs of cooperation and thus the likelihood of whether or not they engage in cooperative relationships (Lado, Dant, & Tekleab, 2008; McAllister, 1995). Similarly, managers' interpretations of potential partners for collaboration facilitate how they choose their actual partners (Smith, Carroll, & Ashford, 1995).

While the interpretations of managers may be impacted by other organizational members, because they are the ones who make decisions on behalf of their organizations it is their interpretations of the interorganizational field that are central to relations between organizations (Kaplan; 2013; Kumar et al., 1993). Having said that, managers' interpretations are influenced by their interactions with other organizations in the interorganizational field, which give rise to shared interpretations and a common understanding of the boundaries of the field, membership, and the sources of success in the industry (Bogner & Barr, 2000). Thus, research on interorganizational relations should also consider the role of other key organizations in the field.

Additionally, managers' interpretations of practices for carrying out relations are also central to understanding how relationships between organizations unfold in the experiences of managers (Sobrero & Schrader, 1998). This is because interorganizational relationships involve managers' interpretations of their own practices as well as the practices of their counterparts in other organizations as key activities in making decisions and interacting with organizations in the

field. Thus, in this study of interorganizational relations, I combine a focus on managers' interpretations of the interorganizational field with their interpretations of the practices involved in engaging in relations with other organizations. Therefore, in the following section, I review the literature on managers' practices and discuss how managers' interpretations of practices may be important for interorganizational relationships.

Interorganizational Relations and Managers' Practices

Formulating and implementing relations between organizations includes not only managers' interpretations of the interorganizational field, but also their interpretations of practices performed to engage in relations with organizations (Zajac & Olsen, 1993). Thus, managers' interpretations of their own practices and the practices of their counterparts in other organizations are also important for a comprehensive understanding of interorganizational relationships in their experiences. To understand the role of these practices for relationships, I draw from the 'strategy as practice' literature, which assumes strategy as something managers do as opposed to something that organizations have (Jarzabkowski, 2004). The three pillars of this approach are praxis, which are the individual activities that form strategy; practitioners are those who formulate and implement the strategy; and practice which is the entire process of strategy formation grounded in the activities of managers (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

Basically, the strategy as practice approach is focused on how and by whom strategy is done, the tools utilized to do strategy, and the implications of strategy doing for key organizational outcomes. In other words, according to this approach, the strategy making includes routinized activities, interactions, and negotiations of various relevant actors as well as the specific actions of these actors (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Some of the practices for developing and implementing strategies studied by earlier research

include, for example, meetings of organizational members, meetings with representatives of other organizations and/or of other stakeholders, official internal and external documents, and strategic decision-making systems. (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008: 282). Empirical research in the practice approach finds that managers' practices have implications both on the matters that concern individuals in the organization and the organization's strategies of how to interact with other organizations (Gomez & Bouty, 2011; Jarzabkowski, 2008). Examples of practices that are relevant to interorganizational relationships include managers' accounts of practices for meeting with managers of other organizations, choosing other organizations they compete and cooperate with, starting relations with other organizations through various interactions, and solving problems as part of these relations between organizations (Provan & Sydow, 2008).

As highlighted by recent reviews on interorganizational relations (Cropper et al., 2008b; Hibbert et al., 2008) and on strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), little attention has been paid to exploring the role of managers' interpretations of their practices for forming and continuing relations with other organizations. Indeed, managers' interpretations of practices, including practices that involve interactions with other managers, are critical for the formation and maintenance of relations between organizations (Marchington & Vincent, 2004). Moreover, managers' practices are situated within an organization that is embedded in an interorganizational field (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Kaplan, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Thus, going beyond understanding managers' interpretations of practices as key activities in making decisions and implementing relations with organizations, the practice approach also focuses on managers' interpretations of interactions with other organizations in the interorganizational field, such as with associations, industry leaders, or government representatives. In doing so, the practice perspective argues that managers' accounts

of practices should be understood in combination with their interpretations of the interactions with other key organizations in the interorganizational field (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Building on this theoretical background, in the following chapters I discuss the details of my study that I administered for developing a comprehensive theory of how managers interpret formulation and implementation of interorganizational relationships that is grounded in data collected from executive managers.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, the overarching purpose of this study is to offer insights regarding how managers interpret interorganizational relations and the interorganizational field that these relations are embedded in. To achieve this purpose, in this study I utilize a qualitative approach, specifically the grounded theory methodology. I adopted this approach because there is no prior exhaustive theory on relations between organizations in the experiences of managers and thus there is a need to develop an analytically structured theory of the complex phenomenon of how firms interact with other organizations grounded in empirical data. By utilizing grounded theory, I explore how managers describe and interpret the interorganizational field and their practices for building and maintaining relationships with other organizations in their industry.

Grounded theory is characterized by developing a theory that is grounded in systematically collected and analyzed data (Bowen, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, data is collected from central actors for the phenomenon (in this study the phenomenon of how organizations interact with each other). The researcher develops a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of interest as well as actions and interactions within the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, because managers and their organizations are embedded in their interorganizational field, they collect information from the field, give meaning to this information based on their interpretations of the field and its constituents, and accordingly develop strategies and actions including relations with other organizations (Kaplan; 2013; Kumar et al., 1993). Thus, research that addresses the phenomenon of deciding on and implementing relationships with other organizations requires an attention to interpretations of managers' who are the central actors that experience these relationships first-

hand (Miller & Friesen, 1983). Managers' interpretations are also impacted by their interpretations of the key elements of the interorganizational field (such as industry organizations, customers, suppliers) as they have important implications for the formation and implementation of interorganizational relationships (Bengtsson, Eriksson, & Wincent, 2010; Fuller & Lewis, 2002). Accordingly, as I will explain in detail below, I relied on semi-structured interviews with the top-level decision makers (i.e., owners and/or executive managers) of organizations based on the assumption that in small and medium sized organizations that dominate the selected field they should be most knowledgeable about the formation and implementation of interorganizational relationships. Additionally, I interviewed several representatives of other key organizations in the field who are influential for relations between organizations as my main source of data. In the remainder of this chapter, I consecutively discuss the empirical setting, preparations made before collecting interview data, description of interview data collected, and detailed explanation of data analysis.

Empirical Setting and Data Collection

Empirical research on interorganizational relations requires selection of a context in which organizations have relations with each other (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992). Moreover, research that attempts to address how managers interpret their firms' environment as they develop and implement strategies benefits from studying a spatially condensed industry in which there are many interactions between firms (Pettigrew et al. 2001; Porac et al., 1989). In light of these requirements, my choice for the study's empirical setting fell on the geographically condensed and relatively tight-knit seafood processing industry in a Southern state of the United States. The seafood processing industry in this Southern state relies on the seafood beds located in the Mississippi River basin in the Gulf Coast of the Southern state and thus is a relatively

geographically condensed industry. Because processors are part of the Southern state's seafood processing industry and they are collocated, these organizations engage in various forms of interorganizational relationships with one another.

To assess the feasibility of the study, to familiarize myself with the context, and to collect background information about the industry and processors operating in it, I contacted an industry association that is the umbrella association for the seafood industry. I met with the executives of the association three times prior to and two times after beginning to collect interview data (I note that the management of the industry association changed before I started administering interviews). During these meetings I collected overall information about the industry, the number and size of companies operating at various levels of the supply chain, other key organizations within the industry, and the overall nature of interactions among these companies to assess the feasibility of the study in the Southern state's seafood processing industry context.

To further familiarize myself with the industry, I collected background information from major online news sources and major industry publications. I identified these sources through my meetings with executives of the industry association, the sources that managers mentioned during interviews as well as online searches. I collected some of this background information prior to and during the interviews as necessary and I identified and reviewed relevant articles from major online industry sources and publications, including Gulf Seafood News, Seafood Source News, Seafood Business, and Seafood News after the majority of the interviews were complete. I utilized this background information to identify two interviewees, collect some information about interviewees before the interview, and further familiarize myself with the industry as these sources provide detailed and up to date material about environmental factors, comments of key government officials, changes in rules and regulations, new investments of

seafood processors, as well as interviews with key individuals in the industry. In the following section, I explain how I developed my interview guide, how I scheduled interviews, and the procedures I followed when implementing the interviews.

Interview Preparations and Design

Prior to conducting any interviews, I prepared an interview guide based on my research questions. Specifically, to explore how interorganizational relationships are formed and implemented in the experiences of managers, I developed questions regarding managers' interpretations of interactions with other processors, specific relationships they form and implement with these processors and the role and importance of other key industry elements for these relationships. After executing pilot interviews together with my dissertation chair, the interview guide was revised extensively based on how questions were received by processors and the type of answers they provided (September 7th, 2014). After the majority of interviews were complete (30 interviews) and I made some progress on coding the data, the interview guide was once again revised (April 3rd, 2015) to better reflect some issues that came up during the coding process and this guide was used in the last group of interviews (final 8 interviews). The final interview guide utilized for processors is presented in Appendix A; it was slightly adjusted to fit the specific needs of other key organizations' representatives. However, interviews were also driven by the answers of interviewees and the follow up questions or probes of some issues and concepts to assure they yield content most relevant to the phenomenon of interest in this study.

Prior to beginning of data collection, I secured approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Louisiana State University. To get access to the industry and interviewees, during the aforementioned meetings with the previous management of the industry association, I was

given a list of seafood processors in the Southern state. Based on my review of this list of companies, I focused on 36 companies with more than 10 employees because they were relatively larger and well-established, which was needed to explore relationships among them. I started interactions first through email and continued with them through email if they responded. I called the offices of processors who did not respond to emails; while some agreed to participate, others did not return my calls or refused to participate. As a result of this process, I was able to recruit 13 owners and/or managers of seafood processors as study participants. My efforts also revealed that the list I was provided with by the previous management of the industry association was outdated; hence contact information for some processors was no longer up-to-date and some processors on the list had gone out of business.

Therefore, in the next step I focused on identifying up-to-date contact information for processors on the list and also to identify additional processors and other key organizations in the industry not on this list through my contact with the new management of the industry association. In addition, I attended three of the industry association's board meetings (consists of members who are leaders of other associations for different species) in August and October 2014 and in February 2015, respectively and one annual marketing meeting in July 2014. During these meetings, I met with new processors and identified new potential interviewees and immediately followed up with these processors via email and/or phone to schedule interviews. I identified other processors (two) based on my initial scan of the news sources and similarly contacted them via email and/or phone. Moreover, I asked the interviewees after each interview for their recommendations of other processors that I could interview, with the exception of three interviewees who became uncooperative towards the end of the interview; I contacted these potential interviewees to request their participation in the study. Most interviews with processors

took place at the offices/processing plants of seafood companies; two took place at interviewees' houses, one at a restaurant, and one at a coffee shop.

For interviews with key industry organization representatives, I collected contact information for them through the official websites of the respective organizations or through the current management of the industry association. Among the ones I contacted for an interview, the majority agreed; however, some field representatives did not respond and one representative of a government agency refused to participate. The interviews with the representatives of key organizations took place at their offices, at the university, or at an industry association office.

Key aspects of the interview (purpose, length, logistics, type of questions, and confidentiality) were explained to interviewees during the initial interaction to request and schedule interviews through email or over the phone. At the beginning of a meeting for an interview, I provided interviewees with an informed consent statement and verbally explained other details of the study (procedures, recording of the interview, rights to refuse, privacy, and confidentiality of content) before proceeding to the interview. As noted above, my dissertation chair joined me for two pilot interviews. Immediately after each of these interviews, we assessed my performance during the interview and how I could improve it. Also, for the rest of the first group of interviews, I shared the audio files with my dissertation chair and received regular feedback from him to improve execution of the interviews and the data collection process. I also listened to audio files of the first five interviews to identify my mistakes and rooms for improvement. I took notes during every interview and wrote reflections of any observations that I made for each interview to keep full records of my observations regarding the context before, during, and after each interview which might impact how I should interpret the findings. These reflections helped me to comprehend the context of the interviews and understand potential

factors that are important for the interpretations of each interviewee. All interviews were fully recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim by a professional prior to analysis. Initially, I compared the transcription of the first interview to assess the accuracy of the transcription service prior to proceeding with the remaining interviews. I continued to listen and compare the audio files with the service provider's transcription to both familiarize myself with the interview content and to check the accuracy of the transcription. In the following section, I describe the interview data I collected for this study.

Interview Data

The main thrust of my data collection involved conducting 38 interviews in the Southern state. This included 30 interviews with owners (25 interviews) and/or managers (5 interviews) of seafood processors (Table 1); the size of these owner/managers' companies ranged from 10-155 employees. It also included 8 interviews with other key industry organization representatives that represent industry associations, universities, marketing agencies, and distributors (Table 2). Interviews were conducted between August 2014 and April 2015 at various locations in the Southern state and the length of interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, averaging around an hour. Three of the processors were also fishermen who had limited processing capabilities and informed the study about interactions with these suppliers (in the context of this study suppliers primarily consist of independent fishermen and docks). Also, about half of the processors I interviewed (14) were vertically integrated to some successive stages of their supply chain (i.e., they owned boats, docks or distribution networks). This informed the study regarding the role and importance of various stages of the value chain.

Table 1: Descriptive Information about Interviewed Processors

Interviewee		Role	Operations	Species
1	I1	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Oyster Farms, Processing & Distribution)	Various Species
2	I2	Owner/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
3	I3	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Processing)	Bait, Shrimp
4	I4	Owner/Manager	Processor	Dried Shrimp
5	I6	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Boats, Processing & Limited Distribution)	Shrimp
6	I7	Owner/Manager	Processor	Oyster
7	I8	Professional/Manager	Processor	Various Species
8	I10	Owner/Manager	Processor	Finfish
9	I11	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Processing)	Various Species
10	I12	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Processing & Distribution)	Shrimp
11	I13	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Processing & Distribution)	Shrimp
12	I14	Owner/Manager	Processor	Crawfish, Alligator
13	I18	Professional/Manager	Processor	Various Species
14	I19	Professional/Manager	Processor	Finfish
15	I20	Owner/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
16	I21	Professional/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
17	I22	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Boats & Dock & Processing)	Shrimp
18	I23	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Boats & Dock & Processing)	Shrimp
19	I25	Owner/Manager	Processor	Oyster
20	I26	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Oyster Farms, Processing & Distribution)	Oyster
21	I27	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Processing)	Crab
22	I28	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Boats & Limited Processing)	Various Species
23	I29	Owner/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
24	I30	Professional/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
25	I31	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Boats & Limited Processing)	Shrimp
26	I32	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Oyster Farms & Processing)	Oyster
27	I33	Owner/Manager	Integrated (Dock & Limited Processing & Direct sales)	Various Species
28	I34	Owner/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
29	I35	Owner/Manager	Processor	Shrimp
30	I36	Owner/Manager	Processor	Various Species

Additionally, the seafood processing industry in the Southern state consists of various segments focusing on different species of seafood and each segment varies regarding the number of firms in the segment, their geographic dispersion, presence of foreign competitors, availability of resources, and level of local and national demand. Therefore, I interviewed processors from each segment; the species that these processors focus on are distributed as follows (see details in Table 1): seven companies process various species, 14 process shrimp only, four process oyster only, two process finfish only, two process dried shrimp only, one processes crab only, and one processes crawfish and alligator which enabled comparison of results within and across species. This data enables me to study interpretations and practices that managers state in the interviews that lead to relations with other organizations because the content of interviews provides a detailed description of how managers interpret the interorganizational field and reveal their way of reasoning for particular interorganizational relations.

As organizations are embedded into their interorganizational field, in addition to managers of processors, other key elements in the industry such as industry organizations and customers are also central to the formation and implementation of relationships between organizations. Thus, I also carried out eight interviews with key organization representatives in the industry as they serve important roles in the initiation and continuation of relations between processors. These interviewees represent industry organizations, distributors, universities, and marketing companies, and I identified them based on recommendations of executives in the industry association, the processors that I interviewed and through the industry association meetings. (Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive Information about Interviewed Representatives of Other Key Organizations

	Interviewee	Role	Type of Organization
1	I5	Field Representative	University Extension
2	I9	Marketing Representative	Advertising Company
3	I15	Field Representative	University Extension
4	I16	Industry Representative	Industry Association
5	I17	Industry Representative	Industry Association
6	I24	Distributor Representative	Distributor
7	I37	University Representative	University
8	I38	University Representative	University

Data Analysis

Grounded theory methodology evolved into different approaches since its introduction (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In this study I follow the approach of Strauss & Corbin (1998), which allows researchers to incorporate previous theory and empirical or practical evidence to the theorizing processes with the intention of developing an overall framework for the phenomenon of interest. In my analysis I worked iteratively back and forth between my interview data, themes emerging in my nodes and memos, and relevant prior literature to generate abstract categories and dimension that form grounded theory following the Strauss and Corbin approach. Also in line with Strauss and Corbin (1998), I followed a three-stage data coding process (open, axial, and selective coding) with the ultimate purpose of creating a detailed story of how relationships between organizations occur in the experiences of managers. Consistent with the constant comparison method, I compared the data within each interview, between interviews, within and between codes, and previous instances to new instances (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Also, to explore any meaningful differences regarding interactions of organizations among each other, I compared instances based on attributes of interviewees: processors vs. other key organizations, professionals vs. owner-managers, or across industry segments (i.e., species). In the following sections, I present details of procedures I

followed in each coding stage and discuss how I address the criteria of trustworthiness for my data analysis.

Open Coding

Before starting the coding process, I closely read the first three interviews to familiarize myself with the content and explore recurring themes across interviews to identify potential nodes. Then, following the Strauss and Corbin (1998)'s recommendation, I started a detailed sentence by sentence analysis ("micro-analysis") of these three interviews to generate initial nodes. I applied "micro-analysis" when dealing with more confusing data passages in the later stages of the analysis as well. In this process, I tried to evaluate each statement (or at times even the words) to understand the unique meanings of each instance in the data, paid attention to the importance of a passage as well as concepts and constructs in the prior literature to accordingly develop the initial node structure. In this stage, I created as many nodes as possible that I believed had some connection to my phenomena of interest. I labeled the nodes with brief descriptive concepts (at times these were "in vivo" labels directly mentioned by the interviewee) that best reflect the content (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 105). I also wrote a brief description of each node that explains how I interpret this node and what is coded in each node.

After I coded the first three interviews, I shared the list of nodes as well as some representative node contents with my dissertation chair, who provided feedback regarding the overall list of nodes as well as the specific content of each node and ways to improve the coding. Following his feedback, I dropped a focus on hierarchical relations as this was limiting my coding process at this early stage and can be better done in the later stages of the analysis, relabeled some nodes, merged some nodes with other similar nodes with considerable overlap, or

split content of some nodes into multiple nodes if the content reflected multiple types of instances.

After an initial node structure emerged, I proceeded to coding the rest of the interviews, periodically shared the node structure with my dissertation chair, received feedback, and accordingly worked on improving the node structure as well as the coding of interviews into nodes. Based on his feedback, I vertically (within node) coded each node to make sure the entire content was consistent with the node label and description and each passage in itself was a meaningful representation of the node. After the initial coding of about 20 interviews, I created a comprehensive excel file that included a list and detailed description of all nodes, rationales for their inclusion, representative data samples, and other notes. My dissertation chair provided several rounds of comprehensive feedback on this summary document of the whole node structure as it was progressively revised and refined, and in this process I substantially changed the node structure, eliminated nodes that were not central to the phenomenon of study, relabeled some nodes, merged some nodes with other similar nodes with considerable overlap, or split content of some nodes into multiple nodes if the content reflected multiple types of instances.

During the coding, I highlighted passages that I was having difficulty in classifying into nodes, passages that I thought was important but was not sure if they were central to the phenomenon of study, and annotated the passages that I thought had important implications for my research. I also created memos and copied passages across interviews for the things that I believed could be important, but did not yet discover enough substance to create nodes for. When I believed a memo achieved to a point that had enough substance and was central to my research, I created a node out of it.

Axial Coding

The purpose of this stage is restructuring the interview data that was classified in the open coding stage by relating categories to their subcategories based on their content, dimensions, and attributes. In the axial coding, a researcher tries to answer questions of "why", "how" and "with what outcome" for each category and building on answers of these questions tries to reveal the relationships among these categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 127). The question of why refers to the conditions for the phenomenon of interest in each category occurs, the question of how relates to the interactions between key actors in response to these conditions and the question of with what outcome relates to the consequences of these interactions. Therefore, concurrently answering these questions inform the researcher both about the structure and details of how a phenomenon of interest unfolds in the experiences of key actors as well as potential outcomes of this phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through the implementation of axial coding, categories are grouped into themes that are represented with more abstract theoretical labels and utilized as the building blocks of emerging theory. Also, this stage helps to translate the instances that interviewees mentioned into the concepts relevant to the management literature that this research contributes to (Rogers, 2012).

For axial coding, I worked on the original node structure and vertically (within node) examined each node to ask aforementioned questions to uncover underlying themes as well as the role of each node for the emerging theory. I identified conditions for the phenomenon of interest to occur, actions/interactions that take place, the consequences of these actions/interactions from the nodes. As part of these details I also identified ideas about key organizations and key practices for interorganizational relationships by asking questions of who, what, when, how, why, and with what outcome as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) all of

which were also potentially important factors for my intended contributions for the study. Following the constant comparison method, I also identified ideas regarding how to compare interactions within and across layers (industry segment, local seafood processing industry, and national seafood processing industry). As suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998), at this stage I started focusing on hierarchical relations among categories that form the building blocks of theory and assigning nodes under these categories as they fit within categories and among each other. Similar to the open coding stage, to assure the accuracy of axial coding, I shared detailed reports of this coding regularly with my dissertation chair and made adjustments in the process and content of axial coding based on his detailed feedback over multiple rounds.

Selective Coding

This stage is the final process of integrating and refining the categories and identifying the relationships across categories that underlie the story of grounded theory to identify theoretical links between nodes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher interprets and refines categories during all the stages of data analysis, but finalizes them in the selective coding stage. Selective coding involves building a theoretical story line around these categories generated in the axial coding stage by focusing on the relationships between these categories.

Building on the actions/interactions, consequences, key actors, key groups of actors, and key practices I developed in the axial coding stage, at this stage I focused on combining these details with the purpose of developing insights regarding how managers interpret interorganizational relationships. Accordingly, I developed an overview of findings that represents theoretical links between individual categories as discussed in detail in the following sections. I shared the evolving category and node structure regularly with my dissertation chair

and based on his feedback I continuously updated categories, nodes fitting under each of these categories, and how categories may be interrelated to each other in the overall theoretical framework. I also developed an outline document for the results that summarizes various potential links between emerging categories of the grounded theory and revised this document based on feedback I received from my dissertation chair. Also, at this stage I performed another detailed review of literature also in light of my findings, in addition to the detailed literature review I performed prior to data collection and analysis. I utilized this extensive literature review for comparing and contrasting my findings with existing theory and research on interorganizational relationships to highlight similarities as well as potential for contributions in developing the grounded theory of interorganizational relationships in the experiences of managers. For all the stages of data analysis, I used the Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software. Nvivo helped me to organize a large amount of data, code the interviews, analyze the data through memos and annotations, and develop theoretical links among nodes. I was able to horizontally (within interview) and vertically (within node) analyze the data and use annotation and memos to highlight emerging interpretations, important instances, and unclear issues.

Assessing Trustworthiness

I followed the criteria that Shah and Corley (2006) elaborated based on a translation of the traditional criteria for rigor in research studies (i.e., internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity) for qualitative research (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability respectively). The way I addressed each of these criteria is explained below:

Credibility. This criterion for trustworthiness requires the researcher to have a substantial understanding of the context as well as debriefing with colleagues at various stages of data collection and analysis (Shah & Corley, 2006). A detailed understanding of the context is

achieved through various information sources as well as interactions with industry organizations and industry representatives as explained in the section on the empirical setting. Peer debriefing requirement was fulfilled by continuously sharing the emerging code structure with my dissertation chair as explained in detail above.

Transferability. This criterion for trustworthiness requires that the researcher develops a detailed description of each category in the grounded theory to assess the applicability of this theory to other contexts (Shah & Corley, 2006). From the beginning of the data analysis, I developed detailed descriptions of each node that explains how I interpret this node and what is coded in each node as well as some notes, questions, or concerns I had about these nodes. Also, I kept detailed records of all the processes that I went through during the data collection and analysis stages to assure transferability.

Dependability. This criterion is related to reliability in traditional research and requires purposive and/or theoretical sampling, assuring confidentiality of data, and rigor in data collection and analysis processes. Data collection section explained the steps taken for purposive selection of the sample (including at times consulting to central figures of the industry as explained) to collect data that is central to my phenomenon of interest. To assure confidentiality, all data was kept in the possession of the researcher in a private office and only on password protected computers. Data was only shared with my dissertation chair (who was included in IRB approval and informed consent forms provided to participants as co-investigator) and with a professional transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality agreement before starting to receive the interviews for transcription. In the presentation of findings any information that could potentially identify interviewees has been removed.

Confirmability. To achieve this criterion of trustworthiness, the researcher is expected to carefully manage data collection and recording, fully transcribe the interviews and keep detailed records of interviews, and notes on key theoretical and methodological decisions. As elaborated in detail above, I followed strict procedures in sampling, collecting and handling data, as well as in analyzing it. As explained in detail in the data collection section, all interviews were fully recorded and transcribed verbatim and I kept detailed notes for each interview. I also kept details of my data analysis process and kept a log of major decisions that were made through the process of coding and analyzing data.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the results of my study. As a reminder, in this study I seek to answer the following research questions: (1) how do managers' interpretations of their interorganizational field and its characteristics shape relations with other organizations? (2) what are managers' interpretations of the characteristics of interorganizational relations and how they choose which other organizations to compete, cooperate, and coopete with? (3) what are the key aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships in the experiences of managers? I designed my study to answer these questions.

All the findings discussed in this chapter are based on managers' interpretations of issues related to interorganizational relationships. I organize these findings following the grounded theory logic. Following Strauss & Corbin (1998), through the three-stage coding process discussed in Chapter 3, I created nodes by combining references from interviewees about a specific theme and labeled these nodes with descriptive concepts that best reflect the content. Then, I assigned nodes under categories as the contents of these nodes fit within the categories and among each other to create a hierarchical structure that form the building blocks of theory. The order of categories roughly reflects the theoretical order of relations among nodes and categories. To support the findings in each node, I utilize verbatim quotes from interviewees. Additionally, I discuss key connections each node has with other nodes and categories only after both nodes and/or categories are introduced in the chapter. To assure confidentiality, all names of interviewees are anonymized and represented with abbreviations (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, …, Interviewee 38), which reflect the order in which I conducted the interviews. Similarly, the names of industry organizations are anonymized in the text and in the quotes and represented with abbreviations (Association 1, Association 2, …, Association 12). The presentation of

findings in the remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. I start by discussing managers' interpretations of the characteristics of the interorganizational field and the key aspects that underlie relations between organizations. I then proceed to explain the aspects that managers identify as key to making decisions regarding the classification of cooperators and competitors. Finally, I discuss the aspects that managers interpret to be key for cooperation for industry issues, coopetition for business issues, and competition respectively.

Characteristics of the Interorganizational Field

The first category of my findings captures characteristics of the interorganizational field that, from the interviewed managers' point of view, have key impacts on relations between organizations as well as on the dynamics of competition, cooperation, and coopetition. These characteristics set the stage for how managers plan and implement their firm's relations with other firms. According to managers' interpretations, these characteristics include the challenges they experience regarding supply; the seasonality of supply, demand, and natural factors; the fragmented nature of the industry; the roles of trade associations, universities, suppliers, and customers for information transfer; the non-contractual relationships processors have with their suppliers; the role and power of big customers for relations; and trade associations' and government agencies' roles as platforms for managers to initiate relations and network with other firms in the field. I now discuss each of these field characteristics and their implications for interorganizational relationships in the interpretations of managers.

Challenges with Supply

The first characteristic of the interorganizational field that managers interpret as vital for relations between firms regards field-wide challenges with the supply of seafood. According to managers, processors in the field focus on processing and selling fresh-caught seafood and rely

on natural resources from the Gulf of Mexico for their operations. The availability of these natural resources may fluctuate due to various factors such as salinity and water temperatures. This is illustrated by the following quote from a manager:

> You know its supply and demand. (…) It's all the determining factors. With our industry it's not as safe. Telling us that we are going to get. It's all up to Mother Nature. The conditions of salinity, temperature, water temperatures, hurricanes. (Interviewee 20)

Interviewees assert that periods of supply shortage result in the occurrence of relatively less cooperation due to a reluctance to share information among the firms directly competing in terms of getting the supply. On the other hand, they see these periods of shortage of supply as easing the competition for selling their products because processors enter into a mode where they do not seek to grow or invest but to survive and continue their current operations. During these periods, processors try to primarily satisfy and keep their existing customers and are less likely to approach their competitors' customers as illustrated by a manager:

> (…) There's not, there's probably less a that [customers being approached by a competitor] now because they're not able to satisfy new customers cause their supply is as low as anyone's, as mine, so they're just trying to satisfy their, the customers that they have, to, with enough product to keep em. (…) (Interviewee 26)

Interviewees suggested that the challenges of supply not only impact relations between firms in the immediate context but also that under these circumstances processors communicate and establish relations with each other and with suppliers located in other regions (e.g., east coast, west coast, and other countries) to expand their potential sources of supply. Put differently, challenges with supply pushes managers to reach out to managers of other processors. This is important because it shows how the challenges with supply may lead to new relationships between firms as exemplified below:

> (…) We've had to expand our, you know, our supply base and going to the east coast. Some people have even went out to the west coast for pretty much a meat, meat product [of oyster] not so much to shell. (…) (Interviewee 26)

Seasonality of Factors in the Field

In addition to many other natural factors, seasonality is among the reasons for challenges with supply discussed in the previous node, but I captured seasonality as a separate node because it is also closely related to fluctuations in customer demand, product prices, industry relations, and regulations. Managers state that their interorganizational field is exposed to seasonal trends in environmental factors, resources, and, customer demand. The seafood industry operates in seasons that are broadly defined by the availability of supply and officially set by government agencies with the specific season start and finish dates for each species. To deal with this seasonality, processors buy and sell fresh products during the season and keep inventory of frozen products for off-season periods as illustrated by the following quote from a manager:

> (…) the way that this business works is it's very seasonal and cyclical. Our primary source of income comes from harvesting as much product as possible during the harvesting seasons and we inventory when supply is limited. (Interviewee 11)

Managers' interpret the seasonality of factors in the interorganizational field to have important implications for competition between processors for supply during the off-season and during the seasons of peak demand; for cooperation with suppliers, customers, and regulators; and for coopetition between processors. When the officially defined season for a species starts, seafood processors tend to compete intensively for supply and for demand, and when the season ends they are more likely to cooperate with each other. Moreover, the interpersonal interactions between managers are more collaborative during the off-season while tensions rise during the season as highlighted by an industry association representative:

> (…) we met with shrimp processors, we met with them in the off-season, and so they were very kind to each other, and it was a real brotherhood kind of feeling. And they told us, they said, during the season when we're competing, it's not so pretty, and they can be very rough with each other at that point, and very competitive (…) (Interviewee 16)

Seasonality is important for relationships in the interpretations of managers also because it has important implications for firm resources and the price levels of seafood processors' products. Specifically, product prices are much lower during the season when plenty of products are available to every firm in the field, but it goes higher during the off-season when there is a relatively low level of fresh supply. The seasonality of seafood prices enables processors who have the means to purchase a large quantity of supply in season and store it until the off-season to create an important competitive advantage for themselves, as explained by a manager:

> (…) they [processors] could just harvest shrimp, put it in the freezer, take as much -- every day, buy as much as you could buy, put it in the freezer, and in December and January, sell it for a big profit. (Interviewee 8)

According to managers, customer demand for products may present seasonal differences as well. According to the interviewed managers, this is important for interorganizational relationships because there are intense cooperative relations with other processors to acquire resources during these periods. During peak customer demand, market prices for supply rise due to increased demand, which may lead suppliers to start selling to other processors for a higher return. Hence, during these periods, managers need to plan carefully and try to utilize the long-term relationships with suppliers to be able to acquire enough seafood to meet their customers' demand as shown below:

> You know, like this weekend coming up is going to be a very busy weekend. Last weekend was a very busy week because of the Lent. (…) I got to have enough on hand to supply my regular customers. (Interviewee 36)

Finally, managers highlight the implications of the seasonality of factors in the field for coopetition between processors. For instance, the time and amount of inventory firms buy from and sell to other processors changes across seasons. When seafood supply is abundant during the season, firms do not rely on each other for acquiring necessary resources. However, as the season

gets closer to the end and the amount of supply starts diminishing, processors rely more and more on each other's resources to satisfy customer needs and start more intensely buying and selling inventory among each other, as illustrated by a manager:

> [Interactions among processors] Very, very little. (…). When production is extremely low, and you get towards the end of the season, where not a whole bunch of people have inventory, they'll actually purchase inventory from each other. (…) (Interviewee 23)

Fragmentation of the Industry

Another vital characteristic of the studied interorganizational field according to the managers I interviewed is what they describe the fragmented nature of their industry. Managers explain that the seafood processing industry is not homogeneous and that it consists of different segments with varying structural characteristics. The major way managers segment the industry is based on the different seafood species they process and sell (e.g., shrimp, oyster, alligator, finfish). A quote from a manager illustrates this fragmentation of industry segments across species below:

> You know, I think that the idea of the (…) [Southern State's] seafood industry is somewhat of a misnomer. It -- there is a -- there's a shrimp industry. There's a crab industry. There's a fin fish industry, etc. Oyster industry (…) (Interviewee 8)

The way business and relationships are interpreted and implemented by managers differ across these industry segments. In managers' interpretations, even though all processors in different industry segments have interactions and are part of the same interorganizational field, different conditions in each industry segment lead to differences in nature and content of relationships between firms. The type of seafood species that an industry segment relies on, and the abundance and availability of supply for that species in a geographic region is a major reason for the differences in interorganizational relations in each industry segment; this is illustrated by the following quote from a manager:

> (...) Shrimp is probably the best of all the seafoods. Fin fish as well, because both can--they can move in and out. They may come inshore certain times of the year, but they live offshore. (…) Oysters don't move. Crabs, you know, lay their eggs out, but then they come back in to live, you know, they go right at that high-solidity freshwater line. (…) So the interaction is very different with all the different fisheries. (Interviewee 25)

To synthesize managers' interpretations regarding the fragmentation of the industry, they underline the presence of four different kinds of industry segments, represented in the context of this study by the oyster, shrimp, crawfish, and crab industry segments respectively. In this synthesis, I repeatedly draw on Interviewee 8 who provided a concise description of these kinds of segments, which were also supported by the interview data more generally. To begin with, the first kind of industry segment includes a relatively small number of processors, which share customer markets and is relatively isolated from foreign competition. For example, in the oyster industry segment, firms compete intensely for demand and for supply, and cooperate strongly at the segment level. The well-defined and concentrated nature of the oyster industry segment is explained by a manager:

> The oyster industry. Probably, there are about three or four processors or distributors, that process and distribute 70% of the product. So, that industry has the unique feature of being somewhat small and defined, and their leaders have been very much involved in the formation of the Association 1. (…) So they coordinated efforts between all of the Gulf states. (…) I find the oyster industry, (…) the most organized. (Interviewee 8)

Because both competition and cooperation are very intense in the oyster industry segment, according to managers seasonality becomes an important issue for relationships. Consistent with the discussion in the previous node, during the season firms in this segment are intense competitors, but during the off-season, they fight alongside for industry issues, especially for the sustainability of their resource bases. These firms still have limited cooperation during the season for buying and selling inventory, specifically when a processor's source of supply becomes unavailable due to natural factors.

According to managers' interpretations, the second kind of industry segment consists of firms that solely focus on a particular species and is subject to intense competition from companies that sell imported seafood, such as the shrimp industry segment; firms compete directly if they are selling in the same customer markets (such as the same metropolitan area) and to the same type of customers (for example to restaurants). There is limited cooperation among these firms for the overall benefit of the industry because the managers of only a small number of processors participate in industry-related matters. The same manager summarizes some features of the shrimp industry segment in the following quote:

> The shrimp industry is the largest, in terms of value, and in terms of individuals harvesting. So you have a much larger group of people who are -- and you'll find conflicts between the in-shore boats versus the off-shore boats; the dock-side buyers, who are buying from the shrimpers, who are then selling to processing plants (…) the shrimp industry is the most important, but it's behind the eight-ball. Because the amount of imports continue to grow, and there's very little effort, I think, to organize the industry, or for the industry to become organized, and there's not truly what I'll call leadership among the processors, or among the shrimpers themselves, to work harmoniously for the betterment of the industry. (Interviewee 8)

The third kind of industry segment is crowded with many firms with limited processing capabilities that sell directly to the public and have limited threat from foreign competition such as the crawfish industry segment; this kind of segment deals with intense, price-based, destructive rivalry with low profit margins as illustrated by a manager below:

> They [new entrants] heard about their cousin, or they see [a processor] successful hauling crawfish, so they buy a truck and they're gonna be a crawfish hauler. (…) And they show up and realize: "Oh, my goodness! I need to lower my price because I don't have a market." They'll disrupt the market on a real local level for between 10 or 15 restaurants because they went around the block and peddled their crawfish at the back door for 10 cents below cost. (…) It happens with crawfish a lot because there's a huge market. (…) Crawfish is just an easier commodity for that to happen with because it's live, most of it's sold live, it doesn't get processed. Whereas the other items, you've gotta do something to them; you've gotta take them to the next stage for them to be useful for the restaurant. There's no guys out there peddling tuna (…) (Interviewee 1)

Finally, the fourth kind of industry segment that consists of a small number of established processors that almost exclusively share their customer markets and suppliers. For example, in the crab industry segment, managers consider interorganizational relations to be shaped by more intense competition and limited cooperation. In short, according to managers, in this study's context firms in the same industry segment tend to have similar needs and objectives and thus, relationships are relatively limited to within industry segments. Moreover, due to the fragmentation of the industry, when it comes to issues of a particular industry segment, primarily processors that are part of that industry segment will be involved in addressing those issues as illustrated below:

> That is to say that the problems of the crab industry are the problems of the crab industry. The shrimpers don't become involved in that. What causes problems for the fin fish industry does not necessarily impact the oyster industry. So, there's these little, you know, islands of industry, that have very little cooperation (…) (Interviewee 8)

Information Transfer

Managers underline another key characteristic of the interorganizational field as the organizations that serve important roles in information transfer, which in turn is central to relationships between processors. Managers state that suppliers (which includes independent fishermen and docks), industry associations, universities, and customers have key roles for information transfer between processors in my study's context. Transferred information can be about the industry, seasonal developments, migration patterns of species of interest, prices, availability of different product sizes and actions of competitors. Managers learn about the majority of the developments in the field from these key channels of information exchange and use this information to plan and implement competitive moves or to share with managers of other processors and cooperate:

> (…) through (…) communicating with other processors alike, other factories, docks, fishermen (…) we learn about the season, what it's looking like out there, if the product is moved in. If it's moved out and migrated, certain species migrate at certain times of the year. (…) We learn about the availability of the sizes - certain sizes out there. (…) (Interviewee 11)

According to managers, especially fishermen are connected through a strong network and word travels very fast in this network. Due to this network, when a processor increases the purchasing price from fishermen, word quickly travels and triggers a chain of interactions among processors, their customers, and the docks (i.e., facilities that are owned either by independent businessmen or by processors and used by fishermen to unload their catch); fishermen call docks and/or processors to see if they would match the increased price, managers of processors check with their customers to see if they are able to increase prices, and if their customers agree, processors or docks increase the price paid to fishermen.

Regarding the implications of this unofficial network for competition, managers of seafood processors explain that suppliers can use their network to bring valuable market information, but they also can carry important business information to competitors, which may have important consequences for competition. According to managers, suppliers transfer information, especially if they are more loyal to another processor and they can use this information as a way to strengthen the relationship with that processor. Because fishermen are very well connected and spread information fast, they can quickly drive up prices among docks that are close to each other. To deal with this problem, processors that are located close to each other actually shut down their own docks and either jointly use another processor's dock or they work with a central independent dock that collects from a large number of fishermen as illustrated by a manager below:

> I purchase my product--I do not purchase at my dock (…) if I buy here, and I'm forced by some of the buyers here to pay an extra nickel or dime, well that's in the news in about

> five minutes, so the next time I go anywhere else to buy, I got to pay what I paid here. So I'm better off not buying here--and I put a fence around my dock, and you'll see a lot of large plants did the very same thing, that are located on a good bayou and they don't buy in their back fence because it's almost better to do it from the collector's standpoints. (Interviewee 29)

Additionally, managers perceive that industry associations have an important role in transferring information between processors as industry associations' meetings serve as occasions for managers to exchange information and learn about the developments in the industry. Managers benefit from universities generally for getting information about new techniques and technological equipment for handling and processing seafood. Managers also regard customers as important sources of information. Most importantly, managers learn about other processors, what they offer, some of the changes they make to their products, new technologies they use, and current market price from these customers, which are very important for competitive relationships between processors as explained by a manager in the following quote:

> We know who [other processors] is in quality [has quality product] and who is not. We find that out through our customers. (…) It's not hard to find out what your competition is doing. We talk to the customers. You can get a feel for what's going on if you get a feel for what's going on in your industry. Your business. (Interviewee 20)

Non-contractual Relations with Suppliers

Another key consideration that emerged from my interviews is the centrality of non-contractual relations for interorganizational relationships in this field. The managers that participated in my study consider the non-contractual relations, especially that they have with their suppliers as a vital characteristic of their interorganizational field. They highlighted that while contractual relationships could be controlled by various enforcement mechanisms, non-contractual relationships require the building of long-term relations with suppliers. Processors

very rarely have written contracts with their suppliers, and therefore, these suppliers can choose among processors to sell their product on an everyday basis, as illustrated by a manager:

> They're all independent fishermen. (…) No agreements; they're all independent fishermen and they just, you know, just word of mouth. That's it. Doing business with word of mouth, that's all. (Interviewee 34)

Some managers do not deal with individual fishermen, but buy from docks, which in turn purchase products from multiple fishermen. These relationships are also non-contractual and not exclusive to a particular processor. The difference of docks is that they are not mobile and they have to deal with price-driven negotiations with the fishermen themselves; docks then charge these increased prices to processors when they are selling to them. In managers' interpretations, a special feature of relationships between fishermen and docks is that docks can provide various services (e.g., ice, gas, equipment, etc.) or help them (e.g., lend money); in return, fishermen bring their catch to these docks as illustrated by the manager of an integrated dock and processing facility:

> But we take care of them [fishermen]. (…) we've made it a priority to make sure that we take care of the boats that unload with us. Meaning, if they have problems, a lot of times if they need to borrow money, a lot of times they need something big so they need me to order something online. They – you name it, I do it. (Interviewee 22)

Managers interpret that due to the lack of contracts between suppliers and processors, transactions are mostly based on negotiations. This is another factor that contributes to the challenges with supply that processors face as discussed above. The lack of a contract is not only due to the established traditions of doing business in the seafood industry, but also a result of the preferences of processors and suppliers to minimize their risks. If a processor relies primarily on a small number of suppliers, it would be difficult to have a steady inventory because fishermen's catch may fluctuate daily. If a supplier relies mainly on a processor they may not be able to sell their catch every day because a processor's customer demand fluctuates as well. Therefore, this

shared decision to avoid contractual relationships minimizes the risk by not limiting processors to a small number of suppliers or suppliers to a limited number of buyers as explained by a manager:

> I wouldn't even recommend any of my suppliers just count on one supplier -- or one buyer. It's not good business. It's just too risky. There's just something -- he could die tomorrow. You've got to have the -- in anything that I ever do, I develop my back door before I open my front door. I want to know how I'm going to get rid of it if I can't sell it. (Interviewee 14)

According to managers, fishermen are technically free to go to other docks and processors, which intensifies the competition for supply between firms. Specifically, because fishermen are well connected, they can inform each other when any processor increases prices for certain seafood, which in turn leads processors to compete on price in order to acquire limited supply. Finally, as will be discussed below, the key aspects of interorganizational relationships are linked to the relations between suppliers and processors and help to explain why they often stick to each other without a contract.

Power of Big Customers

In the eyes of managers, big and resourceful customers primarily in the nation's commercial centers of the Northeast and Midwest have power in the interorganizational field's relationships. Specifically, a small number of big customers are important for competition because they impact product prices and drive processors to compete on price among each other as they control ample financial resources. Big customers buy products in very large amounts and, therefore, they can negotiate the price of the products in their own terms as explained by a manager below:

> You'll have what I call a major buyer like a person out of Chicago. (…) Like maybe Philadelphia who is a major user of gulf shrimp. He can impact – not greatly impact – but impact the price. If he has a certain price that he needs, then he can raise prices at the

> dock to get it. But these guys, normally, what they'll do is they'll wait until supply is greater than demand and they'll buy at better pricing. (…) (Interviewee 2)

According to managers, these big and resourceful customers have great inventory capacity as well. Therefore, they buy seafood processors' products at lower prices when they are in season and there is abundant supply and sell them at high profits during the off-season when there is a shortage of supply. Moreover, managers perceive that generally small local processors experience cash limitations and thus, big customers with ample financial resources gain a competitive advantage over them. Neither do relatively less resourceful processors readily have required cash flow nor can they easily get credit from loaning institutions as explained by a manager:

> One of the big problems that we have in our industry is that there's not enough capital invested in our industry. Banks won't loan money, won't up credit cards, so therefore, we are extremely under-capitalized in our industry. Which will force a small processor to sell shrimp at cost, just to roll over money. (…) (Interviewee 22)

Therefore, managers state that their abundant resources and storage capacities enable these big customers to purchase in large amounts and to drive processors towards price competition. In the interviewed managers' view, some larger processors also benefit from the limited financial resources smaller processors have and their resulting inability to buy large quantities. Specifically, they may wait until a small processor gets desperate and sells their inventory at or below their costs just to roll over money as seen below (because while the price of seafood increases when the season is over, keeping inventory also becomes costlier over time):

> (…) Chicago, we've got some really, really big companies up there that purchases our shrimp. And they own nothing more than a telephone, and a large checking account. (…) When they see our price bottom out, they'll come in and buy large, large quantities from our packers. And they'll hold it and hoard it, and wait for the price to rise. (…) (Interviewee 23)

Industry Organizations as Platforms for Relations and Networking

In my study, the managers perceive industry organizations, including government agencies and trade associations, to be another key characteristic of the interorganizational field of relationships. According to managers, associations are important for processors to broaden their network, and initiate and continue relations with other processors and other organizations in the field. Managers get together with each other as well as with representatives of some of the field's other organizations on occasions such as industry organization meetings or industry-wide events (e.g., trade shows, seafood festivals), which serve as a platform for processors to network as illustrated by two managers below:

> Well interactions can come from meetings from processors that belong to certain organizations like Association 2 or Association 3. These aren't – these could be organizations that have both processors, and docks and retailers so some of these organizations aren't just necessarily processors but ultimately these organizations get together (…) (Interviewee 11)

> I always use Association 1 for information, contacts. They're always going to the trade shows. I've done trade shows with Association 4 [agriculture], Association 1 [seafood promotion], which is very important. You know, Boston Seafood Show, and different trade shows, regional. And then you've got to work with your politics, you know, you've got to work with your marketing – Association 5. Let them know who you are and where you're at. (…) Because you have to have some political connections and everything.(…) (Interviewee 14)

The members of these industry organizations include the managers of processors that operate in different industry segments and representatives of other interest groups such as fishermen, docks, restaurants, and distributors. Consistent with their perception of the fragmentation of the industry, managers and industry association representatives explain that different processors and representatives of interest groups cooperate with each other depending on the issue at hand. For instance, during board meetings of industry organizations, when the discussion is about an issue that relates to the entire Southern State's seafood industry, all

processors lock in together and cooperate against companies that sell imported seafood or other interested parties such as recreational fishermen. When the discussion involves conflicting interests of industry segments, for example the crab versus the shrimp industry segments, processors of the same industry segment cooperate against the ones in other industry segments. Finally, in discussions about issues that are relevant to a particular industry segment, for instance, official season start and finish dates or time allotted for inshore versus offshore fishing for shrimp, processors in the shrimp industry segment compete among each other. For instance, a manager illustrates how they cooperated with other processors in the shrimp industry segment to pass a legislation against imported seafood:

> So, one of the areas we all cooperate, is when we see legislation that may be put in place that would have a negative impact on our industry. (…) A significant example would be -- the importation of crawfish over the years has been a big issue, when it comes to imports -- and even shrimp over the last few years. And so, we've participated with others in the industry, because we have a shrimp processing plant here. (…) So there's legislation that impacts -- and this is at the federal level -- imported shrimp, and how it impacts our industry. So, we would cooperate with other shrimp packers, to let our legislators, both at the state level and the federal level, know that certain bills is either good or bad for the industry. (Interviewee 8)

Overall insights this category offers include managers' interpretations of the characteristics of the interorganizational field, including, resource availability, and the roles of key elements of the field. These characteristics are interrelated with and are central to interorganizational relations and the dynamics of competition, cooperation, and coopetition as they set the stage for and impact how managers plan and implement their relations with other organizations. Characteristics such as the abundance and shortage of resources as well as the key elements of the field such as industry organizations, suppliers, and customers may have important implications for all types of relationships between firms.

Key Characteristics of Interorganizational Relations

The next category of my findings captures the characteristics that managers interpret as key for all types of interorganizational relationships. They develop these interpretations based on interactions with other processors and utilize them to form and implement different types of interorganizational relations. To begin with, managers consider other firms' established reputation in the market important for initiating cooperative relations. The second key characteristic of relationships is reciprocity. The third characteristic is loyalty and it is important for relationships with suppliers and customers. The fourth characteristic is geographic proximity to other processors that result in these firms to rely on the same sources of supply and the same customer markets. The fifth characteristic is social bonds between managers that are developed by being from the same family, neighborhood, and/or friend groups. The final key characteristic of interorganizational relations is managers' trust towards other firms, which is formed based on prior interactions. I define and discuss each of these relationship characteristics and their implications for interorganizational relationships in the interpretations of managers.

Reputation

In the study's context, managers interpret their own reputation as well as the reputations of other firms as key to initiate and maintain interorganizational relationships. In managers' interpretations, reputation is not only important for relations with other processors but also for relations with customers and suppliers. Managers indicate that reputation is a consequence of the quality of a processor's products and dependability of its service in previous interactions. The first quote below illustrates a managers' interpretation of their own reputation and the second quote exemplifies how a manager pays attention to product quality to assess the reputations of other firms:

> You know, this is a service business that we're in. And the chef has to know that if he calls us at 8 o'clock in the morning and he's got an important party coming in and he orders from us, he's got to know that without a doubt it's gonna get to him and it's gonna get to him right. Because we've done such a great job, our reputation is that he knows he can trust us. (Interviewee 18)

> (…) if you're not really good at your inventory, (…) some of the smaller operators, they just develop reputations of being just not good quality and making bad decisions. (Interviewee 1)

If managers are not satisfied with a particular partnership, they may ask around the field and get other managers' recommendations about other potential partners. Accordingly, these managers make their decisions to choose a new partner based on the known reputations of other local processors. Managers of processors that have been in the business for a long time have first-hand knowledge about other processors regarding the quality of their products and services through direct interactions with them. On the other hand, managers of relatively younger processors would need to rely on the reputations of firms in the field that they hear from other managers, suppliers, or customers when they are looking for a partner to initiate relationships with them. Thus, reputation is widely underlined by managers as an important characteristic for the initiation of relations with other firms, especially for newly founded processors:

> Because we're the new kid on the block. All these other people have been around -- they've been in the business, their dad's been in the business, their grandfather's been in the business. (…) We've only been in the business 15 years, so we're the new kid. So we know all the reputation -- just hear all the reputation, you know, "He's a good supplier, he's a good supplier, [or] no, don't buy from him." [We learn other processors' reputation from] Other processors that we interact with. We become friends with processors, and, [we ask:] "Hey, what do you think about their shrimp?" [they respond:]"Oh, they've got a good quality pack. (Interviewee 13)

Reciprocity

In the context of this study, managers interpret reciprocity as a key characteristic of relationships between firms. Managers plan and organize their subsequent interactions with other processors based on their previous experiences. Due to the variability of supply, processors are

not always able to fulfill their customers' orders and may request help from other firms for completing these orders. These relationships are reciprocal because other processors may face similar needs due to inconsistencies in the availability of supply and may, in turn, seek help from these processors. Reciprocity in relations may also involve referring a customer to another processor with the expectation that they will receive a similar favor in return. The first quote below illustrates the reciprocal relations in the exchange of resources and the second quote exemplifies the role of reciprocity in referring customers:

> (…) Then you're short [of inventory], and you've got to call your buddy [another processor], working together, "Hey, can I buy some crawfish from you today?" "I'll help you out tomorrow, to cover my ass." So that's how we reciprocate there, in the live market. (Interviewee 14)

> (…) if we know of a contract then (…) we try to service that contract ourself. If we can't, then we'll give them that favor, but we expect a favor back. (Interviewee 15)

According to managers, in addition to its importance for the exchange of resources and favors between processors, reciprocity also plays a role in competitive relations between firms. Specifically, processors reciprocate in their competitive interactions with a competitor. For instance, if a competitor approaches and 'steals' (Interviewee 32) a customer, that processor will go ahead and work on regaining that customer and/or gaining other customers' of that particular processor. This is illustrated by the following quote:

> (…) we try not to get into a price war with the one – I think there's only one really guy that really does that, and it's not worth it. (…) At one point, he took a lot of our business away. We didn't lower our price. (…) And then gradually went back to those people, and he messed up some kind of way, and now they sell more of our shrimp. (Interviewee 13)

However, in my interviewees' experiences, not all relationships are reciprocal as some of their peers fail to return favors in their interactions. Managers still do not discontinue their relationships with the managers of these firms in case there might be an opportunity to reciprocate in the future. Specifically, because managers interpret challenges with supply and

inventory and seasonality as important characteristics of their interorganizational field, they expect that there will be many occasions when processors will have to rely on each other's resources. On the other hand, when a previous interaction is not perceived by managers to be favorable, they also respond with a similar reaction as exemplified below:

> (…) It's kinda a back and forth thing. There's a couple [other processors] that you can really trust what they are telling you and you disclose to them when you are doing well but you know not everyone works closely. A lot of them are trying to lead you astray. The ones that lead you astray, you do the same thing in return. (Interviewee 6)

Loyalty

In the interpretations of interviewed managers, loyalty is a key characteristic, especially for relationships with suppliers in the study's context. According to managers, the reputation of a firm will contribute to the loyalty of its suppliers and customers. According to my findings on loyalty, despite the fact that the relationship of a processor with its suppliers is on a non-contractual basis, both parties are still loyal to each other; this is important because of the constant challenges that processors face regarding supply and inventory. Managers noted that suppliers are loyal when they are treated fairly by processors, which is related to being paid on time and being able to sell their entire catch according to managers. The role of loyalty in relations with suppliers is illustrated by the quote from a manager below:

> I've got some fishermen that drive 50, 60 miles just to bring their product to me. That's real loyalty. (…) you do have a lot of, lot of fisherman that will pass up other seafood buyers. (…), I had one gentleman who lived in Houma. He would leave and go crabbing out of South of Houma, (…) drive all the way to [interviewee's processing facility], sell his crabs then go back home. Two, three boxes of crabs. 150 miles he would drive and bring me his product. (Interviewee 3)

According to managers, suppliers do not exclusively work for a particular processor, but they may have priorities due to their loyalty to a processor. Thus, suppliers tend to sell their products to those processors that they have been working with over the years. However,

especially when fishermen are experiencing cash problems, they demand that the processor that they have been loyal through the years match the highest price paid and purchase their entire catch. On the other hand, managers explain that especially larger processors do not deal with individual fishermen because they buy and sell in large amounts. Instead, they buy from the docks, which are independently owned facilities that purchase seafood from many fishermen that unload their boats at these docks. As previously discussed, the relationships between docks and processors are also on a non-contractual basis and docks do not work exclusively with a single processor. While every transaction with docks is subject to competition between processors, processors tend to prefer the docks that have been loyal through the years:

> We buy from the docks. Some of the plants in the industry do buy from fishermen. (…) They are independently owned. That's a competitive market. We buy from certain ones that have been loyal to us over the years. Sometimes they sell to other – sometimes we have shared docks that sell to my competition. Some of them are 100 percent with me. Some I buy from on occasion. (Interviewee 20)

Geographic Proximity

The participants of my study identified the distance of their firm to other processors as well as to suppliers and customers as a key characteristic of relationships. There is a limited number of suppliers in each of these neighborhoods and processors need to compete with each other to get access to the limited supply. If a firm is in need of a certain product, they first try to reach out to other processors who are located close to them in these fishing communities/towns or close to the sources that can provide that particular product as explained by a manager:

> I normally call the ones that's closest to me, because I can't pay the freight. That's what I do. I think most of them, (garbled) because the freight kills you, right there. (…) (Interviewee 34)

Regarding suppliers, managers assert that fishermen are very knowledgeable about specific priorities of each processor; so depending on their particular catch they might change

their destination processor. Having said that, according to managers and fishermen I interviewed, suppliers do not want to travel long distances to unload their boat so they mostly rely on a small number of processors that are located in geographic proximity. However, processors that purchase supply from multiple docks may choose to work with those located in distant geographic locations to avoid the potential risk of price-based rivalry. This is because docks that are located close to each other get their supply from the same group of fishermen that can lead these docks to compete on price to acquire the limited seafood resource, which would result in increased prices for supply for these processors. The following quote illustrates this phenomenon:

> (…) I deal with quite a few docks in different areas (…) I try not to buy from multiple docks in one area because then I'm pitting myself against one another. (…) if I get into a situation to where I am committed to this dock for several thousand pounds of product and I'm committed to the dock right next door for several thousand pounds of product, they start fighting each other with the same—with the price—and they drive the price up. And what happens is, I'm the one that's ultimately paying the higher price. (Interviewee 36)

Geographic proximity and the fragmentation of the industry are linked because managers explain that processors that are in the same industry segment and located close to each other tend to avoid cooperating with each other and compete intensely if they have shared customers. Also, managers interpret the geographic proximity of their customer markets to other processors' markets to be important in their relationships. Accordingly, processors are more likely to cooperate with other firms for exchanging products when these firms are selling to geographically distant customers. Hence, geographic proximity of firms and their customer markets is important for relationships with these firms as illustrated by a manager below:

> (…) I might feel more comfortable selling a firm out of state though because I know that by selling that firm out of state or selling this firm in-state, that firm that is selling it out of state is putting that product away from me and so it won't come back to bite me versus

> selling this product in state and helping him out, I'll know that he might be going to a customer that is a competitor of my customer. (…) (Interviewee 11)

Social Bonds

Interorganizational relationships are not only based on contractual relations, but also on interpersonal relations through informal communication among organizational actors resulting from being members of joint, informal, interpersonal networks. In managers' experiences, long-term acquaintances due to belonging to the same neighborhood, social groups, or family may lead to closer social relations and friendships. Managers underline that these social bonds have implications for relationships with suppliers and customers. Moreover, many processors started off their business as fishermen and, therefore, they have developed long-term relationships with other fishermen. These social bonds with suppliers are important for processors in dealing with challenges related to supply as illustrated by a manager below:

> We have a real good relation with the docks. Like I said, I've been doing this my whole life. (…) We've got a real good relationship with the fishermen. We know the people that bring the shrimp to us so I'd like to think that I have an advantage over most processors because I grew up with all these people. (…) So when there is as shortage of shrimp I like to think that I can get what I need to get. (Interviewee 30)

Based on managers' and industry representatives' accounts, social bonds among owners and managers of relatively older and more established processors were established by previous generation owners. Accordingly, these processors are more likely to cooperate with each other for various business and industry issues compared to the ones that are relatively new to the seafood processing industry. Additionally, while these processors may compete intensely with each other for acquiring supply or for selling their products to customers, they also collaborate when another firm is in need of help due to these social bonds. This is illustrated in the observations of an industry organization representative and in the first-hand experiences of a manager below:

> (…) because these areas do tend to be small communities, I mean, they've all known each other forever, so, I mean, it's kind of like family in that they'll be very defensive of each other and at the same time they'll also go after each other. So, but you know, I think when one of them's [processors] hurting the other one a lot of times will pitch in and help out too. (Interviewee 5- Industry Organization Representative)

> His dad started the company (…) by picking up some of the items that we would have eventually thrown away (…) My Dad had a heart attack and I just started sales and I didn't know what I was doing and I called him up and said can you help me sell my shrimp and he did. That's true-friends. When my Dad got better, the next day the fight is on. Next day he jacked the price on me and took some shrimp from me. (Interviewee 20)

Trust

In the eyes of managers that I interviewed, trust is another key characteristic of relationships between firms. Trust is especially important in the study's context because relations between suppliers, customers, and processors are mainly on a non-contractual basis. Accordingly, managers suggest that they do not engage in business relations with other firms if they do not trust that they will be complying with the terms of their verbal agreement. Managers' interpretations of trust are related to business practices and key characteristics of relationships as exemplified by a manager below:

> (…) You trade every day with the same people (…) and you can find out which one you can deal with when you receive the product, and it's what he said it was. (…) honor between plants, and you deal with the ones that sell you the quality they back up, you know? It's all about quality and availability. (…) (Interviewee 14)

According to managers' interpretations, trust is an important factor in relations with customers, industry organizations, and suppliers. Regarding transactions with customers, trust is key as the industry mostly works through long-term credits. In reference to relations with industry organizations, managers who do not trust industry associations are reluctant to participate in their events and networking at these events with other organizations in the field. Managers cite the way industry organizations operate and how they were structured as important for their interpretations of trust towards these organizations. Finally, in regards to relations with

suppliers, even though the price might be a deciding factor, because both suppliers and processors know that they will continue to have interactions, they try to focus more on long-term characteristics of these relationships as outlined by a manager below:

> Same thing I do with the boats, trust and honesty. You know, a man's word is—means more than anything. It's not a piece of paper, it's not a contract you put your name on it, it's a handshake deal, it's word— (…) when you say something, you better do it (…) (Interviewee 19)

Overall, my findings regarding the key characteristics of relations underlines a set of factors that managers interpret to be key for their relations with other firms, including some that are relatively uncommonly found in prior literature on interorganizational relationships such as social bonds and geographic proximity. According to managers, these key characteristics are not only central to relations with competing processors, but also are vital for relations with suppliers, customers, and industry organizations. These characteristics are interrelated with each other and managers' interpretations of these characteristics are formed based on their prior interactions with processors and other organizations in the interorganizational field.

Key Aspects Underlying Identification of Competitors and Cooperators

Another category of my findings includes key aspects underlying identification of competitors and cooperators. According to managers' interpretations, key aspects underlying the identification of competitors and cooperators include processing and selling the same or similar products, selling products to the same types of customers (e.g., restaurants) in the same customer markets, providing high-quality products and services, and being experienced and knowledgeable about the dynamics of the seafood industry. In the following, I discuss each of these aspects and their implications for interorganizational relationships in the interpretations of managers.

Producing the Same or a Similar Product

According to my findings on this node, managers consider other processors that are selling the same product categories (e.g., shrimp) or similar products (e.g., head-on shrimp, peeled shrimp) not only as competitors but also as potential cooperators because of similar processing capabilities. In respect to identifying competitors, some processors focus on the end product to classify their competition and because there are not many firms that produce the exact same product, their managers consider to have a limited number of direct competitors. Other managers define other firms with similar processing capabilities as their competitors, which significantly narrows down the number of processors to the ones that focus on a particular species and possess particular processing methods and technologies. These narrow conceptualizations of competition are illustrated in the experiences of a manager below:

> (…) We have a high pressure process that we put our product through. Other, there's another process that is a pasteurization process and they put oysters through it. They would be a competitor of ours. And then there's a third, well there's a couple others, but the third one, which we actually do also was the freezing. (…) it is a product that a couple people are trying. (…) And so that would be competition to us (Interviewee 26)

Managers also identify other processors that produce the same or similar products as potential cooperators. Because these firms are in the same industry segments, they interact with each other more frequently than firms outside of their segment and their interests mostly align. For instance, processors that produce the same products have similar resource requirements and they can jointly benefit from the exchange of these resources when needed. Hence, managers define a group of potential cooperators that mostly consist of processors that focus on the same or a similar products as illustrated below:

> (…) After being in 35 years, you build a circle of people you talk with, and have acquaintances with through past projects. The circles are processors that do the same thing I do (…) (Interviewee 14)

Overlapping Customers and Markets

Participants in my study indicate that they define another processor not only as their competitor but also as their potential cooperator if it is selling products to the same types of customers (e.g., restaurants, distributors) and in the same geographic markets (e.g., Chicago, Atlanta). These processors are considered potential cooperators because they have shared experiences that they acquired by serving the same customers and/or markets. They are considered as competitors because they target the same customer base and adopt a similar distribution system (direct sales to local restaurants versus selling to nationally spread distributors). The identification of other processors as competitors and/or cooperators based on overlaps in customers and markets is illustrated by two quotes from managers below:

> (…) obviously if I'm here and you're across the bayou, and I'm looking at you, the restaurant five miles away--obviously we're in a more competitive situation. But when you get to national sales, it really doesn't matter. (Interviewee 29)

> Sometimes a shared customer will bring you together. (…) so you have this dialogue of working together, making it happen. Just always sharing ideas and everything. (Interviewee 3)

On the other hand, managers state that some processors avoid cooperating with other processors they compete with in the same customer markets. This, managers explain, is because processors that serve the same customer markets and thus may have shared customers "are competing so closely against each other" (Interviewee 23). This is illustrated by the following quote:

> (…) the relationships I have are with people who are not competing in my market. So I don't really have very good relationships with people that compete directly with me and my market. (…) (Interviewee 1)

Finally, based on managers' views, competitors from other states may target the same customer market and compete with local processors as well. However, managers argue that local

processors know and utilize their advantages, such as good long-term relationships with local customers and suppliers. Hence, managers claim that it is difficult for processors from other states to get a strong foothold in local markets due to limited supply and the difficulty in getting access to customers.

Product and Service Quality

Product and service quality is important for choosing partners in collaboration. The managers I interviewed indicate that they identify potential competitors and cooperators based on other processors' quality of products and services they provide (such as how they deliver and how they receive payment). Managers choose a small group of potential cooperators among the processors that they also compete with based on their business practices and their ability to consistently provide high-quality products. Managers evaluate the quality of products and services, building on an evaluation of prior experiences of interactions with these same processors. A manager explains how they identify the group of processors with whom they cooperate as follows:

> We have about – (…) eight or 10 of them that we kind of interact like that. They'll buy – we'll buy from them when we're in need. (…) Just knowing that they have a good pack. That they produce a quality pack, and the weight count's correct. And so over the years, we've bought from them, and it's been good, and so, there's been no complaint from our customers. So we know that we can continue to do that with them. (Interviewee 13)

Managers explain that during the season processors are busy and they pay attention to product quality and price in choosing their potential cooperators. However, during the off-season and when they have more time to make deliberate decisions, managers also pay attention to the service quality and business practices for preparation and delivery of seafood for choosing their potential cooperators. Price becomes important when the cooperation involves exchanging inventory. Service quality relates to the speed and condition of delivery as well as the payment

options offered to these processors. Managers' attention to these qualities in identifying their cooperators is illustrated in an example below:

> Some [processors that they cooperate with] are more aggressive, as far as getting trucks more rapidly. (…) The agreed upon price, sometimes if you deal with a guy that gives you a better price on some of the bigger sizes, but has a horrible price on some of the smaller sizes, you know, you put a pencil to it and you average everything out, and figure out, well I'll be better off selling to this guy than this guy. (…) (Interviewee 23)

Product and service quality and the key aspects of interorganizational relationships, including reputation and trust are linked, because a firm's product and service quality over time constitute an important basis for its reputation in the interorganizational field according to managers. When they are exchanging inventory, managers will assess the reputation of other processors regarding their product and service quality to initiate relationships with them. Moreover, managers explain that their experiences of product and service quality in a relationship with a processor will eventually lead to trust towards that processor.

Rootedness in the Industry

Firms' experiences and the amount of investments they made in an industry are important in their decisions related to interorganizational relationships. Managers indicate that they choose and prefer to cooperate and to compete with direct competitors that have been in the industry for a long time and that have investments in large processing operations; they refer to this group of competitors as "good" or "true" competitors (Interviewees 1, 14, and 36). I refer to these companies as 'rooted', because managers state that these processors are experienced, and knowledgeable about the rules of the game, are cognizant of the long-term dynamics of the industry and have heavily invested in their business so that they will not easily make short-term oriented decisions. Accordingly, managers prefer these rooted competitors as opposed to smaller operations that generally have a very short life span as explained by a manager:

> (…) We're competing with them more so than with anybody else. So they're calling on the same business that we're calling on. (…) I guess a good competitor is somebody that keeps you on your toes and keeps you doing a good job. (…) but if you can imagine some of the smaller operators, they just develop reputations of being just not good quality and making bad decisions. (…) And they [these competitors] give us fits because they do a good job, so that's a good competitor, if that makes sense. (Interviewee 1)

In managers' interpretations, even though these more established competitors are more challenging to compete with, they are at least selling high-quality products. Managers believe, because of these similarities in business practices, these rooted processors all have similar cost structures and comparable investments in the industry. Therefore, these more established processors cannot easily engage in price wars because the managers of these firms need to consider the long-term sustainability of their firm. Therefore, managers prefer competing with such competitors and try to stay away from the ones who do not have much to lose, as explained by a manager:

> (…) there's certain competitors that I won't sell against. Well, some competitors, if you sell against them, well they drop their pants, and they do anything to salvage that sale. (…) But other competitors, don't drop their price that much. They know what their overhead is, they know what they've got to make. (…) So you've just got to know which ones are sturdy enough to stay in the game, and compete, and not drop their pants all the way down when they start hearing, "I'm going to compete against you"(…) (Interviewee 14)

According to managers, rootedness in the industry has implications for their decisions about choosing cooperators as well. Managers prefer cooperating with their experienced direct competitors. This is because these processors abide by similar rules and regulations and follow similar business practices for preparation and delivery of their products. Thus, managers expect these processors to have high-quality inventory and identify them as cooperators as the following quote illustrates:

> So, you have a good relationship with them [some processors], and, like I said, the true competitors, um – you know, the other guys that do business like I do? (…) Yeah, from the 20% [that this processor won't cooperate with] we was talking about earlier. Strictly

> because I don’t trust anything that comes out of that place. True competitors. Guys that have integrity and have good business practices. (Interviewee 36)

My findings in this category underline that managers pay attention to a combination of these key aspects for identifying their competitors and cooperators. The conceptualization of competitors and competition is critical for any type of interorganizational relationship because the breadth of conceptualization may define whom firms will compete and cooperate with and if this will be a coopetitive relationship or not. For instance, some managers conceptualize competition to be across states, within the state, and within fishing communities and towns, while others conceptualize it based on the similarities in product, sources of supply, processing capabilities, and markets.

Aspects of Coopetition for Industry Issues

Another category of my findings relates to managers’ interpretations of the aspects of coopetitive relations related to industry issues. From the point of view of managers, processors cooperate with each other for issues relating to the seafood industry or to industry segments, frequently as part of industry associations. As these processors that cooperate for industry issues also are competitors, these instances can be classified as co-opetition. The first aspect of coopetition for industry issues includes managers working together to solve issues that impact the seafood industry resulting from various external factors that threaten the natural resources the industry depends on. Secondly, the most common type of coopetition for industry issues identified by managers relates to working together to influence state- or nation-level regulations that may impact the entire seafood industry or relevant industry segments. Finally, managers indicate that processors team up with others and other key organizations to promote either the entire seafood industry, or various industry segments to create awareness, to promote products

and drive sales, and at times to change unfavorable perceptions. I now discuss these each of these aspects of coopetition for industry issues in detail.

Coopetition against Threats to Natural Resources

Managers I interviewed noted that one way in which processors cooperate for the overall benefit of the industry is by collectively working to ensure the long-term sustainability of natural seafood resources. They state that firms in their field may cooperate with other processors following the leadership of government agencies or trade associations when the industry is facing threats from natural factors such as fresh water diversions, pollution, and hurricanes. The ultimate purpose of these efforts is to assure the long-term availability of seafood resources, as explained by a manager:

> Sustainability is when the people go shrimp, do they damage other supplies of seafood in the Gulf? (…) You might have plenty of shrimp for yourself, and you might produce shrimp all the time, but if you destroy turtles, or you destroy redfish, or you destroy different things while you're shrimping, then your industry is not sustainable. Because you are affecting the life of other -- of other fish life in the Gulf. (…) So that is a cause that we in the shrimp industry, on the Association 7, that we fight. (Interviewee 13)

According to interviewees, this form of cooperation and the challenges with supply are linked because it is more common during periods of shortage of supply because processors work together in trying to solve issues that lead to this shortage. For instance, the oyster industry segment, which has experienced a supply shortage for years, is highlighted by managers as the most organized group of processors who are trying to fight for the survival of reefs and other natural sources of oysters. A manager explains the objective of cooperation between oyster processors for the sustainability of their natural resources below:

> The purpose basically was depletion, the effects of the disaster and how to protect the coast and how to protect the sustainability of oysters, which in turn protects the sustainability of other fisheries. (Interviewee 7)

In the eyes of managers, the enablers that organize these efforts of coopetition against threats to natural resources are industry organizations, including trade associations and government agencies. As part of these industry organizations, managers meet and work with their competitors for the overall benefit of the industry as they interpret threats to natural resources to have important implications for the long-term performance of their own firms. The following interview quote illustrates the cooperation among competitors when it comes to these issues:

> I co-operate with them through the boards [of directors for Associations 11, 12, and 13] that I'm on. (…) And I believe that it's important for us to try to work toward that, that's why, you know, we're working toward trying to get this hatchery thing, using these different funding sources so that we can continue it on. So, yes, I reach out, work with our competitors and--friendly, you know, and some that aren't so friendly--to try to get to a goal to extend the longevity of the oyster business in the state of (…) and the Gulf. (Interviewee 25)

Notably, industry organization representatives underline that only after significant challenges to their resource base, such as for example major hurricanes, do the majority of processors become involved in cooperation for industry issues. During regular times, the participation in the efforts of industry organizations is carried on by the managers of a relatively small group of processors who are on the board of almost every industry association as explained by various representatives I interviewed (Interviewees 16, 17, 38). An industry association representative illustrates how key organizations in the interorganizational field get together and cooperate in the face of disasters:

> Immediately following Katrina, Association 7 worked with the trade associations that I mentioned for crab, shrimp, oysters, seafood in general, Association 1, Association 8. And we formed something called Association 9. (…) The size and the scale and the scope of that disaster was so great, that they [all the processors] were all involved. (…) (Interviewee 37)

Coopetition for Regulations

Managers consider regulations as the rules that processors need to abide by while operating in the seafood industry and, therefore, as important reasons for interorganizational relationships. The managers I interviewed interpret regulations as one of the major reasons for why processors cooperate with their competitors as well as with other key actors in their field. This is because regulations facilitate the coordination and control of resource distribution within the interorganizational field, and thus are central interests for different elements of the industry. Coopetition for regulations mostly involves managers to have interactions with various government agencies as illustrated below:

> Cooperation when it comes to regulatory issues. That's more so done on a government state-wide level at certain meetings like shrimp task force meetings, crab task force meetings, you know, which ultimately might go to wildlife and fisheries commission meetings and eventually they will travel to the legislative session, which will then be responsible for passing bills and statues and so forth. (Interviewee 11)

According to managers, the areas of cooperation for regulations include the fighting for zoning issues (oil rig versus fishing zones), for season start & finish dates, foreign workers, product sizes that can be caught, and fresh water diversions. Additionally, in the eyes of managers, a central reason for coopetition for regulations relates to pursuing regulations against seafood importers. This is because managers believe that the firms importing seafood have a relatively lower cost structure compared to local processors and that they crowd the market with products at significantly lower prices. Therefore, processors and other organizations in the field cooperate to lobby the government for anti-dumping regulations and tariffs (i.e., additional taxes on imported products to protect local firms from imports' prices that are below the fair market value) as explained by an industry representative:

> (…) in 2008 and 2009, the price of shrimp got so low, it was at a 50-year adjusted low in the United States and the Gulf, because of imports. And so they petitioned the Federal

> Trade Commission, "they" being the Association 3, [the Southern state's] (…) shrimp processors, and they had to work collectively to show the economic damage and hardship, in order to get tariffs put in place, and to get federal recovery funding through something called the Trade Adjustment Act. (Interviewee 37)

According to managers and industry organization representatives, there are many powerful actors who fight for various regulations which often conflict with the interests of the local seafood processing industry, such as the representatives of recreational fishermen, seafood industries of other states, companies who sell imported seafood, and the oil industry. Therefore, the members of the interorganizational field cooperate to try and counter these influences and to affect the passing of favorable regulations. In fighting for these regulations, processors cooperate not only with their competitors but also with a wide range of key organizations in the field, including suppliers, distributors, and other industry associations as illustrated by a manager below:

> There's some issues that we have to take to our shrimp industry task force that is on the state level, that has docks and processors and fishermen. And we're about to go change some laws this coming June. So there is the cooperation of those things. Things that need to better our industry. (…) (Interviewee 22)

Due to the fragmented nature of the industry, these coopetitive relationships unfold differently depending on the issue at hand. When processors are dealing with regulations against imported seafood, they generally get together with other processors as well as with representatives of other domestic seafood industries. For regulations setting issues such as the season opening dates, which are related to the Southern state that interviewees are located in versus other Gulf states, processors tend to get together with other firms, suppliers, customers, and industry organizations in the state. However, on the matter of advocating for state-level regulations with opposition by other state-level parties (e.g., the interests of recreational fishermen), processors that share the same interests in opposition of these parties cooperate.

Coopetition for Promoting and Marketing the Industry

Coopetition for the promotion and marketing of the seafood industry is another aspect of coopetition for industry issues in the eyes of interviewed managers. Managers consider promotion and marketing of the overall seafood industry to be important for their individual businesses, and thus they cooperate with other processors and other organizations in the field for this purpose. Similar to other aspects discussed above, industry organizations are considered as the main platforms for organizing and leading the efforts of coopetition for promotion and marketing of the industry among competing processors and other organizations in the field, as illustrated by the following interview quote:

> We've just recently banded together to hire a marketing firm to try and promote Gulf wild shrimp. That was part of that Association 10. (…) And we band together to try to convince Washington to give us grants, to give us grant money to be advertised as wild American shrimp. (…) (Interviewee 13)

According to managers, suppliers, customers, processors, and other organizations in the field team up to focus on promoting various features of domestic seafood to educate consumers regarding the differences of its qualities compared to the qualities of imported products (e.g., fresh caught domestic products are compared to farm raised imported products) with the general objective to increase the competitiveness of the local seafood industry. The current node and the node on coopetition to deal with threats to natural resources are linked to each other; for example, the BP oil spill had a long-lasting adverse impact on the perceptions of customers because they perceived the pollution in the Gulf may have impacted the seafood in the region. Thus, in the aftermath of this disaster, promotion and marketing activities of the industry became a crucial reason for coopetition among processors. Another example of coopetition for promotion and marketing of the industry includes the development of programs with industry organizations to certify the quality of the local seafood as exemplified by the following quote:

> We have to market our product like, I guess you are familiar with the (…) the Southern state's certified programs [a quality certification of the Southern state's seafood through Association 1]. (…) We are working on traceability. I handle gulf wild snapper, which is a snapper that is traceable. It is a snapper that is caught in (…) [the Southern state]. It is caught by (…) the Southern state's fishermen and (inaudible) but each snapper has a tag. It shows you – if you pull up the number on that tag on your phone it shows you a picture of the captain, a picture of the boat, his biography and a dot on the map where he caught it. (Interviewee 10)

My findings show that there are different areas of coopetition in the experiences of managers. While one area involves coopetition for collective issues relevant to the entire industry or to industry segments, the other area of coopetition is related to issues concerning individual firms. Based on the findings of my study in this category, managers spend their time and resources for coopetition for industry issues because they interpret these industry-wide factors to have important implications for the performance of their own firm. The interviewed managers interpret that due to the fragmentation of the industry, coopetition for industry issues is often limited to processors within an industry segment that more closely share interests and needs. By the same token, there is limited cooperation for industry issues among firms in different industry segments. Also, in industry associations that provide a platform for the entire industry as opposed to specific segments, processors from different industry segments fight for the benefit of their own segment and become discontent when resources are distributed more towards other segments. There also are a number of associations that specifically cater to and represent the interests of each segment. Moreover, managers explain that the practices of cooperation for industry issues are more common during the off-season because, during the main season of the respective seafood species, firms are busy focusing on their own businesses and on competing with other processors for supply and for the customer demand they aim to satisfy.

Aspects of Coopetition for Business Issues

This category captures findings related to a second area of coopetition and it covers aspects of coopetition among individual businesses. These nodes include a range of aspects of coopetition. First, competing processors may buy and sell inventory or they may share each other's docks to cope with supply challenges. Second, processors may co-pack or process a certain product for each other to satisfy certain customer orders. Third, competitors may share information, for example about fluctuating market prices or about business opportunities. Fourth, competitors may cooperate to share new technologies and to solve problems regarding technical equipment. The final aspect of coopetition for business issues shows that managers interpret coopetitive relations based on their prior interactions with the same partners as they assess the dependability of these partners based on trial and error. I now discuss each of these aspects of coopetition for business issues in detail.

Buying and Selling Product

According to my interviewees' interpretations, processors buy and sell inventory from other firms that they compete with and they may cooperate to share each others' docks when they need a certain product size or category. This is widely indicated as an aspect of co-opetition between processors by the participants of this study. They suggest that this aspect of coopetition has evolved primarily as a way of coping with the field's pronounced challenges with supply and inventory, as explained by a manager:

> We trade products back and forth, we run out of some products and let's say [another processor] (…) has some, we'll call up say hey, you got some of this you can spare? And then they'll sell it to us, we'll go pick it up or vice versa, they'll call us, and say hey, you got some of this? (Interviewee 18)

During the off-season and when there is a shortage of supply, or when a processor's customers demand a special product they do not have in inventory, they turn to competing

processors to check if they can buy this specific product from them to fulfill the order. As discussed in the node on challenges with supply, because the resource availability in this interorganizational field is considered somewhat unpredictable, processors cannot foresee when they will need assistance from other firms. Hence, in managers' interpretations buying and selling inventory has evolved to be a reciprocal practice, meaning a selling processor who helped another one with inventory may in turn need help with inventory from the buying processor. Over time, these exchanges are expected to balance out at and to provide mutual benefit for both firms, as illustrated below:

> (…) So that [the nature of seafood products] leads to usually having an inventory problem, which means that you end up trading with other dealers. So while we try to buy or produce everything we want to sell we aren't always capable of doing that so we have to buy excess inventory from other dealers and they, in turn, need to buy from us. So there's a trade that (…) by the end of the year we're probably, it balances out to zero. (Interviewee 1)

Based on my findings, the buying and selling of inventory between processors is linked with the identification of competitors and cooperators because processors do not buy and sell inventory with every other processor, but rather do they rely on a small group of processors defined based on prior interactions for such transactions. My interview data further suggest that processors have a condition for this coopetition: they prioritize their own customers and share any remaining excess inventory thereafter. Also, processors lacking infrastructure may sell their products to relatively larger ones because they lack the distribution channels to customers for moving their products on their own or they lack the capacity to keep inventory for a very long time.

Co-packing and Processing for Each Other

The managers I interviewed indicate that competitors in the field may cooperate to fulfill large customer orders that a processor may receive but not be able to fulfill on his own; put

differently, they may cooperate to pool complementary capabilities. To accomplish this, processors team up with each other either to fulfill specific technical requirements or processing needs to satisfy the order, or they may combine packing capabilities due to the large size of an order. According to managers, customers that give large orders are generally the big and resourceful customers that have a defining influence on the interorganizational field. In addition to frequently inducing price competition among competitors due to their substantial buying power, these big customers may trigger coopetition between processors as explained by an industry representative who used to work in the seafood processing industry:

> If a small processor has an order that he or she can't fill, that they may pool their production with another processor to meet an order. (…) It's better to be part of an order than to lose the order altogether. (Interviewee 37)

There are meaningful differences between cooperation to co-pack orders and to process products for each other according to managers. Co-packing happens when a processor with limited packing capabilities to satisfy an order cooperates with a competitor who has the required packing capabilities. This typically is the case when packing large orders for customers with specific requirements. By cooperating in packing, both processors get access to orders they otherwise could not fulfill and they choose to cooperate with one another to acquire that contract instead of competing with each other for that order. A manager illustrates this form of cooperation between competing processors:

> (…) We co-pack for one another [with other competing processors] (…) certain processors have contracts for certain stores and rather than trying to come and undercut, uh- you know, like I said it's friendly competition so at the end of the day even though we compete against one another, we also work together, you know, so I might co-pack for a factory that has the Wal-Mart contract and I might not be able to ever get the Wal-Mart contract because of maybe the credit terms they need, or the amount of volume exceeds my, ability, which in this case is why I would co-pack for another factory that has the Wal-Mart contract because he can't (…) supply everything that he has orders for, so he'll reach out to, another factory to see if he can supplement for that. (…) (Interviewee 11)

With respect to processing for each other, according to my interviewees this happens when a processor receives an order from a customer but lacks certain processing capabilities or the capacity to process a certain amount in the time frame given to them in the order. For instance, this may be needed due to the lack of a required technology or machinery. In that case, the manager of that processor asks for help from a competitor who has these processing capabilities. A processor provides an example of this form of cooperation:

> we share processing, and when we can, or need to. (…) he buys a strong load of big crawfish, and he might have -- not have the capacity to do all of it before he starts losing percentages to dead loss. (…) So he'll give me the process. It's cheaper for him to let me cook it for him, than to take the mortality. (Interviewee 14)

Finally, managers noted that some processors focus on the distribution and marketing of value-added products and outsource the processing and/or packing of their products to other processors. These firms refrain from investing in traditional processing and packing capabilities because their managers believe these services can be purchased from other processors at a comparable cost and instead of buying and maintaining needed equipment, they pay other processors to provide these services. From the point of view of the processors who are providing these packing and processing services, being able to sell these services is an important benefit because they have sizable investments in their equipment and selling extra packing or processing capacity to competitors contributes to the returns on their investments. Thus, managers interpret that this form of coopetition creates a mutual benefit for both parties involved in this relationship.

Exchanging Information and Opportunities

According to managers' interpretations, another aspect of coopetition captures the cooperation between competing processors by informing each other about prices, changing technologies, developments, industry organization programs as well as business opportunities.

Managers collect information from other processors to decide on a price range for their own products as product prices may be constantly in flux in the seafood processing industry. The following quote illustrates the different types of information a manager sources from competitors and how this information is used to assess a firm's position in the market:

> (…) we learn grading techniques or maybe they have gotten a jumpstart on new technology that might be out there that they might be experimenting with or new certifications. It kinda all relates back to we all are in this same pool where we share information amongst each other. (…) Information about the season. Information about prices. What one processor might get for his product compared to what I might get for my product and that might differ depending on the region where he is selling and the region where I'm selling. Or maybe it might differ depending on how he packs my product or how I pack my product. So we share this information amongst each other to see what I'm doing wrong or what I'm doing right compared to him. So you know, at the end of the day it's friendly competition. (Interviewee 11)

Managers also indicated that managers may pass on a business opportunity to a competitor after establishing that they are not able to utilize that opportunity by themselves. This coopetition practice is linked to reciprocity because when managers share information about a business opportunity with a competitor they expect their favor to be returned in the future. Also, if a processor has more inventory than their demand, they reach out to competitors for them to pass this information to their own customers. These instances of exchanging information and opportunities for coopetition are illustrated in the following examples:

> Yes we do, we do compete, again on a friendly but cautious basis. (…) You know, we try to service that contract ourself. If we can't, then we'll give them that favor, but we expect a favor back. (Interviewee 15)

> We do [pass business opportunities] converse back and forth on that nature. If I find someone that I can't deal with, because it's not what I do, then I'll pass it on to a few of them, or what have you. And they'll do the same thing. And sometimes it's just one the of processors that we've become real good friends with, like we're holding on to probably half a million pounds in inventory, and so he's like, "Hey, do you need to sell any of that?" I'm like, "Sure, sure." So we send him a picture of it, send it over there, and he sends it out to all of his clients. (Interviewee 22)

Linking this node to the fragmentation of the industry, according to managers' interpretations processors in the same industry segment have more shared interests regarding information and technologies, thus, coopetition in the form of exchanging information and opportunities is more common between processors within industry segments. It is important to note that managers emphasized that they do not share information that is not easily accessible in the market or about their own company during these interactions. Some managers even stated that they share inaccurate information with their competitors because they expect competitors to do the same, which violates coopetition between these processors. Hence, because varying and sometimes inaccurate information is coming from different firms, managers need to combine all these pieces of information from various sources to have a better understanding of the conditions in the interorganizational field and make their decisions accordingly.

Sharing and Helping Each Other with Equipment

In the eyes of managers interviewed for this study, competing processors also cooperate for developing and sharing new technologies or for solving problems with their current equipment and machinery. According to managers' interpretations, processors that have been in the business for a long period of time are open to sharing equipment and technologies they developed with other competing processors, which otherwise might be used to get ahead of the competition, as illustrated below. This could be linked to the social bonds that are a prevalent characteristic of the studied interorganizational field, as well as to the fact that many of these managers consider companies importing seafood as their firms' major competition. Having said that, being innovative, developing new technologies, and having knowledge about new advancements makes these processors more attractive to other firms in the interorganizational field as potential cooperators. The technologies developed may be useful not only for

competitors in one industry segment, but also for other processors in other industry segments as illustrated by a manager below:

> (…) we've always been somewhat innovative in our approach. And so, that attracts people to us, relationships to us. And we've always been involved on that cutting edge of development. My father (…) drew up boats he drew up conveying systems. Support equipment for our high pressure processing. (…) [We gave the technologies my father developed] To everyone. We've had thousands of people, industry people come and look at our process and make analysis of it. And see where it could be applied to not only oysters but lobsters and king crab and many other products (…) (Interviewee 26)

According to the interpretations of managers, another motivation for coopetition among processors is the need to find solutions to problems with equipment and machinery. The proper functioning and utilization of equipment and machinery are vital for a processors' financial viability. Managers consider this to be a reason for why processors tend to cooperate with each other, especially during the season when there is an abundant supply of seafood, processors cannot afford to stop their operations because maintaining and fixing machines are indicated to be costly and time consuming. Therefore, processors help each other out for coping with these problems, as illustrated by a manager:

> (…) a couple of them, that's what we interact with, about equipment. (…) I have one of them that their family been in the shrimp business as long as my family (…) Like if I have a part they need, I let them use it and they'll replace it. If they have a part I need, I'll, you know – vice-a-verse-a. (Interviewee 35)

Coopetition as an Outcome of Interactions

In managers' experiences, cooperative relationships between competing processors in the study's context evolve as a result of prior interactions for assessing the quality of products and services and the reputations of these processors. This is important because, as discussed in the nodes on the identification of cooperators, processors do not cooperate with every firm in the interorganizational field but rather limit their cooperation to a select circle of firms. According to

managers' interpretations, coopetition with these selected processors is based on the prior interactions of trial and error with these firms, as illustrated by a manager:

> There is a list of every seafood producer in (…) [the Southern state]- in every state now. So you start calling around and then, you know, if the business practices are good. If everybody does what they say they are going to do, if everybody pays their bills, then you become a bond. (…) (Interviewee 2)

According to managers, these coopetitive relationships are formed over time. Therefore, competitors that are relative newcomers may face challenges with developing these relations in the short term as they have to prove their quality as a potential cooperator through "trial and error" (Interviewees 1, 2, and 13) when a certain processor is in need of a particular product. Managers' interpretations show that these interactions not only are central to subsequent coopetitive relationships, but also are key for the characteristics for developing relational characteristics such as trust and reputation.

Overall, the insights this category offers suggest that competitors engage in coopetition for business issues, primarily with a relatively small group of processors, as a result of prior favorable interactions. Additionally, social bonds among processors may serve important roles for coopetition between these firms. For instance, one participant indicated that the managers of a group of processors join for having coffee every morning and these social interactions among competitors may lead to various forms of coopetition for business issues, such as exchanging information and discussing the joint development of technologies. This node is also linked to geographic proximity; according to managers, processors located close to each other mostly compete for getting supply, but they do not necessarily compete with each other for customers because they may focus on different customer markets. Therefore, these processors may compete in the supply market and cooperate in the customer market which is an example for vertical coopetition. Moreover, processors that offer the same or similar products tend to have similar

processing capabilities, and thus, are likely to more frequently co-pack and process for each other, cooperate regarding new technologies for their processes, and exchange market information and refer customers that they cannot fulfill the orders for. Finally, the processors whose managers consider companies that import seafood as their major competition are more likely to cooperate with local processors.

Aspects of Competition

The final category of my findings consists of the aspects of competition that managers highlight in the context of my study. The first aspect involves competition for the limited supply as processors compete with other firms to get access to seafood resources to match their demand. The second aspect includes some managers' feelings that they have successfully differentiated from other processors with superior operational capabilities. The third aspect consists of managers' accounts of how processors try to avoid directly competing especially with local firms. The fourth aspect relates to processors' common practice of continuously changing prices to compete with other firms. The fifth aspect involves offering value-added products that go beyond the basic processing to compete with importers. The sixth aspect includes providing good quality products for every order and catering good customer service to customers. The seventh aspect consists of utilizing various marketing activities to educate customers regarding facts about imported products, and unique and superior attributes of local/natural seafood. The final aspect relates to competing against fishermen who forward integrate and sell their catch directly to customers. I now discuss each of these aspects of competition and their connections to previously introduced nodes and categories.

Competition for Supply

The managers I interviewed interpret competition for supply as one of the fundamental aspects of competition in the interorganizational field because the seafood processing industry relies on limited and unsteady natural resources as discussed in detail above. One of the ways to compete for supply is for processors to develop long-term relationships and loyalty with their suppliers. However, according to managers, the selling price is an important decision factor for suppliers and thus, in times of scarcity of seafood supply processors try to outbid each other on price to get access to it. Managers explain that fishermen have a very efficient network of communication among each other, so they immediately learn about price changes at different docks and processors eventually match the price of any close competitor to maintain the loyalty of their suppliers as illustrated by a manager below:

> Now when you find out about the price, you're going to match that price. [We find out the prices] 90% from the fishermen. Yea, he might say, "George, look, I'm fishing off of Grand Isle over here. This one's got a nickel more on the 40-50s." Say, "Just a minute. Let me see what I can do." The first thing you do is you call [customers] to check. Make sure he is paying it. (…) And if he tells me yea, good. And if he tells me no, I have to swallow the loss or the shrimp. (…) (Interviewee 33)

Additionally, managers also consider aspects such as loyalty and reputation to be central to suppliers’ decisions which in turn is another key aspect of the competition for supply. Fishermen's catch will not always match a processor’s needs, but fishermen want to make use of all their catch and their loyalty is very much affected if all their catch is purchased by one processor that they have long term relationships with. Moreover, when there is an abundance of products the prices go down; however, if processors still offer “good prices” (Interviewee 10) to fishermen during these times of abundance, fishermen are more likely to also bring their products to these processors to return the favor when there is a shortage of supply. Thus,

processors try to consistently offer good prices for fishermen's catch and preserve the loyalty of their suppliers as explained by an industry organization representative below:

> (…) talking to some of the fishermen, (…) most of those guys coming in on their boats, they'll be calling each processor, asking what price they're giving that day. And so, they're constantly jumping around. One [processing] company told me, they believe that if they pay high on a regular basis, that then they get a loyalty and they get better product. (…) (Interviewee 16)

In addition to offering good prices, managers also indicated that being able to offer help to suppliers with equipment such as ice, gas, machinery, and knowledge facilitates getting access to supply. The shortage of seafood resources for species such as crab and oyster and intensified competition for the supply in those industry segments are linked to each other. Accordingly, during a shortage, processors buy inventory at high prices due to this competition for supply at the risk of selling with a relatively lower profit because they need their equipment and facility to continue operating to get a return on their investment. Also, one participant explains that his firm used to get resources from a single location, but due to the shortage of supply they opened up new docks and started buying from other locations which led them to face new direct competitors. According to the interpretations of managers, geographic proximity is also key to competition for supply as fishermen only travel a certain distance with their catch so they have a limited number of alternatives to unload their products. Therefore, managers consider processors that are located closely as their main competitors for supply.

Feelings of Superior Operation Capabilities

Some of the interviewed managers emphasized that they have a very high opinion of their own company and argued that they ignore other competitors because they consider their firm to be ahead of competition due to successful differentiation. However, when further probed, these managers acknowledge that they still see other processors as their competitors. These feelings

are especially common among managers of relatively younger seafood processors because they consider the main reason for the lack of competition as their unique and superior processing techniques due to their cutting edge technologies which cannot be matched by relatively outdated processors. Managers of these processors believe superior operation capabilities result in a higher quality of products that they produce. Feelings of superior operation capabilities and product quality are exemplified by managers below:

> I don’t feel like we have competition. Cause we’re very unique in what we do here. We being a state of the art facility and processing. (…) So being a brand new state of the art facility we offer the latest technology where plants who had been in business fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years, you know, they kinda are what they are. (…) (Interviewee 21)

> No-one puts out the quality we do. (…) We have a--we have such a high standard here on what we put out and what the customer orders. (…) I don't have any competition. Okay, we demand highest prices, we're not the cheapest you're going to buy fish from. We pay higher than anybody, we demand a higher price on sales. (Interviewee 19)

According to my findings on this node, feelings of superior operation capabilities have implications for cooperation because managers of these processors suggest that not only do they not pay much attention to other firms, but also that they avoid engaging in any sort of cooperation with them. Managers say these preferences might also be related to their business style, which involves focusing on their own business and avoiding any interactions with their competitors. Therefore, these processors have only limited interactions with other processors as well as with other key organizations in their interorganizational field.

Avoiding Direct Competition

Another aspect of competition involves avoiding competitive interactions with other firms as much as possible, especially because some managers consider seafood importers as their major competition and they believe that by avoiding to compete with local processors they can prevent further decreases in their profit margins. For instance, some of the interviewed managers

argued their firm tries to avoid directly competing in the customer markets that other local processors operate in by not selling their products in those markets. In the following quote, a manager explains how they focus on different customer markets to avoid direct competition with local processors:

> We are not all competing on the same market. (…) Some of us are competing on the same market but then again it is all North America. The guys that sell in Canada and Michigan and California... (…) We don't always step in each other's toes a whole lot I'll be honest with you. (Interviewee 2)

Managers state that another approach to avoid direct competition with other local processors is to focus on producing different versions of the same product, such as unprocessed live crab instead of processed, which may help to create a niche for their company. Moreover, to be in the same distributor's shelves without necessarily competing with other local processors, firms may choose to focus on a certain product/package size such as small-size shrimp as opposed to large-size shrimp. Also, managers explain that firms can focus on different distribution outlets for their products to avoid direct competition with other local processors as illustrated in the example below:

> (…) Not that much though, but we do compete [with other local processors] a little bit. We try not to. (…) Because the market is so big. (…) So that's why you can just go find another -- there's too many grocery stores, too many other food supply places out there. Go find somebody else. (Interviewee 13)

Avoiding direct competition, the fragmentation of the industry, and geographic proximity are linked because managers do not consider processors that operate in different segments as their direct competitors because of the fragmented nature of the industry. Thus, focusing on a single seafood species and operating in one industry segment is interpreted by managers as a way to avoid direct competition with processors who operate in other industry segments. On the other hand, managers also indicate another way of avoiding direct competition as to processing

multiple species of seafood and operating in different industry segments; this way, firms not only avoid directly competing with processors that focus on a certain species, but also can they compensate the gap that is due to weaker sales in a species by stronger sales they may achieve in other species. In relation to geographic proximity, based on managers' accounts the processors that are located geographically close to each other have more frequent interactions and cannot avoid intense competition for supply; thus, they at least try to avoid competing with each other in customer markets they operate in.

Changing Prices

In my study's context, managers explain that firms vary product prices to compete with other processors. Thus, managers continuously interact with each other as well as with suppliers and customers to keep abreast of the frequently changing market prices of seafood. That is, when there is a change in the price of supply or price charged to customers, managers learn that via their interactions with the managers of other processors, suppliers, and customers and accordingly adjust their own prices. A common practice related to changing prices involves price-based competition among processors, which involves undercutting each others' prices to secure orders from customers. This is illustrated in the observations of an industry association representative:

> (…) shrimp processors (…) are very competitive, and quite frankly I think sometimes they hurt themselves, because to get the business they'll continue to cut prices, they won't hold the line, so they'll continue to cut prices almost to the point of somebody not making money just to get the sale. (…) (Interviewee 16)

According to the interpretations of managers, changing prices became a common basis for competition in the seafood processing industry following the introduction of imported seafood to the US market. Managers explain that companies that sell imported seafood have the power to significantly change seafood prices due to their lower cost structure and the large

quantity of supply they are able to bring to the US market. In managers' accounts, the strong foothold that these companies established in a short period of time and their ability to impact the seafood prices were also due to the limited knowledge of customers about nature of seafood products. This is illustrated by a manager below:

> Most of them [imports] compete on price. It's 90 percent farm raised product which is totally different to me but it's hard to tell when you see a shrimp in a bag in a grocery store and say that's so much different from this shrimp that was wild caught, gulf shrimp, it looks the same. (…) It becomes about price to the consumer – to the uneducated consumer doesn't know the difference. (Interviewee 12)

Offering Value-Added Products

In the eyes of managers, another aspect of competition in the study's context involves offering value-added products. This is the main direction that industry associations are trying to lead processors towards because they believe that competing as a commodity against the companies that import seafood is very difficult due to the low-cost structures of these companies. However, in the eyes of industry organization representatives, a relatively small number of processors realize this and offer value-added products to successfully differentiate their products from imported seafood to be able to charge premium prices. Processors that focus on offering value-added products do more than basic processing to create differentiated products that are beyond the seafood commodity traditionally produced and sold in the industry. Some of these approaches to offering value-added products are illustrated by quotes from two managers below:

> (…) we take less lobster meat right here and make a patty with it. But it's an added-value product. And we've had some success with it in four years. (Interviewee 34)

> We try to create products where the value is in -- like, we went to chef (…), world-recognized chef, to create our sauces. So we want a premium-tasting sauce to pair with the premium shrimp. (…) we will have shrimp that does not have any sodium tripolyphosphate. It'll be chemical-free, so that -- that'll be a niche that we can focus on. (…) (Interviewee 8)

According to industry organization representatives, especially some smaller scale processors (referred to as “micro” processors by Interviewee 16, an industry organization representative) achieved success in competing with the companies that import seafood and larger local processors by offering value-added products. These micro processors are defined as small scale processors that create a niche for themselves and develop successful businesses by selling products directly to end consumers without any invasive processes. The manager of a micro-processor I interviewed explained that by focusing on end consumers, he was able to eliminate the majority of direct competition. Because this manager does not consider other traditional processors as his direct competitors, he is more open to engage in cooperative relationships with those processors in the interorganizational field. In addition, processors create value-added products by developing or adopting new technologies. This is linked to coopetition because these new technologies often drive firms to share equipment and technical solutions with other processors as discussed above. Finally, according to the interviewed managers, some newly founded processors that adopt cutting edge technologies for processing seafood tend to focus more on selling value-added products as opposed to cutting prices for competition when compared to more established ones.

Competition Through Product Quality and Customer Service

According to participants, processors compete with others by making sure they provide good quality products every time they deliver and offer good customer service to their customers, including fast delivery and extended payment periods; this node complements the value-added products node discussed above. Specifically, the seafood product that managers discuss under this node is still a commodity, however processors try to improve the customer experience and add value to their products by focusing on product quality and good customer

service. For instance, many interviewees underlined that they sent their inventory to independent testing after the oil spill to relieve their customers from doubts regarding the safety of their products. Moreover, managers explain that a major way to overcome price competition and to retain customers is to especially focus on the service provided to customers, as illustrated below:

> We're big on service. (…) Delivery is a big part. Having the right stuff. Having the product all the time when they need it so one of the things that I do is I don't pick up a customer that I can't handle but if you can't get him the product everyday, you aren't doing your job so we try to take and that's how we maintain some of the customers that we have. (…) We never let them run out. (Interviewee 10)

In managers' interpretations, providing high-quality products and customer service distances their firm from price-focused customers and destructive price-based competition. To be able to produce high-quality products, managers consider maintaining their firms' long-term relationships with suppliers as crucial. Therefore, competing through product quality and service and competition for supply are linked because processors compete among each other to get access to high-quality resources, which is central to the quality of their products. Moreover, this node is linked to the relationship characteristics discussed above because managers believe product quality and service are important for the reputation and trustworthiness of their company in the eyes of their customers. Also, because they pay so much attention to product quality, some managers carefully choose their cooperators and buy and sell inventory only from other processors that they know will consistently supply quality products. According to managers, this aspect of competition also captures being very diligent about using proper business practices by paying attention to product quality and proper packaging throughout the relationships with their customers as shown below:

> (…) the way that we try to compete is just by selling our product for what it is; making sure that we pack proper weights. If we glaze our product, then we over pack to allow for the glaze to make sure that the count or to make sure that the customer is not just paying

> for quality but he's paying for piece of mind to know that he's getting down to the penny what he's paying for (…)

Educating Customers and Promotions

According to the interviewed managers, educating customers and organizing promotion activities is another aspect of competition in the study's context. Accordingly, processors utilize marketing activities such as informing distributors, restaurants, and individual customers regarding the unique and superior attributes of the local seafood. Managers believe that an average customer cannot differentiate between farm-raised imported seafood and wild-caught local seafood. Therefore, these promotion and marketing activities are especially utilized to compete with seafood importers by educating customers regarding various features that make local seafood superior to the imported products. This is illustrated by a manager as follows:

> Researcher: How do you compete against the imports?
> Interviewee: That is mostly done through educating the consumer. Which would be through social media, which is having people understand, one, where we sell our product to, two, what to look for, why the taste is different. We also tell the stories of what the ponds do, with all the antibiotics, and how it is -- how they're taking apart their own countries just for the shrimp. (…) (Interviewee 22)

In managers' interpretations, the promotion and marketing activities of individual processors complement industry's collective efforts of promoting the entire seafood industry. Educating customers and coopetition for the promotion and marketing of the industry are linked because many of these industry-wide efforts of educating customers are based on industry organization led programs through which processors coopete among each other and with other key elements of the industry. In managers' perspectives, while more resourceful processors develop their own practices for educating customers, relatively smaller ones expect industry organizations to educate customers on behalf of all firms in the industry. In organizing their own activities for promoting their products and educating customers, processors develop close

relations with customers through their sales teams. A manager explains below how they try to reflect the unique features of their local products in store with an objective to educate customers:

> Focus studies have shown that consumers believe 90% of the time, they believe they're eating wild-caught shrimp, but they're not. They're eating foreign shrimp. So when the consumer gets educated that this is wild American, and wild-caught, not imported, they'll pick it up every time (…) we put on our packaging, we'll put "wild, wild-caught, caught in the Gulf," to just blow it out right at their face, that they see that it's wild-caught, where the other ones can't do that. (Interviewee 13)

Competing with Forward Integrated Suppliers

In the eyes of interviewed managers, forward integration of fishermen recently became a common phenomenon in the study's context. Specifically, fishermen who are suffering from increasing costs and dropping revenues, eliminate other levels of the supply chain and sell directly to end customers after either a limited processing or not processing their catch. Some fishermen forward integrate by incorporating novel technologies on their boats and establishing sales channels; others participate in industry organization programs that facilitate a business model of selling directly to customers instead of docks or processors. This is illustrated in the experience of a fisherman who successfully forward integrated and started selling their catch to end customers:

> I didn't want to just settle for what the docks were paying so we started marketing and selling all of our own product off the boat. (…) what we have is something that's really unique (…) - no one producing the way we produce so it gives us an advantage and an edge. (Interviewee 6)

Managers of processors suggest that they view these fishermen as indirect competitors because they eventually try to market their products to their firms' customers. While this is a common practice in other industries, in the interpretations of managers and industry organization representatives it is relatively new in the seafood industry because it has only recently started through a program by an industry organization. Some managers do not perceive this program by

industry organizations that support the forward integration of fishermen well because they consider forward integrated suppliers to utilize a portion of the already limited seafood supply and become new competitors for some of their customers. According to representatives, the dissatisfaction among processors towards these programs is reflected in association meetings, especially by the dissatisfied managers who are also board members of these industry organizations. The nature and content of these industry organizations' programs as well as some of the challenges received from processors are explained by two industry organization representatives below:

> (…) micro-processors [that participate in the Southern State's Direct Program] --again, what's happening there is those guys, for a limited investment, can do their own processing, basically set it up in a garage, be able to catch--bring in their catch, process it, they put a label on it, and it's selling higher because people know it's local and they trust it because it's kind of a boutique seafood product. (…) (Interviewee 37)

> (…) They [processors] called and complained a lot. One threatened to sue (…) [us], and one of the agents. But he never did anything. But – Well, because we were going to take all of the -- you know, he wouldn't get any seafood anymore, because it would all be sold directly, and so we are cutting into his bottom line. (Interviewee 38)

On the other hand, some interviewees whose firms do not have any shared supply or end consumers with these forward integrated suppliers say that they like the idea that these fishermen are able to sell some of their catch directly to individual customers and make some money to survive because they consider a recent phenomenon of fishermen leaving the industry to be a major problem for the industry. According to the interpretations of managers, the processors who support the forward integration of suppliers are generally the ones that are located far away from these forward integrated suppliers and thus have different sources of supply. Also, unlike the forward integrated fishermen that only directly sell to end customers due to the regulations of the industry association program, these processors focus on distributors or restaurants. Accordingly,

some suppliers I interviewed underlined that some of these processors, in fact, help them for processing so that they can sell their catch directly to end consumers.

Processors follow different practices to compete with importers, other local processors, and forward integrated suppliers. When competing with importers, processors tend to avoid competing with other local processors, offer value-added products, establish good relations with customers, and educate customers regarding the differences of imported farm-raised and local wild-caught seafood. In competing with other local firms in the segment, processors try to acquire the limited supply by building long-term relations with suppliers, engage in price-based competition and/or offering good quality products to their customers. In competing with forward integrated suppliers, they try to utilize their influence in the industry organizations and their cost advantages due to the larger size. Some managers highlighted that they classify processors that are located close to them as their main competitors and focus on these companies as their frame of reference in competition. Finally, processors also reciprocate in their competitive interactions. For instance, if a competitor approaches and 'steals' a customer, that processor will go ahead and work on regaining that customer and/or gaining other customers' of that particular processor.

Summary of Findings

In this section I discuss the findings explained above and how my findings addressed each research question of my study and how this study contributes to the literature on interorganizational relationships. To begin with, Figure 1 provides an overview of the findings of my study. This figure also highlights how relationships between organizations are embedded in the interorganizational field, and how the aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships are linked with other nodes and categories based on managers' interpretations of the field and relations as discussed in detail below.

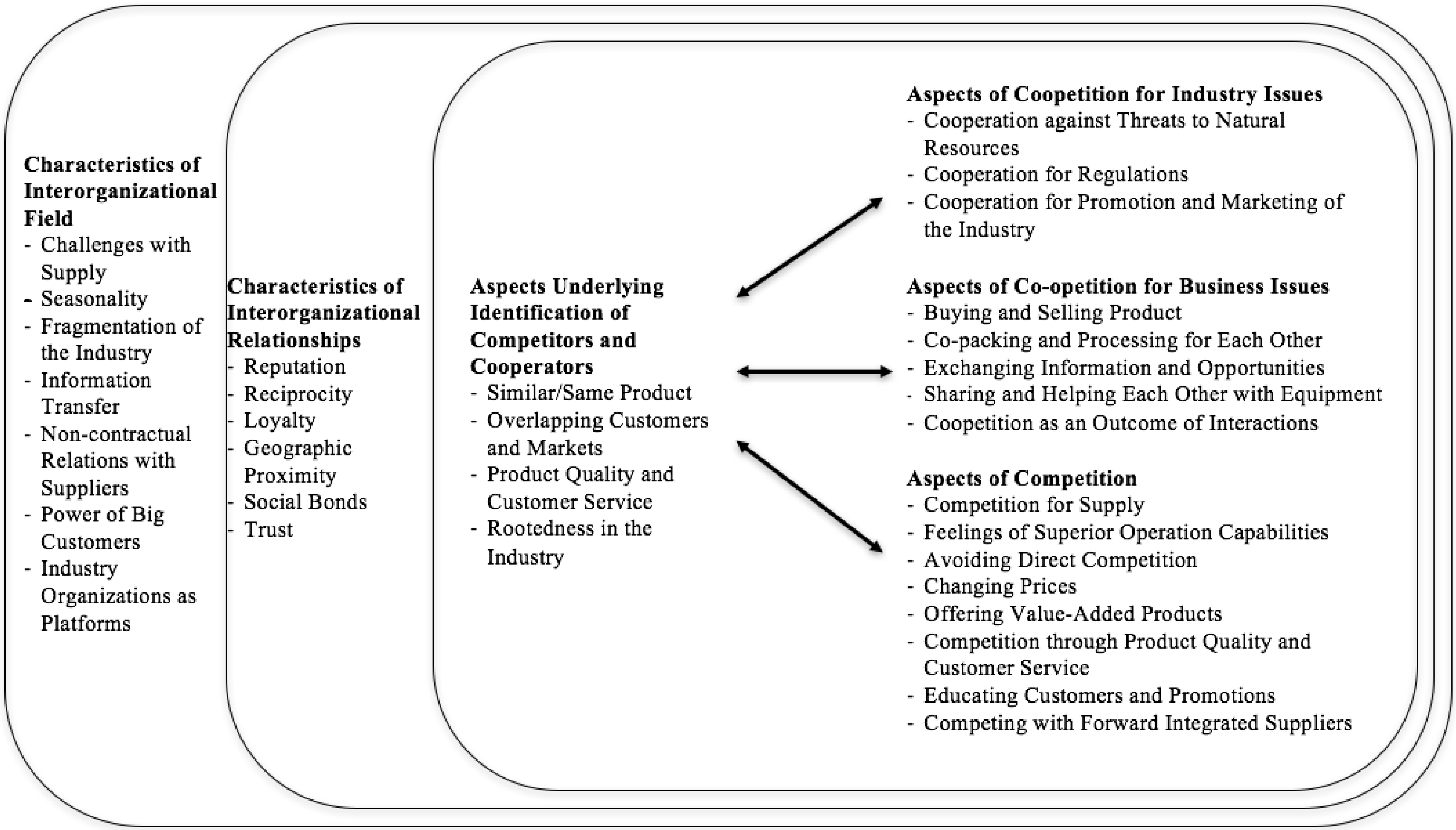

Figure 1: Overview of Findings

My first research question was centered on the interorganizational field of the study for which I explored the role of managers' interpretations of the field, its characteristics, and other organizations in the field of relations between firms. My findings show that the interviewed managers interpret issues related to the structure of their field and highlight the roles of key elements of the field, including suppliers, big customers, and industry organizations. Managers consider the characteristics and elements of the field to be interrelated with each other and they interpret them as central to interorganizational relations and for the dynamics of competition, cooperation, and coopetition. This is because these characteristics set the stage for and impact how managers plan and implement their relations with other organizations.

The findings regarding managers' interpretations of the challenges with supply as a key field characteristic in terms of shaping relations between organizations echo the importance of resource availability for interorganizational relationships (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The absence of a steady supply of resources and the resulting constant inventory problems are important drivers of the various interactions between firms. Specifically, these characteristics lead processors to different levels of cooperative and competitive interactions with other firms and push them to reach out and establish relationships with new processors, which are not part of their traditional interorganizational field.

My findings on managers' interpretations of seasonality also show that the factors that are important for relations between organizations may fluctuate throughout the year in an interorganizational field. In doing so, I contribute to previous research which has shown that factors such as demand for products, resource supply, and regulations are key for interorganizational relations (Cropper et al., 2008a). Specifically, the findings of my study contribute to this line of research by showing that firms may more intensely compete, cooperate,

and coopete with other firms in the interorganizational field due to the issues related to seasonality, such as official start and finish dates, fluctuating customer demand, and varying product prices.

Heterogeneity of competition within industries and within organizational fields has attracted significant scholarly attention in the management literature (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994; Ketchen et al. 2004; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Similarly, with respect to my findings on the fragmentation in the industry, the interorganizational field of my study is not homogenous as it consists of different industry segments in which firms interact more frequently with each other compared to firms in other industry segments, follow developments about each other, and co-develop shared interpretations about the state and the needs of the particular industry segment. My findings on the fragmentation of the industry further contribute to the literature by showing that the differences across segments of an industry may lead to variations in relations between firms. For instance, my findings present that cooperation between firms is often limited to within industry segments; because processors in the same industry segments have similar needs and thus, there is only limited cooperation between firms in different industry segments. Therefore, in industry associations that contain the entire seafood industry, firms that represent different industry segments fight for the benefit of their own segment and become discontent when resources are distributed more towards other segments.

The roles of key elements in the field, such as customers and suppliers, in relations between firms has received considerable attention in the prior literature on interorganizational fields (Barnett, 2006; Parmar et al., 2010). My study underlines specific roles of these elements in the interorganizational field for interorganizational relationships, including the roles of large and resourceful customers, suppliers that work with processors without a contract, and industry

associations. For instance, by showing the roles of various elements in the interorganizational field, including suppliers, industry associations, universities, and customers for information transfer between processors, my study contributes to research that has highlighted information exchange and learning as important motivations for interactions between firms (Cropper et al., 2008a; Noteboom, 2008). Moreover, I contribute to research on the role of contracts for interorganizational relationships (Ring, 2008) by discussing how non-contractual interactions that processors have with their suppliers may impact their relations with other processors and organizations in the field. Additionally, I show how big customers can influence processors to cooperate with each other for exchanging inventory, processing seafood for each other, or co-packing products to deliver large orders from these big customers.

The second research question was related to the characteristics that managers interpret to be important for relations between organizations as well as the way they make decisions regarding their competitors and cooperators. Based on the findings of my study, the key characteristics of interorganizational relationships in the interpretations of managers include factors that are conceptualized and studied in the prior literature, such as reputation, reciprocity, and trust (Cropper et al., 2008a) as well as characteristics that are underlined by the managers who participated in my study such as loyalty, social bonds, and geographic proximity. According to managers, these key characteristics are interrelated with each other and managers' interpretations of these characteristics are formed based on prior interactions.

My findings contribute to the literature on interorganizational relationships by showing the role of reputation not only for cooperation and for initiation of relations, but also for competition between firms as managers prefer to compete with processors that have a good reputation and try to avoid the ones with a bad reputation. Moreover, loyalty is considered to be

important for customer relationships, and for customer satisfaction in marketing research (e.g., Dick & Basu, 1994), but I also underline loyalty as an important characteristic of the relations with other firms and with suppliers. In addition to the established role of geographic proximity for intense competition for supply, I show how it facilitates cooperation, especially for exchanging resources such as inventory and information. Building on research that argues interorganizational relationships are not only based on contractual relations, but also on interpersonal relations through informal communication among organizational actors (Ingram & Inman, 1996; Marchington & Vincent, 2004), I find that the social bonds between managers are important for the initiation and continuation of relationships. I also contribute to research on trust by showing its role for non-contractual relations between organizations.

With respect to managers' interpretations of the key aspects underlying the identification of competitors and cooperators, I extend research on competitor identification by introducing new aspects that managers consider as key to defining their competitors such as firms' rootedness in the industry. Because there is no established research on cooperator identification, my findings contribute by showing how the same aspects that managers consider when identifying competitors are also important in their selection of cooperators. Moreover, my findings underline that managers pay attention to a combination of these key aspects to identify their competitors and cooperators and they have idiosyncratic definitions of firms they compete and cooperate with. I also underline that there is an asymmetry regarding who and what type of processors are identified as competitors and cooperators in the customer and supply markets.

The third research question was related to managers' interpretations of key aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships they engage in with other firms in the interorganizational field. Regarding coopetition for industry issues, my findings show that these

types of relationships often take place under the leadership of industry associations, and managers spend their time and resources for these issues because they interpret industry-wide issues to be important for their own firms. A contribution of my findings involves showing how participation in the efforts of industry organizations tends to be limited to a relatively small group of managers who dominate the boards of virtually all industry associations. Moreover, my findings show that managers' conceptualizations of coopetition and the firms that they coopete with may change based on their interpretations of the issue at hand.

In relation to the coopetition for business issues, my study contributes to the coopetition literature by uncovering the phenomenon that firms engage in these types of relationships primarily with a relatively small group of processors that are defined as a result of prior favorable interactions and social bonds between managers. To do so, in initial interactions managers appear to pay attention to the characteristics of an evolving relationship, such as reputation, reciprocity, and trust so that with time they identify this relatively small group of processors that they choose to coopete with. I also show competitors that are relatively new to the industry may face challenges with developing these relations in the short term as they first have to prove their quality as a potential cooperator through trial and error.

Finally, I contribute to the rich tradition of research on competitive relationships (e.g., Chen & Miller, 2012) by highlighting that managers follow different practices to compete with importers, other local processors, and forward integrated suppliers. My findings also underline the importance of some relatively uncommon aspects of competition, such as avoiding direct market competition with other local processors when facing a larger external threat from the companies that import seafood. These key aspects of competition are important to illustrate how

the key elements of an interorganizational field may alter traditional competitive strategies and actions of organizations.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of my dissertation was to understand how managers interpret interorganizational fields and relations with organizations, and how these relationships unfold in their experiences. Specifically, I studied managers' interpretations of the characteristics of their interorganizational field and relationships, the way they identify their competitors and cooperators, and the key aspects of competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relations. The grounded theory methodology and my research design to collect and analyze interview data from managers and other key organizations' representatives in a Southern State's seafood processing industry context provided vital insights into managers' interpretations of their interorganizational field and the practices involved in carrying out relations with other organizations. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of my study for theory and research, identify areas for future research, and discuss the limitations of the study.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study offers important contributions to the literatures on interorganizational relations, interorganizational fields, managers' interpretations, and practices. To begin with, I contribute to research on interorganizational relationships by highlighting that managers' interpretations of relationship characteristics are influential for both competitive and cooperative relationships. For example, my findings show that firms not only reciprocate for cooperation in exchanging resources or referring customers, but also that they do reciprocate competitive interactions, such as stealing each other's customers. This is in line with the argument that there is only a fine line between competition and cooperation as firms can simultaneously compete and cooperate with other firms in their field (Ingram & Yue, 2008). My findings contribute to this line of argument by presenting empirical evidence from the experiences of managers.

Specifically, my study shows that instead of pre-defining a course of action for relationships, managers interpret their interorganizational field, the issue that they are dealing with at the time (e.g., the sustainability of natural resources), and relevant relation characteristics to choose to implement a proper type of relationship with other firms.

In prior research, scholars such as Peteraf and Bergen (2002, 2003) called for a combination of the distinct approaches to competitor identification that focus solely on the industry structure, strategic similarities or customer needs to develop an exhaustive conceptualization of competition. Accordingly, my study contributes to the literature on competitor identification as my findings show that managers do not focus only on product and resource similarities, market and customer overlaps, or industry structure, but they pay attention to a combination of these key aspects for classifying their competitors. This is important because this integrated approach better represents the complex nature of how managers actually conceptualize competition and identify their competitors.

I also extend research on competitor identification (e.g., Chen, 1996; Thomas & Pollock, 1999) by highlighting the aspects that underlie not only the identification of competitors, but also of cooperators. Specifically, my findings suggest that similar considerations that underlie the identification of competitors are also important for the identification of cooperators. For example, I show that managers define other firms that produce similar products with comparable processing capabilities as their competitors; in addition, managers also identify these processors as their potential cooperators because they possess complementary resources and technologies and have shared interests. My findings also underline that managers identify a set of firms they compete and cooperate with based on their conceptualization of competition and cooperation. For instance, some managers conceptualize competition to be against imports, across states,

within the state, or within fishing communities/towns and others conceptualize it based on products, the sources of supply, processing capabilities, and markets. Building on this argument, I contribute to research on competition by showing that firms display different competitive moves depending on the type and distinct characteristics of firms they are competing with at the time. In my study's context, firms follow different practices to compete with companies that import seafood, other local processors, and forward integrated suppliers. For example, when competing with importers, processors avoid competing with other local processors and try to outcompete seafood importers by offering value-added products, establishing good relations with and educating customers regarding the differences of imported farm-raised and local wild-caught seafood.

Previous reviews on interorganizational relations underlined the importance of paying more attention to managers to shed light on how different relations are formulated and implemented (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Cropper et al., 2008b). I contribute to this literature by focusing on managers' interpretations and studying the key aspects that managers perceive to be important for competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships in their experiences. One of my study's contributions to coopetition research is that my findings show the distinct spheres of coopetition for collective issues and benefits on the one hand and for individual organizations' issues and benefits on the other hand. With a few exceptions, (e.g., Barnett, 2006), prior research predominantly focused on coopetition for business issues (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014) and to my knowledge prior research has not shown the concurrent aspects of coopetition in these two spheres. As concerns the various aspects of coopetition for industry issues, it appears that firms cooperate with different competitors depending on the issue at hand. Relatedly, my study suggests that managers' conceptualization of coopetition within the interorganizational field

change based on the phenomenon under consideration. Additionally, the findings of my study illustrate a range of coopetitive practices and relationships; for example, they show that coopetition may involve jointly solving problems with competitors, including finding ways to cope with the unpredictability of supply and inventory or dealing with customer orders that may surpass the capabilities of individual firms.

I also contribute to the literature on interorganizational relations by bringing together insights from research streams on interorganizational fields, competition, cooperation, coopetition, managers' interpretations, and strategy as practice. My study's findings show that relationships between organizations are embedded in an interorganizational field similar to other organizational actions and strategies. Specifically, the type and nature of relationships are impacted by the interorganizational field while in turn impacting the field itself. My findings also show that other elements in the field, including customers, suppliers, and industry associations play important roles such as transferring information, triggering various relations between firms, and serving as a platform for networking. Building on this argument, I show that competitive, cooperative, and coopetitive relationships are rooted in the field, but how they are formulated and implemented are based on managers' interpretations of the field and organizations. Thus, I also bring in insights from the literature that focuses on managerial practices to identify and highlight the different types of actions and interactions that they perform to carry out relations with other organizations.

Finally, my findings suggest that the characteristics of an interorganizational field have important implications for relations between organizations. These characteristics may be related to natural factors that impact the interorganizational field, such as the shortage of supply in my study's context. They may also be related to established relationships or the ways of doing

business in an interorganizational field such as the practice of relying on non-contractual relations with suppliers, customers, and other firms in the context of my study. In addition, there are general characteristics of interorganizational fields that are more common across different contexts such as resource limitations, and elements of the field that are important for relationships as discussed in the prior literature (Phillips et al., 2000). According to my findings, the characteristics of the interorganizational field have implications for competition, cooperation, and coopetition between firms. For example, as a result of the seasonality in the interorganizational field, during the season firms are intense competitors, but during the off-season they cooperate for industry issues, especially for the sustainability of their resource bases. Therefore, my findings show that research on relationships between organizations should be situated in the interorganizational field and particular attention should be paid to the idiosyncratic characteristics of the field that these relations take place in.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this grounded theory study also have implications for future research on interorganizational relationships. To begin with, the study provides important insights for future research on relationships between organizations by offering theoretical links within and between categories. These categories are related to the interorganizational field, relationship characteristics, identification of competitors and cooperators, and competitive, cooperative and coopetitive relationships. Future research may benefit from the findings of this grounded theory and further study some of these links.

Building on the contributions of my study to the literature on interorganizational relationships, future research should pay close attention to the characteristics of the interorganizational field as these characteristics set the stage for relationships. As discussed

above, the idiosyncratic characteristics that are due to the special environment and the unique ways of doing business in the interorganizational field, as well as more general characteristics, have important implications for how relations are formed and implemented between organizations. Therefore, future research on interorganizational relationships should pay explicit attention to the the characteristics of the interorganizational field that set the stage for relations between organizations in a respective study.

Future research may also focus on the finding that managers define a group of firms as potential cooperators based on prior interactions and explore the determinants and implications of this cooperator identification. This research could benefit from the aspects that my study revealed that underlie the identification of cooperators in this context. For example, research could further investigate the individual and joint roles of industry structures, resource complementarities, and customer needs for the identification of cooperators. Also, building on my findings as well as the established literature on competitor identification (e.g., Chen, 1996; Thomas & Pollock, 1999), future research could explore the similarities and differences between competitor and cooperator identification. A joint investigation of competitor and cooperator identification would also offer vital contributions to research on coopetition by highlighting the overlaps between identified competitors and cooperators.

To depict the content and processual nature of managers' practices for performing relations between organizations, future research in the strategy as practice literature could explore the day-to-day activities of managers and other members of the firm, such as various meetings within and between organizations, phone calls, and industry-wide events for initiating and carrying out relations with these organizations. Moreover, due to the time and resource limitations of top-level executives in large firms, other organizational members such as mid-level

managers and sales associates, may be involved in the formation and implementation of relations with organizations including customers, suppliers, promotion agencies, or distribution channels. Future research could investigate the roles of these employees as boundary spanners and explore the differences between interorganizational relations that are formed by different organizational members.

Finally, future research can further explore managers' conceptualizations of competition, cooperation, and coopetition and shed light on the way they make decisions for choosing between these types of relationships. Especially, the limited research on coopetition can be extended by looking into similarities and differences in managers' decision-making processes of coopetition for industry and business issues. The insights of the present study can inform future research that investigates the determinants and outcomes of coopetition and that seek to identify practices managers utilize to carry out these relationships. Most importantly, future research is needed to elucidate the factors leading to coopetition for industry issues and their implications for other relationships and for the performances of participating firms as well as the collective performance of the industry.

Limitations of the Study

I note that there are some limitations of this study, which are not uncommon in similar research designs that are associated with the context of study as well as the methodology of choice. A key concern regarding the limitations of this study relates to the generalizability of my findings due to the particular characteristics of the interorganizational field in the study's context, which set the stage for relationships and may vary in other industry contexts. For example, the characteristics of the interorganizational field and resulting relations between organizations may differ in relatively larger industries that are more geographically spread with

limited personal interactions between managers. Moreover, as discussed above, some characteristics of the field I studied may be relatively particular to this context and some of the relationships that are due to these characteristics may not be observed in other contexts. Also, this study focused on a single industry context, and it is possible that there are differences in interorganizational relationships between organizations in the same industry versus the ones that operate in different industries. Also, the processors that I focus on in this study are small processors. Large firms might differ regarding how interorganizational relations are formulated and implemented. For instance, as discussed above, in addition to top-level executives that I focused on in this study, managers at other levels and in various capacities may be involved in carrying out certain interorganizational relationships.

With respect to the grounded theory methodology, as explained by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher becomes an object of the study and his focus on particular topics, may have implications for the emerging grounded theory. Similarly, I approached data collection with a particular focus due to the specific research questions I was seeking to answer. For instance, my research questions' focus on interorganizational relationships between firms in the study's context might have inhibited potential findings regarding the roles of other key influential organizations and individuals in the field. Finally, interorganizational relationships are developed over time through a process (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994), however, I collected my data at one point in time due to my research design. In doing so, my study might be potentially leaving out some insights regarding how interorganizational relationships evolve as a result of continuous interactions. For example, my research design did not allow me to capture the formation processes of relations between organizations and how firms switch between competitive and cooperative relationships.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory of the phenomenon of how managers interpret interorganizational fields and relations with other organizations, and accordingly, how relationships unfold in their experiences. The context of the seafood processing industry in a Southern US state enabled me to explore managers' interpretations of their interorganizational field and their practices for building and maintaining relationships with other organizations in their field. The emergent theory synthesized managers' interpretations of the characteristics of the field and relationships, key aspects of identifying competitors and cooperators, coopetition for industry and business issues, and competition. In doing so, the emergent theory contributes to management research in general and specifically to the literatures on interorganizational relationships, interorganizational field, managerial interpretations, and strategy as practice.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Final Interview Guide (as of 04/03/2015)

1. Can you briefly tell me about your background with the company (also ask responsibilities for managers other than CEO or owner)?
2. Can you please (in a nutshell) describe how business works in this industry?
    a. How do you stay current about developments in the industry?
3. What do interactions among seafood processors in the industry look like?
    a. Who do you consider your major competition?
    b. In your experience, how do firms compete in this industry? (If needed, follow-up with: What do you do to compete?) Can you give some examples from your personal experience?
4. Do you also cooperate with some of the firms in your industry?
    a. If so, how would you describe the nature of any such cooperation?
    b. Can you give some examples from your personal experience? (If needed, follow-up how does your cooperation impact your competition?)
5. Could you describe what kinds of interactions you have with other parties or institutions relevant to your industry (such as industry associations, governmental agencies)? (Follow up if needed: universities, marketing, advertising, or consultancy firms)
    a. What is the role of LSPMB and other industry associations and government agencies in the industry? (Follow up: how do they distribute resources)?
    b. Can you give some examples of such interactions and their implications/consequences for your firm?
    c. What is your involvement in these interactions?

VITA

Furkan Amil Gur earned his bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey, in June of 2005. He earned his master's degree in Production Management and Marketing at Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey, in April of 2009. Furkan has worked in advertising industry before he received a merit-based scholarship from the Turkish Ministry of Education to complete his PhD in the United States and he joined Louisiana State University as a PhD student in August of 2010. Furkan Gur's areas of study are interorganizational relationships and entrepreneurship. He has particular interests in coopetition, competitor identification, and opportunity recognition. Furkan is married and has a two year old daughter.