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## Key Drivers of Relationship Commitment in Supply Chain Management: Insights from Thailand's Manufacturing Industry

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### ABSTRACT

Relationship commitment is a vital asset in today's dynamic business, as it cultivates connections among different parties and enhances a company's performance. This study explores how relationship commitment can be enhanced and strengthened, improving supply chain management performance within the Thai manufacturing industry. Based on in-depth interviews with nine executives in the Thai manufacturing sector, trust was found essential. Furthermore, trust promotes integration and collaboration within partnerships. The findings offer effective strategies for enhancing relationship commitment in supply chains, highlighting the crucial role of trust in achieving operational efficiency and success.

*Keywords: resource-based theory, relationship commitment in Thai manufacturing, trust-based supply chain management, qualitative supply chain analysis*

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## Background and Significance of the Research Problem

Establishing strong business relationships is critical in manufacturing supply chains (Hessling et al., 2018; Jang & Lee, 2022), as effective coordination in procurement, production, and logistics is paramount (Soosay, 2024). Robust partnerships empower suppliers and manufacturers to collaborate on technology investments, implement process improvements, and share vital information. Such cooperation drives efficiency and significantly boosts competitiveness (Lambert & Cooper, 2000). Challenges such as raw material shortages (Guo et al., 2024), fluctuating demand (Bustinza et al., 2013), and geopolitical instability (Tse et al., 2024) can significantly affect supply chains. However, building strong partnerships allows companies to engage in effective contingency planning and risk-sharing, enhancing supply chain resilience. Additionally, strengthening commitment between manufacturing firms and their suppliers could mitigate risks within manufacturing supply chains to a great extent (Han & Um, 2024; Um & Han, 2021). As businesses navigate complex market dynamics, cultivating reliable and enduring relationships with suppliers, clients, and other stakeholders is crucial for sustained growth and innovation (Pfajfar et al., 2022).

In the context of Thailand, which holds the position as the second-largest economy in Southeast Asia (Thailand Board of Investment, 2024), manufacturing plays a pivotal role in driving economic development. In 2023, manufacturing propelled the economy, contributing 4.46 trillion Baht to GDP (Statista, 2024). Manufacturing is essential for economic expansion (KPMG, 2023).

The focus on relationship commitment aids Thai firms in managing intricate global supply networks. Operational efficiency and competitiveness rely on collaboration with international suppliers (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2023). Robust supplier relationships enable companies to endure disruptions, particularly during pandemics such as COVID-19 (Leingchan, 2020; Ruamchart, 2023; HSBC, 2024; Mutambik, I. (2024).

Innovation and the uptake of technology necessitate symbiotic partnerships. Strategic partnerships could improve information sharing and collaborative investments in advanced manufacturing techniques within Industry 4.0 (Janmethakulwat & Thanasopon, 2024; Huang et al., 2023). A well-organized and robust supply chain ensures prompt production and distribution, enabling producers to adjust to evolving consumer demands and market dynamics (Nisar et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding and evaluating relationship commitment in Thai manufacturing is essential for addressing issues and enhancing supply chain performance. Investigating this commitment yields numerous advantages. First, understanding the factors influencing commitment allows manufacturers to construct stronger connections with their suppliers and distributors. Second, investigating relationship commitment offers valuable insights

for mitigating risks in Thailand's manufacturing supply chains especially the post-pandemic situation which affect the whole supply chain in the pipeline from the decommitment of the trading partners.

Since relationships are highly valued in Thai culture, it is crucial to comprehend the importance of commitment and trust in business dealings. This implies the disparity in relationship commitment in Thai manufacturing. This comprehension is crucial for navigating the complicated procedures of conducting business in Thailand and establishing robust, enduring sustainability. Most importantly, the Resource-Based View (RBV) is applied as a solid theoretical foundation.

### **Research Objective**

This study aims to study how relationship commitment affects supply chain performance in manufacturing sector in Thailand through a resource-based lens. To this end, in-depth interview was conducted with executives from multinational companies crossing various manufacturing sectors, including energy, chemicals, food and beverage, automotive, packaging, and electronics.

### **Scope of the Research**

This study seeks to address several gaps in existing research. Firstly, many studies on relationship commitment have been conducted in Western countries or within service industries, with a limited focus on manufacturing in emerging markets like Thailand (Korathad & Boonpattarakon, 2017; Rungsithong et al., 2017). Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped business relationships globally, but its impact on Thailand's manufacturing sector has not been thoroughly examined. Thirdly, there is a lack of studies utilizing qualitative methods (interviews or case studies) to gain in-depth insights from senior management on relationship commitment in Thailand-based multinational corporations. To fill the gaps, in-depth Interviews were conducted across various regions of Thailand from June to August 2023, providing a rich and immersive exploration of participants' experiences, insights, and the nuanced realities of their professional lives in Thai manufacturing. Each interview typically lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, allowing ample opportunity to uncover factual information and the emotional landscapes, perceptions, and judgments shaping the interviewees' perspectives (Jepson et al., 2014; Holloway, 2008; Zhu, 2016).

The remaining study is structured as follows: The literature review explains TCT theory to establish a strong theoretical foundation for the study. The research methodology is then

presented, followed by a comprehensive presentation of the findings, an in-depth discussion, conclusive insights, targeted recommendations, and limitations. The author acknowledges that the statistical generalizability of findings from elite interviews may be constrained by the small, frequently non-random sample size; yet, the profound insights obtained might still provide significant theoretical transferability.

## Literature Review

### The Resource-Based View (RBV)

Wernerfelt (1984) first introduced the RBV as “a resource-based view of the firm,” examining how a firm’s resources are classified and their relationship to its products. In 1991, Barney (1991) advanced the central concept of the RBV, now widely regarded as one of the most influential ideas in the field, especially in explaining how competitive advantage is achieved (Barney & Mackey, 2018; Amaya et al., 2024). Barney (1991) emphasized that to achieve organizational competitive advantage, resources must be valuable, rare, imitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). He added that a valuable resource enables a firm to develop and implement strategies that enhance efficiency and effectiveness. This is particularly significant when the firm has limited resources, as it can create a competitive advantage and establish the firm as a market leader (Barney, 2007).

By leveraging scarce resources, a firm can drive innovation and respond more adeptly to customer needs, leading to sustainable growth. Moreover, a resource that is difficult to replicate poses challenges for competitors attempting to imitate it. This may stem from distinctive factors such as proprietary technology, exclusive organizational processes, or specialized knowledge, setting the firm apart in the marketplace (Purba et al., 2023). Such imitable resources can significantly contribute to the firm’s enduring competitive edge by establishing barriers safeguarding its unique positioning (Zvarimwa & Zimuto, 2022). Finally, non-substitutable resources are critical assets that cannot be easily replaced by alternatives offering similar benefits. These unique capabilities are vital for achieving strategic objectives and maintaining competitiveness in the market (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2003; Zvarimwa & Zimuto, 2022). For instance, a highly skilled workforce or an established brand reputation serves as a non-substitutable asset crucial for delivering value to customers and ensuring long-term success (Kero & Bogale, 2023). By focusing on these valuable, imitable, and non-substitutable resources, firms can build a robust foundation for sustained competitive advantage.

### **Relationship Commitment as a Reflection of Sustained Competitive Advantage**

The RBV suggests that a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) occurs when a firm possesses resources that meet the VRIN criteria (Mailani et al., 2024; Utami & Alamanos, 2023). By effectively leveraging VRIN resources, firms can attract more resources and long-term orientation from their partners, leading to strong relational commitment (Dyer & Singh, 1998). In the RBV context, examining how manufacturing firms cultivate relationship commitment by establishing trust through transparent information sharing is key to identifying how enduring, sustainable partnerships are formed within supply chain management. Conversely, the Resource-Based View (RBV), when applied to relational constructs in developing countries, highlights the challenges of employing a paradigm primarily focused on internal resources in contexts where relational dynamics and external factors significantly impact competitive advantage. VRIN resources (Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable) may display unique attributes in relational contexts compared to asset-based ones, underscoring the importance of understanding the interaction of relational resources such as trust, networks, and informal institutions in developing countries.

### **The Key Drivers of Relationship Commitment.**

Previous studies highlight key factors that drive relationship commitment in supply chains. Trust is vital for developing strong partnerships and long-term engagement (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It facilitates effective information sharing and collaboration and reduces information hoarding, ultimately fostering innovation and enriching the industrial ecosystem (Imam, 2024). Information sharing is essential for effective supply chain management, enabling timely data exchange that enhances coordination and responsiveness (Monczka et al., 1998; Yue et al., 2022). Abdulla and Musa (2014) emphasize that it allows firms to access accurate information, aiding decision-making and resource optimization quickly. Supply chain integration (SCI) coordinates processes and communication across the supply chain, facilitating the efficient movement of materials and knowledge to meet customer needs (Stevens & Johnson, 2016; Khanuja & Jain, 2019). Effective information sharing is crucial for achieving this integration and enhancing supply chain performance (Monczka et al., 1998; Yue et al., 2022).

In summary, mutual trust established through effective information sharing is essential for fostering sustainable relationships among supply chain partners, enhancing collaboration, and improving overall performance (Abdullah & Musa, 2014).

## **Research Methodology**

This study utilized qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews to investigate the intricacies of supply chain processes in the Thai manufacturing industry. The semi-structured interview method is optimal for exploratory research as it effectively investigates complex human behaviours and organizational processes (Galletta, 2013). It fosters contact between the interviewer and interviewee, cultivates a more informal atmosphere, and aids in the generation or reconstruction of information, hence enhancing the research process (Mason, 2002; Ruslin et al., 2022).

Semi-structured content analysis questions that facilitated in-depth responses were developed by the researcher. The questions initially began in general, but their development was thematic, making them applicable and deep. In order to ensure inter-coder reliability, it was piloted against trained coders who coded separately for a data subset. This is to reveal and discuss if any discrepancies exist so that the coding scheme can be refined. In an effort to reverse social desirability bias, researchers clearly inform interviewees the interview goals to provide a comfortable environment for honest responses. After the interview, notes were shared with the interviewees to ensure the accuracy of the information collected. More importantly, the study obtained ethical approval from the right institutional review board with informed consent from participants, ensuring their privacy and rights. This reflects responsible research and the establishment of participant trust. To summarize, the detailed interview provides significant understanding of fostering relationship commitment in Thai industrial supply chains by enhancing the understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences while enabling the exploration of new topics. It also offers important insights into the ways relationship commitment is nurtured within Thai manufacturing supply chains (Bryman, 2016; Bearman, 2022).

### **Participants**

Industry experts from top management teams were recruited through snowball sampling to gather diverse yet pertinent insights. This approach facilitated valuable introductions via referrals, enabling access to key industry influencers with significant expertise. Although 11 distinguished industry experts were approached, nine ultimately agreed to participate. These experts held prominent management positions, and their collective insights were instrumental in constructing a detailed and nuanced understanding of the industry landscape, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in the Thai manufacturing sector. According to Creswell (1998), conducting between five and 25 interviews can effectively illuminate specific phenomena.

Accordingly, the nine industry experts consulted were considered to offer a wealth of knowledge encompassing the entire supply chain of their respective organizations.

Most executives (7) were over 50, indicating that experienced professionals dominated leadership roles, primarily in governance, supply chain management, operations, global purchasing, research and development, and engineering, the majority of which were on the Board of Directors. Most held a master's degree, while one had a PhD and another a Bachelor's, demonstrating that industry experience can sometimes replace higher education. This highlights trends in executive leadership, emphasizing the prevalence of experienced professionals and high educational qualifications.

### **Data Collection**

The saturation technique was meticulously applied throughout the data collection process, with interviews continuing until no additional insights were uncovered. By prioritizing the depth and quality of information, the research yielded a robust analysis of the complexities involved (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Boonsuwan & Zhu, 2023). Social desirability bias was a significant factor during the interviews (Winterstein et al., 2024). To mitigate this and improve reliability, the study's relevance and methodology (Bispo Júnior, 2022) were clarified, and the interview approach was adjusted. A trial was conducted with a few interviewees, and sensitive topics were avoided. Additionally, explanations and clarifications were offered for the interviewees during the interview process.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis is a research technique utilized to systematically examine textual, visual, or audio materials by categorizing patterns, themes, or interpretations within the content (Krippendorff, 2018). It is frequently used in qualitative and mixed-methods research to make sense of social phenomena, media messages, or organizational communications (Neuendorf, 2017). In this study, after reading the transcripts, the text relevant to predefined topics was underlined and coded with pre-determined categories.

## **Results**

These results signify that the study's findings have been aggregated and are prepared for analysis or discourse. It indicates a culmination of endeavors that may yield more insights or uses. This preparedness for analysis marks a critical juncture in the research process, allowing for the examination of collected data to achieve deeper insights. Ultimately, it offers prospects for new breakthroughs or practical applications stemming from the study's results. The rich

context provided by the semi-structured interviews was thoroughly analyzed, while the open-ended discussions uncovered insights unlikely to be revealed through traditional quantitative methods. Specific excerpts and anecdotes reinforced the study's arguments, highlighting the key themes and complex interplay of influential factors.

**Finding 1: Relationship commitment is a foundation for sustainable business growth.**

The interviewees were asked, "From your perspective, what role does relationship commitment play in business operations, particularly supply chain management?" All interviewees agreed that stability and efficiency depended on a committed relationship, enabling companies to prosper and react promptly to changing market conditions while influencing business performance.

1. Operational Stability and Performance Enhancement – Commitment enhances agreement adherence, promoting smooth operations and improving business performance. Strong supplier relationships provide mutual support in emergencies, minimizing disruptions.

*Interviewee 2 explained: "Relationship commitment requires both parties to adhere to agreed rules, stabilizing operations and enhancing business performance. A reliable supplier helps us during emergencies, reducing disruptions, while frequent supplier changes may indicate internal challenges jeopardizing operational integrity."*

2. Trust building and long-term collaboration – Relationship commitment goes beyond contractual obligations, evolving into trust, transparency, and open communication, enabling businesses to navigate challenges and enhance their collective expertise effectively.

*Interviewee 8 explained: "A solid business relationship can turn into friendship, allowing us to frankly address issues and find solutions while promoting growth by quickly solving challenges."*

3. Code of Conduct and Partnership Integrity—Commitment guarantees professionalism and moral conduct, strengthening confidence in business contacts. Repeated non-compliance may erode trust, and devotion is a sign of long-term partnerships.

*Interviewee 9 explained: "Commitment to the relationship involves adhering to a shared code. A partner crossing these limits without justification undermines trust, potentially altering our relationship."*

**Finding 2: Trust, particularly in suppliers, promotes relationship commitment.**

When asked, "What do you think about the role of trust in your supply chain management?" The interviewees considered trust crucial in supplier relationships, serving as the



foundation for sustainable and effective collaboration. Such trust in suppliers can be performance-based, accumulated experience-based, or long-term-oriented.

1. Performance-based trust: Trust in suppliers is built on consistent performance, measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) like Quality, Cost, and Delivery (QCD). Suppliers who reliably deliver high-quality products, maintain cost efficiency, and meet deadlines, promote business confidence.

*Interviewee 1 explained: "Trust is crucial for the company's key suppliers and based on KPIs like QCD. A strong level of trust fosters strategic partnerships, ensuring suppliers consistently meet performance criteria while reinforcing long-term business relationships."*

2. Accumulated experience-based trust: Trust in suppliers is built through consistent positive interactions and long-term engagement. Suppliers reinforce their creditability by upholding commitments, demonstrating transparency, acting ethically, and developing trust and stable connections. Businesses possessing long-standing relationships with reliable suppliers benefit from lower risk, improved coordination, and greater strategic alignment.

*Interviewee 3 explained: "Partnership and integrity are cornerstones of our interactions. Trust evolves from the accumulation of positive experiences with our strategic suppliers."*

3. Long-term oriented-based trust: Supplier trust involves mutual commitment and agreement adherence. It relies on contractual compliance, respect for regulations, and ongoing support between partners, fostering the predictability and stability crucial for long-term collaboration.

*Interviewee 6 explained: "Our long-standing collaboration with suppliers fosters mutual support and trust, strengthening our relationships. Maintaining our commitments and keeping to agreements ensure sustainable partnerships."*

### **Finding 3: Trust facilitates information sharing, enhancing relationship commitment.**

Some interviewees also provided insights into how trust facilitates information sharing in supply chain activities and business partnership commitment.

1. Sharing crucial information with partners promotes collaboration and transparency, aligning with relational governance theory, and highlighting the importance of trust-based agreements over rigid contracts. Open communication reduces uncertainty and misunderstanding, leading to smoother operations. According to interviewee 4, dependable partnerships are vital for navigating challenges and seizing opportunities in volatile markets.

*Interviewee 4 explained: “We prioritize sharing crucial information with our partners, allowing them to adapt to our evolving needs while avoiding uncertainties and misunderstandings. Through collaboration and transparency, we can progress toward our goals. A dependable partner is essential for navigating challenges and seizing opportunities.”*

2. Trust is fundamental to building and sustaining partnerships, fostering collaboration, adaptability, and growth. Trust enables effective information-sharing, informed decision-making, and operational adaptability, improving business performance and facilitating long-term success.

*Interviewee 9 explained: “Trust is essential in a successful partnership as it fosters collaboration, allowing us to share information and adapt to changes effectively while enhancing business performance and creating new opportunities.”*

#### **Finding 4: Information-sharing practice facilitates relationship commitment**

When asked, “Can you describe the impact of information sharing on your supply chain management?” the interviewees indicated that open and proactive discussions reduce uncertainty, prevent disruptions, and strengthen relationship commitment. Companies must balance openness and confidentiality to protect sensitive data while promoting transparency.

1. Enhanced decision-making and agility: According to some interviewees, information sharing enables companies to make timely, informed decisions. Access to accurate, current data, especially in supply chain management, helps firms anticipate challenges, evaluate alternatives, and implement solutions efficiently while enhancing competitiveness and operational efficiency.

*Interviewee 6 explained: “Effective information sharing is crucial for our success. Prompt notification allows us to address challenges and minimize risks quickly. Keeping each other updated empowers timely decisions, enhancing business preparedness. Collaboration with suppliers is key; strengthening our partnerships and helping us to confidently navigate changes.”*

2. Risk Mitigation and Business Resilience: Interviewees consider effective information sharing crucial for risk reduction. Keeping stakeholders informed allows companies to create contingency plans and respond swiftly to supply chain disruptions, market fluctuations, or operational challenges, minimizing potential negative impacts. However, while transparency is beneficial, confidentiality between partners is essential to protect sensitive information.

*Interview 5 explained: “Sharing information with our suppliers signifies trust. Open communication helps minimize uncertainty and prevent operational disruptions.”*

3. Relationship strengthening through communication: Strong communication enhances relationship quality. Sharing insights, updates, and challenges is crucial in a competitive landscape, allowing firms to better respond to market fluctuations, innovate collaboratively, and achieve shared goals. In global supply chains, raw material shortages or transportation delays can significantly impact operations.

*Interviewee 8 explained: "The effectiveness of information sharing is closely tied to our relationship-building approach, enhancing partnership connections while enabling us to better prepare for potential changes."*

**Finding 5: Supplier integration fosters relationship commitment, with trust as the catalyst**

When asked, "Could you share your thoughts on how working closely with suppliers impacts your supply chain performance?" the interviewees emphasized that it is essential for effective supply chain management. Trust improves teamwork, communication, and project alignment under the strategic goals of securing stable supply sources, fostering sustainability, and encouraging innovative product development.

*Interviewee 9 explained: "Working closely with suppliers means we can deliver products to the market on time, with fewer concerns about the shortage of raw materials."*

Robust supplier integration and cooperation can significantly improve operational efficiency, reducing supply chain risks and uncertainties while improving demand forecasting and inventory management, which benefits all parties.

This research study uses direct content analysis to analyze structured data. Key concepts or variables are defined as initial encoding categories through RBV. Texts are highlighted, coded with predefined categories, and subcategories are rechecked. Subcategories are arranged into a hierarchical structure. Texts are highlighted, coded with predefined categories, and subcategories are rechecked and arranged into a hierarchical structure. This method ensures comprehensive and accurate data analysis.

## Discussion

Based on the results, our discussions provided valuable insights into the current dynamics of trust, nuances of information sharing, and the strength of relationship commitment. The perspectives shared by the interviewees highlight the critical importance of trust in fostering robust relationship commitment while also underscoring the fundamental role of adequate information sharing in cultivating successful partnerships.

This study highlights three dimensions of trust, specific to the Thai manufacturing context, offering new insights for local industries and academics. They emphasized that primary suppliers, as strategic partners, display high integrity and expertise, promoting a collaborative environment. A lack of trust can lead to misinterpretations, profit allocation disputes, and cooperation breakdown, harming business performance (Farouk et al. 2023).

In addition, effective information sharing is crucial for a well-functioning supply chain, as it enhances communication and data exchange, leading to improved response times, streamlined operations, reduced costs, and less waste. Trust plays a vital role in fostering collaboration, reducing information hoarding, strengthening partner relationships, and driving innovation in Thailand's industrial ecosystem (Imam, 2024). Conversely, a lack of information sharing can erode trust, increase conflict, and complicate decision-making, jeopardizing partnerships and corporate operations (Ali et al., 2017).

Supplier integration is essential for improving operational practices in supply chain management. By enhancing relationships and communication with suppliers, companies can reduce complexity, streamline operations, and increase efficiency (Anwar et al., 2025). Effective collaboration also enables a smoother flow of materials and information, allowing firms to respond quickly to market demands. Conversely, a decline in supplier integration can lead to supply chain disruptions, quality issues, and higher costs (Madzimore, 2020).

Four research propositions arise for future investigation based on the insights gained from the interviews.

**Proposition 1: Trust influences relationship commitment**

Trust directly and significantly impacts relationship commitment. When individuals trust one another, their commitment to maintaining and nurturing the relationship is naturally elevated.

**Proposition 2: Information sharing affects relationship commitment**

Open and transparent communication can lead to a more profound sense of connection and accountability, enhancing the commitment between the parties involved. The contribution is that information sharing to relationship commitment offers a significant foundation for comprehending how relationships are established, sustained, and reinforced through the open and transparent flow of information.

**Proposition 3: The influence of information sharing on relationship commitment is mediated by trust.**

Sharing information plays a significant role in the level of commitment within a relationship, with trust serving as a key mediator. This proposition emphasizes the importance of trust as a vital intermediary in the connection between information sharing and the development of strong, lasting commitments in partnerships.

**Proposition 4: Supplier integration affects relationship commitment**

Supplier integration strengthens the bond between companies and their suppliers in the supply chain. It encourages interdependence and lasting partnerships through smooth collaboration, efficient information exchange, and collective planning. This integration enhances overall relationships by fostering trust and establishing lasting alliances. Moreover, it aids in risk reduction, encourages teamwork, and ultimately boosts supply chain performance.

The trust-commitment-performance pathway may not encompass all variables that affect performance. Additional factors, like company culture, leadership styles, and job design, can significantly influence performance outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

This qualitative study adds to the existing literature on relationship commitment by revealing how RC is developed in the Thai context and developing four propositions. This offers new avenues for research into trust dynamics in various cultural and business contexts. In practice, developing relationship commitment in supply chain management is essential for long-term partnerships. Effective tactics could include assessing potential partners' qualifications, establishing clear KPIs to build accountability, improving supply chain integration through collaborative planning and precise demand forecasting, and establishing efficient information-sharing protocols to protect sensitive information and confidentiality.

## **Future Studies**

One major limitation of this study is its small sample size of interviewees, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. To enhance the validity of the proposed model, a future in-depth interview with more interviewees is recommended. The findings also pertain to the manufacturing industry in Thailand; thus, exploring related issues in other industries could show a bigger picture of the dynamics of trust.

in addition, future studies can develop an integrated framework to classify relational resources—such as trust, transparency, and shared norms—that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) in the Thai industrial context. From this point, researchers are encouraged to empirically test the proposed framework using quantitative techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A mixed-method study is practically recommended to reveal how relational resources can foster firm performance and innovation capability. By identifying most influential relational assets, this mix-method study not only benefit academic community but also practitioners to develop strategies to sustain business growth in Thailand's competitive manufacturing sector.

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