

**Advancing External Firm Knowledge and Building Network Ties:
A Mixed Method Examination of Apparel Industry Conditions**

Understanding how manufacturers engage in knowledge sharing with other firms is key in providing insights for the reshoring and strengthening of US apparel and sewn products manufacturing. Based on both social capital theory and the knowledge-based view of the firm perspective, this paper analyzes the conditions within the firm that support knowledge absorptive capacity, social interaction, and a people-oriented culture in building network ties to advance sharing of resources along the supply chain. Manufacturers of apparel and sewn products operating within a western US state form the sample population for this mixed method exploration. Study 1 involves a four-year qualitative examination of manufacturers across the state. Findings highlighted the frequency of knowledge as a topic of external organizational discussion. Study 2 probed aspects of knowledge quantitatively using an online survey with 38 participating manufacturing firm owners. Results suggested strong associations among the three independent variables and network ties generating an adjusted R² of 0.766. A significant two-way interaction effect was found for absorptive capacity and social interaction indicating their positive effect on network ties. The relationship between absorptive capacity and network ties was found to be greater with higher levels of social interaction. Theoretical implications and suggestions for application of findings are offered.