

## **Doctoral thesis in Cluster D “Networking in Manufacturing”:**

### **COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS**

A Systems Theoretical Approach to Interorganizational Collaborative Relationships

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#### **Abstract:**

In different forms, collaborative networks have been recognized as 'the societal structure of the 21st. century'. At the heart of these networks are the interactions between and among organizations: the interorganizational collaborative relationships. These relationships have been studied for almost 50 years under different labels, such as 'Strategic Alliances', 'Hybrid Governance Forms' and 'Collaborative Supply Chains', and different benefits have been associated with them. Nevertheless, high failure rates have been often reported in literature, suggesting that the existing understanding of interorganizational collaborative relationships is still incomplete.

This work abstracts from specific types of interorganizational collaborative relationships and contributes to their understanding by focusing on their nature. Based on second-order cybernetics and social systems theory a novel theoretical model is therefore proposed: the Collaborative System. This model explains: a. the organizational function of these relationships; b. their nature and structure; c. their emergence and evolution; and, d. the high failure rates observed in practice. Obeying the requirements of a good theory, the proposed model sheds new light not only on the understanding of interorganizational collaborative relationships, but also on the research and practice of collaboration.