Thesis Abstract: The Management of Regional Economic Development Organisations with a Particular Emphasis on Funder Relationships

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Abstract of Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of New England, Armidale

The study aims to assist understanding of the management and organizational behaviour of regional development organisations in non-metropolitan Australia. The objective is to find new methodologies for studying regional development. The study will increase stakeholders' knowledge of appropriate management techniques.

This study has been undertaken when Australia is experiencing rural/urban and rural/coastal population movements exacerbated by difficult economic conditions in inland areas.

Maintenance of the economy in rural communities is the background to this work.

The theoretical context adopted for the study proposes that development organisations are entities operating within an environment which exercises political economic and social demands (an open systems view). However, the open system is modified here by the addition of permeable organisational boundaries.

The style of the thesis is empirical and multi-disciplinary rather than theoretical. Disciplines such as government, non-profit sector management, regional economic development and organisation theory contribute metaconcepts and diverse perspectives. A modified case study method is applied to two organisations in New South Wales, one government-owned and one community-based non-profit. A new analytical tool compares the impacts of five critical incidents upon each organisation, by their effect and source.

A comparison of summarised case study information suggests that organisational behaviour during the critical incidents differed distinctly. Specifically the non-profit organisation appeared to be more evenly: balanced than the government organisation in the quantity of its dealings with all stakeholders. Qualitatively, the former also had more positive transactions overall. Further, the government organisation appeared to have more negative transactions in total than the non-profit.

Strategic management of permeable organisational boundaries and of external relationships is proposed as being significant for organisational independence and viability. Five management factors are proposed as a framework for balanced proactive management. Finally, the study canvasses possible productive roles for stakeholders in their support of regional development organisations.

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