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APPROACHES ON THE COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract:
Within this study, we approached the concept of "competitive intelligence" (CI), which we consider a key element for the success of a business, especially in the current period, characterized by numerous economic and financial turbulence. According to Society of Competitive Intelligence (SCIP), competitive intelligence is defined as a method of ethical and moral collection, analysis and dissemination of information regarding the competitive environment, opportunities, vulnerabilities, and intentions of business competitors. Education in the field of CI enhances the ability of managers to cope with risks, to resolve the threats from competition, to anticipate market opportunities and to sustain or to gain a market advantage. In order to present a more consistent view of competitive intelligence, we have highlighted in the body of our study the importance of organizational culture and intelligence, and the various approaches of specialized literature on competitive intelligence: practical view, academic and interdisciplinary view. The main conclusion is that competitive intelligence supports the manager in making better documented decisions, with greater speed and confidence. In this sense, it becomes difficult to identify any aspect of the activity of the company that does not have a benefit as a result of the use of CI. Regarded as an instrument to improve the competitiveness, CI contributes to the continuous improvement of the quality of the products, services and solutions offered by companies, and on the other hand, has an important role in increasing the companies innovation capability.

Key words: competitive intelligence, organizational culture, strategic intelligence, competitive advantage, management of the organization.

JEL classification: L26, M14.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to capture the complexity of the concept of "competitive intelligence" and to highlight the importance of which it has in the process of decision-making. When some people come into contact with the term competitive intelligence (CI), they are often thinking of industrial intelligence or intelligence itself. Even though it may be linked to them, CI mostly reffers to the development of a systematic program regarding the collection, analysis and processing of external information and knowledge (or internal), in order to improve the company's ability to make decisions (Liebowitz, 2006, p. 57).

Knowledge management (KM) and *business intelligence* (BI) are closely related to CI. KM focuses on how you can best manage knowledge within your organization, and externally - to customers of the organization and its stakeholders. Of course, some cultures are more lax and less receptive to the sharing of knowledge: for example, Canada has proven to be more diligent in this respect than the United Kingdom or France (Calof and Wright, 2008), which has an effect on people's mood to convey to each other information and knowledge. Similarly, BI is concerned with improving the way information is taken and shared, in order to make it widely available throughout the organization.

CI is similar, to a certain extent, with the practice of a sport. Examination of adversaries is useful to work out a game plan in advance, in order to prepare for confrontation. For example, as a tennis player, you can learn from others' game that your opponent has a weak backhand and is slightly slower on the ground. This CI can help you develop winning strategies, by sending the majority of the balls to your opponent's backhand and running him on all sides of the court. Of course, the planning and execution are two different things. It is possible to have a good strategy and a plan based on CI, but if they are not well enforced or adapted in the process (if the strategy

proves ineffective), success will belong to the opponent. In the most simple way, CI represents: collection, analysis, development and management – collecting information and appropriate knowledge, analysis, development of an approach based on the synthesis of the results and implementing the strategy.

Competitive intelligence is nothing but the process of identifying and collecting relevant information periodically about existing and potential competitors of the company. After the information is collected from various sources, it is analyzed in order to understand the possible market strategies and future directions of the competition. Competitive intelligence will generate the reduction of costs, mitigate risk, increase productivity and reduce the reaction time of a company. To be effective, a competitive intelligence system should produce a steady flow of accurate and current information, which must be considered by decision-makers of the company and converted into action, because without action (closure), a competitive intelligence system is useless.

FROM INDIVIDUAL TO ORGANISATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Change is omnipresent – nothing stays the same. A closer look reveals, usually, changing elements, even where it seems that everything is unchanged from the surface. For example, the small town where you raised may appear to you just as you remember it: insignificant traffic, beautiful places, neat houses, the same decent people. However, walking through the city, you will notice that things are not as they were: the cinema entrance no longer costs 2 lei, but 10 lei; the main employer in the city has moved most of it's operations outside the city area; many of the small businesses went bankrupt because of the economic turmoil. Even your highschool, with so many good memories, was transformed into an adult education center.

Your hometown looks the same on the surface, but upon closer examination, reveals that change occured. The paradox "change is constant" is completely true. But how can change be constant? We have also heard the expression "people never change." Is this true? There are certainly many events in life that can change a person. However, some believe that the genetic composition of an individual requires a certain stability and pattern such that the environment may change, but the person never really changes.

The same argument is available for knowledge management. Knowledge management involves best leveraging knowledge internally and externally in an organization and creating a process for valuing the organization's intangible assets. Some people say that knowledge cannot be managed, i.e., the environment in which knowledge is housed, transferred, and used can change, but knowledge itself cannot be controlled. On the contrary, Liebowitz (2006) believes that knowledge, as well as the environment itself, can be managed.

When discussing transformation, a fundamental question appears: do you have to first change the macro-level organizational culture before new initiatives (that may not fit the current organizational culture) can be introduced, or do you match the approach to the current organizational culture to achieve successful change at an individual level for possible incremental propagation at the organizational level? As it could take 10 to 14 years to change a large organization's macro-culture, Liebowitz (2006) believes that it is best to match an approach to the current organizational culture to succeed, rather than force-fitting an approach that goes against the macro-organizational culture. As people start to embrace the new initiative, some individual learning takes place that, over time, should lead to collective organizational learning and transformation.

Some, mainly from the organizational learning community, could say that changing the culture must be done before injecting a new approach into the organization, because using an approach with the existing culture may perpetuate the same culture that currently exists. If you want organizations to change, this school of thought indicates that a top-down cultural shift is needed versus a bottom-up approach.

In his disertation from 2003, presented at the George Washington University, Juan Roman concluded that it is best to align knowledge management strategies with existing cultures (at least for government and not-for-profits) to better ensure knowledge management success. Next, we will analyse an example in which organizational transformation is a challenge (Liebowitz, 2006, p. 6). The Department of Homeland Security in the United States has about 177.000 employees from over 20 agencies. Each of these agencies has its own culture. To share information and knowledge through various levels of the relatively new department, various cultural barriers have to be broken down. This is quite a tall order for trying to develop an integrated, cohesive department in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. However, for organizational intelligence to flourish within the department, there must be a massive cultural transformation to synergize the department. Instead of trying for a mass transformation of the large department, perhaps the subcultures of the component agencies working within the department could be addressed. In this manner, this transformational task may not be as daunting.

An analogy to the issue of changing the macro-organizational culture first before new initiatives can be introduced is throwing a large rock in the water and making a huge wave. In this respect, some say there must be a large impact first before organizational transformation can take place. According to another opinion (Liebowitz, 2006), throwing a pebble in the water may be a better way to organizational transformation. In this manner, incremental improvement through individual learning can be accomplished, which can lead to the desired collective effects.

Organisational intelligence refers to the collective assemblage of value-added benefits derived from the organization's intangible assets (knowledge from employees, management, stakeholders, and customers). To increase the IQ of the organization, we should first build a hierarchy of components that contribute to the intelligence of an organization. The traditional hierarchy is shown in Figure 1.

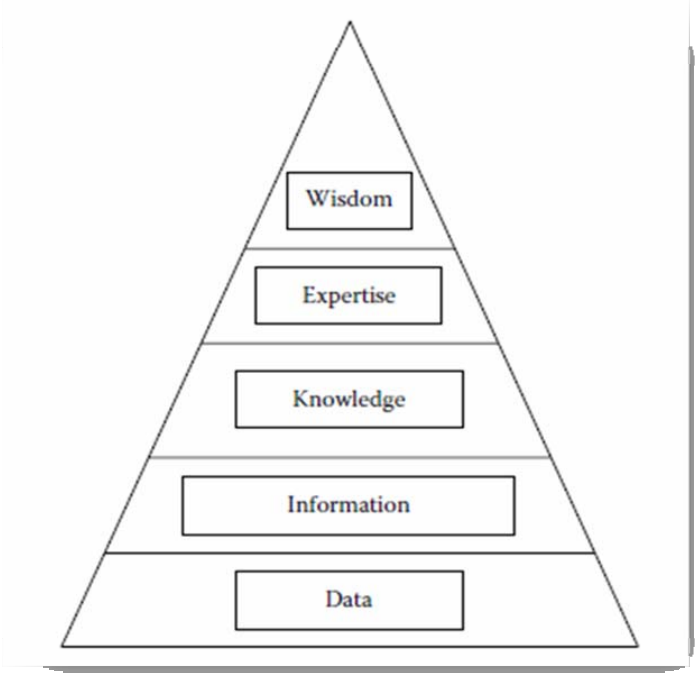

Figure 1. The intelligence hierarchy
Source: Liebowitz (2006, p. 7)

Data relates to discerned elements. Once the data is patterned in some way, it becomes information. Information plus insights and experience becomes knowledge. Knowledge in a specialized area becomes expertise. Expertise turns into wisdom after many years of experience and lessons learned.

How does culture then influence organizational intelligence? If organizational intelligence includes human capital, then how employees perceive themselves and how they fit into the organizational environment can dramatically affect the growth or decline of human capital. Let us think of an an example. Suppose there is a very creative person who doesn't like to deal with the bureaucracies and rules that may be enforced upon him/her in the hierarchical, very structured organization. Also, we suppose that the boss is a very controlling person who likes to micromanage his subordinates. It probably would be difficult for the above mentioned person to cope very long and thrive in this kind of a constrained environment. His/her creativity may be hampered in this climate or culture, which would probably diminish his/her innovation and productivity.

According to Dave DeLong, in his book titled *Lost Knowledge: Confronting the Threat of an Aging Workforce* (2004), a culture's support for knowledge retention can be determined by the levels of trust in the organization, which is often reflected in a shared sense of purpose. Organizational intelligence can be enhanced if there is a knowledge-sharing culture in the organization. Otherwise, people will be discouraged to share the knowledge and confidence in the organization will be diminished. As DeLong points out, Delta Air Lines asked more than 50 high-performing employees who were leaving voluntarily to share their knowledge and explain different aspects of their jobs with others before leaving the company. Delta Air Lines held luncheons to recognize and thank these individuals for their service and for participating in this knowledge transfer program. This resonated very well with the remaining employees of Delta and helped sustain trust levels and build support for other knowledge retention activities. In this case, culture again (through trust) affected the organizational intelligence by facilitating a knowledge-sharing atmosphere to create synergies.

A PRACTICAL APPROACH OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Many scholars have written about intelligence over the years. The Global Intelligence Alliance (2007a) indicated a strong need for intelligence: "Today's business environment demands a comprehensive system for managing risks in the external business environment. Never before have the forces of globalization been as intense as they presently are. Most business executives feel that these forces of change will have a major impact on their organisations." The Global Intelligence Alliance is a consulting group of individual companies and/or individuals, represented in a number of locations, and their findings revealed that companies were grappling with the need to better understand the complexity of the external environment and integrate that into their strategic planning process (Calof and Wright, 2008).

According to Gilad (2004), there was a need for more formal intelligence in major companies. He found that almost 2/3 of the respondents in his survey had been surprised by as many as three high-impact competitive events in the past five ears. In addition, 97% of the respondents said their companies lacked an early warning system. To what extent have corporations recognised the need to develop what is known as an intelligence capacity? In a Market Wire (2007) press release, it was reported that: "America's largest 1,000 companies were expected to increase their spending on staff and activities associated with Competitive Intelligence to at least $10 billion by 2012, from current spending of about $1 billion. As a means of comparison, this number was close to zero only twenty years ago, when whatever money spent in this arena was usually buried within the market research or perhaps strategic planning budgets."

Different estimates of the size of the CI market have been reported in the media. Reuters (2001) reported that the market for business intelligence was worth about US$2 billion a year worldwide, including services ranging from detailed investigations to a "news clipping" service. At a corporate level, a survey of 520 CI practitioners worldwide by the Competitive Intelligence Foundation (2006) reported that over 25% of respondents said their company's total CI spending in 2000 topped $100.000. Almost 14% said their company spent over $500.000 on CI or CI-related activities (Calof and Wright, 2008).

Other groups have focused their attention on understanding how firms manage CI, rather than the size of their CI budget. The Global Intelligence Alliance (2005, 2007b) analyzed the integrated intelligence capacity among the largest international firms with a response rate of 287 in 2005 and 281 in 2007. They reported that 87% of the companies interviewed had some form of integrated intelligence capability with a systematic approach for collecting and analysing information about their external environment. These studies covered: Asia-Pacific, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, India, Mexico, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the UK and the USA (Calof and Wright, 2008).

Due to the increasing focus on CI activity within the media and consulting environment, it is not surprising that there has been some public debate about why CI is important and what its value might be to companies. Business Week (2001) magazine reported on how companies with well-established CI programmes enjoyed greater earnings per share (EPS) than companies in the same industry without CI programmes. Among the examples cited was Texas Instruments: in this case, the CI team uncovered the need to pursue an acquisition before a rival could do so, and was thus able to protect what is now a US $100 million business with enormous growth potential (Calof and Wright, 2008).

PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002) reported the following: CEOs who rated competitor information as being either “very” or “critically” important grew revenues by 14.2%, versus 11.8% for all others. Also, those placing a premium on competitor information are outperforming their peers on sustained revenue growth, gross margins, and a number of other key performancemeasures.

ACADEMICAL APPROACH OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

References to the concept of "environmental scan", a predecessor of CI, are found in the literature since the 1960s (Aguilar, 1967), with further developments in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Fahey and King, 1977; Daft et al., 1988; Hambrick, 1982; Culnan, 1983; Grabowski, 1987; Daft and Macintosh, 1981; Slater and Narver, 1994). More meaningful and more relevant work was done in the 2000s (Beal, 2000; Kourteli, 2000; Saxby et al., 2002; Kumar et al., 2001; Voros, 2001; Decker et al., 2005; Vojak and Suarez-Nunez, 2005; Rajaniemi, 2005; Brouard, 2006; Knip, 2006).

The need for organizations to become aware of developments in their particular business environment should be a concept well understood, appreciated and well represented in the literature. Thirty years ago, Porter (1980) stated that these activities were carried out informally, but it was not enough. He called for a permanent and structured process of CI, in order to identify and pursue opportunities and threats related to business.

To examine the academic attention granted to CI, there were used more bibliometrice techniques in order to identify the academic literature devoted to the topic. Table 1 is the result of the search on Proquest Abi-Inform, designed to identify those items that have approached CI or market intelligence.

Table 1. Abi-Inform Proquest search results

	Competitive intelligence	Market intelligence	Marketing intelligence	Marketing or market intelligence
Total	710	144	1379	1497
Except CIR (Competitive Intelligence Review), JCIM (Journal of Competitive Intelligence and Management) and MIP (Marketing Intelligence & Planning)	369	127	61	168

Source: Calof and Wright (2008, p. 3)

Despite the popularity of intelligence in terms of adapting the business, magazines that have published articles about market intelligence can praise themselves with the publication, on average,

of only 1,4 articles in the last 40 years (table 2 presents the magazines and articles published), many of them being a brief description of the concept, of 2-3 pages.

Table 2. Articles regarding "marketing intelligence", by journal

Journal title	Number of articles
International Trade Forum	6
Industrial Marketing Management	6
The Journal of Product Innovation Management	3
Journal of Marketing	3
Journal of Business Research	3
International Marketing Review	3
California Management Review	3
Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin	3
American Marketing Association Conference	3
The Journal of Business Forecasting Methods & Systems	4
The International Journal of Bank Marketing	4
Journal of Marketing Research	4
British Food Journal	4
European Journal of Marketing	5
Management Decision	6
Journals with one article: 74	74
Journals with two articles: 17	34
Total articles	**168**

Source: Calof and Wright (2008, p. 4)

Analyzing the literature on CI and "marketing intelligence", it seems that there are two themes: the definition of intelligence and assessment of the intelligent capacity of the company (they involve description and testing of the intelligence model). Over several decades, efforts have been made to evaluate the company's intelligent processes and subsequent performance: for example - Antia and Hesford (2007), Hodges (2005), Greenley et al. (2004), Lichtenthaler (2004), Hasanali et al. (2004), Nitse et al. (2003), Wright et al. (2002), Gibbons and Prescott (1996), Solomon (1996), Maltz and Kohli (1996), Sawka et al. (1996), Cartwright et al. (1995).

Regarding the examination of the literature on competitive intelligence, Wright and Calof (2006) have expressed their concern about the need for a higher degree of rigor in the methodology. In its basic form, competitive intelligence involves planning, collection, analysis, communication and management. Most studies have attempted to quantify all of these variables, with success that differs from one to another. In this sense, Fleisher (2008) presents a case study that reveals how a Department of intelligence was the catalyst for a profitable success for a company. Trim and Lee (2008) investigated the link between the organizational flexibility and the intelligence specific to strategic marketing. Michaeli and Simon (2008) explore the way in which the application of a technique used in other fields, can be used in the analysis of competitive intelligence.

Demonstrating the links between competitive intelligence and other fields, Qiu (2008) examines the entrepreneurial attitude, normative beliefs and their influence on management practices in scanning CI. There are proofs regarding the way in which intelligence is linked not only with the process of decision-making, but also with the organizational assessment. Tanev and Bailetti (2008) have focused in particular on the relationship between activities related to intelligence and innovation of technologies used by companies.

INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Competitive intelligence involves collecting various information: external, internal, related to the competition, but also regarding customers, vendors, technologies, the environment or potential business relationship. CI is designed in order to ensure an early warning and to support the

foreseeing of the actions of competitors, customers and Government (Gilad, 1996). This fact suggests that CI aims the whole competitive environment, and not just the competition itself. This systematic scanning specific to CI is critical for organizations, in terms of awareness of changing market conditions and avoid costly errors (Patton and McKenna, 2005; Anderson and Hoyer, 1991).

A Competitive Intelligence Foundation study (2006) noticed that CI at the level of surveyed firms was focused on obtaining the following results:

- New or higher income;
- New products or services;
- Cost savings or cost avoidance;
- Time savings;
- Increased profit;
- Achievinf the financial objectives.

The systems of these firm were concerned with certain key topics related to intelligence, listed below in the order of the hierarchy:

1. Company's profile;
2. Competitive Benchmarking;
3. Early warning;
4. Market trend;
5. Customers' or vendors' profile;
6. Assesing technology;
7. Economical/political analysis;
8. CEO's profile.

Thus, it was proven quite clear that CI supported the process of decision-making in the following areas:

- Business strategy;
- Development of sales and business;
- Decisions of market penetration;
- Development of products;
- Decisions on research-development/technology;
- Decision on partnerships;
- Legal answers.

CONCLUSIONS

All matters presented above show that competitive intelligence affects a wide range of areas of decision-making, and it is a vital ingredient for the formulation of business strategy. In this sense, it becomes difficult to identify any aspect of the activity of the company that does not have a benefit as a result of the use of CI.

Regarded as an instrument to improve competitiveness, CI contributes to the continuous improvement of the quality of products, services and solutions offered by the company. On the other hand, it has an important role in increasing the level of innovation. The need for "intelligence" arose due to the decision-making process, which involves the development of different courses of action. A precise knowledge of the situation from the business environment and analyzing in real time its supposed implications, implies complex and fast correlations, which are facilitated by the use of competitive intelligence.

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