Competitive Intelligence in the Enterprise: Power Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Due to increasing challenges, as well as competitiveness, many organisations have sought advantaging and beneficiary techniques and options. One of those options is through Competitive Intelligence (CI) products, which some organisations have come to rely upon for sustainability and competitive advantage. Unfortunately, and to some degree, fortunately, there are different CI products which organisations could choose from. The products are supposed to be selected and deployed based on organizational requirements from both technical and business perspectives. Some organisations deploy more than one competitive intelligence product. Others are not guided, and do not understand the essence of the deployment, regarding achieving the organisational objectives. The fortunate and unfortunate situations which occur in the deployment of CI products in organisations are drawn from relationships amongst stakeholders in the selection and implementation processes. The relationships are manifested from control of sources which use the power for decision making. The relationships emanate from the fact that there are no proper comparisons of the products, driven by requirements. As a result, the organisations are faced and challenged with duplication and waste of resources. They struggle to determine their competitive advantage. This situation further manifests the complexity of technical and business artefacts. Case study research was conducted to understand how CI products are deployed in the organisation. A sociotechnical theory, actor-network theory was employed in the analysis of the data, primarily to examine and understand how control of resources for power defined and shaped relationships.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, Business Artefacts, Competitive Advantage, Competitive Intelligence (CI), Deployment of CI Products, Power Relationships

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations make use of services offered by Competitive Intelligence (CI) companies. Organisations may make use of various software products or consultancy services that help them determine their competitiveness relative to their competitors (Gatsoris, Pripores, & Zacharis, 2005). It is always necessary for a company to take proactive measures in terms of formulating competitive strategies way before related events happen (Sewlal, 2004). For example, the
services of such organizations are used by the marketing managers, top managers, executives as well as strategists to determine their companies marketing or organizational strategy and to also try and determine what the competitors are doing or not doing so as to ensure that they stay ahead of them (Hannula & Pirttimaki, 2003). According to Viviers and Muller (2004), organisations are still slow to recognize CI as a product to enhance competitiveness.

Many organisations rely on CI products to offer their services. This is because they believe that they could improve their competitive edge as well as its overall performance through effective CI products (Guimaraes, 2000). Also, some organisations deploy CI primarily to ensure to their survival (Tustin & Venter, 2007). Some organizations make use of CI products to guide them with their strategic decision making. According to Calof and Brouard (2004:4), “enterprises in an industrial sector access information and services to help them to improve competitiveness and growth and to support their strategic decision-making”.

In some cases, organizations deploy products into their environments without a thorough understanding of what the product or products can and cannot do for them in order for them to realise their strategic objectives (Bernhardt, 1993). According to Van Brakel (2005:1) “CI is a business discipline that is used by companies and countries alike as a means to improve competitiveness by making better use of information”. It is a product that companies use to improve their competitiveness. The positive outcomes of Viviers and Muller’s (2004) study include the fact that organisations acknowledge that CI product can enhance competitiveness and that it is regarded as a legitimate business activity.

Based on some of the arguments above, this study was conducted primarily to understand the interplay of relationships which manifest from power, in the deployment of CI in organisations. The study was to unveil empirically facts, which subsequently assist IT managers and other employees in their quest for CI products deployment, going forward.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The case study method was employed in the study. Yin (2003:4) describes a case study as the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from context. According to Stake (2010:27) case studies are simplistic in that they look at only one or a few classrooms, but they can also look most carefully at levels in test emphasis and teaching. Case studies are used to learn more about a real situation that is currently happening and may be used to learn more about a certain phenomenon in its current setting. According to Welman and Kruger (2001:182) a case study is used when a limited number of units of analysis such as an individual, a group or an institution, are studied intensively. According to Olivier (2004:98) case studies use techniques such as structured or unstructured interviews and direct observations, including participant observations and group discussions, to gather information. The case study explains exactly what the study is going to explore and how it is to be conducted. According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008:377) the main advantage of case studies compared to other approaches is that they permit the combination of different sources of evidence such as Interviews, documents and archives and observation.

Data was collected using the semi-structured technique. The interpretive approach was applied in the data analysis, using the underpinning theory. The organisation used in the case was Media Company, Letsema Media Solutions who provides content to its customers and its mission is to bring media entertainment and services to its customers through various platforms.

The study was underpinned by the Actor-network theory (ANT). ANT consists of actors and networks. It accesses the semiotic
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