Economic Intelligence
Information and Process
in Shipping Companies
in Morocco:
The Case of TangerMed Area

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a survey conducted in 2014-2015 on the practices of economic intelligence within a population of 100 shipping companies in the area of TangerMed. The research objective is to check whether information management strategy and economic intelligence exists in these types of companies, and how to exploit internal and external information of the different actors in the same business in order to prevent risks, seize opportunities and to anticipate threats. Such type of companies lives in a context of economic struggle where they try to protect their status and promote their development. The research seeks to present practical situations and provide clear recommendations to resolve the difficulties threatening their existence on a daily basis. Data elicited from the respondents provide reliable results thanks to a well targeted sampling of interviewees. The activities of shipping companies are divided into four categories: shipping agents, ships’ consignees, freight forwarders and forwarding agents. TangerMed area was chosen on the basis of the high concentration of shipping companies attracted by competitive advantages of the bustling port hub. The analysis of questionnaires revealed that 27 interviewees did not respond to questions knowing that the results discussed are derived from 73 questionnaires. It appears that the need for economic intelligence is an emerging concept in these types of companies, despite the considerable need to it. EI provides a number of advantages, in terms of organization, competitiveness and process. This study aims to increase knowledge of these type of companies. The approach is descriptive and explanatory, and thus allows room for the evaluation of the spread and ownership of the concept.

Keywords: Economic Intelligence, Logistics Platform, Shipping Companies, Survey, TangerMed Territorial Area

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic intelligence is a multifaceted concept, which is according to researchers, encompasses a modern vision of processing and information management aiming to intervene in unexpected incidents and to cope with the uncertainty of the environment. Several collective and individual authors have explored this broad concept, providing many definitions. The theme is therefore rich and wavers between the decision-making control of an entity and information systems.

Firstly, it should be noted that a concept is the result of the alignment of several authors. Economic intelligence (EI) is evolving in view of the developments in technology, science, as well as mentalities.

We consider EI to be the component of business intelligence aimed at gaining strategic advantage, as proposed by Porter (1998). EI includes competitor intelligence as well as intelligence collected on customers, suppliers, technologies, environments, or potential business relationships (Guyton, 1962; Fair, 1966; Grabowski, 1987; Gilad, 1989). The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP, 2008) defines EI as “a systematic and ethical process for gathering, analysing and managing external information that can affect the company’s plans, decisions and operations”.

The concept of an “Economic Intelligence System” as developed by Luhn in 1958, was the first to define the need for updated observation of storage and filing for decision making and business conduct. He argues that “Any system of communication for the conduct of business in the broadest sense can be considered an intelligent system ...” This definition is echoed in the works of Simon (1960) in management strategy to designate the process of environment’s exploitation with the purpose to identify situations requiring action.

A thorough reading of the concept of intelligence highlights the work of Wilensky, author of the concept of organizational intelligence. Fundamentally, Wilensky’s idea is that decision making requires collection, processing, interpretation and reporting. In the year 1967, Agular developed the term “scanning business environment,” giving rise to the concept of strategic vigil.

We have observed that the first interesting definitions revolving around EI go back to the 70s by G. Albaum (1964), under the appellation of “Environment scanning” while the first glimmering concept of EI appeared in Britain where corporate banking, insurance companies and financial institutions have adopted what is called “smart marketing” in the conduct of business. This term has been translated in Britain into business intelligence (Audrey Knauf 2010).

With the development of computer science, this versatile term has taken on a new dimension, as the “Marketing information system”, supportive of intelligent information systems in decision making. Prescott names this stage1995 “Competitive data collection”. Most distinguished authors are Clelond & King (1975), and Montgomery & Weinberg (1979). At the onset of the 80’s Porter, argued that intelligence means “Giving the right information to the right person at the right time to make the right decision.” Prescott (1995) describes this period of “competitive and sectoral analysis.” In 1984Samunuses the word “strategic intelligence” and distinguishes between “Environmental scanning” and “competitive analysis,” which he terms “systematic approach to competitive information”.

The transition from theory to fieldwork is often more important and more difficult. Tayson (1986) developed a system to prevent the potential actions of competitors. Several cases of EI exploitation have emerged through the work of professional consultants Fuld (1985) and Kelly (1987). In the late 80’s and early 90’s some researchers (Ribault & Martinet, 1988) pondered upon the usefulness of strategic vigil as a driving force feeding EI for strategic purposes. In the 90’s Jakobiak (1991) used the term ‘Technology Watch.’

However, the concept of intelligence along its derivatives remains a controversial topic among Anglo-Saxon researchers [Harmel 2001]. Most important researches were made by Americans and Germans. In French-speaking
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