Understanding the Deployment of Competitive Intelligence Through Moments of Translation

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ABSTRACT

Organisations employ different strategic tools such as Competitive Intelligence (CI) to enable and support their goals and objectives, periodically. Unfortunately, the tools do not seem to resolve the challenges that they were deployed for. This could be attributed to the fact that there is too much focus on the tools, and less attention on the social interaction which occurs in the process. The CI is deployed by many organisations primarily to collect and analyse relevant data for decision making, and competitive advantage. However, CI products are deployed in various ways, and in different contexts. CI products differ in many ways such as in terms of compatibility and functionalities that they offer. These are some of the factors that are driven and shaped by non-technical interplay. How organisations deploy CI products has been a challenge, and it is difficult to understand. Some organisations did acquire CI products, unfortunately, they could not make use of it as intended. This is attributed to compatibility challenges which they encountered during the implementation of the product. This is the primary motivation for this article. A qualitative case study research was conducted in order to examine how CI products are deployed in organisations. Analysis of the data was done, using the Moments of Translation from the perspective of actor network theory to understand how the interaction and interplay amongst actors, shapes and deployment of CI in the organisation that deploys it.

Keywords: Actor Network Theory, CI Products, Competitive Intelligence (CI), Moments of Translation, Non-Technical Interplay, Organisations

INTRODUCTION

Some organisations make use of Competitive Intelligence (CI) products in their businesses as a decision making tool. According to Bernhardt (1993), CI assists organisations with significant contributions to the strategic management process in their organizations. CI is argued and belief to assists organisations to improve the business performance and change management. According to Gatsoris et al. (2005), organisations are starting to view CI as a key ingredient in their business environment as a useful tool business decisions regarding

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organisational strategy. CI makes possible to access the competitive industry that organisations find themselves.

According to Johns and Van Doren (2009:552), “there seems to be greater recent need for CI because organisations are constantly changing their services and marketing messages to stay successful”. Ignatov (2004) argued that CI is rapidly becoming one of the most significant components of the modern business infrastructure, perhaps equal in importance even to the financial area or securities markets. According to Hesford (2008:17), “CI involves the systematic collection and analysis of information about competitors”. This information may also be used to plan and improve marketing, strategies and pricing.

Logically, it is important that managers understand their competitors’ strategies and their reasons for employing them. Hannula and Pirttimaki (2003) argued that a “competitive edge is gained through the ability to anticipate information, turn it into knowledge, craft it into intelligence relevant to the business environment, and actually use the knowledge gained from it”. It is important to identify information gaps in one’s knowledge of a competitor and to receive new information promptly in order to make informed decisions. According to Pirttimaki (2007:154), competitive intelligence has benefited organisations and the organisations have given it the following terms “improved quality of information,” “improved threat and opportunity identification,” and “improved awareness”.

Due to the aim of the study, which was to examine the deployment of CI in organizations, so as to reduce complexities and improve implementation success rate, research approaches and methods were carefully selected.

**RESEARCH APPROACH**

The study employed different methods, approaches and techniques. These included a qualitative research method, a case study approach and semi-structured interview techniques for the data collection. In Stake (2010:29), qualitative research is considered subjective and personal. It contributes towards an improved and disciplined scientific field. Qualitative research methods were used to determine the ‘why’ certain actions taken and they impacted the deployment of Competitive Intelligence in organisations. According to Babbie (2007:378), qualitative method is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.

Case study approach is described by Babbie (2005:306) as the in-depth examination of a single instance of some social phenomenon, such as a village, a family, or a juvenile gang. The information that was obtained from the Case Study was represented in a qualitative and interpretive manner. From Blumberg’s et al. (2008) argument, the main advantage of case studies is that it permits the combination of different sources of evidence such as Interviews and documentation.

Data collection technique allows for gathering of data that may range from a simple observation at one location to a survey at another location (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). The semi-structured interview technique was used in the data collection. According to Blumberg et al. (2008:378), “interviews are the most widely used source of collecting information”. The main purpose for conducting interviews is to find out “various aspects” that the researchers are unable to observe themselves (Stake, 2010).

Capital Investments, a financial institution in South Africa, was used as the case study. The company offers a complete range of banking and wealth management products and services. Over the years the organization has grown from strength to strength. The organisation has about 7000 employees, 300 of them are in the IT department.

The moments of translation of actor network theory (ANT) as a lens guided the analysis of the data. ANT focuses on each of the nodes that hold a network together and on how they came about and what keeps them together. Translation focuses on the activities on the micro
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