COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE: AN EXPLORATORY LITERATURE REVIEW OF ITS POSITIONING

Alexander Maune *

Abstract

This article is a qualitative-exploratory literature review. The primary concern of the author is to explore the positioning of the competitive intelligence function within organisations so as to establish the best positioning. To ensure reliability of the literary exploration, only peer-reviewed journal articles were used. The findings of this article will make it possible to generalise about the best position of the competitive intelligence function and to develop some valuable propositions for future studies. The findings show that there is no single criterion on which to base the positioning of the competitive intelligence function within organisations. This article will assist business managers to understand and improve their positioning of the competitive intelligence function. This article has therefore academic value.

Key Words: Competitive Intelligence, Positioning, Exploratory Literature Review

* CEMS, Department of Business Management, UNISA,
Tel.: +27 73 200 8603
E-mail: alexandermaune6@gmail.com, maunea@unisa.ac.za

1. Introduction

As competition increases the world over, the demand for competitive intelligence (CI) is gaining popularity (Combs and Moorhead, 1993). Questions are, however, arising as to where organisations can best position the CI function.

There are many definitions of CI. According to McGonagle and Vella (2002), CI is defined as the use of public sources to develop data regarding competition, competitors and the market environment. CI then transforms, by analysis, such data into intelligence (McGonagle and Vella, 2002). They further state that public, in CI, means all information one can legally and ethically identify, locate and then access. CI is assumed to be both a process and a product in which information is transformed into actionable intelligence to be used as knowledge and foreknowledge when elaborating strategic products to inform decision-makers and to improve the quality of their decisions (Kahaner, 1996).

The position of CI within organisations is proving to be very critical now more than ever before (Kahaner, 1996). Kahaner (1996) further states that until recently, a common answer has been to place intelligence in strategic planning. Today, however, as the CI process finds application in companies beyond the strategic planning function, there is no single standard position for this capability (Miller, 2000). The position of CI functions is important because it often influences reporting relationships, budgets, and the type of projects undertaken. It is clear from the

studies that there is no single organisational structure used by the majority of organisations (Lackman, Saban and Lanasa, 2000). Gilad (2001) states that the debate on where best to position the CI function is an on-going one. He claims that many companies traditionally place the CI function under other functions and thereby limiting its scope to a narrow functional focus. Kahaner (1996) in support of this idea asserts that many organisations position the CI function in each business division such as marketing, sales, and research and development. Kahaner (1996), further claims that many large organisations place the CI function in strategic planning offices, which report directly to top management. This position, he asserts, makes the most sense if the CI function`s main job is to support strategic planning, which is the case in most companies. There are many considerations for positioning the CI function.

Miller (2000) claims that there are a number of criteria to consider when deciding where to position the CI function. He states that factors such as a company's organisation, culture and market environment have a bearing in deciding where to position the CI function. The balance between strategic and operational intelligence requirements is also an important determinant (Miller, 2000). However, the ultimate determining criterion ought to be the locus of decision-making. Miller (2000) further claims that, for the CI function to have any effect on company performance, it should be positioned where it can provide direct support to both the strategic and day-to-day operational decision-making activities of an organisation. However, Miller`s assertion is based

on the reasoning that, since the main task of CI is to support management decision-making, having a formalised CI system in place will go a long way in helping an organisation to address many different issues. To add to this debate, Kahaner (1996) claims that, since CI is not a function but a process, it should appear in all aspects of business as one seamless process not relegated to one area, division or unit.

According to Kahaner (1996), where CI is placed is not as important as how its lines of communication are configured. Kahaner (1996) asserts that, for maximum efficiency and power, CI should be placed high enough in the organisation that people will respect it and see that it has a senior champion. However, CI should be close to the prime users and must be accessible to everyone in the corporation (Kahaner, 1996, Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013).

As a research topic, CI has received much attention, especially in developed countries (Kahaner, 1997). Kahaner (1997) states that countries, such as France, Japan, Sweden and the USA, are more advanced compared to other countries, especially in Africa, in their embrace of CI as a means of enhancing competitiveness. However, there have been concerns on the positioning of the CI function within organisations by authors such as Kahaner (1997), Miller (2000) and Gilad (2001) who argue that unless the organisation of the CI function is done appropriately, its merits will not be fully recognised.

Very few academic works have tried to answer the following question: How is the CI function positioned within organisations? This article will help to establish the best possible position for the CI function within organisations through an exploratory literature review. Furthermore, some valuable propositions will be developed to generate questions and hypotheses that will help to guide further future research. Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole (2013) state that one must become more familiar with a phenomenon if one is to formulate more searching research questions or hypotheses. The remainder of this article presents the literature review, methodology, discussion of findings, and conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature review

2.1 The competitive intelligence process

The CI process or cycle is usually divided by CI professionals into five basic phases, each linked to others by a feedback loop (McGonagle and Vella, 2012). These phases, making up what CI professionals call the CI cycle, are:

– Establishing the CI needs. This means both recognising the need for CI and defining what kind of CI the end-user needs (McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

– Collecting the raw data. First, a CI professional translates the end-user's needs into an action plan, either formally or informally. This usually involves identifying which questions need to be answered, and then where it is likely that he/she can collect the data needed to formulate the answers to these questions. From there, the collection begins, both of secondary and primary data (McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

– Evaluating and analysing the raw data. During this phase, the data that was collected is evaluated and analysed, and is transformed into useful CI. That may be done by the person doing the collection or by a separate CI analyst. If one fails to use some analysis during the collection process, one might waste hours collecting useless information (McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

– Communicating the finished intelligence. This involves preparing and presenting the results in a usable format and in a timely manner. The CI may have to be distributed to those who asked for it and, in some cases, to others who might also benefit by having it. Timeliness and security of the finished intelligence are all important aspects to consider before communication (McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

– Taking action. This means the end-user actually uses the CI in decision-making. The CI may be used as an input to decision-making, or it may be the first of several steps in an overall assessment of, for example, a new market. The decision of how and when the CI is used, is made by the end-user and not by the analyst (McGonagle and Vella, 2012).

2.2 The importance of competitive intelligence

According to the findings of McKinsey study (McKinsey, 2008) that asked executives how their firms responded to a significant price change by a competitor or to a significant innovation by a competitor, the majority of executives in both groups, across regions and industries, said their companies found out about the significant competitive move too late to respond. CI is considered valuable, even though virtually all evidence of the value and effect of the process are to date anecdotal or deals with indirect assessments (McGonagle and Vella, 2002). In the early 1990s, a study of the packaged food, telecommunications and pharmaceutical industries reported that organisations that engaged in high levels of CI activity show 37% higher levels of product quality, which in turn could be associated with a 68% increase in business performance (Jaworski and Wee, 1993). In the mid-1990s, NutraSweet's chief executive officer (CEO) valued its CI at USD50 million. This figure was based on a combination of revenues gained and revenues which were "not lost"

to competitive activity (Flynn, 1994). A more recent PricewaterhouseCoopers' study (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002) of CEOs reported that virtually all CEOs surveyed (84%) view competitor information as important to profit growth of their company.

2.3 The main competitive intelligence players

The CEO inspires in his subordinates/employees a will to practice some form of CI by transmitting to the employees some knowledge and know-how, and in this way, get all the employees to become part of a CI culture (Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013). These two authors also claim that the other role of the CEO is to provide training of financial and social incentives. The CEO always leads the CI function within an organisation. Managerial policies must create awareness and legitimise the CI process with human resources for company policy formulation. The number of employees dedicated to a CI function should be in proportion to the size of the organisation (Lackman et al., 2000). Lenz and Engledow (1986) state that the number of employees dedicated to a CI function should be between one to seven employees, whilst Prescott (1999) confirms that there should be three full-time staff, one part-time secretary and a monitoring team. Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) state that the majority of these employees that are involved in the CI process are not information experts and therefore they do not participate as full-time employees. They further claim that it is the most seasoned and former staff, in the CI subject, who occupy the position of manager. Information experts are therefore full-time employees in CI practices. CI key players within organisations are at times difficult to identify (Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013). According to the study by Salvetat and Laarraf (2013), based on 1500 firms in the European Union, the involvement of managers in the CI process is strong although the awareness of this practice among employees remains low. The results of the study by Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) show that on one hand an organisation which structures its CI unit weakly does not employ experts and on the other hand, an organisation which structures its CI unit strongly employs many experts. More so, it appears that the presence of information experts within an organisation will allow the building of a structured and independent CI unit (Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013).

2.4 Determining factors for positioning the competitive intelligence function

Until recently, little thought had been given to the question of where in a corporate organisation to place the CI process/function (Sawka, 2001). Strategic planning or other functions akin to it, for the most part has been the most logical fall-back location (Sawka, 2001). CI units were concerned mainly with issues of strategic importance to a company, and the strategic planning department seemed to be the most logical choice for placing the CI function. Miller (2000) states that, as more and more U.S. companies have embraced the concept of CI and have set on the path of developing and managing robust CI functions, strategic planning is no longer the important reaction to the question of where to locate the CI unit. He further states that indeed, more and more companies are electing to place their intelligence programme within sales and marketing, finance, operations, and other corporate functions. Miller (2000) adds three forces that seem to be behind the expansion of reasonable locations for company CI functions.

CI functions, like any other organisational functions, have many needs that must be met for the CI process to pay dividends that are measurable to the organisation (Sawka, 2001). CI functions must be located where they can support decision-making by providing intelligent information, discussing alternatives and compelling action. It is argued that whether CI units address strategic or tactical needs is almost irrelevant; CI must be as close to the decision-maker as possible.

One mistake many companies make is to locate the CI function in such a way that layers of bureaucracy exists between them and the decision-makers they are ultimately intended to serve. Whether decision-makers are senior corporate staff or district sales managers there should be no filters between them and the CI staff (Miller, 2000).

CI functions should be highly visible in organisations. Miller (2000) states that, unlike the government or military, where CI activity is necessarily shrouded in secrecy, corporate CI functions should not take steps to mask their day-to-day activities. CI units should have strong links to other parts of the organisation. In many cases, this requires indirect relationships with other staff and departments in addition to the direct reporting lines the CI function already has.

CI functions must be located in places where they will be adequately nurtured. Companies usually fail to support the CI process. Miller (2000) states that too often executives speak of the need for a robust intelligence process and then designate an already overworked market research analyst to serve as the company's CI person. Furthermore, Miller (2000) states that CI functions that should have any significant influence on corporate decision-making and competitiveness must exist (must be placed) within a section of the organisation where it can be well staffed and have technological and other support. Organisations must be able to provide adequate staff, technology and other support.

Though strategic issues, such as long-term planning, capital investments and technological matters still tend to play an important role, companies no longer adopt and apply intelligence systems to

meet purely strategic needs. The greatest challenge is to strike the right balance between strategic and tactical needs to avoid an imbalance (Miller, 2000). Miller further argues that other industries, too, are finding that CI departments are well suited to address highly operational matters.

Decentralisation of the organisational structure in many firms is opening up new opportunities for a variety of organisational functions to house the CI system "empowerment", and the pushing of decision-making downward to operational levels has made CI more applicable at a number of levels within an organisation. Many companies are creating virtual networks of CI professionals within their organisations, linked together through formal and informal mechanisms.

Perhaps most important, the locus of priority on CI issues is – rightfully – having a greater impact on the decision of where to locate the CI process (Miller, 2000). It has been recognised that CI systems succeed only when they are demand-driven, that is, when they are organised to provide insight and clarity to competitive issues that decision-makers have identified as important to a company's competitive success (Miller, 2000). Miller (2000) further states that CI systems are increasingly being developed to address specific competitively important issues, and being placed in organisational structures where those issues tend to have the greatest effect.

The combination of the determining factors and organisational options depicted in Figure 1 below provides a framework that companies can use to help guide their decision as to where to locate the CI unit, (Miller, 2000) but it is by no means applicable to every situation.

Figure 1. Locating the intelligence unit: An organisational framework

	Strategic vs. tactical	Corporate organisational structure	Locus of decision-making
Centralised	Weigh toward strategic focus	Strong corporate staff	Little empowerment
Decentralised	Weigh toward tactical focus	Highly autonomous strategic business units	Complete empowerment
Hybrid	Mix of strategic and tactical needs	Balance of power among corporate and divisional staffs	Consensual decision-making.

3. Methodology

This article is qualitative in nature and a literature review was conducted on some of the identified peer-reviewed and published journal articles on CI and its positioning or structuring. To identify relevant literature/journals, academic databases and search engines were used. A review of references in related studies led to more relevant sources, the references of which were further reviewed and analysed. Keywords such as, 'competitive intelligence', 'structuring', and 'positioning' were used in search engines to find relevant sources. To ensure reliability, only peer-reviewed articles were used. The researcher skimmed through the text of the journal articles first, checking whether it was relevant for the purpose of this research article. Reviewing data of existing journal articles was necessary to enhance the generalisability of the findings (Morse, 1999). The purpose of this review was to identify the contributions of research in advancing the understanding of the CI function`s positioning in organisations.

Criteria for inclusion of articles in the review included the following:
− Written in English
− Published in peer-reviewed journals
− Cited CI structuring or positioning

4. Structuring the competitive intelligence function within organisations

Companies' efforts to weigh the determining factors of strategic versus tactical needs, decentralised organisational structures, and the locus of decision-making lead to the availability of general organisational structures for the CI function. The organisational options most companies typically face are highly centralised systems that report to a single corporate entity, decentralised systems that typically incorporate multiple CI units serving several organisational components, or hybrid systems that combine features of both previous options (Miller, 2000, Du Toit and Muller, 2004). Salvetat and Laarraf (2013), however, add in-sourcing or out-sourcing and formalisation or non-formalisation as other organisational options available for adoption. Providing precise of CI systems becomes therefore difficult since particular company CI requirements differ from company to company. As a result, Miller (2000) argues that CI systems must be highly customised for each individual company choosing one to pursue. Lackman et al. (2000) carried out a study on 16 companies.

According to a benchmarking study of 16 companies that was conducted by Lackman et al. (2000) to determine how the market intelligence function was structured in these enterprises, it was

found that there was no single organisational structure which was used by the majority of firms. It was found that the CI function was in the marketing/marketing research (46%) or sales (14%) departments. At most companies, the CI function relied on internal sources. The study by Lackman et al. (2000) also found that two thirds of the enterprises sourced their intelligence from outside, fewer than six times per year. It was also found that those organisations with a more established CI function had senior management playing a critical role (67%) in the assessment of intelligence needs than those organisations with a less established CI function. Usually, the CI function is organised within the marketing or market research departments (Michaeli, 2004).

4.1 Centralisation of the competitive intelligence function

Centralised CI functions start with the premise that strategic needs dominate, and that decisions regarding strategy (planning and execution) are made by corporate decision-makers (Miller, 2000). As a result, these systems tend to stand alone, relying on informational and analytical inputs from throughout the organisation. Miller (2000) states that these centralised CI functions report most commonly to a senior corporate officer who is responsible for not only providing the necessary organisational support for the CI process – in terms of budgets, personnel and other resources – but also for leading the effort to define and refine intelligence requirements among executive management. In a highly centralised organisational structure, top executives retain authority for most strategic and operating decisions and keep a tight rein on business unit heads and department heads; comparatively little discretionary authority is granted to subordinate managers (Sawka, 2001). The intelligence delivered is highly analytical, forward looking, and typically has a longer shelf life than intelligence provided by decentralised systems serving more tactical needs. Centralised CI practices are mostly observed in large firms (Levet, 2002 in Salvetat and Laarraf (2013), Bournois & Romani, 2000, Salles, 2006). According to the GIA`s survey (GIA, 2005), it was found that in larger companies in particular, the CI function was performed in-house within a centralised unit but that certain areas of the CI function might be out-sourced. The GIA`s survey (GIA, 2005) also found that there was no right or wrong concerning centralising the CI function. The findings of the study also show that in some countries such as Finland, companies have an equal number of centralised and decentralised units, while in Mexico, companies are inclined towards centralised units.

According to Levet (2002) in Salvetat and Laarraf (2013), thanks to his study based on eight French small to medium enterprises (SMEs), 39% of firms practice a form of CI without a monitoring department. CI function is often centralised at the top

management levels in SMEs, while it is rather decentralised with information experts in large firms (Pearce, 1982). Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) assert that the centralisation of the CI process provides a global vision, a rapid satisfaction of information needs, facilitates analysis, reduces duplication and ensures motivated and trained employees. The centralisation of the CI process is preferred (Porter, 1985) for acquiring legitimacy for the CI approach with employees. According to the findings by Lackman et al. (2000), the CI process is centralised in 46% of firms, especially at the top management level (55%). A centralised system reduces redundancy and makes it easier for the data to be assembled and shared, since all divisions transmit their information to a single, organised unit. This procedure, according to Greene (1988), enhances the coordination and sharing of data. Centralisation assumes that information can be processed and transferred from one point to another without much difficulty (Pirttila, 1998). Johnson (2005), however, states that centralised, command-and-control CI practices have been called into question by the very theories driving modern decision science.

4.2 Decentralisation of the competitive intelligence function

Stubbart (1982) is in favour of a decentralised CI practice within each functional section of an organisation. Indeed, the decentralisation of the CI function/process allows multi-actor and multi-domain expertise, information better targeted to needs, and a monitoring activity more operational and better integrated with the decision-making process. Digital technology has enabled more and more organisations to adopt decentralised systems (Miller, 2000). Decentralised CI functions consist of multiple intelligence employees who are proliferated throughout the organisation. Decentralised CI functions provide tactical intelligence requirements and rarely provide these to senior management. Miller (2000) further states that these decentralised CI functions may or may not be accompanied by separate, smaller organisational employees. Two problems, however, arise from this type. There is the redundancy or duplication of effort, as each department strives to collect the information it needs. CI also depends on the convergence of data to function properly and, with a decentralised system, that confluence is much more difficult to achieve (Greene, 1988). On the other hand, the advantage of a decentralised unit is its dependence on interpersonal networking that leads to information sharing and spontaneous team building (Hall, 2000).

4.3 Hybrid competitive intelligence function

Hybrid CI functions combine attributes of both centralised and decentralised functions (Du Toit and Muller, 2004). Salvetat and Laarraf (2013), in support of Du Toit and Muller (2004), state that there is a mix of centralisation and decentralisation regarding CI practices. They further found that CI practices are focused on the top managers and information experts, but decentralised to middle managers. Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) supports Terry (1977), who recommends that firms must have both centralised and decentralised CI units. Miller (2000) states that multiple CI units may exist throughout each organisation, but they are usually fewer in number as compared to single CI units. The CI needs of senior executive members are the overriding driving force in setting intelligence targets and requirements, though hybrid systems usually have the flexibility to be able to address ad hoc operational needs as well. CI methodologies for the collection and analysis of information are fairly consistent throughout the organisation, and the number and type of intelligence products are equally uniform (Miller, 2000).

4.4 In-sourcing or out-sourcing of the competitive intelligence function

The problems of internally managed and executed CI models have given rise to out-sourced models, that is, the out-sourced CI project model or the complete third-party model (Eaton, 2003). Out-sourcing is typically considered when cost-cutting is taking place but also when the necessary support from top management is lacking. Having high-level management on board is critical to a successful CI function (Miller, 2000, Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2002). Muller (2009) states that obtaining an external view and assistance will be beneficial as this bring new objective ideas. Out-sourcing is also considered in cases where the CI function is performed as an additional function. Muller (2009) claims that, with regard to the use of resources, time and expertise, out-sourcing will be beneficial. A benefit of out-sourcing to a supplier that specialise in real CI is the provision of a forward-looking analysis and opportunity analyses that go far beyond simple librarian-style information. Out-sourcing is also considered in cases where certain information is unavailable or difficult to access from an internal CI function's point of view, or when companies might feel uncomfortable to gather certain information, or when key external expertise is required (Muller, 2009). The best legally attainable intelligence is available within a company and from a company's customers, suppliers and people in the field, including sales people and marketing people and merchandisers. However, often CI personnel are discouraged to talk to such external sources and, if they were permitted to do so, it would be difficult to obtain honest views (Muller, 2009). CI ensures that the sales force is integrated in the corporate intelligence network (Galvin 2001). Out-sourcing CI presents no barrier to the ethical collection of data from external experts (Eaton, 2003).

Eaton (2003) and Johnson (2005) state that there are advantages and disadvantages to the out-sourcing model. The advantages include an enhanced external objectivity and a professional stature within the client, unattainable by lower-level internal employees, access to specialist processes, skills and tools and openness to contact customers, suppliers and other professionals who are often shielded from interaction with internal staff. Out-sourcing also helps create a larger strategic context into which the competitive data is placed. Most CI focuses upon the threats to the company represented by specific competitive activity but, often, a threat could also give rise to an opportunity for the company. Such opportunities are often neglected. The out-sourced CI professional might be bolder in providing alternative outcomes to a competitive situation than a person from within the organisation. This added analysis of the implications of the data could be a valuable resource.

Experts argue that perhaps the most significant advantage of out-sourcing is the building of a longer-term CI capability (Malhotra, 1996, Eaton, 2003). Having a long-term relationship with an external third-party consulting company means that resources are available to build a larger awareness capability throughout the client company. Companies that may consider out-sourcing CI should be aware of the potential problems that exist when out-sourcing CI or when considering an external third-party project-oriented CI capability. CI vendors may lack the unique company view and knowledge on an industry (Muller, 2009). According to Muller (2009), CI vendors are also not given the necessary access to place a given specific CI issue within the broader strategic context of the client`s organisation. Furthermore, out-sourced projects are often short-term focused interventions, resulting in the client company being left without significant new skills, knowledge and CI aptitude.

A CI vendor would typically focus only on the narrow issues described within the scope of the project agreed upon, perform the study, and deliver the results and leave (Eaton, 2003). The failure to install a process that puts the immediate competitive threat within its broader strategic context or leave behind an empowered organisation makes the out-sourced CI project approach inefficient. Out-sourcing can also be costly and often does not provide the expected return on investment due to its limited capacity.

The CI function concerns information management (Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013). For this reason, Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) argue that CI

should remain largely in-sourced. However, there is still division on the necessity of in-sourcing. Even though information is strategic for an organisation as stated above, there are other activities of the CI process that are out-sourced to specialised service providers. The use of service providers is a complement to existing internal CI activity. A number of models are emerging related to the out-sourcing of key CI functions (Eaton, 2003). Fahey and King (1977), recommend an internal and autonomous CI function, based on a study of 12 American organisations. According to studies by Jain (1984) and Prescott (1999), 30% of firms have an internal CI department.

Out-sourcing pieces of the value chain formerly performed in-house makes strategic sense whenever:

- An activity can be performed better or more cheaply by outside specialists. An outsider, by concentrating specialists and technology in its area of expertise, can sometimes perform these services better and more cheaply than a company that performs the activities only for itself (Quinn, 1992).
- The activity is not crucial to the firm's ability to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and would not hollow out its core competencies, essential skills or technical know-how (Quinn, 1992). Critics agree about the fact that extensive out-sourcing can hollow out a company, leaving it at the mercy of outside suppliers and barren of the skills and organisational capabilities needed to be master of its own destiny (Chandler, 1962).
- Out-sourcing reduces the company's risk exposure to changing technology and/or changing buyer preferences.
- Out-sourcing streamlines the operations of the company in ways that improve organisational flexibility, cut cycle time, speed up decision-making, and reduce coordination costs.
- Out-sourcing allows a company to concentrate on its core business and to do what it does best.

4.5 Formalisation or non-formalisation of the competitive intelligence function

Within firms, information is correlated with the level of progress of monitoring activities (Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013). A study by Phanuel and Levy (2002) based on 75 French SMEs, shows that 17.5% formalised CI procedures were used for the collection of information, 22.5% for its analysis, and 50.5% for its dissemination. Peters and Waterman (1982) show that 72% of managers want a formalised CI function/process whilst the rest were of the other opinion. A study by Bournois and Romani (2000, in Salvetat and Laarraf, 2013) based on 5000 European firms, showed that only 12.4% of firms have a formalised CI function/process, whereas Diffenbach

(1983) maintains that 73% of firms have a formalised process. Gilad and Gilad (1985), however, state that the formalisation of the CI process allows for better quality, quantity, targeting, efficiency and reliability of information. However, non-formalisation reduces organisational, operational and training costs. Salvetat and Laarraf (2013) argue that, although formalisation is seen as generally good, strong formalisation can be seen as a tool to control employees and as a lack of creativity because of its standardisation, thus limiting a competitive advantage.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The primary concern of the author of this article was to explore how the CI process is positioned in organisations and to establish the best positioning. The research found that the single most important criteria, according to Miller (2000), on which to base the position of the CI function within the organisation is the location of those decision-makers who have an expressed need for CI and who are willing to provide requirements-based targets. In addition, it is possible for several decision-makers or decision-making components to be served by a single CI function, as long as the needs are roughly comparable and are not divided among strategic and tactical issues. The research found that there is no hard and fast rule for CI positioning. The following guidelines, adopted from Miller (2000), are worth recommending. Several CI functions are likely when an organisation has strong needs for both strategic and tactical CI; thus it becomes impossible for one CI staff to meet both requirements.

It is recommended that whatever CI structure an organisation decides upon, it requires flexibility to support decision-making at all levels continuously. Miller (2000) argues that it is rare for CI programmes to maintain a single organisational structure and remain in one corporate position forever. More so, CI needs to be flexible and adaptive to shifting market needs and strategic requirements. It is also recommended that CI functions be structured to maintain a balance between strategic and tactical needs. Miller (2000) argues that tactical needs are as important as strategic needs and that it is a mistake to think that strategic needs are more important than tactical needs.

The people involved in the CI function must recognise the importance of process coordination at all levels. Mechanisms to ensure coordinated processes become very important as many companies set up several CI units. Miller (2000) states that inefficiencies are sure to exist if CI staff members are left to develop their own procedures independently of one another. Duplication of effort, internal miscommunications and incompatible CI products are only a few of the missteps an organisation is likely to experience if it fails to coordinate its CI activities. Miller (2000) further states that, as a rule of thumb,

the greater the number of separate CI functions a company has, the greater the number of resources it will need to bring to bear to ensure consistency of operations among them.

Given all the arguments by different authors and from different researches, one can conclude that there is no one-size-fit-all when it comes to the position of the CI function within organisations. The position of the CI function is situational, that is, it differs from one organisation to another and there are factors that go by each position such as culture, market environment and the company's organisation which differs from one organisation to another. The best position of the CI function is where it can provide direct support to decision-making although there seems to be a shift away from purely internal CI function towards out-sourcing of the CI function.

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