

Economic Intelligence as a Driver of Organizational Performance and Competitive Advantage: Evidence from Moroccan Enterprises

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ABSTRACT: Economic intelligence has become a strategic capability for organizations operating in competitive and information-intensive environments. This article examines the contribution of economic intelligence to organizational performance and competitive advantage among Moroccan enterprises. Drawing on a quantitative survey of 260 enterprises operating in commerce, services, industry and agri-food sectors, the study analyzes how strategic monitoring, information sharing, knowledge management, digital tools, formal intelligence units and information integration are associated with performance-related outcomes. The findings show that 68.4% of surveyed enterprises consider economic intelligence well or very well aligned with organizational needs, while 68.5% perceive an important or very important contribution to competitive advantage. Moreover, 72.3% report a significant or very significant improvement in performance. Bivariate analyses confirm statistically significant associations between several economic intelligence practices and turnover, growth, profitability, innovation, responsiveness and competitiveness. The strongest relationships concern maturity of the intelligence system, knowledge management, information integration and training. The article concludes that economic intelligence should not be treated as a peripheral monitoring function, but as an integrated managerial system linking information acquisition, analysis, protection, dissemination and strategic action. Practical recommendations are proposed for Moroccan enterprises seeking to improve competitiveness through structured intelligence practices.

KEYWORDS: Economic Intelligence; Strategic Monitoring; Competitive Advantage; Organizational Performance; Moroccan Enterprises; Knowledge Management; Decision-Making.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary markets, enterprises face rapid technological change, intensifying competition, increasing regulatory pressure and a growing abundance of information. In such an environment, performance no longer depends only on financial resources or production capacity. It also depends on the ability to identify relevant signals, interpret them, transform them into actionable knowledge and protect strategic information assets. Economic intelligence responds to this challenge by organizing the collection, processing, dissemination and protection of information useful for decision-making.

The concept has evolved from early business intelligence and organizational intelligence approaches to more integrated models combining strategic monitoring, knowledge management, information security, influence and decision support. Luhn introduced the idea of a business intelligence system capable of disseminating relevant information to decision points [1]. Wilensky later emphasized organizational intelligence as the ability of organizations to acquire and use knowledge for policy and industrial decisions [2]. Aguilar's work on environmental scanning and Ansoff's weak-signal approach then showed that strategic anticipation requires systematic attention to external changes [3,4]. Porter further established the

importance of competitor and industry analysis for strategic positioning [5].

For Moroccan enterprises, the issue is especially important because competitiveness increasingly depends on the capacity to manage market information, anticipate changes, protect know-how and respond quickly to customer, technological and institutional dynamics. However, many organizations still treat intelligence activities as informal or fragmented practices. This creates a gap between the strategic importance of economic intelligence and the degree of formalization, measurement and integration observed in practice.

The purpose of this article is to examine how economic intelligence contributes to organizational performance and competitive advantage in Moroccan enterprises. The article addresses the following research question: to what extent are economic intelligence practices associated with performance, competitiveness, innovation and responsiveness? The study contributes by providing empirical evidence from a survey of 260 enterprises and by proposing managerial implications for strengthening intelligence systems in emerging economic contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Economic intelligence: concept and scope

Economic intelligence can be understood as a coordinated managerial process through which an organization collects, verifies, analyzes, protects and distributes useful information in order to support strategic action. In the French tradition, the Martre report defined economic intelligence as coordinated actions of research, processing and distribution of useful information to economic actors, carried out legally and with necessary protection of corporate assets [6]. This definition underlines three inseparable dimensions: information acquisition, information exploitation and information protection.

The literature generally identifies three pillars of economic intelligence. The first is strategic monitoring, which includes technological, competitive, commercial, regulatory and environmental monitoring. The second is the protection of strategic information, including confidential data, know-how, intellectual assets and sensitive communication flows. The third is influence, understood as legal actions through which organizations act on their environment, stakeholders and market perception. Together, these pillars transform intelligence from a simple data-gathering activity into a strategic management system.

2.2. Economic intelligence and performance

The link between economic intelligence and performance is based on the idea that information becomes valuable only when it reduces uncertainty and improves action. Strategic intelligence helps firms detect opportunities and threats earlier, improve market orientation, support innovation and allocate resources more effectively. Studies on competitive intelligence show that systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of competitor and market information can precede marketing strategy formulation and improve strategic responsiveness [8,9]. Business intelligence research similarly highlights the role of data, analytics and decision-support systems in improving managerial decisions [10,11]. Economic intelligence can affect performance through several mechanisms. First, it improves environmental awareness and therefore reduces strategic uncertainty. Second, it supports faster and better-informed decision-making. Third, it strengthens knowledge sharing and organizational learning. Fourth, it helps protect information assets and reduces vulnerabilities. Fifth, it contributes to innovation by connecting internal capabilities with external signals. These mechanisms justify the following propositions guiding the empirical analysis.

- H1: Strategic monitoring is positively associated with enterprise growth and turnover.
- H2: Information collection and sharing are positively associated with profitability and general performance.
- H3: Knowledge management, training and digital tools are positively associated with innovation and responsiveness.

- H4: Formal intelligence units and dedicated budgets are positively associated with higher performance.
- H5: Integration of information into strategic decision-making is positively associated with competitiveness.



Figure 1. Conceptual model linking economic intelligence practices to performance outcomes.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design

The study adopts a quantitative, exploratory and explanatory design. It is exploratory because it clarifies the state of economic intelligence practices among Moroccan enterprises, and explanatory because it examines associations between intelligence practices and performance indicators. The approach follows a hypothetico-deductive logic: theoretical propositions drawn from the literature are confronted with empirical data collected from enterprises. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on enterprise profile, information needs, strategic monitoring practices, information sharing, protection mechanisms, formalization of economic intelligence, knowledge management, digital tools, training and perceived performance outcomes. Responses were coded and normalized using an ordinal scale to facilitate quantitative analysis and comparison across items.

3.2. Sample and data collection

The empirical field consisted of Moroccan enterprises of different sizes and sectors. The final analytical dataset contains 260 valid observations. The sample includes small and medium-sized enterprises, large national enterprises and foreign or multinational firms operating in commerce, services, industry and agri-food activities. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire administered to managers and staff involved in commercial, marketing, technical, quality, human resources, monitoring or strategic functions.

The profile of the sample indicates a strong presence of SMEs, which represent 91.2% of the surveyed enterprises. The sectoral distribution is dominated by commerce (51.5%), followed by services (25.4%), industry (16.9%) and agri-food (6.2%). This distribution is useful because it reflects enterprises exposed to different forms of market pressure and information intensity.

Table 1. Profile of surveyed enterprises

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Size	SMEs	237	91.2%
Size	Large enterprises	23	8.8%
Sector	Commerce	134	51.5%
Sector	Services	66	25.4%
Sector	Industry	44	16.9%
Sector	Agri-food	16	6.2%
Ownership	Private	120	46.2%
Ownership	Public	80	30.8%
Ownership	Foreign / multinational	60	23.0%

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Alignment of economic intelligence with organizational needs

The first descriptive result concerns the perceived alignment between economic intelligence and organizational needs. A total of 68.4% of surveyed enterprises report that economic intelligence is either well or very strongly adapted to their strategic and informational needs. This result suggests that managers recognize the usefulness of economic intelligence for decision support and organizational reactivity. However, the finding must be read alongside the limited presence of measurement indicators: only 37.7% of enterprises report having indicators to evaluate economic intelligence activities, while 62.3% lack such tools. This gap indicates that economic intelligence is valued, but not always controlled through formal performance measurement.

Table 2. Key descriptive results on economic intelligence and performance

Indicator	Main categories	Frequency	Percentage
Alignment with organizational needs	Good or very strong alignment	178	68.4%
Measurement indicators	Existence of indicators	98	37.7%
Measurement indicators	Absence of indicators	162	62.3%
Competitive advantage	Important or very important impact	178	68.5%
Performance improvement	Significant or very significant improvement	188	72.3%
Strategic process	Influence during diagnosis	225	86.54%

	and analysis		
Strategic process	Influence during strategic choice	210	80.77%
Strategic process	Influence across the whole process	180	69.23%

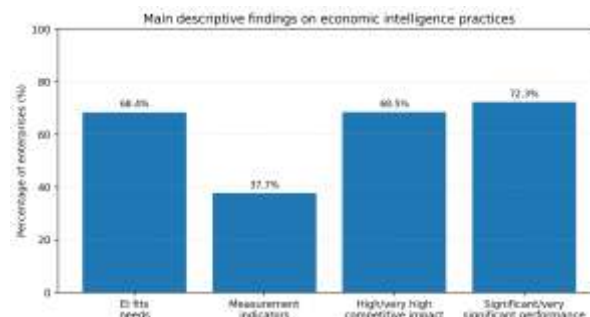


Figure 2. Descriptive results on economic intelligence practices and outcomes.

The contribution of economic intelligence to competitive advantage is also clearly perceived. About 42.3% of enterprises consider its impact important and 26.2% consider it very important. Similarly, 41.5% of enterprises report significant performance improvement and 30.8% report very significant improvement. These results support the theoretical argument that economic intelligence creates value when it is connected to decision-making, market positioning and operational responsiveness.

4.2. Bivariate relationships between intelligence practices and performance outcomes

The bivariate analyses show significant relationships between several dimensions of economic intelligence and performance-related outcomes. Environmental monitoring is significantly associated with turnover, indicating that enterprises that monitor their environment are more likely to belong to higher turnover categories. Competitive monitoring is associated with growth, while systematic information collection is associated with profitability. These findings confirm the idea that the capacity to observe and interpret the environment supports both strategic and financial performance.

Table 3. Summary of bivariate statistical associations

Relationship tested	Chi-square	df	p-value	Contingency coefficient
Environmental monitoring / turnover	18.42	2	<0.001	0.257
Competitive monitoring / growth	21.37	2	<0.001	0.275

Information collection / profitability	24.16	2	<0.001	0.292
Information sharing / general performance	22.58	2	<0.001	0.283
Knowledge management / innovation	58.946	4	<0.001	0.337
Digital tools / responsiveness	48.336	4	<0.001	0.305
Formal EI unit / performance	31.82	2	<0.001	0.330
EI qualification / performance	27.45	2	0.001	0.309
EI training / innovation	34.91	2	<0.001	0.344
EI budget / performance	30.54	2	<0.001	0.324
Information integration / competitiveness	33.12	2	0.009	0.338
EI maturity / performance	41.26	2	0.006	0.370

The relationship between information sharing and general performance is particularly important. Enterprises with higher levels of information sharing show a higher proportion of elevated performance outcomes than enterprises with weak information sharing. This confirms that the value of intelligence does not lie only in collecting information, but also in circulating it to the actors who can use it. Knowledge management is also strongly associated with innovation. Enterprises with high knowledge management practices show substantially higher innovation outcomes, which supports the view that economic intelligence contributes to innovation by combining external signals with internal learning.

The use of digital tools is significantly associated with responsiveness. This is consistent with the growing role of business intelligence technologies, data analytics platforms and digital monitoring tools in accelerating information processing. However, technology alone is not sufficient. The presence of a formal economic intelligence unit, qualified human resources, training and dedicated budgets are all associated with higher performance outcomes. These results suggest that economic intelligence is more effective when it is institutionalized and supported by managerial commitment.

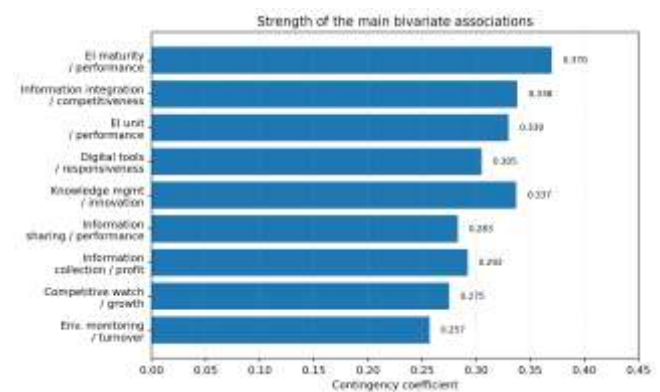


Figure 3. Strength of selected bivariate relationships measured by contingency coefficients.

The strongest contingency coefficient in the analysis concerns the relationship between maturity of the economic intelligence system and performance ($C = 0.370$). This result is highly meaningful because maturity combines several aspects: formalization, continuity, tools, human skills, decision integration and evaluation. It shows that isolated practices may generate limited benefits, whereas a mature and integrated intelligence system is more likely to create sustainable performance effects.

4.3. Discussion and managerial implications

The findings support the general proposition that economic intelligence contributes to enterprise performance by transforming information into strategic knowledge. The empirical evidence is consistent with the foundational literature on environmental scanning, weak signals and competitive analysis. Enterprises that monitor their environment, collect and share information, manage knowledge and integrate intelligence into strategic decisions appear better positioned to improve competitiveness, innovation and reactivity.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals weaknesses that should be addressed. The most important limitation observed in practice is the absence of measurement indicators in a majority of enterprises. Without indicators, managers cannot accurately evaluate the efficiency of intelligence activities, the quality of information flows or the contribution of intelligence to decision outcomes. This may lead to underinvestment, fragmented practices or the perception that intelligence is useful but difficult to manage.

Table 4. Practical recommendations for strengthening economic intelligence systems

Observed issue	Managerial recommendation	Expected effect
Weak measurement of EI activities	Define indicators for information quality, response time, use in decisions and performance impact	Better control and justification of intelligence investments
Fragmented	Create cross-	Improved

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information flows	functional routines for sharing strategic information	organizational learning and faster decisions
Limited formalization	Establish an EI unit or assign clear responsibilities to a strategic monitoring team	Greater continuity and accountability
Insufficient training	Develop training in monitoring, analysis, information security and digital tools	Improved quality of analysis and innovation capability
Weak integration into strategy	Connect EI outputs to diagnosis, strategic choice, implementation and evaluation	Stronger competitive positioning and strategic coherence

For Moroccan enterprises, especially SMEs, the implementation of economic intelligence should be progressive and realistic. A first step is to identify strategic information needs and priority sources. A second step is to organize collection and validation routines. A third step is to establish internal dissemination practices, such as dashboards, monitoring reports or decision meetings. A fourth step is to protect sensitive information and develop a culture of confidentiality. Finally, intelligence outputs should be integrated into strategic diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation.

4.4. Limitations and future research

This study is based on cross-sectional survey data and therefore identifies associations rather than definitive causal effects. The measures are also based on managerial perceptions, which may be influenced by respondent experience and organizational culture. Future research could use longitudinal designs to observe how intelligence systems evolve over time and how their maturity affects performance trajectories. Comparative studies between Moroccan enterprises and firms from other emerging economies would also help clarify the role of national context. Finally, future work could examine the influence of digital transformation, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity practices on the development of economic intelligence systems.

5. CONCLUSION

This article examined the contribution of economic intelligence to organizational performance and competitive advantage among Moroccan enterprises. The results show that economic intelligence is widely perceived as useful for strategic decision-making, competitiveness and performance improvement. Descriptive findings indicate that most enterprises recognize its importance, while bivariate analyses confirm significant associations between

intelligence practices and performance outcomes such as turnover, growth, profitability, innovation, responsiveness and competitiveness.

The main conclusion is that economic intelligence should be understood as an integrated managerial system rather than a simple monitoring activity. Its value depends on the articulation between strategic monitoring, information collection, knowledge sharing, digital tools, information protection, training, formal structures, dedicated resources and integration into decision-making. Enterprises that move from informal monitoring to mature intelligence systems are better positioned to anticipate environmental changes, improve strategic choices and sustain competitive advantage.

For managers, the study highlights the need to formalize intelligence practices, define measurement indicators, strengthen the role of human resources and connect intelligence outputs directly to strategic processes. For researchers, the article opens further avenues for studying economic intelligence in emerging contexts, especially in relation to digital transformation and organizational resilience.

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