

## ***Economic Intelligence & Creativity within SMEs/SMIs: An Offensive Skill to be Introduced***

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**Summary:** SMEs and SMIs create most of our national wealth, create most of our jobs and make more than half the productive investments in our country. Although, thanks to their size, their history and their flexibility, they are often the melting pot for innovation and sources of information coveted by competitors, in creative project mode, it is the player within a structured organisation, as the one that uses their products, that has a major role to play in information management and the emergence of new ideas. The importance of strategic monitoring and economic intelligence in their development, diversification, innovation and decision-making processes no longer needs to be demonstrated.

However, although the defensive aspect has become more familiar, the offensive aspect is often restricted to gathering and processing information and introducing a monitoring process. The offensive wing of economic intelligence, as we see it in our context, takes creativity as a means of conveying competitive intelligence and advertising techniques that may contribute to the definition and subsequent integration of an offensive model within SMEs and SMIs. This model would be a model which is no longer the prerogative of monitoring services alone, but is within reach of each company player such that it becomes a source of diversification, innovation and decision making.

We refer to the sociology of the network player or translation sociology developed by Latour, Callon & Latour (1991 and following), and to the recent proposals that we have called "*reverse creativity*" or the new uses and new imagined or misappropriated uses of products which constitute a relevant proposal. We shall build on the Nonaka and Takeuchi knowledge creation method (1997) which supports the scenario in which the employee is the main player in the company since he possesses knowledge, processes information and interacts with its structure in order to cause new proposals to emerge. Finally, we will analyse the creative advertising techniques, the "disruption technique", in particular, for which we can thank the advertiser, Jean Marie Dru (1996 & 2003), and we will attempt to demonstrate that a model which associates the fields of knowledge and creativity, shall, in fact, be furthering the tactical and strategic objectives of the company.

**Keywords:** :Player, creativity, competitive intelligence, economic intelligence, offensive, project, strategy.

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### **Competitive intelligence & creativity in small business: a double-reverse skill to be structured**

**Summary:** Organizations, as small-medium business in France, create the largest part of national wealth and employment; generate more than half the productive investment of our country. Through their size, their history and their adaptability, capability, they are often considered as innovation center and veins of inspiration coveted by the competition, members of one organisation powered to creativity goals in project team, has a principal mission on managing the information and pushing up new ideas, for product and services. The position of strategic intelligence and business intelligence in their development, diversification, innovation and decision-making processes is common knowledge. However, although the defensive aspect has become familiar to them, the offensive side often focuses on the role of gathering and processing information and introducing intelligence procedures. Can creativity be a support for competitive intelligence and can advertising approach contribute on defining and integrating an offensive model for SME SMI? - A model which would not be solely for the benefit of intelligence alone, but available to each of the company's stakeholders in order to become a source of diversification, innovation and decision making.

Part of the paradigm, we have assembled for this research in general and for that purpose in particular, should have to refer to the "networking-actor" sociological field Latour (1991 and following ), (Callon & Latour,) and what we called through this article 'reverse creativity'. We will base our theoretical and furthermore, practical development, on the Japanese approach in Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) research which supports the employee as the main stakeholder in the company with access to and the ability to process information and knowledge and interact with the organisation. We will analyse how creative advertising techniques and, particularly, the disruption manner, which we owe to the publicist Jean Marie Dru (1996 & 2003), and attempt to demonstrate that a model which links the field of "knowledge" to that of "creativity" would serve a company's tactical and strategic goals.

**Keywords** Competitive intelligence, Creativity, Offensive business intelligence, Project, Strategy.

## Context Introduction

We inform the reader that this article is part of research carried out within the framework of a doctorate thesis for Information and Communication Science which focuses on the integration of economic intelligence into an offensive wing in order to enable development or increase creativity within certain SMEs/SMIs, the characteristics of which we will present later on in this contribution. We shall also present the scenario for our intervention along with the circumstances surrounding the meeting. To this end, we shall use and adapt the *disruption* technique, in particular, to our main subject, the Development of Creativity in SMIs/SMEs and the Development of Advertising Techniques. We intend for creativity, thus revealed and produced within the framework of an organised team in project mode, to be nurtured and acquired by the organisation, thus enabling the companies concerned to develop new procedures and new products so as to be able to maintain, bolster and even increase their market share.

In this introductory paragraph, and in order to place our contribution in perspective, we are very modest regarding the players and given the high stakes, we have firstly chosen to refer to three articles in order to only mention the main points, and to then return to the concept of creative destruction proposed by the economist, Schumpeter, in order to place the general framework and introduce the keywords that illustrate our line of thought.

Referring to such content helps us illustrate each pillar of our epistemological and scientific instrument as well as our individual hypotheses: the concept of creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942), the general framework in which to position creativity; the Nonaka and Takeuchi knowledge creation method (1997), which supports the scenario in which the employee is the main player in the company; the sociology of the network player or translation sociology developed by Latour, Callon & Latour (1991 and following) because our subject, creativity, is taken from our understanding of "translation-mediation"; this necessity, amplified by the competing resources available in emerging countries and the recent proposals that we have called "*reverse creativity*"; and, finally, the disruption technique for which we can thank the advertiser, Jean Marie Dru (1996 & 2003).

### Asking the Right Questions when there is a Downturn

The first excerpt of an article to which we shall refer concerns an interview between Sam Pitroda, Minister of State for Structures of Public Information and Innovation in India, an emerging country, published in the *Le Monde* newspaper of 9 July 2010. In response to the journalist's question "You have just taken part in meetings for the Aix-en-Provence Economists' Circle on the

theme "New Growth", what did you think of them?" he answered, "*It was interesting, but they were not asking the right questions. They ask how we can return to the pre-crisis situation, but that's impossible! We should be asking ourselves how we should organise ourselves in this new world order.*"

Creativity Spreads and can be Shared and Exchanged

The second article is dated 17 February 2010 "Cheap Creativity in Emerging Countries Benefits Western Multinationals" and *Le Monde* provides this summary: "More and more groups are relying on their Asian or Eastern European research laboratories to come up with imaginative products suitable for sustainable development. Innovation is no longer the domain of developed countries alone. The creativity of researchers and engineers in emerging countries is now being put to work in order to design products to be used all around the world. We have entered into a new phase in the globalisation of research. A website, [www.indovations.net](http://www.indovations.net), has just been created to promote Indian innovations and create links between Indian innovators and western companies."<sup>1</sup>

A Vast Movement and Endogenous Factors.

The third article by Michel Delberghe is dated 7 August 2010 and entitled "More than 168000 Salaried Jobs Cut in the Industrial Sector in 2009." is part of a wider movement.

### *Context*

Within an economic and social context marked by the globalisation of economies and the internationalisation and virtualisation of exchanges via the use of ICTs, commercial and non-commercial organisations (SMEs/SMIs, NGOs, Associations, Universities) have yet to write the scenario of their future in which there is an exceptional crisis, that no-one had foreseen and the effects of which we cannot fully comprehend today in spite of the fact that Laïdi (2010) imputes these difficulties to endogenous factors, i.e. "*Increased work costs, VAT in France being twice that in Germany, and a disastrous delocalisation policy.*"<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty with this statement lies in the need to both let go of part of the world vision of modernity – the separation of the world into players, institutions and territories – and adopt a resolutely innovative *hyper-modern* vision which places the emphasis on mediation, networking and translation and only then, on the mobilisation of skill sets that have been individually trained and nurtured<sup>3</sup>. These questions in response to the above context may show the intentions of our contribution.

The Perimeter of our Contribution

We shall instate our perimeter by proceeding with a line of questioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt of article by Annie Kahn "Cheap Creativity in Emerging Countries Benefits Western Multinationals", published on 17 February 2010, provided by *Le Monde*.

<sup>2</sup> Laïdi, Z., "Substituting fair trade for free trade stems from a wrong vision", *Horizon Debates*, p.15, *Le Monde*, 15 May 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Bertacchini, Y., "Territorial Intelligence: a Retro-Prosppective Lecture", *International Economic Intelligence Review* 2 (2010) 65-97.

Isn't man at the heart of the strategic monitoring process and therefore close to any source of improvement of the company's competitive advantage? Wouldn't introducing an integration model into companies promote competitive intelligence? If company players learn this integration model will it promote the disclosure of competitive advantages? Aren't the company players the ones that are the best placed to improve existing know-how or analyse the reasons for the failure or lack of success of their company's products or services? Aren't their diagnoses more tried and tested than any other monitoring tool and, in any case, something not to be sidelined during the strategic analysis of the company?

Finally, we shall temporarily conclude this provision of context by mentioning the concept of "*creative destruction*" which designates the process in which business sectors disappear and new economic activities are created. This expression is strongly associated with the economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) and became popular via his book "*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*" , published in 1942<sup>4</sup>. In Schumpeter's vision of capitalism, innovative entry by entrepreneurs was force that sustained long-term economic growth , even as it destroyed the value of established companies and labourers who enjoyed some degree of monopoly (or caused a "perpetual hurricane" according to Schumpeter).

The companies that have revolutionised and dominated their markets until now - such as Xerox for photocopiers or Polaroid for instant cameras - have seen their margins decrease and their domination disappear with the arrival of competitors with better designs or significantly lower production costs. Creative destruction may sometimes actually form monopolies rather than destroy them. This is the case with Wal-Mart, a company which is gradually gaining the upper hand in the retail trade in the United States by using new stock management, marketing and human resource management techniques, causing numerous older or smaller companies to disappear.

When innovation is crowned with success it actually leads to the temporary monopoly of a market by reducing the profits and power of the established companies and, over the long term, it can cause them to disappear via the competition of the new products commercialised by the newcomers. Creative destruction is a very powerful concept because it explains the dynamics of industrial change and the transition from a competitive system to a monopoly, and *vice versa*. This is at the root of the Endogenous Growth Theory and the Theory of Economic Evolution. Creative destruction, however, may be accompanied by job losses, until such time as the skill sets that have become obsolete, and therefore unemployable, may be replaced by others which are more able to meet the needs of the companies<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> At <http://fr.wikipedia.org> viewed on 18 August 2010

<sup>5</sup> <http://fr.wikipedia.org>, cited above

Many types of innovation lead to creative destruction<sup>6</sup>:

- New markets or new products
- New equipment
- New sources of work and raw materials
- New forms of organisation and management
- New means of transport
- New means of communication (e.g. via internet)
- New advertising and marketing methods
- New financial or fraud instruments
- Legislative changes or new ways of influencing the political decision-makers.

Schumpeter originally saw five types of innovation:

- The production of new goods
- New production methods
- The appearance of new outlets
- The use of new raw materials
- A new work structure

We shall retain some of the main ideas from these excerpts throughout our contribution along with some elements contained in the *creative destruction* proposal made by the economist, Schumpeter, even though we are now in a position in which we may question the relevance of this creative destruction association in light of the current situation in which we see Asia becoming the epicentre of global economic growth.

#### Searching for the *Right Vision* and Request for Integration

Companies have always sought the "*right strategic vision*", that is to say that they have always sought the "ideal" trajectory, resulting from their capacity to analyse and understand their environment so as to enable them to make the right decisions, which will lead to well-managed diversification, the maintenance of their know-how, development of their resources and will *eventually* ensure their competitive advantage. As much as large companies have been able to turn to, and pass from, the Porter Model, to a planning or positioning strategy model, or even to make efforts to learn lessons from the successful experience of their competitors, SMEs/SMIs have, for as much, a size inferred on them by more limited resources and have difficulties forming an appropriate strategy.

However, it is the latter that produce most of our national wealth, create most of our jobs and make more than half of the productive investments in our country. By their size, their history and their flexibility, they are often the melting pot for innovation and sources of information coveted by their competitors. But they are probably also the most exposed. The importance of and the concepts associated with strategic monitoring and economic intelligence in their development,

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<sup>6</sup> *ibidem*

diversification, innovation and decision-making processes are definitely more appreciated and are certainly gaining ground. If however, the defensive aspect has become more familiar, the offensive aspect is often restricted to gathering and processing information and introducing monitoring processes.

This made Dou<sup>7</sup> write the following (1995, p.4) *"Technological monitoring for companies that "produce" goods and services, however, remains the foundation on which economic intelligence activities can be developed. We would be deluding ourselves if we believed that simply manipulating the concept of economic intelligence would be enough to cause the company to have a strong position in the long term."*

We are convinced, from our experience with SMEs/SMIs, that the latter cannot envisage using the same form of economic intelligence as that used in large companies. This is a two-sided problem since, in addition to being an economic problem, the problem of maintaining a permanent pool of competitive advantage lies at the heart of the strategies of medium-size enterprises. Their structure and their operating methods require a specific, individualised, approach - an approach which is difficult to reproduce - the invention of a new strategic path model, or a path that may promote and rely on the creativity of the people working in the company, favouring their knowledge of the field and the business and their ability to see what needs to be done and translate it into proposals. SMEs and SMIs may (must) call on their endogenous resources in order to create competitive intelligence, rather than economic intelligence. In terms of their results, the specific situation of SCPs (previously SCOPs) is worth examining and, to this end, we introduce the work of Patrick Lenancker on same<sup>8</sup>.

*« In practical terms, whereas the bankruptcy of companies in France has risen by 24% over the two years of the crisis, 2008 and 2009, in comparison with 2006 and 2007 together, the bankruptcy rate for SCOPs has remained stable over the same period. The SCOPs – including industrial SCOPs – have shown their resistance capacity. Why?*

*Firstly, because they have significant and stable capital. In fact, at least 16% (and an average of 40 - 45%) of the results are set aside which provides a key advantage: the money set aside definitively remains the property of the company, thus ensuring the consolidation of its capital and its long-term financial stability.*

*Secondly, the SCOP employees are associate co-entrepreneurs who hold a controlling share in the capital of their company and are therefore associated with the governance and involved in the smooth operation of their company. Therefore, the director, by nature, is not isolated and can count on management involvement, since the co-entrepreneurs are very attached to the sustainability of their jobs and therefore to the sustainability and independence of their company. This is why the decision-making centre in SCOPs naturally remains at the heart of the territory."*

More exposed to the vagaries of the economic crisis that we are experiencing, medium-sized enterprises must dig into their human and organisational resources in order to weather this crisis

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<sup>7</sup> Dou, H., *Technological Monitoring & Competitive Advantage*, Dunod, Paris, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Lenancker, P., "France can keep its Industrial SMEs", LEMONDE.FR | 19.04.10.

and the cycles inherent to the capitalist economic system, which shall lead to other crises." *Historians have observed it - crisis phases are inherent to financial logic.*<sup>9</sup> "

Creativity is therefore made to contribute more often and is set to work full-time in order to attempt to answer the challenge depicted by Dou (*cited above*) when he speaks of technological monitoring that accurately conveys our problem. "*How can we analyse and make short or medium-term predictions on the development of a certain technology, as far as is possible, or how can we forecast technological changes based on the analysis of social development?* ".

Recently General Electric was used as an example<sup>10</sup> on how to make the most of the incredible know-how of the Indian users of their products. Brought up in a frugal context, not in one of western abundance, they thought of other marketing vehicles for the MAC 400 electrocardiogram and the ultrasound device by G.E. These devices are now being used in the United States for new applications that the Americans had never considered, i.e. examining the injured on the site of an accident, thrusting its fabulous, previously under-exploited, flexibility, into the limelight and increasing the manufacturer's margins for this product. We shall come back to what we have called "*reverse creativity*" in another article.

Mirroring Dou's double line of questioning (*cited above*) on technological monitoring, we summarise the central theme of our contribution and our thesis as follows: "*Can creativity support competitive intelligence and can advertising techniques, which are major consumers of creativity, contribute to the definition and, subsequently, the integration of an offensive model within SMEs and SMIs?* ". We shall speak of a model that is no longer the sole domain of monitoring services, but which is within reach of each company player so that they may be a source of diversification, innovation and decisions made.

Although the term "creativity" is not a term directly associated with the field of competitive intelligence , we aim to lay the foundations for this creativity paradigm, as we refer to it in our research, as the starting point for our reflections with a crossed triple objective:

- To highlight and demonstrate the need to place man and his knowledge at the heart of the creativity process, based on the Japanese work model by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) which could be combined with a project-type method of institution.
- To attempt to demonstrate the similarity or parallels between the cycle of a creative advertising technique and the information cycle for competitive intelligence, based on some elements of the translation-mediation approach as described by Latour (1991);
- To lay the foundations for this creativity paradigm within the context of creative advertising techniques and, more specifically, the disruption technique for which we can

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<sup>9</sup> Aglietta, M., *The Crisis Escape Routes*, Michalon éditions, Paris, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> "Cheap Creativity in Emerging Countries Benefits Western Multinationals", *Le Monde*, 17 February 2010.

thank the advertiser, Jean Marie Dru (*cited above*).

We shall already point out three common elements for each section of our epistemological instrument listed above, which are, of course, present at varying degrees and in different volumes and very certainly organised and articulated in an order that can differ from one situation to another. The common areas are division, analysis and integration which implement an information and communication process. We have associated keywords with each of these areas. Division: ideas, proposals, sources – **disruption**; analysis: ideas, sources, content – **Japanese model**; and integration: proposals, content, summaries – **mediation/translation**.

Dou (*cited above*, p.65) writes the following regarding *integration science* "*the motivating force of creativity, innovation and the mastery of the complexity that surrounds us develop at speed in all advanced countries*<sup>11</sup>. *These allow liaison and dialogue between science experts that are very far from each other, but whose "study subjects" are indispensables to the implementation of large projects...*".

We see here the partial justification of the coherency of our epistemological instrument as we presented it in the introduction.

If Anderson expressed the (1959)<sup>12</sup> basic principles of creativity, Porter (1993) details them in his work *Forecasting and Management of Technology*<sup>13</sup>. We shall present them briefly here.

- Fluency: ability to present and integrate new ideas and new concepts.
- Flexibility: ability to change concepts and reference bases and transpose applications to different fields.
- Originality: capacity needed to fight against conformism.
- Awareness: openness to imaginative and new visions.
- Drive: being motivated.

These basic creativity principles, present to different degrees in the people within the organisation, can only be brought to light in a situation that is perceived and shared by the members of this economically-destined community. But these parts of the whole can only melt down so as to be transformed into competitive advantage if they are physical pieces of information.

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<sup>11</sup> Dou writes "*French science, by the vertical structure of its teaching and its distribution into fields that are often very compartmentalised, makes it very hard to take the horizontal and multidisciplinary sciences into account.*" (integration sciences)

<sup>12</sup> Traits of Creativity, Interdisciplinary Symposia on Creativity, 1957-1958, New York, Harper & Row, 1959.

<sup>13</sup> Porter, A.L., Roper, A.T., Mason, T., W., Rossini, F.A., Banks, J., Widerholt B.J., New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1993.



## **Creativity, a Physical Piece of Information that Reflects Solidarity Experienced<sup>14</sup>**

Reserved and set aside for psychology and philosophy until now, neurologist and artists agree that creativity can be associated with other mental functions such as imagination, perception and emotion (Pfenninger, SHubik, 2001) "*The exploration of creativity, that quintessentially human and most remarkable power of the mind, used to be confined to the domains of psychology and philosophy.../...The origins of creativity examines in a cross-disciplinary fashion the biology of the brain and creativity, as well as associated functions of the mind, such as imagination, perception, and emotion.../...Artist and neuroscientist agree that the way our brains process information determines how we perceive, with the brain matching perceived images with innate or learned visual symbols to elicit a reaction.*<sup>15</sup>"

We have written about the environment and the construction of 'operable' reality. (Bertacchini, 2010) cited above as a result of the information process which determines our perception. "*The environment as we perceive it is our invention.*" (Von Föerster, 2003, ). "A growing body of new knowledge suggests that what we call reality is actually something we construct." And Morin wrote (2005, pg 144) "*I agree with von Foerster when he says that information does not exist in nature. We extract it from nature; we transform the elements and the events into signs, we snatch information from sound, using redundancies. The information, of course, exists since living beings communicate with each other and interpret their signs. But before there was life, there was no information.*"

Planetary and ecological conscience is associated with cybernetics, which were born out of World War II, as a reaction against it Bounoux (1993) and Serres (1990) speak of the laws in the *Natural Contract* and then invite us to follow them in order to respect our environment. We are, of course, surrounded by varied environments, close, intermediate and distant, but the manner in which we experience them, according to our peers, and the position of territorial intelligence can be found in this reply.

If the living being perceives and, according to Lévy (2002) *computes* the world, this means that the individual projects their interior reality onto the world, whilst being penetrated by it at the same time, via a circular interaction which jeopardises the act of sharing between the subject and the object.

The living being organises itself, stipulates its own goal, determines its own distinction and action criteria and "calculates" uncertain surroundings by sorting, selecting or translating information, by aiming to transform disorder *into* its order (Bounoux, cited above).

- The self-organised subject lives ensconced behind its informational or cognitive fence;
- this informational fence, itself, is produced by the organism's organisational fence;

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<sup>14</sup> Echoing Morin's proposal (2005, p. 124) "*at a push, an organisation without freedom and with very little order would disintegrate unless this freedom was accompanied by a deep solidarity between its members.*"

<sup>15</sup> Pfenninger, K-H., Shubik,S., *The Origins of Creativity*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

- the living being interprets its relationships with its surroundings (The Semiotic Fence and "*I have the Mental Image: the Third Party Concept*", (Deleuze, 1983) and does not limit them exclusively to those with its peers (Peirce, 1931-1935).

The previous epistemological elements place the accent on the relational approach, the pragmatic approach or the subject-to-subject approach, or when, in interacting with the other, we discover the *certain* uncertainty of the rules of the game and the way of describing the system and constructivism. Mucchielli (2004, p.130) proposes a "*comprehensive communicational approach*" for a phenomenon as an element of an 'active' system composed of *external cognitive objects and actors as the contributing factor for a circular movement, for the emergence of another phenomenon.*". This would therefore position itself in the paradigm of complexity, a paradigm brought to light by the work of E. Morin (1991 and 2005 re-edited).

That which cannot be summarised with a key word and which cannot be reduced down to a law or a simple idea is complex. (Morin, 2005) "*The Removal of Fences*" (Bertacchini, Gramaccia, Girardot, 2006) invites us to look again, on a case by case basis, in the field, immersed in the environment, for the inter, the mesh, the devices and Sitic, invites us to look for the social facts and action. This is why, as Breton & Proulx (1989) explain, "*communication thus constitutes the final and the best alternative ideology or religion, i.e. the ideology of universal conciliation, since it knows no enemies other than the inevitable demon of noise.*". Bounoux (1993, p.14) describes the pivot of the relationship wherever it penetrates "*the communication model places relationships before its own terms. It does not study things, but flows, and replaces the sector-based, static vision of the world by the approach of its dynamic complexity.*".

An to illustrate our title - *Creativity, a Physical Piece of Information designating a Spirit of Solidarity* - as a perception, relationship and then attachment and to show the context in which we position the word "creativity" in our research, we shall cite the article by Lombardo, Bertacchini, Malbos (2006) written on the passage from interaction<sup>16</sup> within a pedagogical relationship to interactivity within a learning situation, explaining the passage from an organisation's perception of an environment calling for an adaptive response in terms of creativity to effective mobilisation by the players that form the organisation.

Creativity, the capacity - an endogenous resource that can be mobilised - to create and imagine differs from creation "*the act of bringing something into existence, of making something out of nothing.*"

Within the context of our research, we address creativity as the art of "transforming" this ingredient - imagination - into a product in terms of signs, ideas, innovation and innovative products or services at the SME/SMI level and we will endeavour to highlight the importance of knowing how to arouse, reveal, *translate* and share it with all the players in the company. This procedure involves

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<sup>16</sup> Lombardo,E., Bertacchini,Y., Malbos, E., "From interaction in a pedagogical relationship to interactivity in a learning situation.", *International Journal of Information Sciences for Decision Making*, No. 24, 2006.

resonance regarding the mentality of the people in the company and a procedure for change that has been rendered acceptable so as to favour the strategic vision-based exchange of skill sets.

Morin (2005, pg 92) "*If you understand complexity, you understand solidarity*. If complexity, according to E. Morin, presents us with a multidimensional reality woven from order and disorder, the same is true of creativity and its techniques. As with the principle of *joint complexity* which coaxes us to associate whilst differentiating and whilst processing uncertainty, creativity feeds on new lines of approach. We can cite one of the more common ones *brainstorming*, the literal translation of which brain storming (Alex Osborn, 1953<sup>17</sup>) conjures up a state somewhere between order and disorder. Irrigating thought, coming up with elements and ideas and joining them together so that they create their own identity as they move towards the same goals, faithful to E. Morin's thoughts "*The whole is more than the sum of the parts*".

This creative detour in E. Morin's work, allows us to place our research into perspective, identifying the possibility of every player in the company accessing information, managing it and being able to articulate it and organise it as per a known creative diagram, specific to the company.

### **From the Competition of Creativity to Innovation in the Economic Intelligence Process**

We refer to the definition of creativity given by Alex Osborn (*cited above*) "*the mental capacity to visualise, foresee and generate ideas*". Creativity translates and feeds on the internal and external environment of the organisation, and is a double-edged activity that calls on the imagination and must product results that are both original and useful. According to *Guy Aznar*, its *the aptitude to produce new things*" by associating the individual with the organisation.

If creativity is distinct from imagination which distances us from the contingent and productive reality, it takes us towards the daydream, imagination is one of the components of creativity to be encouraged and transformed into production, creation and innovation so as to ensure that the company has a better competitive advantage and knows how to involve people.

*"The complexity of the relationship between order, disorder and organisation, therefore, arises when we empirically observe that, in certain conditions and in certain cases, unordered phenomena are required for organised phenomena, which contribute to the growth of order, to be produced."* (Morin, *cited above*, p.85).

Guilhon and Levet (2002) observe the following within the framework of economic intelligence, "*Information and knowledge are complementary, they may cause a meaningful structure to emerge. One of the priorities therefore consists in developing organisational learning nodes and introducing changes of behaviour in order to renew and transform knowledge. Openness to the environment, the collection and processing of information then becomes a motivating force for learning*".

Throughout our contribution, we will attempt to demonstrate how creative advertising techniques

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<sup>17</sup> Osborn, A.F., *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Thinking*, New York, Charles Scriber's Sons, 1953.

can be included in many new organisational approaches that aim to produce competitive intelligence, i.e an offensive wing of economic intelligence. In substance, we can only write if our imagination feeds creativity and creativity then authorises innovation which leads to the improvement of the company's competitive advantage.

In order to conclude this necessary summary appraisal, we shall present creativity "*as a strategic path, a translation, a mediation, a change or a requirement for company managers to adopt a new perception.*" In all cases, there must be a movement to be initiated, a movement for which the driving speed and the speed of application are of particular significance in the race to obtain the competitive advantage. This would less allow a company to pass from "technical specifications for problems or situations" to a set of ideas and solutions than to reveal and lead a change in organisational culture. We shall speak of the disruption creativity technique as a means for hoarding information and then we will apply this to the example of a product developed by General Electric and primarily destined for the Indian market, given above.

### **Disruption**

*Disruption has been defined as a means of questioning the status quo, and contesting the established order.*" Jean Marie Dru<sup>18</sup>, former president of the advertising agency TBWA.

It aims to incite companies to re-define the way in which they direct their commercial activity, their strategies and the way in which they innovate in order to be competitive.

The methodology can thus be broken down into the following three steps:

- Determining the thing that sets the thoughts in stone: *Convention*.
- Questioning it with disruption idea: *Disruption*.
- Re-framing it in a pre-determined manner: *Vision*.

Produced by the advertising field, the creative technique of disruption comes within the perimeter of our research, in that it needs to hoard information on the brand and the products and analyse (*the convention*). Since a brand cannot be reduced to a set of values and emotions for each of its products, it must be called up as a living representation at the heart of all that the company does. *The convention* breaths coherency into the brand.

Knowing how to question this representation of the brand (*disruption*), allowing oneself to think outside the box and adopting *related and lateral lines of thought* are actions that shake the accepted ideas and provoke chaos whilst keeping the desired vision in mind (*the vision*).

Three creative advertising steps form this cycle which we see as a copy of the steps in the economic intelligence information gathering cycle.

If we take up the example of the new use of General Electric ultrasound imaging devices (*cited above*) which were originally created for rural India and which *in fine* are now employed for other uses back in the country where they were designed, the disruption would be broken down as

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<sup>18</sup> Dru, J-M., *Disruption live: To put an end to conventions*, Village global, 2003.

follows:

- Finding the thing that restricts our thinking: *Convention* "Devices in rural India are only used for inhabitants of isolated villages".
- Questioning it with disruption idea: *Disruption* Why do we not make more noise about the fact that it's easy to handle in contexts where this is needed? "
- Re-frame it in a predetermined way: *Vision* "To better handle emergency situations (on the site of accidents in the USA) thanks to the fact that the device is easy to handle.

We shall now present an excerpt of the application associated with our research with a reminder of the main research question, company research and selection protocols, assessment of the company situation and products or services, assessment of the company situation and offer, the composition of the creativity cell and work meeting procedures. Finally, we will pay special attention to the case study depicting a specific company.

### **Presentation of our Application with a Focus on Companies**

Here is a reminder of our main research question: "*Can creative advertising techniques promote the installation of an integration model and support offensive EI within SMEs/SMIs?* "

In order to verify the validity of the initial proposal and the associated hypotheses, the application was introduced within 10 volunteer companies from diverse business sectors, i.e. IT/ Advanced Electronics/ Pharmacy Management Electronics/Automobile Hi-fi/ Automobile/ Ready-Made Clothing/ Insurance/ Naming Agency/ Foodstuffs.

We will now describe the company search and selection protocol.

The company search and selection procedure covered local and regional entities, SMEs and SMIs, with a size of between 10 and 250 employees.

There are two ways of compiling the SME/SMI portfolio:

- The first way is that of prospecting companies in order to offer them the opportunity to participate in the study based on a three-month commitment with 2 meetings per month.
- The second is to offer the same approach to companies who want to call on the Safeguarding Law, based on a three-month commitment with two meetings per month, but comprising a prior context-sensitive analysis phase in light of the difficulties experienced.

Assessment of the company situation and its offer, the composition of the creative cell and the work meeting procedures, i.e.

- Meeting with the company director or manager of the department concerned in order to identify the expectations and the perimeter of the study.
- Recruitment of contact people who shall form the *creative cell*.
- Definition of the objectives: diversification of a product or a service, international development, increased turnover.

- Conduct of creative simulations, experimental lines of investigation and the analysis phase.

#### Creative Cell Work Meetings

- 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Meetings

Information collection: identification of what we think we know about the company, its identity, its products and services and confrontation of the perception of the players in the creative cell.

#### Definition of the Objectives

- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting

*“The mental capacity to visualise, foresee and generate ideas.” (Alex Osborn, cited above)*

#### Reminder of the definition of the objectives

Context: be ready to create and produce understandable ideas, accept the fact that you'll be launching yourself into a different system of thought, accept a new way of thinking, formulate other strategic lines of thought, share them, disseminate them, confront them.

Development of a detailed perception model at the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

Choice of the creative method and explanation of its progress.

Creative scenarios currently being applied.

- 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting and 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting:

Creative scenarios in application and scenario debriefing and selection of ideas.

How does it match up with the predetermined objectives and feedback.

*Presentation and details of the work carried out in one of the companies in the portfolio.*

### **Industrial Electronics Company**

Activity: industrial electronics, adjustment, parts, cleaning, setting machine tools, general maintenance, for industrials, in particular.

Created in 1994, 80 employees, hereditary company.

The company was experiencing difficulties in January 2009.

The company, aware of its difficulties, wanted to benefit from the protection of the Safeguarding Law, giving itself the opportunity to take a few steps back from its activity, without focussing on the management of financial problems. The Safeguarding Law offers the company a period of time in which it can make the decisions needed to ensure the sustainability of the its business and jobs and the time to work on re-defining its objectives, in particular.

Observation: fewer orders received from its main clients, represented by the automobile sector, with the crisis that rapidly had an impact on the automobile industry being the main cause, via the knock-on effect.

Objective: line of work enabling the unearthing of a new development of turnover.

The Creative Cell: 6 members: managers, intermediate staff working on the machines and administrative staff. The creative cell is that much more motivated in that it knows that a social plan shall be implemented in September 2011 if the results remain insufficient.

The constitution of the creative cell decided with the manager is, without any doubt, the most delicate point of the study. This must be comprised of men and women from varied services in order to ensure a mix that promotes creativity. It must comprise trustworthy people since they shall be party to information that the manager could normally consider to be sensitive.

This must comprise people who commit to participate in the meeting that shall be at least every month, for a minimum duration of 3 months, with the objective of arriving at a tangible solution.

It became clear during these meetings that simply having a strategic vision is not enough, it needs to be rendered operational, otherwise the meetings become informal. We were able to observe that the development of a strategic vision is, above all, an intellectual process, which can be found in the realm of thought and not the realm of action. It aims to change the manner in which things are seen - perception - and it must drive the work until it also changes reality.

### **Applied Creative Technique: Disruption**

*"Disruption was established as a means of questioning a status quo, of contesting established order"*, technique developed by Jean Marie Dru, former president of the advertising agency TBWA.

The disruption technique is based on the principle of the creative leap. It must break with convention and redesign a new identity for the company. Three steps need to be implemented in order for this to be successful:

**Step 1 - Convention:** This step enables the habits that set thoughts in stone and the stereotypes that imprison perception, to be validated. Conventions are not facts, but opinions. We used the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 1995) widely used in advertising techniques to analyse the values of a brand in order to model this step.

During the information-gathering phase in the company, a semantic was brought to the forefront that can be translated on this prism. In reply to the question: If it were a person, what type of person would the company be?

**Step 2 - Rupture:** The time for questioning that enables the company to re-position itself. This is a matter of detecting the conventions that write the "standards", that is to say, the stock of accepted ideas that are keeping things in one place and to then distance oneself from them.

*Analysis of the Creative Cell Semantics.*

The company, born out of a family company, was qualified as an old company which did not immerse itself in new management techniques, has stayed in its favourite segment - the automobile sector - which, until the crisis, satisfied the heart of its business. Steeped in its traditions, the employees see it as an unknown company, they are not very proud of working there and the work remains repetitive.

The word "noise" and the adjectives "dull" and "grey" come up often in the analysis.

**Step 3 - The Questioning - The Vision:** To produce a new direction for the company for its services, giving imagination the space to roam.

*Analysis of the Creative Cell Semantics.*

-- "and if we could work outside", "and if we were a new company and not a company that's over 20 years old " and "if we moved" ... "push back the walls, breathe, silence, notoriety, breath, air, etc."

### **Summary of the Three Steps: Convention, Disruption, Vision**

#### **Convention:**

The company, of family origin, has a know-how that it has dedicated to the main sector of the **professional** automobile industry, which it has mastered for years but has not known how to breathe new life into it. The automobile sector has been hit by the crisis, so the company is hit by the crisis. It remains **enclosed** in its **iron collar**, and creates **boundaries**.

**Disruption:** The company is not intended for professionals alone in the automobile sector, the company becomes visible to the average citizen and is more open.

**Vision:** Respecting the semantic choices translated by the creative cell,

the decision was made to **open up** and **blow away the cobwebs**:

by organising **Open Days**: this has never been done until now because the client base was exclusively industrial. However, in addition to the fact that it places value on the teams who are happy to share their day-to-day life, it has **birthed** a new market, i.e. the **individual** who, in doing work that always gets bigger and bigger, sometimes feel they need professional services.

Even more **openness** and **air**: expanding the company's horizons on the invitation of a **Bulgarian** industrial company for Public Relations (CCI competition search assistance); A delegation of 5 people was invited to come and discover the know-how required to manufacture automobile parts. A skill set was discovered within the team of adjusters: perfect mastery of English, not previously exploited, which enabled the link to be made between the two countries and **boundaries to be crossed**.

#### **The Results Obtained**

Individual Orders: new market = +35K€ in 3 months

Bulgarian Orders: + 150K€ by December 2009.

To date, the company is still weak, but the restructuring plan has been avoided.

### **A Step Report for the Other Companies Studied**

#### **Naming Agency**

Description of the problem Creating company or product names is not an activity with a high level of renewal. Once the name has been created, the company keeps it for a few years before changing it. So where do we find new name-hungry clients?

In using the divergence technique, we helped the company highlight the generic medicine sector which is a major consumer for the creation of drug names that can best depict the molecule and the



symptom treated. By extension, a drug crosses borders, the multiplication of the creation of these drug names for laboratories arose naturally within the creative team, thus imbuing the company with an international dimension. To date the naming agency has been won several budgets, and the Swiss budget for the Roche Laboratory for a molecule currently in the process of obtaining market authorisation, in particular.

### **Ready-Made Clothing**

Problem: How do you face up to the low demand for brand ready-made clothes for children under 10. An event or an impulse buy OK, but its rare to find mums who buy all brand clothes for their children under 10 years of age.

In using the *disruption* technique, the sales point adopted sales for 2 months.

Any client may "hire" a garment for 2 months, at a lower cost. Once the garment has been returned, the client is granted a discount on another garment, whether "bought" or "hired". The sales point recycles the garments returned, sending them to the sales depots, recovering a part of its margin, and has thus introduced a staunch loyalty system which guarantees client loyalty.

**Convention**: It's not worth spending a lot on ready-made clothes for the under 10s, they barely have time to wear them before they grow out of them.

**Disruption**: And if children allowed themselves to wear brand clothes, just like grown-ups? It's not a question of age, but of time."Grown-ups have the **time** to wear their clothes for a long time, children only have the **time** to slip them on and they've already grown"

**Vision**: "Let's let kids dress like grown-ups."

So much work is carried out on the bases of creative techniques and semantic exercises which enlarge the vision of the company, enabling it to always be a few steps ahead as regards the competitive advantage.

Adding conventional economic intelligence strategies to the steps – *Expression of Needs - Information Gathering - Processing and analysis of **the production of ideas by creative techniques** - before moving on to – Diffusion*, this may be placing **real competitive intelligence** within reach of medium-sized enterprises, adding the concept of understanding and intuition to that of the information so important to economic intelligence.

**Temporary Conclusion**: Creativity is an offensive pool of skills at the disposal of Economic Intelligence.

The Japanese Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) approach develops the idea that knowledge is not easy to see or express and lists the explanatory roots of the success of Japanese companies in the 70s and 80s, i.e. their capacity to create new knowledge, in that it places man at the centre of the process, promoting intensive and creative interaction between the members of a team. One of the main points in our model is the implementation of project-by-project management which is

conducive to the development of creative techniques, and a creative cell that functions as per the project management diagram. Creativity is a skill that can be put to work for Economic Intelligence when it is aroused and then used in the company's production section. Creativity, this aptitude to produce something new, to detect and solve problems and to give birth to ideas, may be accessible to any player in the company and may be covered in an apprenticeship. Creativity is a state of mind that we can acquire with method and is not the monopoly of creation professionals and advertisers. Jean Claude Wydouw<sup>19</sup>, psycho-sociologist, states that " *To create, one needs to be able to create, want to create and now how to create*".

To be able to create, resolve a problem or produce ideas, above all one needs to **identify and express the needs and gather the necessary information** and to have analysed the constraints and the data.

In order to be able to create, one needs to **organise the information gathered in a different manner, analyse it and process it**. One must know how to produce ideas and have a deep desire to throw oneself into a new system of thinking, accept to think differently and **formulate strategic reasoning with a view** to innovating and leading new projects. This is a space to be defined, structured and organised inside the organisation that can be penetrated by the organisation. One needs to confront one's own ideas with others' ideas, **share them, disseminate them** and enhance them and exchange practices and knowledge.

"Identifying, collecting, compiling and processing information, organising it and disseminating it", the creative steps are very similar to the steps of the information-gathering cycle for economic intelligence strategies, with one step - Step 5 - being different. This is the step in which the new ideas are produced or the will to "*think differently*", to accept to get out of the straight-jacket of normal thought-patterns is expressed.

The creative strategy may be imposed with the same thoroughness, by integrating a "creativity" step to the information-gathering cycle along with an idea-production translation-mediation step, thus authorising us to look towards different horizons before centring ourselves once more on the solution or the innovation. Didn't Guy Aznar<sup>20</sup>, one of the pioneers of creativity, go as far as to introduce dedicated creative agents into a professional world in order to solve one-off problems? The companies that will take the time to train their teams in this creative skill shall thus benefit from a true decision-making assistance tool. Creative intelligence, a skill set that the people in the company need to acquire, is a potential that only demands to be seen, involved, asked, an offensive strategy with a different view of company activity, possible question-raising in order to ensure the competitive advantage, the certainty of not giving in to the temptation of mental compartmentalisation and allowing imagination free reign once more.

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<sup>19</sup> Wydouw, J-C., *Creativity Handbook*, Editions d'Organisation, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Aznar, G., Introductory Exposé, *Creativity Meeting*, Université de Paris René Descartes, 7 and 8 July 2005.

Man, the strategic company asset, possesses knowledge, processes information and interacts with the organisation. Our research thus aims to propose that an integration model that links knowledge with creativity, would efficiently further the tactical and strategic objective of a medium-sized enterprise.

The expression of a new development vision for companies to obtain the competitive advantage modifies our view of conventional strategic processes and demonstrates, that in a time of crisis, the required restricted creation opens up perspectives in terms of management and economic development. The use of creative advertising techniques and the call on the creativity of all the players in the company, may enable the company to face up to the time for strategic reactivity, which is becoming shorter and shorter

*“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they’ve had more experiences than other people.” Steve Jobs”*

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