



Economic Intelligence: A Driver of Competitiveness and Strategic Efficiency for Organisations

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Abstract:

Economic intelligence plays a pivotal role in enabling companies to methodically collect and rigorously analyse pertinent information about their environment, competitors, and market trends. EI is not just about gathering data; it also includes protecting important information and trying to influence the outside world. In this context, this study explores the impact of EI on competitiveness and organisational performance. It is organised around, an initial section on the theoretical foundations of EI, drawing on the main theories of information, resources, decision making and networks. Next, we move on to the different components of EI and how EI plays a part in the analysis of the organisational environment, distinguishing between the macroenvironment and the microenvironment. Finally, the central section presents a comparative study involving two major organisations in the oil sector, which will enable us to better analyse the EI measures adopted by each organisation in strategic decision-making and to gain a competitive advantage.

Key Words: Economic intelligence, Organisational performance, Strategic decision-making, Information, Influence.

JEL Classification : D83, L25, M21

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Introduction:

In a global economic context marked by increased competition, rapid technological innovation and a constantly expanding mass of information, the ability of organisations to master strategic information has become a determining factor in their competitiveness and efficiency. Economic intelligence (EI) is therefore becoming an essential lever for anticipating market trends, detecting opportunities and threats, boosting competitiveness and supporting decision-making at all levels of the organisation.



Far from being limited to simple data collection, EI encompasses strategic intelligence, the protection of sensitive information and influencing the external environment. This proactive approach enables companies and institutions to transform information into a sustainable competitive advantage, by providing the right information, to the right person, at the right time, to support the creation of value and the sustainability of the organisation.

While the role of EI in competitiveness and strategic effectiveness is increasingly recognised, it remains difficult to measure its impact on organisational performance in concrete terms, particularly at microeconomic level. In fact, the diversity of EI systems, the complexity of environments and the specific nature of each organisation make the evaluation of this contribution complex.

In this context, a key question arises: **To what extent and through what mechanisms does economic intelligence contribute to improving the competitiveness and strategic effectiveness of organisations, and how can these effects be assessed and optimised in competitive and uncertain environments?**

To address this issue, we propose the following hypothesis:

H : Integrating economic intelligence into the organisational culture fosters greater responsiveness and more informed decision-making, which optimises overall performance.

In order to address our issue, we have structured our study around three key points: first, we outline the theoretical foundations of EI, drawing on the main theories relating to information, resources, decision-making and networks. Then, we discuss the various components of EI and its role in analysing the organisational environment, distinguishing between the macroeconomic environment and the microeconomic environment. Finally, the central section presents a comparative study involving two major organisations in the oil sector, which will enable us to better analyse the EI measures adopted by each organisation in strategic decision-making and to gain a competitive advantage.

I. The theoretical foundations of economic intelligence:

EI is based on a number of studies that explain how organisations exploit information to improve their strategic position:

The theory of information and communication, inspired by the work of (Stigler, 1961) and (Stiglitz, 2000), this theory underlines two important points, namely the cost of information introduced by Stigler, the information useful for making a rational decision has a research cost, which limits the access of economic agents to all available data.

The second point corresponds to the asymmetry of information introduced by Stiglitz, who explains that some agents possess more information than others, which generates imbalances and can compromise the proper functioning of markets.



We also have the theory of resources and skills developed by Edith Penrose and developed further by Jay Barney. This theory states that competitive advantage is based on mastery of internal resources, including information (Barney, 1991) (Penrose, 1959).

Rational decision theory, which stems from classical and neoclassical economics, is based on the assumption that decision-makers have full information, are perfectly rational and seek to maximise their interest. Within this framework, optimal decisions are determined in a logical and mathematically coherent way (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

However, Herbert introduced the notion of bounded rationality in the 1950s. According to the author, individuals make decisions in a context marked by informational and temporal constraints. They do not always seek the optimal solution, but rather a solution that is satisfactory given the resources available. (Herbert A, 1955).

In his book *Competitive Strategy* (Porter, 1980) introduced the 'Five Forces' model, an analytical tool that assesses competition within a sector by examining five key elements: rivalry between existing companies, the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers, that of customers, and the threat of substitute products. This framework helps companies to gather and analyse strategic information about their environment, anticipate competitive reactions and adjust their strategy, which corresponds directly to the objectives of economic intelligence (Porter, 1980)

The network theory developed by Castells emphasises the role of networks of players in the circulation of information. IE exploits these networks to improve intelligence, create partnerships and strengthen strategic cooperation. According to this theory, power and performance no longer reside solely in the resources held by players, but in their ability to access, process and disseminate information via dynamic, interconnected networks. These networks may be economic, social, political or technological (Castells, Manuel, 1996) (Castells, Manuel, 1997)

The theory of economic warfare, developed by (Harbulot, 1999), according to this approach, global competition is likened to an information war. The author considers that the weapons are: control of strategic information, disinformation, influence strategies, and economic destabilisation manoeuvres such as cyber-attacks, regulatory pressure, etc.

II. Economic intelligence: how does it work?

The concept of 'Economic Intelligence (EI)' was first defined in a book by (Wilensky, 1967). The author defines EI as *'the activity of producing knowledge serving the economic and strategic goals of an organisation, gathered and produced in a legal context and from open sources'*

The Martre report states: *"Economic intelligence can be defined as all coordinated actions of research, processing and distribution, with a view to its exploitation, of*



information useful to economic players. These various actions are carried out legally with all the guarantees of protection necessary for the preservation of the company's assets, under the best conditions of quality, deadlines and cost” (Martre, 1994)

The report also specifies that useful information must benefit the various decision-making levels of the organisation, in order to develop and implement in a coherent manner the strategy and tactics necessary to achieve the objectives defined by the company with the aim of improving its position in its competitive environment (Dufau, 2010)

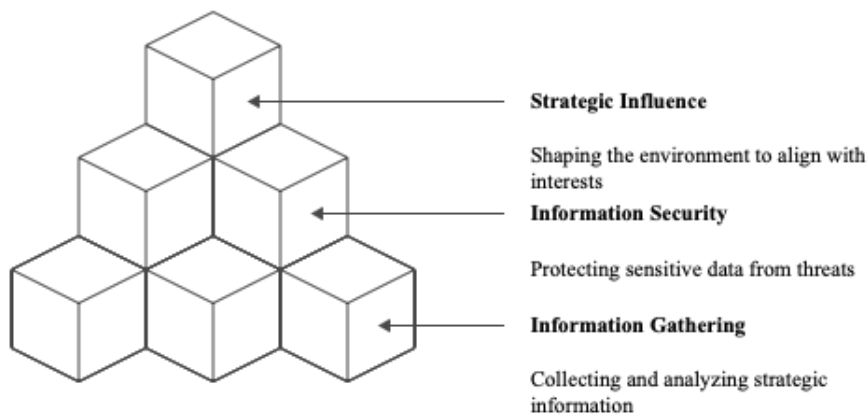
According to (Pardini & Delbecque, 2006), EI encompasses monitoring, security and influence. Intelligence is characterised by the gathering of strategic information, and is a crucial stage in the development of an organisation's strategies (Lebrument, 2012). It involves collecting, analysing and exploiting information in order to anticipate changes in the organisation's external environment, with the aim of preventing threats that could harm the smooth running of the organisation (Juillet, 2005). This mainly involves anticipating major economic, political and technological trends, monitoring innovations to remain competitive, keeping an eye on competitors to adjust strategy, and monitoring standards and laws to ensure

However, it is important to add the security aspect to monitoring, as this involves protecting the company's information assets, with the aim of preventing internal and external threats to an organisation's sensitive or strategic information (Reix, 2004). According to (Harbulot, Christian, 2003): *“Information protection consists of protecting sensitive company data against the risks of loss, theft, distortion or unauthorised distribution”*

Finally, EI includes strategic influence, which is an organisation's ability to influence its environment in its own interests. This involves influencing public opinion, political decision-makers, regulators and economic players. As quoted by the authors. *“Influence is a process aimed at acting on the organisation's external environment to steer decisions and behaviour in line with its strategic interests”* (Boumeska, Bengrich, El Ghadouia, & Amazzal, 2023).. Influence encompasses all kinds of action exercised through different methods, such as lobbying and public relations, strategic alliances, targeted communication, community involvement and thought leadership.



Fig. 1: “The different aspects of EI”



Source: Authors own construction

III. EI at the service of strategic decision-making:

It is essentially important to analyse an organisation's environment properly in order to adapt its EI approach. Analysing the company's environment, whether global or specific, is a fundamental step in making strategic choices. This environment is constantly changing as the organisation evolves, exposing it to threats but also offering opportunities that need to be accurately identified in order to ensure its long-term survival and strategic development.

There are generally two main categories of environment (Nickols, 2015): The macro-environment, which groups together the global factors that affect all companies, irrespective of their sector of activity, mainly the political and legal environment, the economic environment, the socio-cultural environment, the technological environment and the geopolitical environment.

The micro-environment, meanwhile, encompasses the players with a direct influence on the company, such as customers, suppliers, competitors (whether direct or indirect), partners, investors, as well as the media and public opinion (Rota, Reynolds, & Zanasi, 2012).

This is where EI comes into its own, providing systematic, structured and targeted monitoring of key variables in the environment. By transforming information from the environment into usable knowledge, EI enables decision-makers to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at play, reduce uncertainty and guide decisions in a more informed, responsive and competitive way (Guilhon & Moinet, 2017). It makes



it possible to link the complexity of the external environment to the strategic choices made within the organisation.

Fig. 2: “Micro and Macro Environments of an Organisation



Source: Authors own construction

However, it is necessary to point out that EI optimises decision-making in several key ways, namely (Coggia, 2009) :

Analysis of the competitive environment, EI makes it possible to collect and analyse data on competitors, market trends and customer expectations. This helps decision-makers understand their position in the market and anticipate competitive movements.

Identifying opportunities and threats, by monitoring economic, technological and regulatory changes, EI helps identify opportunities to be seized and threats to be avoided, enabling proactive strategic decisions (El mountassir, 2021).

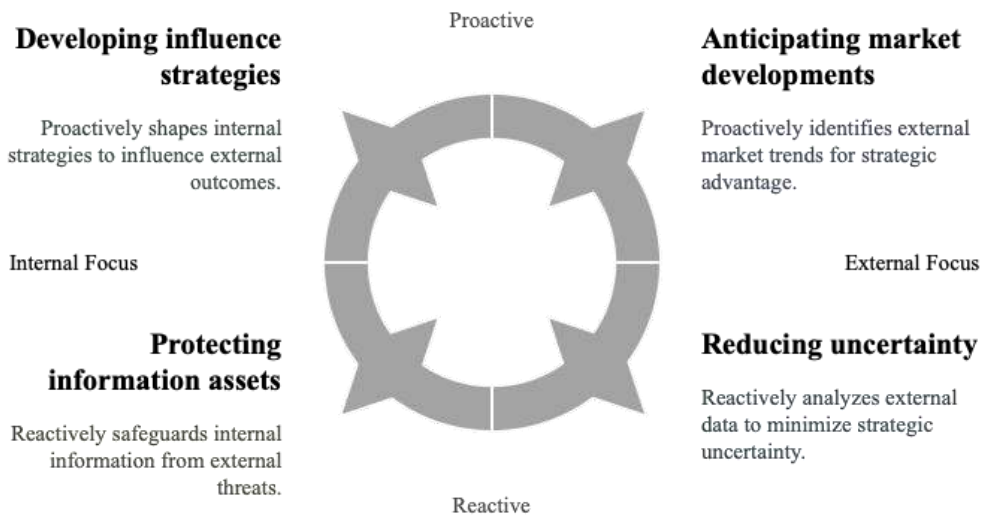
Informed decision-making, EI provides accurate and relevant information, reducing uncertainty and enabling managers to make choices based on reliable data rather than intuition. By analysing historical and current data, EI makes it possible to forecast market trends, which is essential for developing new products or services (Berrada, 2019).

El Mabrouki (2020) Explains in his study that EI makes it possible to identify potential risks, whether related to markets, regulations or reputation, and to prepare action plans to mitigate them. He explains that EI helps identify future risks and provides a better understanding of current risks (El Mabrouki, 2020)

Optimising resources and facilitating innovation through a better understanding of market needs and internal performance, as well as identifying unmet customer needs and analysing competitors' innovations. EI helps to allocate resources more efficiently, maximising return on investment. And subsequently develop new products (Coutenceau, 2025).



Fig. 3: “EI’s contribution on strategic decision-making”



Source: Authors own construction

By way of example, we can cite the case of the company “ExxonMobil”, one of the world's largest oil companies. Its experience is a perfect illustration of how EI can become a lever for performance, innovation and strategic adaptation in a fiercely competitive and rapidly changing sector.

ExxonMobil operates in an energy sector marked by international competition, pressure on margins, market volatility, increasing regulatory requirements and the need to innovate in order to remain a leader. Faced with these challenges, the company must anticipate trends, optimise its resources and reduce operational risks.

To meet these challenges, ExxonMobil has placed EI at the heart of its strategy, focusing on a number of areas:

- **Strategic intelligence and analysis:** ExxonMobil uses intelligence to monitor market developments, technological innovations, competitive movements and regulatory changes (Tradingview, 2025). This enables the company to anticipate opportunities and threats, and to adapt its strategy quickly.
- **Data mining and artificial intelligence:** The company has invested heavily in data science, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) to optimise exploration, production and maintenance (ExxonMobil, 2025). For example, AI is being used to analyse geological data, predict the location of resources, optimise drilling and improve the predictive maintenance of equipment, thereby reducing costs and risks (Harsh, 2025).



- **Digital transformation:** ExxonMobil has adopted an organisation-wide digital culture, integrating advanced technologies (HPC, analytics, IoT) to enhance agility, performance and innovation. Partnerships with technology leaders such as Microsoft, IBM and Intel enable the company to remain at the forefront of innovation and data security (ExxonMobil, 2025).

Adopting a business intelligence approach and technological innovation ExxonMobil has:

- Improved resource discovery rates and reduced exploration risk through advanced predictive models (DeNittis, 2023).
- Optimised costs and operations, with synergies generating several billion dollars in annual savings after the integration of new assets.
- Enhanced its ability to adapt to environmental and regulatory requirements, by integrating real-time monitoring tools and solutions to reduce its carbon footprint.
- Maintained its position as world leader through constant monitoring, proactive risk management and a strategy of continuous innovation.

ExxonMobil's EI, combined with digital transformation and innovation, is a key success factor for anticipating market trends, optimising decision-making and guaranteeing long-term competitiveness. This approach enables companies to transform information into a strategic advantage, and to constantly adapt to a complex and uncertain environment.

In terms of influence, ExxonMobil has entered into a partnership with Qatar Petroleum (QatarEnergy) around the North Field East (NFE) project (Larkin, 2022), which represents one of the most significant alliances of international cooperation in the energy sector. This partnership has major strategic implications for ExxonMobil, in industrial, commercial and geopolitical terms (Larkin, 2022).

ExxonMobil gains privileged access to one of the world's largest natural gas fields. The North Field East will increase Qatar's annual LNG production capacity from 77 to 110 million tonnes by 2026, with ExxonMobil holding a 25% direct interest in the joint venture dedicated to this project (Ugal, 2023). This guarantees ExxonMobil a stable, long-term supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG), a key resource for meeting growing global demand, particularly in Asia and Europe.

This partnership will enable ExxonMobil to strengthen its global LNG portfolio, diversify its sources of supply and increase its export capacity, with the aim of achieving a global LNG portfolio of 40 million tonnes a year by 2030 (Hari, 2023). This expansion gives the company a major competitive advantage, particularly in a context of energy transition where LNG is perceived as a transitional energy that is cleaner than coal.

The collaboration with Qatar energy allows ExxonMobil to share and benefit from the latest technological trends in liquefaction, transportation and management of



energy megaprojects (Boon von Ochssée, 2023). ExxonMobil provides technical expertise, while QatarEnergy offers in-depth regional market knowledge and large-scale execution capability. This sharing of skills fosters innovation and the optimisation of operations.

ExxonMobil's presence in Qatar since the 1990s, with almost 30 billion dollars invested and involvement in virtually all of the country's LNG projects, reinforces its geopolitical influence in the Gulf region and on the global energy market (Pekic, 2022). This strategic partnership also enables ExxonMobil to secure its outlets in key markets, while contributing to global energy stability.

This partnership demonstrates ExxonMobil's ability to rely on economic intelligence and international cooperation to remain a key player in the global energy sector in a context of profound change.

IV. Comparative SWOT analysis: ExxonMobil vs Chevron:

In order to refine our work, we conducted a comparative study between ExxonMobil and a competitor operating in the same sector, namely the giant Chevron. The joint SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis sheds light on the mechanisms by which each group leverages economic intelligence to fuel its resilience, anticipate disruptions in the sector, and maintain a competitive advantage in the face of increasing digitalisation and the proliferation of economic, regulatory and technological risks.

As two of the world's largest oil and gas players, ExxonMobil and Chevron have taken ambitious steps to integrate economic intelligence at the heart of their digital transformation and strategic decision-making. However, they differ in terms of their organisational structure, innovation culture, degree of proprietary data integration, speed of adoption of digital tools, and relationship with technology partnerships.

The objective of this SWOT study is to compare how ExxonMobil and Chevron use economic intelligence to strengthen their resilience, seize opportunities in decarbonised energy and consolidate their competitive advantage in a context of increased risks, whether in terms of cybersecurity, geopolitical instability or market developments. This analysis will highlight the main strengths, limitations, growth opportunities and vulnerabilities specific to each group, drawing on concrete examples of recent investments, digital initiatives and strategic alliances.

**Table.1: SWOT analysis (ExxonMobil-Chevron)**

	ExxonMobil	Chevron
Strengths	• Centralised monitoring through business analysis units (exploration, refining, trading, industrial safety), analytical hubs and centralised decision-making. • Massive investments in seismic modelling, logistics optimisation, predictive maintenance and real-time market data processing to drive capital allocation (Kitishian, 2025). • Investment capacity and financial strength enabling Q1 2025 net income of 7.7 billion dollars • Operating cash flow of 13 billion dollars, and planned 2025 (Kitishian, 2025) • CAPEX of 27–29 billion dollars. And a net debt/equity ratio of 7% (Eren, 2025) • Strategic partnerships, through the major agreement with Sonatrach (Algeria, 2025): resource development and low-carbon innovation with sharing of technological and regulatory information. And alliances with QatarEnergy, Chart Industries and Calpine for LNG, CO₂ capture and management (Aecweek, 2025).	• Integrated digital monitoring platforms, use of ‘nerve centres’ and real-time dashboards, integrating business intelligence across all business lines and countries (ARC, 2018). • Flagship partnerships with Microsoft, Schlumberger and Halliburton, enabling the development of cloud solutions, AI, connected objects and the pooling of sector-specific data (Chevron, 2025). • Favourable financial and budgetary situation: • Subsidiary capital expenditure in 2025 ranging between 14.5 billion dollars and 15.5 billion dollars; EBITDA in 2024 estimated at 38.9 billion dollars and a total debt ratio of 0.08 (Gregg Bewer, 2025) • Active participation in industrial intelligence consortia and academic sharing networks (Stanford, MIT), facilitating the multi-business exploitation of economic intelligence (Chevron, 2025).



	• ExxonMobil is implementing advanced protocols for the protection of strategic data and prevention of industrial espionage and cyberattacks (Kitishian, 2025).	
Weaknesses	• Transverse information flow between divisions and geographical areas is sometimes slow, hindering competitive agility. • Most of the IE focuses on optimising fossil assets, limiting early detection of disruptions in renewables (Kitishian, 2025). • Cumbersome decision-making processes, large scale, and a rigid industrial culture slow down the adoption of new agile practices and hinder rapid adjustment to weak signals (Eren, 2025).	• Heterogeneity of intelligence systems between upstream and downstream branches or geographies. • Cyber vulnerability due to multiple access points (IoT, cloud); example: regular cyber audits but resilience still needs improvement. • Post-merger integration challenges following the acquisition of Hess (53 billion dollars) and PDC (6.3 billion dollars) (StabroekNews, 2025), standardisation and interoperability of knowledge bases remain challenging.
Opportunities	• ExxonMobil employs international collaborative monitoring through the proliferation of sectoral groups (Algeria, Angola), (Aecweek, 2025) sharing benchmarking and data with other majors to accelerate synergies and anticipate regulations. • Deployment of regulatory alert tools and automation of ESG, carbon and global supply chain monitoring.	• Leading role in sector groups, advanced supply chain and regulatory risk management with the Algerian government and other major players. • Existence of advanced AI data mining platforms and accelerated migration to the cloud via Microsoft/AWS (Kitishian, 2025). • Strategic alliances and in-depth monitoring for innovation in new energy



	• Generation of additional profits, expected synergies following the Pioneer integration: +3 billion dollars per year, expected profits: 20 billion dollars by 2030 (Eren, 2025) based on AI and low-carbon innovations.	sectors with integration of academic and industrial economic intelligence (Chevron, 2025).
Threats	• Constant increase in risks to data protection and intellectual property with the rise of digital technology (Levisohn, 2025). • The relevance of IE analyses is hampered by geopolitical uncertainties (Africa, Middle East) and the acceleration of technological change (Aecweek, 2025). • The effectiveness of IE depends on the level of sharing and the integrity of partner networks in new African and gas projects.	• Risk of dilution of data/analysis quality due to the proliferation of digital sources and partners • Gradual loss of competitive advantage as the entire sector adopts digitalised economic intelligence and data sharing (Gregg Bewer, 2025). • Presence in sensitive areas (Algeria, Angola, Middle East), requiring increased vigilance to prevent loss of strategic data and intellectual property leaks (Chevron, 2024)

Source: Authors own construction

This SWOT analysis shows that economic intelligence, catalysed by digital transformation, is central to the competitiveness of ExxonMobil and Chevron. ExxonMobil stands out for the strength of its investments and the robust global integration of its intelligence system, but has to deal with more organisational complexity and post-acquisition challenges. As for Chevron, the organisation prioritises agility and alliances to maximise its flexibility in a changing environment, although it is dependent on third-party expertise.

**Conclusion:**

In a rapidly evolving global context marked by heightened competition, accelerated innovation, and information overload, EI has become a critical lever for strengthening organisational competitiveness and strategic effectiveness. This research has highlighted that EI is not limited to simple information gathering, but encompasses an integrated approach involving strategic monitoring, protection of sensitive assets, influence operations, and the proactive transformation of information into a sustainable source of advantage.

A comparative study, illustrated by a SWOT analysis involving ExxonMobil and Chevron, demonstrates that strategic investments in digitalisation, artificial intelligence and robust intelligence protocols can produce measurable results, namely improved operational efficiency, risk reduction, increased adaptability and global leadership in key sectors such as energy.

The strategies of ExxonMobil and Chevron, focused on partnership but also on innovation, analysed through the SWOT framework, show that the integration of AI brings tangible benefits in terms of resource optimisation, faster and better-informed decision-making, and increased resilience in a context of geopolitical and technological turbulence

In light of the stated hypothesis, the results confirm that integrating economic intelligence into organisational culture does indeed promote greater responsiveness and more informed decision-making, thereby optimising overall performance. ExxonMobil and Chevron are two compelling examples: their leaders leverage EI to seize opportunities, mitigate emerging threats, and ensure the sustainability of their competitive position in an unpredictable environment.

However, the comparative analysis also reveals that the effectiveness of EI depends on the degree of integration, the flexibility of organisational structures and the ability to adapt intelligence systems to specific sectoral challenges, factors that can be either strengths or limitations depending on the company.

In conclusion, this study confirms the central hypothesis: economic intelligence, when systematically embedded in culture and processes, is a major driver of competitiveness and strategic performance. For energy sector leaders like ExxonMobil and Chevron, the ongoing challenge lies in deepening this integration, continuously adapting EI mechanisms to the demands of digital transformation, and ensuring that the value of intelligence is fully realised across all levels of decision-making in an increasingly complex world.



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