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## Strategic Intelligence and Innovation in a Public Enterprise: Analysis Based on the Holistic Approach

### L'Intelligence Stratégique et l'innovation dans une entreprise publique : une analyse par l'approche holistique

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#### Abstract

In a context marked by a diversity of reforms, unpredictability of crisis and an intensity of ecosystem requirements, public enterprises meet challenges qualified as complex and multi-dimensional. In addition, there is an increasing need to innovate products, services, and managerial practices.

Meeting these challenges requires switching the mode of management to a more proactive one based on Strategic Intelligence. In our knowledge, the previous studies analyzed the impact of Strategic Intelligence on innovation from different angles and without articulating the functions of Strategic Intelligence which generate ambiguities involved in practical application. For this purpose, our study aims to investigate how to articulate Strategic Intelligence with innovation in a public enterprise. Our study was based on the qualitative method by conducting interviews in a public enterprise. The main results of our study pointed out that Strategic Intelligence could support innovation through its triptych, highlighting the importance of adopting a holistic approach to analyze Strategic Intelligence and innovation.

**Keywords:** Strategic Intelligence; innovation; strategic watch; communication; Knowledge Management; Public enterprise.

#### Résumé

Dans un contexte marqué par la diversité des réformes, l'imprévisibilité des crises et l'intensité des besoins de l'écosystème, les entreprises publiques relèvent des défis complexes et multidimensionnels. Aussi, il est nécessaire d'innover les produits, les services et les pratiques managériales.

Relever ces défis revient à adopter un mode de gestion proactif, fondé sur l'Intelligence Stratégique. À notre connaissance, les études précédentes ont analysé l'impact de l'Intelligence Stratégique sur l'innovation sous différents angles sans articuler les différentes fonctions de l'Intelligence Stratégique générant ainsi des ambiguïtés quant à son application pratique. À cette fin, notre étude vise à étudier comment articuler l'Intelligence Stratégique et l'innovation dans une entreprise publique. Notre étude a adopté la méthode qualitative à travers le guide d'entretien. Les résultats de notre étude montrent que l'Intelligence Stratégique soutient l'innovation grâce à son triptyque ce qui interpelle l'importance de l'adoption d'une approche holistique pour l'analyse de l'Intelligence Stratégique et de l'innovation.

**Mots clés :** Intelligence Stratégique; Innovation; Veille stratégique ; Communication; Knowledge Management; Entreprise publique.

## **Introduction**

Within the framework of the recent reforms implemented at the national level, the Moroccan public administration undergoes fundamental transformations to carry out its mission of serving the general interest, to implement governmental policies and to modernize public action (Cour des comptes, 2016). In line with these structural reforms, the enterprises and public institutions are involved in achieving structuring projects, implementing the Economic Recovery Program and enhancing the competitiveness of Morocco (Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement, 2021). Additionally, according to the Law no 54-19 on the public services charter, enterprises and public institutions have to meet the legal requirements related to strengthening the good governance, adopting strategic targets, opening to the internal and external environment, and implementing risk management system. Moreover, enterprises and public institutions have to optimize management costs, guarantee a dynamic of constant improvement, promote transparency and access to information. On the other hand, enterprises and public institutions have to facilitate administrative process, consider the digital transformation and innovation as a driver of efficiency, and enhance the quality of services to meet the needs of users, conforming to the Law no 55-19 on the simplification of administrative procedures and formalities.

Regarding this complex and uncertain context, enterprises and public institutions need to adopt Strategic Intelligence as a mode of strategic management which develops agility and adaptability. Indeed, strategic agility is considered by many researchers and analysts as a new innovative management paradigm, adopted by contemporary organizations. However, the lack of integration of different theories and conceptual frameworks developed in strategic management (Hambrick, 2004) did accentuate the need to adopt a new approach which articulates and integrates the different theories in practical processes. Related works highlight the contribution of some functions of Strategic Intelligence in an isolated way and without articulating them. Additionally, the different studies on Strategic Intelligence and innovation lead to disparate conclusions, analyze Strategic Intelligence from several different angles, fail to converge towards a common understanding of the link between Strategic Intelligence and innovation, and neglect the procedural dimensions of innovation (Bouzinab et al, 2017).

In this perspective, our study seeks to highlight the contribution of adopting a holistic approach that articulates the theoretical functions of Strategic Intelligence with innovation in the public enterprise.

## **1. Theoretical background**

### **1.1 From scanning to Strategic Intelligence**

The concept of scanning has evolved over time and different terms are used to refer to the activities of survey of the environment as “Environmental scanning” (Aguilar, 1967; Hambrick, 1981 ) which is a process included in strategic management to ensure adaptability to the external environment. The concept of scanning refers to the research of information related to the external environment to seize opportunities and prevent risks (Lesca, 1997). Information is transformed into Knowledge and then into intelligence to refer to the “actionable knowledge” used for taking actions and decisions (Lesca, 2003).

Intelligence differs as far as the field of its application varies, for example “The economic intelligence is used principally by « economic actors » (Martre, 1994). Regarding Strategic Intelligence, MacDowell (2001) indicates that it aims «making decisions related to long term policies and supporting the achievement of operational objectives ». Strategic Intelligence is understood as a process of transforming information from the organization’s environment into strategies. The identification and use of Strategic Intelligence can potentially increase competitiveness, using pertinent information to support the decision-making process in organizations (Pellissier & Kruger, 2011).

### **1.2 The triptych of Strategic Intelligence**

According to Mallowan (2012) the operational components of Strategic Intelligence are : “strategic watch”, “protection of information” and “influence”. These components are integrated in the “process of economic intelligence” (Pechenot Paillot, 2016), for the author, the process has as inputs the information, as a raw material, gathered from the external environment through the scanning process, then information is processed within the activities of organizations: knowledge management, protection of information assets, intellectual property, and information security. The outputs of the process include essentially information with added value that influences the ecosystem like communication, reputation.... etc. Considering this model, we have chosen for our study the three functions of Strategic Intelligence which represent its triptych:

- The anticipative function aims to prevent threats and seize opportunities to ensure adaptability to the external environment, proactivity, and resilience. This function includes basically the strategic watch in reference to known expressions such as “environmental scanning” which is a proactive process, giving the organization adopting it a proactive characteristic (Lesca, 2003).
- The defensive function of Strategic Intelligence is related to safeguarding an organization against potential threats, risks, and vulnerabilities by protecting the organization's interests, assets, and reputation. The defensive function focuses on securing the information assets, ensuring the compliance with legal texts, and managing strategic knowledge.
- The offensive function in Strategic Intelligence refers to the proactive approach in gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information. This involves anticipating changes in the environment and taking proactive measures. In our approach, the offensive function concerns the adoption of communication to promote the added value of innovation among the ecosystems.

These functions are arising from the principal mission of Strategic Intelligence and impact the proactiveness of organizations.

### **1.3 Innovation**

Damanpour and Evan (1984) define innovation as a response to changes in the environment. Innovation can concern products, services, or processes.

By public innovation we mean innovation that is applied to public organizations including administrations and institutions with a public service mission. According to Bonnenfant and Berardi (2012) , innovation aims to improve or propose new public services, create value for clients and bring efficacy for organizations.

As far as the process of innovation is concerned Hartley et al. (2013) precise that it is iterative, the “cycle of innovation” according to the author covers identifying problems, creating ideas, designing, and testing prototypes, implementing and disseminating solutions.

#### **1.4 Strategic intelligence and Innovation**

The need for organizations to innovate arouses interest in the use of Strategic Intelligence. Therefore, the relationship between innovation and Strategic Intelligence is studied from several angles and has many implications. For El Haoud (2011) economic intelligence supports innovation through its “absorption capacity” and its potential for the “development of interfirm networks”. For the author, Strategic Intelligence is a strategic management approach, that enables identifying, assimilating, and exploiting knowledge from its environment (such as new needs, new partners, new trends and emerging technologies) which can give rise to innovations. Bouzinab et al, (2017) also consider that Strategic Intelligence support innovation through its capacities. The authors state that the process of Strategic Intelligence is based on dynamic abilities of identifying and seizing opportunities, which could influence the creation of relevant knowledge for decision-making on innovation opportunities. For the authors, the dynamic abilities also enable the capitalization on innovations to make decisions about the allocation of resources required for their development. Thus, generated knowledge supports innovation, moreover the existing knowledge conditions future ideas, and thus leads to innovation (Benhamou et al., 2011). To this end, « innovation often benefits from intelligence process, especially when it provides new knowledge, monitors technological trajectories, and expands understanding of the external environment » (Reichert et al., 2020). Scanning the environment provides a portfolio of opportunities and inputs to evaluate. Thus, scanning the environment influences decision-making during the innovation process especially during the first phase of the process “creativity phase” and at the final one to obtain feedback on the product's behavior in the market (Caron-Fasan & Fasquelle, 2018). Additionally, the economic intelligence system, dedicated to opportunity intelligence, becomes risk intelligence by ensuring risk reduction through the Protection-Security Mission (Besson & Possin, 2008). Risks and precisely exogenous ones are considered as responsible for most failures in innovation processes (Bertrand & Saint-Pierre).

The success of an innovation depends on several factors, according to Attarça et al. (2010) innovation and in particular radical innovation, is most often at odds with the existing institutional and legal environment. The authors indicate that the success of innovation projects requires a change in the institutional environment which arouse the interest of adopting proactive strategies to promote innovation.

## **2. Methodology**

Our work is based on the qualitative method and uses a case study. The case study method was chosen since it is suited to contextualize and refine the understanding of the functions of Strategic Intelligence, and to help comparing the theoretical functions of Strategic Intelligence to the operational activities related to them. Yin (2003) indicates that the case study method « investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context » and brings response to « a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control ».

## 2.1 Case description

The case study chosen is a public enterprise belonging to the sector of enterprises and public institutions, it has a public service mission and serves the general interest. The core business activities of the organization are the satisfaction of customers by providing services. It has a rich and diversified portfolio of clients, operates in a hardly demanding environment, and works in alignment with legal texts and normative standards. Also, the organization adopts innovation of products, services, and managerial practices.

The organization selected for our study was chosen for these reasons: first, the context of the public sector is lined up with the principles of managing Strategic Intelligence that advocate agility, adaptability, and proactivity. Second, the chosen enterprise is among the organizations who adopt innovation. Finally, the accessibility of the field of study (interviewees having accepted to respond to our request).

## 2.2 Data collection

To collect data related to our case study, interview guides were established after selecting units concerned with Strategic Intelligence and innovation. To choose these units, we analyzed the organizational chart and portfolio of functions, consequently 8 functions were selected according to their close interaction with our study. For each function, we established an interview guide, the axes of interviews were defined according to the results of the literature review.

The interviews were conducted in person, based on the interview guide sent in advance, the duration of interviews ranged from 45 to 60 min. During the interviews, notes were taken, and relevant elements were checked with the interviewees to ensure coherent formulations. For research rigor, a code (e.g., F1) was assigned to each interviewee. Table 1 lists the different functions interviewed during our study and the axes of interview:

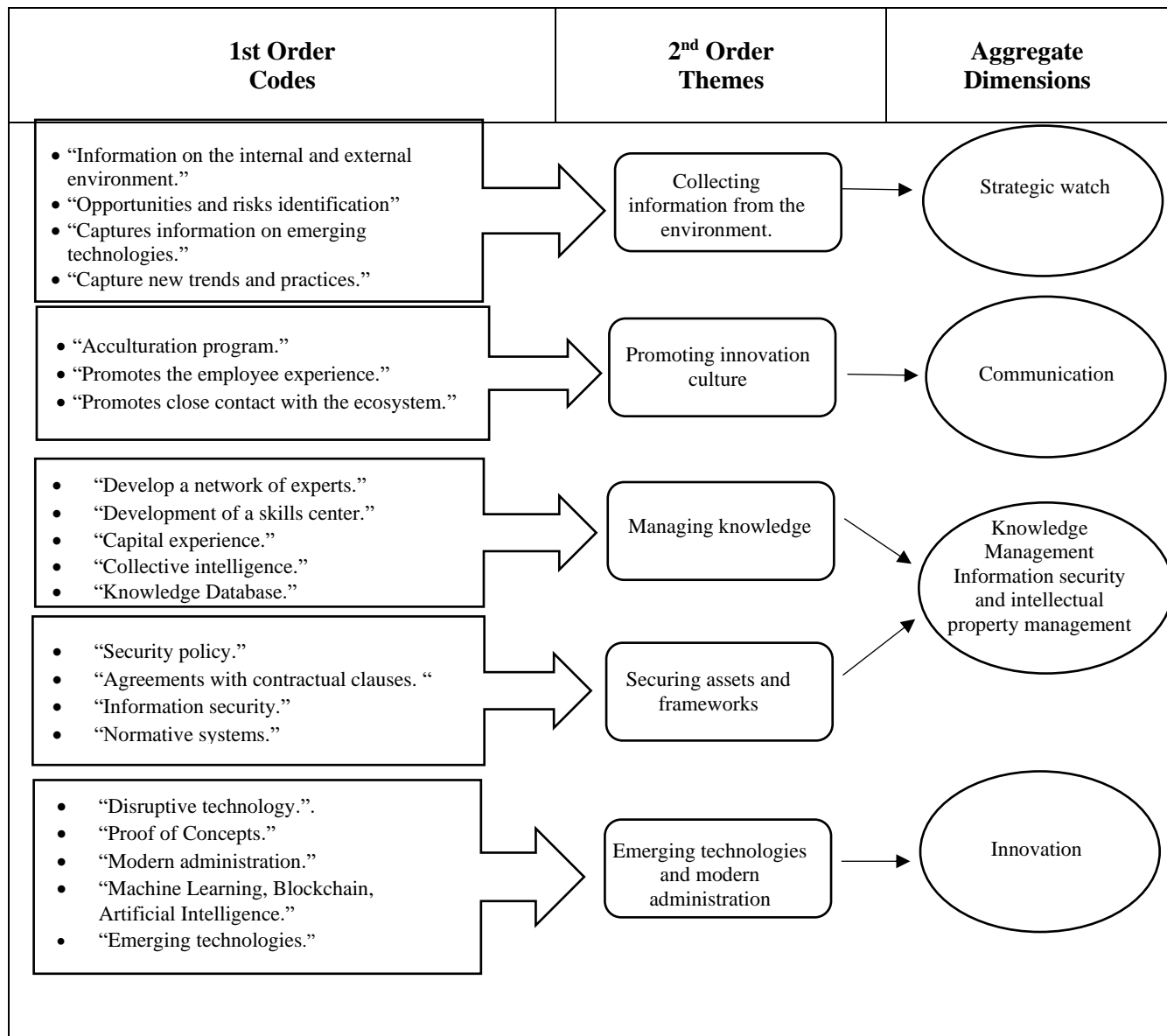
**Table 1: Interviewee profiles and axes of interviews.**

Reference	Quality of interviewee	Function	Axes of interview
F1	Manager	Strategic management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process of strategy.</li> <li>- Strategic watch axes and goals</li> </ul>
F2	Manager	Innovation management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process of innovation</li> <li>- Needs and expectations of interested parties.</li> <li>- Internal and external issues</li> <li>- Culture and collaboration</li> </ul>
F3	Manager	Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic alignment of innovation projects.</li> <li>- Management systems</li> </ul>
F4	Manager	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal communication</li> <li>- External communication</li> </ul>

F5	Manager	Knowledge management and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Management of skills and knowledge</li><li>- Continuous training</li></ul>
F6	Manager	Relationship with Customer and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Customer focus</li><li>- Client satisfaction</li><li>- Partnerships</li></ul>
F7	Manager	Management of Risk and compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Information security management</li><li>- Risk management</li><li>- Intellectual property management</li></ul>
F8	Manager	Research and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Benchmarks and studies</li></ul>

### **2.3 Data analysis**

The analysis of the data gathered was guided by the Gioia method to facilitate “research rigor” (Gioia, Corley, Hamilton, 2013). We used the interviewees quotes for the first round of coding (Fig.1). After, we established the second order themes, in this stage of analysis coherent and interdependent categories were constructed. In the last stage, categories were aggregated into global dimensions taking into consideration the theoretical concepts based on the results of the literature review.



**Figure 1: The data structure according to Gioia Method**

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 The contribution of the anticipative function of Strategic Intelligence

The interviewees in charge of strategic management and innovation pointed out the importance of collecting information from the environment to launch the process of innovation, this flow of information is captured by: *“keep abreast of new developments, seize opportunities, take part in events, develop a network of experts, develop a networking strategy, carry out benchmarks”* (F1). The results of strategic watch are taken into consideration to identify opportunities and risks. These ones are evaluated to determine their relevance and impacts on activities, *“the identification of opportunities and threats involves systematically an analysis of relevance and impacts”* (F3). Relevant opportunities

are proceeded within innovation process and lead to new services, products, methods, and practices in response to environmental changes, legal requirements and evolving trends and practices. The interviewee (F1) precises that *“The strategic watch report is one of the entry points to the innovation process.”*

Different types of strategic watch feed the innovation process: for example, technology watch captures information on emerging technologies, *“Innovation also means capturing disruptive technology: Machine Learning, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence..., which are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty”* (F1). In connection with managing knowledge, *“Human resource watch identifies practices to promote the employee experience and the employer brand”* (F5). Concerning legal watch, it *“identifies new legal or regulatory frameworks for compliance purposes”* (F1). According to (F6) *“Partnership watch identifies new partners and helps develop the organization network”*. As far as the function of communication is concerned *“it scans social networks and the media to gather customer opinions, as well as to capture new trends and practices and promote close contact with the ecosystem,”* These types of strategic watch bring value to the innovation process, and according to (F6) *“The added value of strategic watch is concentrated in identifying the needs of customers as well as the requirements of interested parties”*.

For the interviewees (F1, F3 and F6), the strategic watch addresses basically the following issues: capture information on the internal and external environment and optimize the analysis of information flows.

### **3.2 The contribution of the defensive function of Strategic Intelligence**

Taking into consideration the results of the literature review, the components of the defensive function of Strategic Intelligence set for our study are the knowledge management (KM), Information security management and the management of intellectual property.

Identifying relevant knowledge for innovation involves mapping knowledge in the organization, therefore *“there is a knowledge Database in the Process Identity Cards (PICs), making possible to identify relevant knowledge by process”* (F3). For the interviewee (F5), *“Participating in or leading innovative projects requires soft skills. There are also training plans to reduce skills gaps. Also, the development of a skills center for each technology through training courses to upgrade the skills of the employees.”* Managing knowledge and skills enables identifying resource persons, enhancing their technical capacities and soft skills, and getting them involved in the process of innovation, *“Our aim is to develop skills towards enhanced human capital, arise interests, and capture knowledge.”* (F1), the interviewee adds *“in fact, conducting innovation projects through Proof of Concept means obtaining new knowledge and increasing experience capital.”*

As far as partnerships and collaborations are concerned, the interviewee (F6) indicates that *“we tend to carry out collaborative projects with the interested parties, in addition to the development of an internal network”*.

Concerning the information security management, it aims protecting information assets related to innovation activities. It ensures data availability, confidentiality, and integrity. The information security management includes among others setting policies to guarantee running the system in a cyclic process, evaluating its performance, and implementing a dynamic of continuous improvement. The interviewee in charge of risk management



precises: “we have adopted an information system security policy as part of the information security management system.” (F7).

Another component of protecting innovation assets is the management of intellectual property which protects innovations outputs, from unauthorized uses by adopting the different types of protecting the intellectual property, “for the innovation process, if a product is developed with partners, we draw up agreements with contractual clauses.” (F1)

For these systems (Knowledge management, information security and intellectual property) to work in favor of innovation activities, the organization makes sure to have an effective joint and integrative system. The interviewee in charge of the Organization function precises that: “Innovation is a cross-functional process that affects all activities, from Human Resources to change management. It is steered and operated according to the practices deployed for other management systems, with techniques, normative systems, objectives, Key Performance Indicator (KPIs), management review, and the impact analysis.” The interviewee adds that the articulation of innovation with the other management systems “is also established through the strategic analysis, which is a requirement of management systems, and through the strategic orientations for greater synergy between the various existing management systems.” (F3). The goals of the information management systems are to be aligned with innovation to have a well-articulated process and an overall synergy. The table 2 consolidates the different goals of information management systems aligned with innovation.

**Table 2: The alignment of the defensive function of Strategic Intelligence with innovation.**

	Information management systems	Goals
<b>Strategic Intelligence</b>	<b>Managing knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify a portfolio of relevant knowledge for innovation activities.</li> <li>- Identify resource persons.</li> <li>- Capitalize and enhance knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>
	<b>Information security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify information assets related to innovation process.</li> <li>- Ensure information Disponibility, Integrity and Confidentiality (DCI).</li> </ul>
	<b>Intellectual Property</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify innovation assets (e.g., application, data base).</li> <li>- Define protection mode of innovation assets (e.g., partnership agreements).</li> </ul>

The different information management systems listed above contribute to innovation by managing information assets and knowledge through setting policies and procedures.

### 3.3 The contribution of the offensive function of Strategic Intelligence

The interviewees in charge of communication highlighted the importance of communicating the added value of innovation to the interested parties and the whole

ecosystem. “Through innovation and good communication, we can change the image and mindsets in favor of modern administration.” (F1)

Communication sets an innovation culture and promotes collective intelligence to: “Promote the employee experience and share a common vision with them” (F1) Thus, the interviewee in charge of communication precises that “There is a dedicated program that focuses on the main technologies that serve innovation in particular: Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence...The program aims all the employees” (F4).

The table 3 presents the different goals of communication announced by the interviewees in charge of communication and strategic management (F1) and (F4).

**Table 3: Goals of communication within innovation activities.**

<b>Internal communication goals</b>	<b>External communication goals</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sensitize and keep employees informed about innovation’s vision.</li> <li>- Promote shared values.</li> <li>- Getting employees engaged all along the process of innovation.</li> <li>- Encourage ideation and promote innovative mindset.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting interested parties involved in the process of ideation.</li> <li>- Develop partnership and collaboration in favor of open innovation.</li> <li>- Ensure change management.</li> </ul>

**To this end, the goals of internal and external communication are to be in accordance with the innovation process.**

#### 4. Discussion

With regards to the results of our research presented above, our study highlights the importance of articulating the different components related to Strategic Intelligence with innovation activities, an articulation that calls for a holistic approach to analyze Strategic Intelligence and innovation process illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: A holistic approach for the analysis of Strategic Intelligence and innovation**

The three functions of Strategic Intelligence, forming its triptych, support the whole process of innovation from generating ideas, analyzing feasibility, creating, and experimenting concepts to developing solutions.

Our research reveals the contribution of adopting holistic approach that connects the functions of Strategic Intelligence and links them to the process of innovation. This approach considers the Strategic Intelligence as an information management system whose goals are to be aligned with innovation activities.

The added value of our study is the proposition of an inclusive framework based on connecting the functions of Strategic Intelligence to take full advantages of them and demystify their integration within the innovation process. The framework brings practical response to how to articulate Strategic Intelligence with innovation projects, it' is addressed primarily to units in charge of defining strategy and implementing innovation projects. The anticipative function driven by strategic watch ensures the identification of innovation opportunities through information collected from the external and the internal environment. The feasibility analysis of ideas generated gives rise to validated concepts that are experimented before developing solutions. This process of transforming ideas into solutions requires applying different information management systems such as knowledge management that provides a data base of relevant knowledge and soft skills for innovation process. Also, the defensive function ensures preserving the information assets mainly through the intellectual property management and information security management that protects information assets on the one hand and ensures legal and normative compliance on the other hand. The offensive function of Strategic Intelligence promotes change-management by up-grading mindsets and communicating the added value of innovation to the whole ecosystem and embeds innovation in a cyclic process.

## **Conclusion**

Information as a decision support brings added value by providing practical solutions to operational problems. Making sens of information is done throughout the process of analysis and interpretation of internal and external data. Strategic Intelligence as a system of information management aims decision-making and adopting proactive attitude. Its application over the innovation process throughout an alignment of orientations and goals ensures a better understanding of internal and external environment and guarantees achievement of strategic objectives related to the process of innovation.

Responding to our initial research question, our study highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach for the analysis of Strategic Intelligence and innovation, an approach that articulates the theoretical functions of Strategic Intelligence with the innovation process.

As with any research, our study has limitations which offers directions for new research. First, our research is limited to one case study, it would be available to multiple case studies to provide a more comprehensive overview of adopting the different functions of Strategic Intelligence within the innovation process in different contexts. Second, the results of our research are derived from a qualitative method, future studies could highlight the relationships between the concepts identified in our qualitative study and broaden the literature review to conceptualize a theoretical model which is to be tested using quantitative research.

## Competing interests

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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