

**Supervisión de la información para exportar productos naturales:
propuesta para un modelo sistémico**
**Monitoring the information to export natural products: proposal for a
systemic model**

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Abstract

Despite the increasing interest by international market for the Amazonian bioresources which generally is characterized for its therapeutic attributes (mainly pharmaceutical and cosmetic properties), the exporter, when venturing itself in the international market, comes across itself, beyond the inherent difficulties presented by the international trade added to the national economic policy, with a specific difficulty: the scarcity of information (statistical, logistic, etc) about the exportation of natural products, in special the Amazonian natural products. This article characterizes the international market's environment as " Environment of Turbulent Field " due to its constant change and for presenting an increasing degree of uncertainty. When contextualizing problems with which exporters of natural products come across, this work presents the importance of the applicability of a tool for managing the information t, in this case the Competitive Intelligence (CI) that, among many advantages, makes possible: to monitor governmental programs that support the export activity; to daily monitor the regulations for diverse products imposed by countries; to monitor prices of the similar products and trends in the international market; etc. The main focus of the process of CI is the external events, the trends (especially the possible activities and intentions of the competitors) and the opportunities.

Key words: Exporting environment sector, Bioresources, Competitive Intelligence

Introduction

The interest by international market for the Amazonian bioresources which generally are characterized by its therapeutic attributes (mainly pharmaceutical and cosmetic properties) grows. Daily articles are published and products presented from which active principle (secondary metabolic products) originates from natural resources found in the Amazonian forest. However, when venturing itself in the international market, the

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Brazilian exporter comes across itself, beyond the inherent difficulties presented by the international trade added to the economic policies, with a specific difficulty: the scarcity of information (statistical, logistic, etc) about the exportation of natural products, in special the Amazonian natural products. These facts show how important is an environment monitoring by the organizations while a tool for information management.

This environment, in turn, must be characterized, once any change or development in the external environment creates signals and messages for which an organization have to be alert (Moresi, 2001b, p.94). Under this statement, monitoring information, as well as an organization - defined by Moresi (2001b, p.95) as "... acquisition and use of the information on events, trends and relations in its external environment [..]" - added to the generated knowledge, will assist managers to plan their future actions.

Dill (1958, *apud* Moresi, 2001b, p.93) suggests that "the best way to analyze the environment is not trying to understand it as a set of other systems or organizations, but to see it as an information that becomes available for the organization". However, monitoring becomes difficult due to the load of available information and Huber & Daft (1987, *apud* Moresi, 2001b, p.101) suggest, for example, two ways of how these loads can be reduced: by routing the messages (a kind of departmentalization) or by summarization of messages (reduction and interpretation of the message).

Apparently these would be simple action, if didn't exist some degrees of uncertainty that contain the information (Moresi, 2001b, p.102). It is observed then that monitoring involves the filtering of many information for a specific need and in a way that fill (attend) specific criteria. In the context of the Brazilian exportation of natural products, the importance of this monitoring is evidenced by the scarcity of public and official data available (as, for example, the inexistence of a specific official classification for the diverse products of the Amazon region in the Mercosul Common Nomenclature - NCM) and which small (or still beginning) exporting company need – these small exporting companies are the ones that face the biggest barriers to initiate their shipment. Obviously this article does not question the performance of the Brazilian export which presents a consolidated activity (letting the discussion of its competitiveness aside, if we compare with other nations of the same feature), but intends to explore the situation, it means, the difficulty faced by the Brazilian exporters of natural products to illustrate the importance of a information management tool that assists, in a sustainable way, this activity.

Characterization of the environment of an exporting company

An organization, for being considered an opened system, coexists with internal (customers, users, etc) and external facts (politics, economy, etc) that interact between themselves, which some authors classify as micro and macro environment. Emery & Trist (1965, *apud* Moresi, 2001a, p. 69-70) had defined these environments in four types associating, in different degrees, two variables: stability and complexity. The environments, according to their typologies, are summarized as follow:

- i. Random placid environment - which is characterized for being relatively steady, or either, the changes occur slowly, facilitating the forecasting, not offering threat to the organization
- ii. Added placid environment – which it presents a slow changing, what it is expressed by sprouting of threats for the organization
- iii. Reactive insane environment - which drift from the sprouting of diverse organizations, great enough to influence the environment and other organizations, such when a company forces excessively the reaction from others.
- iv. Environment of the turbulent field – which is characterized for constant change and it presents high degree of uncertainty, for the changes occurred in the organization are wide induced by the environment. In this association of instability with high complexity, one cannot define with clarity up to which point the elements possess capacity to influence themselves.

Figure 1 represents the association between the variables classifying the four environments.

		Environment typology	
Stability	High	Random placid	Added placid
	Low	Reactive insane	Turbulent field
		Low	High
		Complexity	

Fig.1 – Environment typology of Emery & Trist (1965, *apud* Moresi, 2001a)

By Emery & Trist’s definition, we can say that the international trade, due its dynamics, can be fit as **environment of the turbulent field**, for a specific economic change (for example, a phytosanitary barrier to the Brazilian chicken in function of the current H5N1 viruses) of a sector can cause changes in other sectors, in its more diverse aspects (technological, economic, political and social)

Under this environmental dynamics the competitiveness becomes difficult in function, still, of the evolution of the globalization. Moresi (2001a, p. 71) strengthens this concern when quote that "the existing uncertainty inside of an organization in relation to its environment is related directly with the uncertainty to know what are the opportunities and the threats of this environment and how they must be used or prevented". Being the environment a great source of facts interacting between themselves and many times in a negative and positive way, the organizations must learn how to manage these adversities, it means, to monitor the informational environment.

The need of information in an exporting company

In a general way the exporter need to be alert to facts such as: international exchange policies (especially the market destination of its product); shipment routines; consumer

behavior changes regarding its product (or changes in the mediator purchaser activities); and commercial policies that regulate the activity in itself, like for example, the Directives² from European Union market. All these situations must be continuously monitored for the maintenance of the activity, but it is important to remember that this does not guarantee the survival of the organization in the long run (due to the already mentioned dynamic of the worldwide economy), neither its competitiveness.

The complexity (or load) of information, truthful or not, if not worked adequately, can affect the activity and can lead to the premature closing of the activity, as points out the study about Brazilian micro and small exporting companies carried out by Markwald & Pessoa (2006); even though this segment presents itself to be promising, according Francis Canterucci, director of the Brazilian Association of Natural Products:

"[...] our access to the external market is very fast and easy , exactly for being Brazilian. Our country is a model of natural production. [...] Our supply is growing. There's no way to brake this. What we have that to make is to use our Brazilian way to dribble the costs, that really ends making the process impracticable [...] can you imagine what it is, for a Brazilian producer, to expose in a international fair. The expenses are so high, especially when everything is paid in Euros or Dollar "(Organic Planet, 2005)

The cost, the adequacy of the products to the prerequisite of the market, etc, are only few of the constraints that must be observed in the export process. Moura (2005) quotes that the growth of the Brazilian exportation was not followed by the investments in infrastructure, generating impediments of all type. Moreover, it has the bureaucracy. Diverse agencies have to be able to intervene on the external sales, like IBAMA (National Institute for Environment and Natural Resources), the Federal Exchequer, the Ministry of Agriculture and others, generating conflicts between regulations. The author mentions examples of small exporters companies which have a common path full of obstacles, like the owner of Fruits of the Amazônia, that produces candies with exotic fruits like cupuaçu, graviola and açaí, among others, whom declares that at the first time she came across the bureaucracies in the Port of Santos (SP), she almost gave up the export.

In a research about the difficulties to export green coffee, Vegro et alli (2006, p.70), displays some problems faced for the Brazilian agro-exporters and recommends that:

"... companies interested and/or willing to export coffee [...] need to find a basis for standardized services that support the foreign commerce [...]. In this case, it must be consulted the services and specialized departments of public and private sectors, that make information available about on the bureaucratic proceedings, operational proceedings and possibilities of assessorship, partnership and financing to exportation. Through this type of assistance, a process of the firm internationalization can be triggered, assisting it since the planning until the identification and the register in cadastre

² The Directives are mandatory in the scope of the European Union and generate legal obligations and sanctions for the not enforced cases. They determine general requirements of security, fixing the specific procedures of conformity evaluation to be adopted for each product and process (Katayama, 2006)

of possible deliverers and stake holders [...] with the target to export ".

To manage these adversities, or either, to monitor the informational environment, exporting companies need a tool for managing their business information, as well as many organizations already make it.

Tools for managing the information

The way which human beings organize their proper resources and increase their income, in the context of organizational science, are the elements that compose the management, which, according to Garvin (1993, *apud* Tarapanoff 2001, p.56) have as objective "to empower informational resources of an organization and its capacity of information, teaching it how to learn and to adapt itself with the changes in the environment building an organization oriented toward the learning process". Tarapanoff (2001, p.57) adds that to acquire, to store, to analyze and to use the information supplies the support to the growth and development of an intelligent organization, adapted to the requirements and new features of the environment in which it is inserted.

Among some management tools (of risks, projects, people, quality, etc.) is that of the information. It doesn't mean that information is not a part of other management tools, but in the specificity of information management, it is the focus (the core) of the analysis. This article, however, doesn't aim to deal with all the tools related to information management but rather to approach one that could be applied in monitoring the process of exportation of natural products, which must be part of the daily routine of the modern company who searches for competitiveness. Among the tools in literature for information management is the Competitive Intelligence (CI), which conceptual bases are summarized in the following

Competitive Intelligence (CI):

According to UCM (2005) Competitive Intelligence "is a process, systematic and ethical, that monitor the competitive environment to collect, analyze and treat information that can affect the plans, the decisions and the operations of a company". The main focus of the CI is the external events, the trends (especially the probable activities and competitors' intentions) and the opportunities.

A key objective of the IC is the emission of "alerts" - information that allow 'decision makers' to anticipate action that keep and/or that defend the competitive advantage. The stages of the process of IC are represented in figure 2.

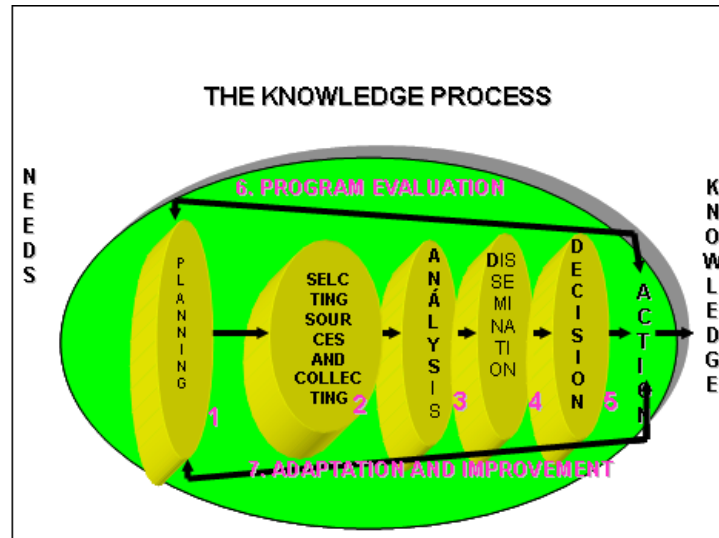


Fig. 2: Competitive Intelligence process flow
 Source: Adapted from Rodriguez & Escorsa, 1997 (apud Luz, 2005)

Competitive Intelligence allows the Seniors Executives, of all levels of companies , to make decisions based on information about any field of activity, from Marketing, P&D and Investments to long run Business Strategies (UCM, 2005). Almost always these information concentrate information that subsidize an economic feasibility study of a Business Plan or Project.

Materials and methods

This research of qualitative nature features is still characterized as: descriptive – which, according to GIL (2002a, p.42), has as primordial objective "the description of the characteristics of given population or phenomenon or, then, the establishment of relations between variables"; and bibliographical, which is developed on the basis of information already elaborated, mainly constituted of books and scientific articles (GIL, 2002b, p.57).

The idea to point out the need of a tool for information management dates from a previous work which objective was to verify the business information available for the natural products export. Under the difficulties faced to acquire public information, for which purpose it was consulted governmental and enterprise sites like INMETRO (Brazilian Institute of Metrics), IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), MDIC (Ministry of Development, Industry International Commerce), MRE (Ministry of International Affairs), Commercial Guide of Manaus and other on-line databases, it was evidenced the importance to consider a management tool that made possible the planning, the collection, the treatment and the analysis of the necessary information for the business.

Results

Considering the operational features of CI and the difficulties faced by natural products exporters, it was verified that a CI process would guarantee more trustworthiness in the decision making of the sector, in a proportion that monitoring had followed the steps that the process demand. When adopting CI, an exporting company, for smaller it be, become able to monitor the export process and, furthermore, detect the niches (market) for its products, innovating in its activity.

Of course that the CI process can be supported by other tools, like for example the SSD - support systems the decisions (or ERP- systems of enterprise management), that is an approach of the data base system, which assists in the business planning and the executives decision making (Santos, 2005). The author suggests that in the development of the process, however, it must be clear which tool will make what and whom they will accurately serve. In thus proceeding, the risk of a tool to overshadow another tool is prevented.

Conclusions

This paper searched to characterize the environment of an exporting company (of natural products) and to present the importance of monitoring the environment to the export activity. As a tool for managing this monitoring, the work suggested the adoption of CI that has as main focus the external events, the trends (especially the probable activities and intentions of the competitors) and the opportunities.

When contextualizing one of the problems with which natural products exporters come across, this work presented the applicability of the CI process, that among many applied advantages may: to monitor governmental programs that support the export (like Easy Export/Exporta Facil, a service of the Brazilian Post Office); to daily monitor the regulations *for diverse products imposed by countries* (using the Focal Point/Ponto Focal, a service of INMETRO); to monitor prices of similar products and trends in the international market (using Commercial Radar and the Aliceweb, a service of MDIC); among others.

It is important to consider that the adoption of an effective monitoring in organizations means long run investment, but which return, according to Moresi (2001b, p. 96), is spectacular. Still, other management tools, for not being exclusive, can be used together. This work recommends that the adoption of CI process in the export activity briefly displayed in this work should widely and empirically be observed.

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