CREATING VALUE-BASED MEDICAL LIBRARY SERVICES THROUGH COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract
Competitive Intelligence is a management tool that enables top executives make smart, successful and strategic decisions thereby minimizing risk, avoiding being short-sighted, and getting it right the first time. The paper is a review on how the medical library can employ competitive intelligence to enhance their services in the healthcare organization. The paper notes that competitive intelligence will enable Medical Libraries to offer innovative and creative services. The paper concludes that medical librarians and information professionals should be re-positioned to become strategic part of the corporate information environment. They must also become more proactive in promoting their services and projecting their library within their own organization.

Keywords: Competitive Intelligence; Medical Information services; Medical Library; Healthcare organizations.

Introduction
Reliable and current data is a decision-tool that is required before investing in infrastructures; new hardware, bigger or additional office space, new personnel or bringing in a new Doctor. It’s simply smart business and the competitive edge needed to make the best plan for growth. Medical practitioners are often faced with making potentially career-altering decisions based solely on “gut feeling”

- What is the best location for a new office?
- Can we justify a capital equipment purchase (e.g., an MRI)?
- Is there sufficient patient demand in the service area?
- Have we documented key trends and growth opportunities? (Or do we just think we know)?
• Where will the patients come from? (Where are they located and what are the demographics?)
• Can we justify adding new surgeons?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of our patient mix?
• How can we quantify our Return-on-investment (ROI)?

While these kinds of decisions may always be difficult, a rash decision and unsubstantiated fact could prove more catastrophic hence the rationale for competitive intelligence in decision-making.

With the increasing competitiveness of the health care marketplace, the need for information by service providers has increased considerably. In response to this need, strategic and competitive intelligence (Cl) systems have emerged as a vital source of information. This article establishes a basis for the development and operation of a competitive intelligence system.

Competitive Intelligence (Cl) is a management tool that enables top executives make smarter, more risk, avoiding being blind-sighted, and getting it right the first time. The ultimate objective of Cl work is the formulation of sound, factual and rational decision for action. It can be utilized to identify risk warning, provide alternative risk responses to mitigate rash decision-making when surprise do occur, develop recommendation for strategic adjustments to align with current trends in the sectors and to execute actionable plans all in order to gain competitive advantage.

The Concept of Competitive Intelligence
Good decision-making is crucial as it determine the overall success or failure of any organization. In order to make the best decisions, an individual needs quick and decisive critical thinking. There is also need to avoid flaws in the process which may harm the organization when confronted with an important decision. Strong decision - making skills are an important characteristics of good managers. They must make the right choices at the right time to remain competitive in their services. Managers must have informed opinions at every minute about issues necessary for the growth of the enterprise. Examining each situation thoroughly and taking quality time to make an effective decision is what competitive intelligence is all about.

Competitive Intelligence is a term used to describe how an organization gathers and uses privileged information resources to further its goals and aspiration as well as keeps tap of what strategies and movements its competitors are making . The society of competitive intelligence professional (SCIP 2012) defined Cl as a systematic program for gathering and analyzing information about competitor's activities to further organization's goals. It is also seen as a process of legally and ethically collecting, analyzing and disseminating actionable intelligence necessary for strategic decision-making.

Competitive intelligence involves transforming raw information into intelligence to support critical decisions. This information can come in a myriad of forms including annual reports, Library statistic, feedback, industry experts, regulatory filings, Library performance data and other activities. Examples of Cl include benchmarking, background checks, services or performance assessment, network analysis, etc. A careful analysis of the environment allows organizations to effectively anticipate developments and
respond proactively (Taib, Yatin, Ahmad & Mansor, 2008), McGonagie and Vella (2012). The strategic value of CI to an organization has received increased attention in management, business practice and information science.

Competitive pressures are increasingly placing organizations in a position to drive greater services, revenue and profit while requiring that they manage cost more effectively and meet a broad range of regulatory factors. In addition, Prescott and Gibbons (1993) in Timberger (2010) maintained that CI is the 'evolving process by which the management teams assess the evolution of its industry and capabilities and behavior of its current and potential competitors to assist in maintaining and developing a competitive advantage. The ultimate objective of CI work is the formulation of sound, factual and rational decisions for action. CI is an activity that gathers intelligence with the aim to categorize it for dissemination to users in an easily interpreted form to influence decisionmaking. To special libraries, CI is particularly relevant to the competitiveness through providing sustainable competitive advantage. Chockrek (2000) opined that CI is the ability to gather the facts, see into the future and convince your audience that you hold the key.

With the increasing need for information in Healthcare management, Medical Librarians are required to be competitive information leaders, utilizing both competitive intelligence and information science to communicate information for strategic purposes to remain purposeful in their capacities. Librarians must be well positioned to become a valid part of the healthcare information environment, but they must become more proactive in promoting and defending their library within their own organization. Librarians have found out that a key requirement of meeting these pressures involves the ability to ensure access to all necessary information at any time and from any place through competitive intelligence. CI is the act of processing and adding value to competitive information.

Competitive intelligence is critical for the organization to stay abreast of the changing business environment and avoid costly mistakes. Oder (2001) opined that CI involves not only the collection of information (from both primary and secondary sources) but also the analyses of how that information affects the organization's competitive environment and the communication of this to decision-makers. Gilad and Fuld (1998) in Alexandra, Andrea and Anca (2002) described CI as the action of ethically and legally gathering, analyzing and communicating information about third players in one's competitive arena: from competitors to suppliers, customers, influencing parties, distributors etc. which is to be used by organization in planning and decisionmaking.

Brief Historical Development of Competitive Intelligence
CI history can be traced back to the writing of SUNTZU who several centuries ago wrote, “The Art of War”, which provided a detailed description of how to develop intelligence for military operations (Sun, 1988 in Calif and Wright2008).

According to Taib, Yatin, Ahmad and Mansor (2008) Prescott wrote one of the first modern insights into the evolution of CI. He highlighted three stages of CI development and contended that stage one occurred
during the 1960’s and 1970s. He noted that CI activities at this time were mostly associated with data gathering, they were informal and tactical. He pointed out that CI was poorly linked to decision making and involved little analysis. Prescott's second stage of Cl development was linked with Cl activities in the 1980s when competitor and industry analysis became popular. According to him, competitive intelligence personnel switched from library functions to marketing and planning functions. He observed that Cl activities remained tactically oriented whereby the spy image began to evolve and there was very little by way of quantitative data analysis. The third stage of Prescott's Cl development which began in the 1990s showed Cl contributing to strategic decision making which was built into dedicated formal units either on their own or within marketing or planning. Since then, Cl activities have been oriented to both tactical and strategic decision making that includes qualitative and quantitative analysis. Cl receives moderate attention from top management and is often a valuable contributor to strategic decision making (Prescott and Gibbons cited in Taib et al., 2008).

To date Cl has gathered so much momentum as a valuable strategy to provide strategic knowledge rather for making decisive decisions. Oder (2001) mentioned that Cl has long been practiced in some form and its increasing importance may be seen in the growth of the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP), which has increased from 150 members in 1986 to nearly 7000 in 1999.

The Need for Application of Competitive Intelligence in Medical Libraries

One of the major factors that can effectively enhance driving innovation and creativity in Medical library management is the application of competitive intelligence into the Medical library services. Library and information centres are to develop innovative and creative service to keep pace with the fast changing knowledge society. ICT development particularly those providing easy access to information on the web, have considerably increased the expectations of library users, who expect the same speed, breadth and comprehensiveness in information services provided by libraries. Hence, there is an urgent need for the introduction of competitive intelligence into the library and information profession so as to enrich the services provided to the clients. In fact, Medical librarians must as a matter of necessity identify and utilize a variety of non- traditional information sources such as Cl that would according to Yaya (2014) enable libraries to edge out competitors and make library users to develop renewed interest in the services provided by the library in meeting their information needs.

Historically, numerous efforts have been made to examine the value of special libraries. One of the earliest and the most classic efforts was conducted by Matarazzo (1981) who explored the decision making process that led to the closing of five corporate libraries. Using a case study approach, he systematically interviewed individuals surrounding these closure decisions. One consistent theme related to these five closures was that none of the libraries evaluated their services against the needs of the parent's organization. This absence of evaluation could trigger a dissonance between needs and services and further create a relevance crisis leading to an eventual closure.

Library and information centers are often
faced with two challenges. One is related to the value that they provide to their parent organization. The other is prompted by the emergent and rapidly evolving information technologies- The ideal tool to better serve the “Google Generation” Generation Y, a group of users who are digitally savvy and communicate via social networks. These two challenges are intertwined and interdependent. On one hand, corporate information agencies tend to be more sensitive to economic stresses than other departments within the organization (Wood, 1972). During economic downturns, they are frequently regarded as luxury or a waste to keep (Day, 1936) if they wish to avoid closure or severe budget cuts, they must prove their worth with solid evidence (Matarazzo 1981).

Medical Libraries must explore some emergent and non-traditional information practices to avoid a discrepancy between what the parent organization needs and what they can offer. Competitive intelligence could be one of such practice. (Housewright, 2009; Kassel, 2003; Margulies, 2006).

The Role of Medical Librarians in the use Competitive Intelligence
Librarians typically provide intellectual services within an organization focusing on access and management (Edgar, 2004). Competitive intelligence concentrates on collecting, analyzing and distributing information of external environment in which an organization operates (Fleisher, 2007). These two concepts intersect in the area of information practice which aims to make the organization excel. IFLA (2011) posits that the core mission of library and information Professionals is to facilitate access to information for all personal development, education, cultural environment, economic activity and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy, hence the use of most efficient and effective methods and standards to serve their clientele. Below are the expected roles of librarians in Health Institutions:

Librarians must demonstrate their impact and relevance.
It is observed that any professional practice exists in a competitive environment. The definition of the work of one profession may be challenged by the other professions who define the work within their knowledge and expert domain (Hill, 1993). In such a competitive environment, professions have to compete for relevance and for the limited organizational resources in a collective manner. Competitive intelligence can be an area that many organizational groups tend to claim relevance to. Given its information practice nature, it is particularly relevant for librarians. A librarian can become relevant by actively participating in the research design and execution by gathering and analyzing research information for decision making. No one is better equipped in this regard than a librarian who is an information expert. He doesn't only bring his wealth of knowledge of information sources to bear but also his expertise in research methodology. Indeed, collecting such information often requires access to a Health intelligence expert who will enable the librarian glean information from varied sources. Similarly Health information, particularly in the rapidly evolving new area of health research available in electronic and other formats which are often poorly documented and difficult to locate; therefore, requires the expertise of a librarian for information that is sufficiently specific, validated and well presented if
they are to be of real value and use to decision makers.

**Benchmarking**
Another role of librarians in competitive intelligence is to understand how your organization compares to others as it helps to steer strategic direction. Benchmarking allows you to evaluate output, performance and trends compared to others in a way that is accurate, reliable and repeatable at individual, group or geographic levels. Ensure strategies and decisions are informed by the best insights available. Identify areas of particular strength to show where the greatest return on investment on health is coming from.

**Increased awareness of librarians value and relevance**
Now that awareness is associated with use, librarians must broadcast more of their contributions to organizational competitiveness; showcase the impact of their collaboration with information users, increase visibility and institutional relevance. This could be achieved by walking around to their client groups to determine their needs and aspirations, matched with proactive and timely deployment of resources and service. Organization leaned heavily on librarians or information specialists to identify, evaluate and select premium information subscriptions, services and resources and have depended on librarians to be used as sanity check when their information gathering results are unsatisfying or when completeness and/ or accuracy of the information challenge is particularly sensitive.

**Knowledgeable Expert**
Librarians are critical to competitive intelligence. They provide knowledgeable experts, who can turn services around quickly and efficiently, train others in research and analysis, help drive informed decisions, and makes an impact on capture strategy and revenue. The challenge is making sure that they can be tasked effectively so the value of their results is fully realized.

**Value Adding Model**
Taylors, (1986) conceptualized the value adding role of a librarian as a series of information processing activities (i.e. organizing process, analyzing process, judgmental process and decision processes) to which value is gradually added until original data is transformed into actionable intelligence. Therefore, librarians may play a critical role in the organizing processes (i.e. grouping, classifying, relating, formatting, signalling and displaying) and part of the analyzing processes (e.g., evaluating, validating, comparing, interpreting, synthesizing).

Correia, (2005) observed that the new information driven economy presents insurmountable challenges to Librarians as they have to rebrand, redefine their roles and titles, developing skills, identifying functions and tasks to adopt and eliminate, developing relationships with different categories of clients and colleagues as well as establishing a new process of gathering and applying new resource and techniques. CI is the tool that will enable librarians to meet the challenges of the new information environment for value based information services. It is therefore imperative that medical librarians adopt CI as strategic management tool in their decision making processes. This will enhance effective information provision in health care organizations.
Conclusion
All libraries, small or large need to have some form of CI activity. With the increasing need for information in healthcare management, information professionals are required to be competitive intelligence leaders, utilizing both competitive intelligence and information science to communicate information for strategic purposes and remain purposeful in their capacities. Medical librarians and information professionals must be well positioned to become a valid part of the corporate information environment and must also become more proactive in promoting their services and defending their library within their own organization.

References


