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The practice of strategic watch in Moroccan universities: the case of the establishments of the Hassan II University of Casablanca

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Abstract

The university is the lifeblood of a region, a city and a country. Its mission is no longer only the transmission of knowledge but also to anticipate socioeconomic developments. With this in mind, the adoption of a clear vision, an intelligent policy and the effective and efficient implementation of the development strategies of higher education and scientific research has become more than ever a national priority. Strategic watch is defined as an information process by which an organization listens to its environment to decide and act in pursuit of its objectives. As far as I know, studies on strategic watch in the university sector are limited and almost all focus on the business world. Which constitutes a value for the present study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations today live in a changing world where health economic crises are taking on disproportionate proportions and sparing no one. Pandemic COVID 19 has proven this, it has forced the academic community around the world to explore new methods of teaching and learning.

Any organization, whether it is a country, a company, a university or an academic establishment wishing to develop must adapt its strategies to the demands of its environment. The university, like any organization, must be up to date with the latest developments in the world in all sectors and this by listening to the needs and expectations of its partners.

In addition, the Moroccan university cannot be far from the changes in society and the evolution of higher education systems around the world.

Strategic watch offers methods, tools, procedures and organizational methods that allow organizations to improve their control of the environment.

Despite the many studies that have been interested in studying the practices of business intelligence in different

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sectors. Our issue remains topical since it is concerned with a vital sector which is the education and training sector. Thus our research aims to present strategic watch as a management practice that deserves the attention of university leaders in order to provide them with an additional tool for the governance of their institutions, thus helping to improve the strategic effectiveness of the university and its institutions establishments.

In order to understand the reality of business intelligence practices within academic institutions, it has been found necessary to use survey methods to collect related information. Carrying out a survey in the case of our research is essential to collect, interpret and analyze the data collected.

The object of this article is therefore an understanding of strategic watch practices in university establishments : Case of Hassan II University in Casablanca.

This paper begins with a review of the literature through which we attempt to shed light on the basic concepts of this research, namely strategic watch. Secondly, we expose the challenges of the strategic watch for university establishments before presenting a summary of the results obtained.

2. The concept of strategic watch

Nearly all of us carries out the strategic watch on a daily basis. Everyone needs information with high added value to lead in the short and medium term and / or daily and long-term planning in order to seize opportunities and avoid threats. Everyone needs to carry out the strategic watch to survive, and move forward in their projects.







Strategic watch is a very old practice that has its origins in the field of intelligence. This concept, coming from several Anglo-Saxon authors, gave rise to several names such as "strategic scanning, process, strategic watch, competitive intelligence".

In Morocco, many big companies have developed their own strategic watch units such as OCP which is the big company in Morocco in the field of Phosphate industry, MAROC TELECOM the big company of telecommunication, Autoroutes du Maroc, etc. as well as several big banks as ATTIJARIWAFABANK, BMCE....

Indeed, François Jakobiak defines strategic watch as "the observation and analysis of the scientific, technical, technological and economic environment to detect threats and seize development opportunities".

We can say that the strategic watch is different from the simple collection and dissemination of information. It is indeed a process by which one seeks information of an anticipatory nature concerning the evolution of the environment.

3. The challenges of the strategic watch for university establishments

- Strategic Watch helps to take as a starting point the best practices of other universities and organizations;
- Better understand the external and internal environment;
- Reduce uncertainty;
- Comparing themselves to others, monitoring your reputation and standing, etc. This can be done by tracking:
 -  Developments in research subjects, major international trends;
 -  National and international rankings;
 -  Monitoring the results of academic, industrial and commercial partners.
 -  National and international calls for projects;
 -  Trends in the field of innovation ;
 -  Laws, regulations, monitoring of public opinions, etc.

4. Survey results

We adopted an explanatory method via the adoption of a qualitative approach, in this sense, we conducted a survey to diagnose strategic watch practices in universities. The survey was conducted among academic institutions and at the headquarters of the presidency of Hassan II University in Casablanca. We were able to retrieve 10 questionnaires that were fully completed by the people responsible for information management within the establishments.

A strategic watch cell is referred to as a "group of people grouped together in a service responsible for

researching, collecting and analyzing information on the organization's environment". This unit must then disseminate the information to the people concerned; it must be close enough to management to focus its attention on the strategic axes of the organization.

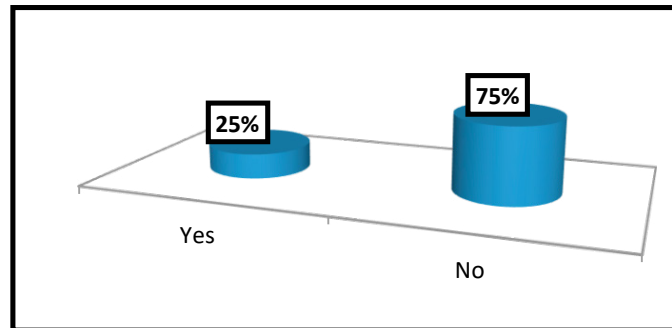


Fig. 1. Existence of a strategic watch unit

Only 2 establishments claim to have a strategic watch unit. Thus, as shown in the figure above, the strategic watch unit is absent in the majority of the establishments studied. Admittedly, the leaders “watch over” without knowing it. However, this watch is not structured.

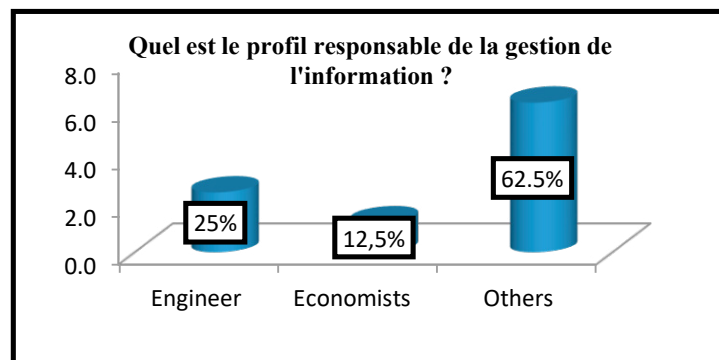


Fig. 2. The profile responsible for information management

To the question what is the profile responsible for information management within your establishment. The profiles that emerge are engineers (25%) economists (12.5%) and others with (62.5%) these are indeed administrators, people with training in communication, etc. Thus, according to discussions with university officials, it is the president and vice-president at the university level and the deans and vice-deans at the level of the institutions who take care of it. Monitoring activities are also carried out by professors in the field for certain cases. To have an effective strategic watch unit, the strategic watch team must be mixed, made up of teachers, administrators, students who will be motivated to do this

work and also have specialists on watch or even professionals with experience in the domain.

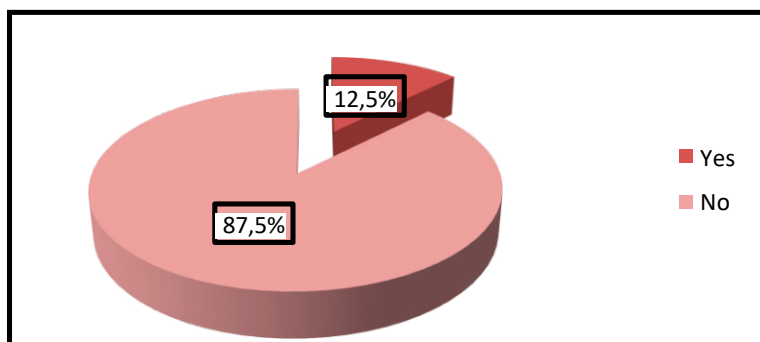


Fig. 3. budget dedicated to strategic watch activities.

As for the financial resources devoted to information activities, 87.5% of the establishments studied claim to devote no budget to information activities, which proves that these establishments are satisfied with free tools to do the strategic watch. Against 12.5% say they devote part of the establishment's budget to monitoring activities. This budget is mainly used for:

Participation in events: exhibitions and fairs abroad;

Subscription to paid databases and specialized journals.

Informational issues

Table 1: List of informational problems

	Yes	No
Lack of humanskills	87,50%	12,50%
Lack of technical and material resources	87,50%	12,50%
Delay in receiving information	87,5%	12,5%
poor knowledge of sophisticated methods	75%	25%
legal and ethicaldifficulties	75%	25%
Difficultyin processing information	75%	25%
Retention of information	62,50%	37,5
Difficulty in assessing the relevance and reliability of the information Received	62,50%	37,5%
Lack of commitment from leaders (especially top management of the university, or university establishments)	62,50%	37,5%
Unsuitable software tools	62,50%	37,5
Scarcity of relevant information	50%	50%
Difficulties in the circulation of information in the establishment	50%	50%
language barrier	37,5%	62,50%
high cost of access to information	37,5%	62,50%
Difficulty locating sources of information	12,50%	87,50%

The lack of human resources is one of the major problems complained of by the establishments studied. They do not have staff familiar with information management techniques. In addition, the lack / insufficiency of technical and material resources and the delay in receiving information which constitute a major obstacle for most of them.

In addition, 75% of cases say they find it difficult to process information, and to know sophisticated methods including methods of analyzing and disseminating information.

In addition, 62.5% feel a lack of leadership commitment, including retention of information.

To remedy these difficulties, the respondents propose:

- high-level commitment and involvement among officials;
- Set up real structures dedicated to strategic watch in universities;
- Substantial financial support;
- A collective awareness of the authorities that information is an essential management tool, and that real transparency can only be beneficial for everyone. On that point, we must provide to our universities the human and material resources in order to make the best use of all opportunities;
- Develop advanced training in information management techniques;
- Listen to everyone's needs;
- Facilitation of an awareness-raising workshop for the benefit of staff;
- Finally, regulate, motivate, promote and invest.

5. Conclusion

In general, we noted for the majority of the institutions subject of our study that the management of strategic information, although it is practiced by university managers, is not centralized in a well-defined structure.

The majority of managers are aware of the challenges of **strategic watch** and express the need to set up a strategic watch structure for each establishment according to its nature and according to its priorities.

We consider that this work is a first step in raising awareness of the importance of strategic watch in our Moroccan university system in order to allow our Moroccan universities to improve their ranking vis-à-vis international universities.

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