

The Contribution of Competitive Intelligence Process in Achieving Strategic Agility: A Qualitative Study of Opinions from a Sample of Executives in the Food Industry Enterprises of Annaba and Skikda

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Abstract: *This study qualitatively analyzes the contribution of the competitive intelligence process to achieving strategic agility, using NVivo v14 software to examine the views of a sample of executives from food industry enterprises in Annaba and Skikda. The study draws on structured interviews with nine executives, all of whom are practitioners in the strategic field. The findings indicate that while the enterprises under study demonstrate strategic agility, this is primarily due to their practice of competitive intelligence, albeit not fully implemented in a comprehensive manner. Based on these results, the study recommends that food industry enterprises develop a clear strategy for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information, leveraging modern techniques. This will enable decision-makers to enhance the quality and speed of their decisions, further boosting strategic agility.*

Keywords: competitive intelligence, competitive intelligence process, sensor agility, decision-making agility, practice agility, strategic agility.

JEL classification: D83.

1. Introduction

The business environment today is marked by uncertainty due to intensified competition, rapid technological advancements, and market fluctuations, all of which affect enterprise performance. This uncertainty has prompted businesses to focus on managing risks and adopting tools to better understand their environment. Competitive intelligence is a key tool in this regard, providing actionable information that aids in scenario planning and quick decision-making, both critical for adapting to a dynamic market. These capabilities are central to strategic agility, which is essential for an enterprise's survival. Algerian food industry enterprises, like their global counterparts, face similar challenges, including shifting

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Cite as:

The journal editors will add this information after completion of the volume!

customer demands, technological changes, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. These pressures make it crucial for these enterprises to develop strategic agility, which can be achieved through effective competitive intelligence practices. This study aims to explore how competitive intelligence contributes to strategic agility in food industry enterprises in the towns of Annaba and Skikda.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1. Competitive Intelligence

Competitive intelligence is a strategic tool that helps businesses analyze and adapt to their changing environment by providing timely, legal, and ethical information for effective decision-making. The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (2015) and Artur (2020, p. 02) define it as a systematic, ethical process of gathering information from various sources. Buzzerio and Marcondes (2014) emphasize its role in collecting and analyzing data on competitors, technologies, and market trends for strategic decisions. Fleisher (2001, p. 04) highlights its importance in understanding the competitive landscape, while Ghannay and Mamlouk (2015) note its role in formulating strategies based on competitor and consumer analysis (Adetayo, Asiru, and Omolabi, 2021).

Thus, competitive intelligence involves several sequential steps: information gathering, analysis, and usage, to help enterprises gain a competitive advantage. However, researchers have different perspectives on these stages, which are illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Competitive Intelligence Process According to the Views of Some Researchers

Researchers	Collection, Analysis, and Communication
Porter (1980)	Direction, Collection, Processing, Dissemination, and Use
Sammon et al (1984)	Collection, Evaluation, Analysis, Storage, and Dissemination
Gilad (1989)	Planning and Direction, Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination
Kahaner (1997)	Planning and Direction, Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination
Calof and Skinner (1998)	Collection, Analysis, Storage, and Dissemination
Bouthillier and Shearer (2003)	Planning and Direction, Collection, Analysis, Dissemination, and Feedback
Bose (2008)	Planning and Collection, Analysis, and Communication
Saayman et al (2008)	Planning, Collection, and Analysis, Communication, Process and Structure, Enterpriseal and Cultural Awareness
Dishman, Calof, and Saayman (2008)	Planning, Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination

Du Toit (2015)	Collection, Analysis, and Communication
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Source: Hassani and Mosconi (2022).

Despite variations in the competitive intelligence process, researchers agree on three key stages: collection, analysis, and dissemination. The collection phase involves identifying sources and methods, such as surveys and media monitoring, while ensuring the process is legal and ethical (Seyyed et al., 2017) and formalizing it to avoid misleading information (Hassani and Mosconi, 2022).

The analysis phase is critical, requiring expertise to convert raw data into actionable intelligence for strategic decisions (Seng Yap and Abdul Rashid, 2011). Practitioners see this phase as key to generating insights that drive competitive advantage.

In the dissemination phase, Muller (2003, p. 02) stresses sharing intelligence through channels like reports and emails. Bernhardt (2003, p. 56) emphasizes that competitive intelligence is only valuable if it reaches decision-makers promptly, highlighting the importance of effective dissemination in decision-making.

2.2. Strategic Agility

Strategic agility is crucial for enterprise survival and success, enabling quick adaptation to environmental changes. It has been defined as the ability to be astute, flexible, and responsive to new events (Mazher and Yasser, 2020), and to continuously adapt to uncertain environments (Ferraris et al., 2022). This agility allows enterprises to quickly identify and respond to opportunities and threats (Al-Rousan and Al-Amoush, 2017), combining flexibility, speed, and adaptability to handle change. It also involves mobilizing resources swiftly in response to unforeseen circumstances (Adomako et al., 2022), emphasizing the need for capabilities that enhance responsiveness.

In essence, strategic agility enables enterprises to adapt swiftly to external changes, providing the flexibility to meet evolving challenges effectively.

2.3. Competitive Intelligence and Strategic Agility

Competitive intelligence provides timely information (Syauqiy & Dirgantara, 2022), helping businesses understand the changing environment and identify opportunities and threats. This supports swift actions, such as seizing opportunities or avoiding risks, aligning with strategic agility, which involves sensing environmental changes (Al-Raei, 2023) and making rapid decisions. According to Doz and Kosonen (2010, p. 371), this also includes quickly reallocating resources (practice agility). Thus, competitive intelligence is integral to achieving strategic agility.

Several studies confirm this link. Stenberg and Vu-Thi (2017, p. 08) argue that competitive intelligence supports agility in sensing market changes. Skyrius and Valentukevičė (2020, p. 19) note that sensing requires gathering and analyzing information for actionable insights. Naidoo (2003, p. 20) emphasizes the importance of timely, fact-based information for decision-making. Plessis and Gulwa (2016, p. 02) highlight that competitive intelligence aids quick decision-making in dynamic environments.

Competitive intelligence also informs strategic decisions, including market entry and product development (Plessis & Gulwa, 2016, p. 02; Calof & Wright, 2008). Atkinson et al. (2022, p. 07) note that it helps enterprises analyze their environment and provide timely insights to decision-makers. Additionally, it supports practice agility, as Ki Park, El Sawy, and Peer Fiss (2017, p. 655) found that sharing intelligence promotes collaboration and quick execution. Atkinson et al. (2022, p. 07) also suggest it helps assess actions and capabilities in real time to manage competitive risks.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed: The competitive intelligence process (collection, analysis, dissemination) contributes to achieving strategic agility (sensing, decision-making, and practice agility) in food industry enterprises in Annaba and Skikda.

3. Study Procedures

3.1. Research Methodology and Sample

This study employed a descriptive approach to examine the responses and perceptions of the sample members regarding the role of the competitive intelligence process in achieving strategic agility. Structured interviews were used for data collection, guided by a set of six questions exploring this relationship. The purposive sample consisted of nine managers from food industry enterprises in the Annaba and Skikda regions, selected for their extensive knowledge of competitive intelligence and strategic agility, irrespective of their specific positions.

The researchers conducted two interviews with each manager between January and March 2024. The first interview aimed to gather initial responses, while the second interview was conducted to assess the consistency and reliability of their answers. As a result, two enterprises (BELDI Enterprise and LES 7 EPIS Biscuits Enterprise) were excluded from the study, as their managers declined to participate in the second round of interviews. The following tables summarize the data collected:

Table 2: Enterprisaal Profile of the Study Sample

Enterprise Name	Start of Activity	Number of Employees	Enterprise Size	Products	Main Operating Area	Capital
Global Soft Drink Enterprise	1998	250	Medium	Soft Drink (Bona)	Annaba and surrounding areas	296,600,000,000 DZD
Mahbouba Enterprise	2000	200	Medium	Pasta, Canned Tomatoes, Canned Harissa	Annaba and surrounding areas	360,186,000,000 DZD

Green Grill Manufacturing	2017	99	Medium	Canned Harissa, Canned Jam, Canned Hamis, Syrup, Canned Pizza Tomato Paste	Skikda	277,675,000,000 DZD
Sipa Enterprise	2018	70	Medium	Canned Tomatoes, Canned Pizza Tomato Paste (Bestom)	Annaba and El Tarf	64,945,800,000 DZD
LES 7 EPIS Biscuits Enterprise	1984	70	Medium	Biscuits (Tom)	Annaba and surrounding areas	6,000,000,000 DZD
Dekoba Enterprise	2011	60	Medium	Coffee (Dekoba Coffee)	Annaba	40,000,000 DZD
Beldi Enterprise	2003	40	Small	Semolina and Flour (Beldi)	Annaba and surrounding areas	252,160,000,000 DZD
Qasr Al-Qahwa Enterprise	1985	30	Small	Coffee (Amar Coffee)	Skikda - Hammouch e Hammoudi	30,000,000 DZD
Laiterie El Maida	2004	30	Small	Milk Bags, Yogurt Bags, Syrup	Annaba - Berrahal	217,800,000 DZD

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the National Commercial Register Portal (via subscription). <https://sidjilcom.cnrc.dz/web/cnrc/accueil>.

Table 3: Interview Information about the Enterprises Managers of the Study Sample

Enterprise Name	Job Title		First Interview	Second Interview
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		Years of Experience	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Interview Date	Interview Duration
Global Soft Drink Enterprise	Commercial Manager	21 years	22/01/2024	1.5 hours	26/02/2024	1 hour
Mahbouba Enterprise	Quality Manager	24 years	04/03/2024	1 hour	07/03/2024	45 minutes
Green Grill Manufacturing	Commercial Manager	32 years	03/03/2024	1.5 hours	11/03/2024	1 hour
Sipa Enterprise	Finance and Accounting Manager	15 years	23/02/2024	1 hour	28/02/2024	30 minutes
Beldi Enterprise	Finance and Accounting Manager	6 years	22/01/2024	30 minutes	/	/
LES 7 EPIS Biscuits Enterprise	Commercial Manager	30 years	27/02/2024	30 minutes	/	/
Dekoba Enterprise	Commercial Manager	16 years	10/03/2024	45 minutes	13/03/2024	30 minutes
Qasr Al-Qahwa Enterprise	Commercial Manager	20 years	29/01/2024	1 hour	31/01/2024	45 minutes
Laiterie El Maida	HR Manager	12 years	22/01/2024	45 minutes	26/02/2024	45 minutes

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the results from the field study.

Therefore, it can be clear from the table above that the respondents' answers did not change, indicating the consistency and reliability of the interview.

3.2. Analysis of Results

In this section, the results of the analysis of the interviews conducted with the seven managers from the enterprises of the study of interest will be discussed. These results were extracted using NVivo software and will be presented through four main approaches: *Lexical Approach*, *Linguistic Approach*, *Thematic Approach*, and *Cognitive Maps*.

Analysis of Study Results According to Lexical Approach

The aim of this approach is to describe what the interviewees discussed in relation to the study variables, specifically competitive intelligence and strategic agility. This is done through the most frequently used key terms in the interviews, which are illustrated in the word cloud as follows:



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Source: Outputs from NVivo v14.

The figure above shows the distribution of terms in the form of a cloud, highlighting the frequency of term repetitions and the importance of each term based on the visible line size. It appears that the terms "enterprise," "information," "customers," "market," and "changes" stood out as frequently used words in the responses of the interviewees.

Analysis of Study Results According to Linguistic Approach

The results of the linguistic approach describe how the interviewees (referred to as practitioners in the NVivo_{v14} coding) speak, or measure the similarity of terms in answering interview questions. The results showed textual similarity in the content and direction of the interview responses from each practitioner (the individuals interviewed at the enterprises). This can be summarized in the following points:

Information Gathering: Practitioners (1, 2, 3, and 5) agreed that sales consultants gather information on the first customer (wholesale merchants), including product distribution, marketing strategies, and customer preferences. Practitioners (4, 6, and 7) specifically focus on gathering information from the final customer.

Use of Trade Fairs: Practitioners (1, 2, 3, and 5) agreed that trade fairs are used to collect information on advanced production machinery. Regarding competitor products, practitioners (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) rely on customers and sales consultants, while practitioner 7 does not. No practitioners gather information on potential alliances or acquisitions among competitors.

Analysis and Dissemination of Information: Practitioners (1, 2, and 3) agreed the enterprise effectively analyzes and disseminates market change information, while practitioners (4, 5, and 6) focus on competitor product data shared with decision-makers.

Adaptation to Market Changes: Practitioners (1, 2, and 3) agreed that the enterprise adapts quickly to market changes, though obstacles sometimes occur. In contrast, practitioners (4, 5, and 6) noted moderate adaptation, citing raw material sourcing challenges that delay responses to customer demands.

Use of Information for Quick Decision-Making: All practitioners agreed that analyzed information helps the enterprise quickly sense market changes and make decisions to adapt.

Importance of Information for Quick Adaptation: Practitioners (1, 2, and 3) agreed that information is vital for adapting to market changes, while others focused more on production and sales to achieve immediate profits.

Analysis of Study Results According to Objective Approach:

This section will present a detailed breakdown of the results from the seven interviews to interpret their content; that is, determining the coverage percentage to identify the most attended question by each respondent (practitioner) and its content. The following table illustrates the aforementioned:

Table 4: Coverage Percentage for Interview Questions

Contract (Questions)	Coverage Percentage (%)							Rank by Coverage
	Practitioner							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Gathering Information	42.96	36.98	39.14	20.27	31.88	25.54	13.84	1
Analysis and Dissemination of Information	7.24	8.43	8.20	12.93	12.87	15.24	5.57	5
Speed of Enterprise Adaptation	5.75	8.18	10.67	9.47	12.63	12.25	17.42	3
Relationship Between Analyzed Information and Sensing Market Changes	10.15	6.82	6.78	8.61	3.74	9.40	8.86	7
Relationship Between Analyzed Information and Decision-Making Agility	9.89	9.14	12.56	12.36	4.60	14.72	11.40	6
Relationship Between Analyzed Information and Practitioner Agility	11.66	15.38	7.74	10.86	2.87	4.46	3.19	4
Opinion on the Importance of Information Provided Within the Enterprise	11.35	13.52	13.17	24.14	29.91	16.33	37.78	2

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on NVivo_{v14} outputs.

It was observed from the table above that:

Practitioner 1 (Global Soft Drink Enterprise) had the highest coverage (42.96%) for the first question, emphasizing the enterprise's daily collection of customer data and weekly competitor updates, gathered through sales consultants, customers, employees, and trade fairs, then communicated to the commercial manager.

Practitioner 7 (Table Milk Enterprise) ranked second (37.78%) for the seventh question, highlighting the importance of information for adapting to market changes, although the

enterprise primarily focuses on production and sales. They noted that better market awareness could improve expansion and decision-making.

Practitioner 7 also ranked third (17.42%) for the third question, citing slow adaptation due to a lack of marketing specialists and limited promotional resources.

Practitioner 2 (Mahbouba Enterprise) ranked fourth (15.38%) for the sixth question, noting that information analysis helped the enterprise respond quickly to customer demand, launch new products, and diversify offerings.

Practitioner 6 (Coffee Palace Enterprise) ranked fifth (15.24%) for the second question, explaining that competitor pricing and customer preferences are analyzed by the commercial manager and shared with decision-makers, although external market changes are not considered.

Practitioner 6 also ranked sixth (14.72%) for the fifth question, describing how the enterprise quickly adapted by reducing caffeine content and adjusting pricing in response to customer complaints and competitive threats.

Finally, **Practitioner 1** ranked seventh (10.15%) for the fourth question, explaining how customer feedback helped identify opportunities in changing preferences, with technology and competitor analysis improving production and market response.

Analysis of Study Results According to Cognitive Mapping Approach:

his approach relies on illustrative diagrams that link the key terms of the study (competitive intelligence process, strategic agility, and its dimensions) with various ideas discussed in the seven interviews. These diagrams help structure mental perceptions and answer the interview questions.

Results of the Cognitive Mapping Approach for the Term "Competitive Intelligence Process": The results of this approach can be illustrated in the following diagram:

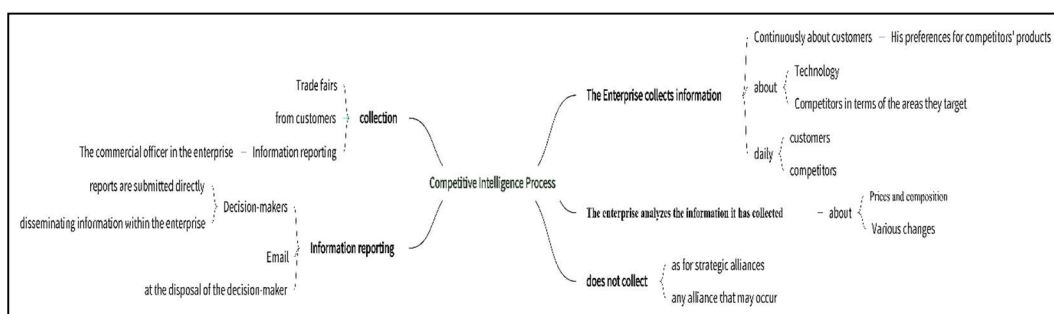


Diagram Placeholder 1: Cognitive Map for the Term "Competitive Intelligence Process"

Source: NVivo v14 Outputs

It was observed that the analysis of the previous diagram revealed that the enterprises under study do not collect information on potential alliances between competitors, nor do they consider forming alliances or acquiring weaker competitors. However, they actively gather

information on customer preferences and requirements, competitor product composition and pricing, and advanced production machinery (costs and benefits). This information is collected from customers and trade fairs, then communicated to the commercial manager. The manager analyzes the data based on their experience, and the results are compiled into reports and delivered to decision-makers.

Results of the Cognitive Mapping Approach for the Term "Strategic Agility": The results of this approach can be illustrated in the diagram, as follows:

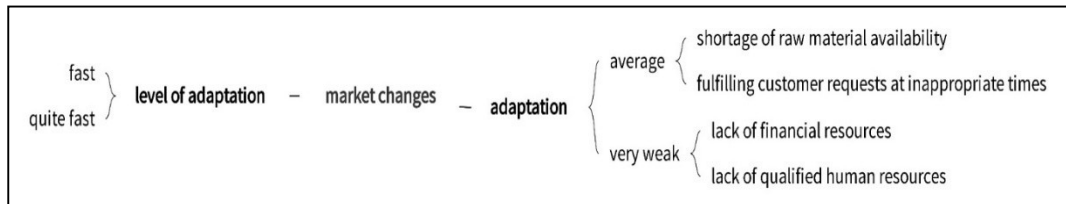


Diagram Placeholder 2: Cognitive Map for the Term "Strategic Agility"

Source: NVivo v14 Outputs.

From the above, it was noticed that the analysis of the interviewees' responses reveals three levels of adaptation to market changes across the enterprises:

Very Weak Adaptation: Table Milk Enterprise shows very weak adaptation due to limited financial resources and a lack of human capabilities to monitor market changes effectively.

Medium Adaptation: Siba Enterprise, Dekoba Enterprise, and Coffee Palace Enterprise exhibit medium adaptation, primarily hindered by raw material shortages that delay their ability to meet customer demands on time.

Fast Adaptation: Global Soft Drink Enterprise, Mahbouba Enterprise, and Green Grill Manufacturing demonstrate fast adaptation, efficiently meeting customer needs and preferences in a timely manner.

Results of Cognitive Mapping Approach for the Relationship Between Competitive Intelligence Process and Strategic Agility: The results of this approach can be illustrated in the following diagram:

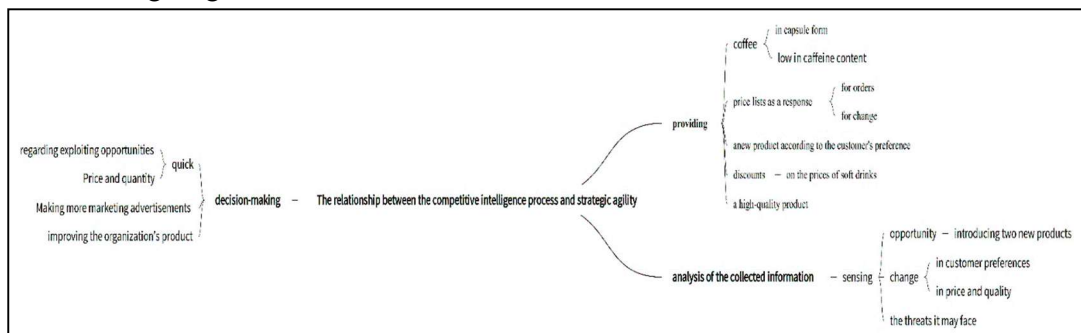


Diagram Placeholder 3: Cognitive Map for the Relationship Between Competitive Intelligence Process and Strategic Agility

Source: NVivo v14 Outputs.

The analysis of the diagram shows that the information collected and analyzed by the enterprises allowed them to sense various market changes:

Global Soft Drink Enterprise identified shifts in customer preferences;

Coffee Palace Enterprise recognized an opportunity arising from customer complaints about coffee addiction; and

Green Grill Manufacturing detected threats from new competing products and changes in competitors' pricing and product quality.

Both **Coffee Palace Enterprise** and **Green Grill Manufacturing** noticed the success of competitors' marketing campaigns.

This sensing led to quick decisions and rapid adaptation to market changes, resulting in the following actions:

Global Soft Drink Enterprise introduced a product tailored to customer preferences and ran successful marketing campaigns with discounts and prizes.

Green Grill Manufacturing launched a high-quality product and adjusted prices in response to competitors.

Coffee Palace Enterprise responded to customer concerns by introducing a low-caffeine coffee product.

3.3 Hypothesis Testing in Light of the Results Discussion

The practices of the studied enterprises in competitive intelligence played a key role in achieving strategic agility. By collecting and analyzing information, the enterprises were able to sense changes in customer preferences. For instance, Global Soft Drinks Corporation identified shifts in soft drink flavor preferences, as highlighted by Practitioner1, and this was reflected in the knowledge map showing the relationship between competitive intelligence and strategic agility (key term: sensing). Similarly, Coffee Palace leveraged customer complaints about coffee addiction to sense an opportunity, leading to the quick decision to launch a low-caffeine coffee product (key terms: decision-making and offering). In addition, data on technological machinery enabled Mahbouba Enterprise to make informed production decisions, resulting in the launch of two new dough products. Global Soft Drinks Corporation increased product quantities, and Dekoba Enterprise innovated by introducing coffee capsules. These actions, reflecting the competitive intelligence process, were also demonstrated in the knowledge map (key term: offering). Thus, the main hypothesis was validated, confirming that the competitive intelligence process (collection, analysis, and dissemination) significantly contributes to achieving strategic agility in all its dimensions (sensing, decision-making, and practice agility) based on insights from a sample of managers in food industry enterprises from Annaba and Skikda.

Conclusion

This study explored two key concepts in business: competitive intelligence and strategic agility, both essential for the survival and success of enterprises in a dynamic environment. It examined how competitive intelligence helps enterprises understand their competitive landscape and how strategic agility allows them to adapt quickly to changes. Additionally, the study highlighted the role of competitive intelligence in enhancing the dimensions of strategic agility—**sensing**, **decision-making**, and **practice agility**—within food industry enterprises in Annaba and Skikda.

The findings revealed that competitive intelligence practices varied across the studied enterprises. Some fully implemented the process (collection, analysis, dissemination), while others either collected information without analyzing it or did so without using it effectively. Despite these differences, most enterprises could identify opportunities and threats related to customers, competitors, and technology. By making quick decisions based on limited sources (customers, sales consultants, trade fairs) and relying on analysts' experience (without advanced tools), they demonstrated **strategic agility** in adapting swiftly to market changes.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the following actions for enterprises:

Diversify Information Sources: Enterprises should expand their information collection beyond just customers, sales consultants, and trade fairs. Internal sources (such as information systems and board members) and external sources (such as industry reports, trade union data, and competitor websites) should be included. Comprehensive information about market changes is essential for the success of competitive intelligence efforts.

Develop a Clear Information Strategy: Enterprises should establish a clear strategy for collecting, analyzing, storing, and disseminating information using modern techniques. This will help decision-makers process information more efficiently and improve the speed and quality of decisions.

Strengthen Strategic Agility: Enterprises should be more proactive in applying strategic agility, rather than merely reacting to market changes. They need to leverage the insights gained from competitive intelligence to anticipate and act on future opportunities and threats, enhancing their agility in both sensing and responding to market dynamics.

By implementing these recommendations, enterprises can better utilize competitive intelligence to enhance their strategic agility and ensure long-term success in a rapidly changing business environment.

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