**WHEN A DISCIPLINARY REFLECTION LEADS TO A CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMATIC OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE**

**QUAND LA RÉFLEXION DISCIPLINAIRE DÉBOUCHE SUR UNE PROBLÉMATIQUE CONCEPTUELLE EN MATIERE D'INTELLIGENCE ÉCONOMIQUE**

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**Summary**

**The multidisciplinary origin that was behind the birth of the modern concept of economic intelligence (later denoted IE) has stained this concept of conceptual vagueness, hindering all consensus definitions, despite the efforts of theorization. This article is dedicated to a work of clarification as to its origins, highlighting its polysemic character.**

**Keywords: Economic intelligence, multidisciplinarity, polysemy.**

**Résumé : L’origine pluridisciplinaire qui a été derrière la naissance du concept moderne d’intelligence économique (notée IE par la suite) a taché ce concept de flou conceptuel, entravant toutes définitions consensuelles faisant l’unanimité, et ce malgré les efforts de théorisation. Le présent article est dédié à un travail d’éclaircissement quant à ses origines, nous permettons de mettre en évidence son caractère polysémique.**

**Mots clés : Intelligence économique, pluridisciplinarité, polysémie.**

**1. Introduction**

Information is a "science as diverse as philosophy, history, geography, psychology, sociology, ethnology, economics, political science, biology, cybernetics, or cognitive sciences" Mattelart & Mattelart (2004). Its transversal nature of information is no longer to be verified. Economic intelligence as a recent specialty developed mainly by the emergence of the information society, as it places information management at the heart of its approach.

Indeed, "whatever the views on information: its management, its use, its sharing, its devices, ... and the organizational context: mediation, debate, decision, memory..., the information system becomes the pivot of organizations... The organizational context also invites the development of a multidimensional approach through the conjunction of contributions from related disciplines: management sciences, sociology, etc." Volant (2008).

Is this a call for the multidisciplinary and/or transdisciplinarity of EI?

After highlighting the richness of the "EI" concept through its multi- and transdisciplinary character, we define what is meant by IE, what it really is, and what it is not.

**2. Economic intelligence, a multidisciplinary concept**

Questioning the disciplinary field of EI is first of all to question what is meant by discipline.

According to Edgar Morin (2012), the term discipline refers to "an organizational category within scientific knowledge; it establishes the division and specialization of labour and responds to the diversity of fields covered by science. Although encompassed in a larger scientific whole, a discipline naturally tends to autonomy, by the delimitation of its borders, the language it constitutes, the techniques it is led to elaborate or use, and possibly by the theories that are specific to it".

EI challenges all border between scientific disciplines. It calls in particular on a transdisciplinarity, made possible by a multidisciplinarity which itself results from a multidisciplinarity.

A study conducted by Lucas and Bruté de Rémur (2006) on 157 theses published between 1993 and 2002 identified 15 disciplines in which these theses were defended, with a predominance of the two disciplines: information and communication sciences and management sciences which provide respectively 41% and 30% of theses.

In the same vein, Hardy M. (2010) carried out, as part of an article dedicated to the history and trends of the French concept of economic intelligence, an update of the data of the aforementioned study by referring to the university catalogue (www.sudoc.abes.fr) in order to be able to identify the number of theses containing in their title and in their keywords the terms relating to economic intelligence and or the watch, by delimiting the temporal field in 10 years from 1999 to 2008, such a request reconfirmed the predominance of the couple information and communication sciences with (59%) and management sciences (19%) compared to other disciplinary fields, the same conclusion as that obtained by the work of Bruté de Rémur (2006).

Taking the same approach but according to more selective criteria, we proceeded to list via the website dedicated to this regard(thèses.fr) the various theses defended between 2010 and 2020, having addressed economic intelligence as a central theme. That said, only theses that include the word "economic intelligence" in the title will be taken into account.

**Figure** : Number of theses treating EI as the main theme, defended by discipline in France between 2010 and 2020

Legal science

Others

Political science

Information and communication science

**Source: own development**

It must be noted that among the 27 theses listed, the predominance of information and communication sciences and management sciences, respectively 13 and 7 of the theses defended, a conclusion until today underlying, reflecting and reconfirming the most prolific disciplines in the production of scientific research, is still raised.

Information and communication sciences are interested in the technical side of information, management sciences are interested in the managerial side, while economics favor to study the macro-economic angle of EI mechanisms of international economics and for political and legal sciences they are interested in coordination between public and private actors.

Other fields have integrated this field of study such as political science that is interested in EI by perceiving information mastery at the state level as a source of power, and many other fields such as psychology and philosophy although they are still in the embryonic phase.

It then developed at the crossroads of several disciplines: the combination of management sciences / information and communication sciences for the heart (Dumas, Lacroux & Gasté, 2001), but also economic, political and legal sciences for the periphery.

This multidisciplinary nature of the concept has considerably enriched EI's theoretical corpus by the diversified contribution to which each of the disciplines tries to contribute to the understanding of this practice.

However, focusing on multidisciplinarity does not prevent us from questioning multidisciplinarity already mentioned by a number of works, including those of Bruté de Rémur (2004), which is the result of the intersection of several disciplines aimed at making different disciplines collaborate jointly in the interpretation and or resolution of a problem.

The studies mentioned above clearly show the supremacy of the disciplinary couple information and communication sciences / management sciences including research dedicated to EI, which nourish a certain multidisciplinary dynamic.

The coupling of information and communication sciences and management sciences (which themselves drew on the work of Industrial Economics) (Moinet, 2010), appears to be the driving force behind this dynamic. At its core, the issue of decision-making is "*a typical example of the convergence between two disciplines that the Cartesian law of disjunction has erected into two structures sometimes in cooperation, too often in competition. The issue of complexity, whether addressed in management sciences in the field of managerial decisions, or in information sciences communication for collaborative learning processes is becoming more and more obviously the meeting point of these fragmented sciences."* Dumas, Lacroux & Gasté, (2001, p. 7).

Indeed, reading some research work in EI in the discipline of information and communication sciences, a marked presence in the use of managerial concepts is raised. It would therefore be incomplete for a researcher in computer science to conduct research work in EI without resorting to the contributions of management sciences. The same applies between the trio of economic, legal and political sciences that are interested in cooperation and coordination between national and international actors in the control and protection of sensitive information perceived as a state power. Approaching EI at the macroeconomic level of a state would not be done according to the rules of the art without taking into account the legislative and political side.

Wanting to identify a problem related to the concept of EI in a well-defined discipline will require a call for contributions from another discipline or even several disciplines. Indeed, the more diverse the knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, the more likely it is to identify the different facets of our problem.

**1.2. From a disciplinary plurality to a multidisciplinary approach promoting a transdisciplinarity of the subject**

As transdisciplinarity is clearly and concisely aimed at exploring beyond interdisciplinary contributions, it is a third approach that would go further in understanding EI issues more than the simple multidisciplinary approach.

Following a doctoral thesis defended in 2002, Bulinge (2002) was the first to focus on the transdisciplinary perspective of EI, tracing with the help of a diagram the evolution of a disciplinary diversity that can lead to this transdisciplinarity.

Through his diagram, he notes that EI is the result of a more complex genealogy, stemming from various scientific fields and disciplines, including economics, management sciences, information and communication sciences, legal and political sciences, psychology and philosophy. He concludes that EI is a matter par excellence of complexity, born of a transdisciplinary fusion that defies any heritage claim.

The academic future of economic intelligence therefore depends on research that is transdisciplinary. Formulating a consensus and circumscribing a theoretical corpus for EI is a considerable task. As Levet (2001) notes, "EI still remains a field with unstable borders" requiring the use of transdisciplinarity between the different disciplines, promoting the production or constitution of a common basis for reflection.

It is thanks to transdisciplinarity that we can ensure the advancement of studies and research dedicated to this theme by taking advantage of the complementarity and difference provided by each of the disciplines abounded or involved.

**3. A definitional problem**

In addition to the problem of diversity of interpretation of the term "intelligence" by the authors, there is the transdisciplinary genealogical origin of the concept, the main causes behind the instability of knowledge regarding the theorization of EI.

Indeed, the polysemy caused by the use of the term "intelligence" is not the only cause behind the polysemic meaning of the term. The cause goes back to the diversity of research disciplines that gave rise to the conception of EI. Thus, this transdisciplinary variety has not failed to create certain difficulties to establish a consensual definition.

This reality has provoked multiple attempts to define the concept and this, since the 1960s. There is currently no consensual definition of this concept (Goria, 2006).

The multitude of definitions of the concept demonstrates the conceptualization effort carried out on the notion of EI, which has not escaped the influence of the polysemy of meaning.

As a result, the definitional inflation of the concept, which reflects the absence of an integrated, consensual and systematically constructed theoretical framework, is often sharpened. As such, it is obvious to note that each of the proposed definitions hides behind the vision and intentions specific to its author. In Larivet's sense, there is no "better" definition of EI in absolute terms. In the humanities, each definition is the enhancement of facets of the defined concept, and the choice made is highly dependent on the intentions of the author.

This observation reveals that EI is an unfinished web, and in the content and outline still remains blurred and difficult to read.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the transdisciplinary genealogical origin of the concept has not failed to raise weaknesses as to the effort to theorize the "EI" theme. It "*appears as a composite concept in search of theoretical foundations in a perspective of improvement of information practices by organizations*" (Harriet, 2014, p. 34).

This makes it a concept that is still under theoretical construction, which makes EI a conceptual vagueness, hindering any consensual definition that is unanimous both academically and practically, despite the efforts of theorization.

As it should be noted, the very term "intelligence" poses a problem of interpretation by authors trying the concept of ambiguity and confusion with other semantically close concepts.

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