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[Dan Paiuc](#)*, Adina Săniuță, [Alina Mirela Teacu Parincu](#)

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Article

Strategic Intelligence: A Semantic Leadership Perspective

Dan Paiuc ^{1,*}, Adina Săniuță ² and Alina Mirela Teacu Parincu ³

¹ Researcher at the Center for Research in Management at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA); dan.paiuc@facultateademangement.ro

² Lecturer Faculty of Management, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA); adina.saniuta@facultateademangement.ro

³ Associate Professor at The Institute for Business Administration in Bucharest (ASEBUSS); teacualina@yahoo.com

* Correspondence: dan.paiuc@facultateademangement.ro

Abstract: This paper explores the notion of strategic intelligence, namely with respect to leadership and business-oriented areas. Strategic intelligence is a researched concept that primarily concerns the collection and analysis of intelligence for policy and military planning, mainly at national and international levels, whereas this study of management and organizational decision-making application is an extension of that. The article's subject is the necessity for strategic intelligence, a crucial competence for leaders, managers, and companies striving to remain competitive, to be utilized and best leveraged in today's volatile and dynamic business contexts. This study follows a research design that includes a thorough literature review and bibliometric research, executed via VoSViewer, illustrating the concept of strategic intelligence from a leadership point of view as a driver of competitive advantage. Furthermore, the article points out that the limitations are acknowledged because the literature on the matter is limited, as strategic intelligence is relatively new to the business sector; moreover, more research is required to fully understand and use the potential of strategic intelligence in business growth. By overcoming these limitations and continuing to study this concept, businesses can gain a competitive edge and make informed decisions that fuel their success in an ever-evolving market.

Keywords: strategic intelligence; leadership; neuroleadership; global management; cultural intelligence; knowledge dynamics

1. Introduction

According to Sherman Kent, Yale University history professor and pioneer of strategic intelligence (SQ), *intelligence work* is an endeavour to acquire the knowledge upon which a successful course of action can be rested [1]. On the other hand, strategic intelligence is perceived as knowledge upon which a nation's foreign relations must rest in war or peace [2]. In this framed context, strategic intelligence is regarded as vital to a nation's survival. Building on this, and according to LaPaglia, who focused on the cultural roots of strategic intelligence [3], SQ enables the possibilities of gaining and keeping strategic values [4] and advantages, goal-reaching, and potential realization in challenging, adverse, or different environments.

Strategic intelligence usually assists high-level decision-makers, such as senior government leaders, in understanding the geopolitical factors shaping the world around them. Such intelligence can help leaders and major stakeholders anticipate future events, avoid strategic surprises, and make informed decisions [5]. Not all intelligence is predictive in nature, but forecasts are a vital aspect of SQ, as they reduce uncertainty about future events for decision-makers. Collecting raw data about a particular country's diplomatic, economic and military capacity falls under the initial set scope of strategic intelligence. However, that data must be analyzed and combined with other forms of

intelligence, such as emotional intelligence (EQ) and cultural intelligence (CQ) [6], to produce credible forecasts [7,8].

Nowadays, strategic intelligence is more important than ever [9]. The bipolarity of the Cold War and its new recent waves have been replaced by the uncertainty of an emerging multipolar system [10]. Nonetheless, strategic intelligence is meaningless if decision-makers refuse to act on it. A nation's need for intelligence resources is dependent on the view of the world held by its leaders. Relations between intelligence producers and consumers are vital for a nation's security. Here lies the great paradox of strategic intelligence: billions of dollars are spent annually worldwide to acquire and interpret information on world events, only to have it dismissed out-of-hand by policy officials for reasons having little or nothing to do with the quality of the intelligence reporting [11]. Strategic intelligence competes for decision-makers' attention against other elements that create strategic information, knowledge, and insights [12], as a considerable number of leaders' decisions today are still based on opinions, beliefs, and their derivatives rather than on SQ. These challenges originate from shrinking trust in state institutions and the decline in the status of truth [13], all in an era under pressure from fake news and AI-generated information [14].

In management fields, strategic intelligence deployment allows leaders to see the whole picture of the direct and indirect competition landscape, sense threats and vulnerabilities at the earliest possible stage for proactive risk management, utilize early changes in the external environment, enhance knowledge dynamics [15], make real-time decisions based on the latest data in order to stay alert and agile and not drown in unpredictable evolutions, and finally achieve sustainable growth and success [16], which is essential in the current complex and dynamic business environment [17]. This strategic foresight empowers leaders and managers to foresee proactive, informed measures and judgments that set their organizations right for sustainable long-term success and resilience in an ever-changing global and multicultural context [16].

2. Theoretical Background

This literature review aims to critically analyze research studies concerning strategic intelligence. In this section, scholarly literature is used to examine key findings, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence that all contribute to our understanding of strategic intelligence. The review covers elements that refer to the nature of strategic intelligence, the theoretical bases of SQ, and the leadership domains of its practical use.

2.1. Nature of Strategic Intelligence

Strategic intelligence is the organized gathering, analysis, and interpretation of information that is needed to support decision-making and strategic planning. Strategic intelligence, in Fuld's vision, is a never-ending process that permits organizations to gather and evaluate pertinent data, detect patterns and trends, and then convert facts into actionable data intelligence [17]. It is a crucial instrument for opportunity identification, threat analysis and effective strategy formulation.

Strategic intelligence is also the process of data capture and analysis to guide major decisions and policies [18]. The application of strategic intelligence is a practice that goes a long way in history, though some thousands of years. In ancient times, kings and emperors had used spies and scouts to get information about their enemy and target lands. Leaders use operational intelligence to plan attacks, create alliances, and strengthen defences [1,19]. The recent centuries have been considered an era of increased importance of systematic intelligence collection, especially in contemporary nation-states. As strategic intelligence became vital during wartime, the CIA, KGB, and MI6 formalized it in the 20th century [20]. Nowadays, leaders in both government and private sectors apply strategic intelligence to design competitive policies and programs. This article dives deeply into the role of strategic intelligence and performance within leadership and examines the historical development of SQ.

2.2. Theoretical and Practical Foundations of Strategic Intelligence

2.2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Intelligence

Different theoretical approaches undercut the strategic intelligence study, which highlights the factors that determine its effectiveness and the consequences for organizational performance.

1. Resource-Based View (RBV): The resource-based view states that strategic intelligence is important for the organization to detect and utilize its unique resources and capabilities [21]. This view focuses on the role of strategic intelligence in gaining and developing valuable resources that can generate sustainable competitive advantages.

2. Information Processing Theory: Information processing theory focuses on how organizations gain, understand, and utilize information to make rational decisions [22]. Strategic intelligence is an instigator of the most optimal information processing, helping organizations analyze their external environment and internal capabilities and resources and then make strategic choices.

2.2.2. Practical Applications of Strategic Intelligence

Strategic intelligence is applied in many areas, such as business, government and national security. The subsequent sections highlight some of the main practical applications.

1. Business Intelligence: Within a business context, strategic intelligence helps organizations in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data related to customers, competitors, and market trends [11,23]. Market intelligence is used to discover emerging opportunities, evaluate competitor strategies, and develop creative solutions. Strategic intelligence also guides decisions in such spheres as product design, marketing, and resource allocation [24].

2. Geopolitical Intelligence: When it is said to geopolitics, the attention is directed to the investigation and assessment of political, economic and social factors; the purpose of this process is to know and predict what changes can happen on the global scale [10,25]. This information is vital for governments and international organizations to develop efficient foreign policies, security strategies, and responses to geopolitical challenges and threads.

3. Competitive Intelligence: Competitive intelligence occurs through the systematic gathering and analysis of information about the competitors to gain a competitive edge [26]. Competitive intelligence helps recognize competitors' strengths and weaknesses, analyze industry trends, and adjust the developed strategies. By keeping abreast of market dynamics, organizations will be able to make more informed decisions and take advantage of emergent opportunities.

4. Risk Management: Strategic intelligence is crucial in risk identification and elimination. Building on a monitoring and analysis of several internal and external factors, organizations are able to pre-emptively identify possible threats and come up with successful risk management plans [27]. SI helps in risk probability and impact assessment, which allows organizations to rightly allocate resources and formulate contingency plans.

2.3. A Short History of Main Strategic Intelligence Forums and Institutions—USA Focused

The theory of strategic intelligence, as presented in the introduction, was first formulated and contextualized by Sherman Kent in 1949 [1,2,28]. Kent defined strategic intelligence as the knowledge upon which a nation's foreign relations, in war and peace, must rest [28]. However, the history of the concept behind strategic intelligence is very ancient, with some of the earliest sources of such knowledge being Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which was penned around 500 B.C. [29,30]. The ancient Chinese text laid more emphasis on the need to understand the enemy and the environment prior to the introduction of warfare.

In the United States, strategic intelligence began to develop during the times of the Revolutionary War in the 18th century [31]. Spies and secret agents were employed extensively by both sides to collect information on each other's military capabilities, strategies, and weaknesses [20]. The Culper Ring was one of the initial American spy networks under George Washington's command, and its primary objective in 1780 was to gather information about the British forces occupying New York. The function of intelligence kept evolving in the 19th century. By the 1870s, all

leading powers had created permanent military intelligence agencies. The U.S. had several active Army and Navy intelligence agencies combined into the Military Information Division in 1885. This branch offered operational intelligence that was used till 1903 to support military operations and planning [32].

Strategic intelligence was essential in the two World Wars and the era of the Cold War that came after [33]. The Second World War was a major stimulant of the development of American strategic intelligence. Before America entered the war in 1941, President Roosevelt had set up the Office of the Coordinator of Information to examine international happenings. Following Pearl Harbor, that office was restructured to perform as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) that was the first central intelligence agency of the nation [34]. The OSS gathered world political, economic and military intelligence in order to assist the war effort. The American strategic intelligence capabilities increased dramatically during the first years of the Cold War. The CIA was created out of the OSS by the National Security Act in 1947 [34]. The CIA was assigned to correlate, assess, and distribute intelligence information in order to help national security policymakers. Other important organizations included Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) that deals with military intelligence, and National Security Agency (NSA) that specializes in signals intelligence [2,35]. Intelligence was a significant silent partner when it came to influencing U.S. policy and assessments during major Cold War crises and conflicts, starting from the Berlin Blockade through the Cuban Missile Crisis, and to the Vietnam War [28]. The advanced technologies improved the satellite imagery characteristics and communications intercept capabilities. So, human intelligence also continued to be important in weaving through closed societies like the ex-Soviet Union.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States resulted in substantial changes within the intelligence community [36]. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to enhance coordination among various bodies. Counterterrorism emerged as one of the highest priorities, in addition to countering other transnational threats. Currently, the U.S. intelligence community is composed of 17 specialized agencies, including the CIA, NSA, DIA, and the components of the FBI, State Department, Treasury, and other departments. Dominant objectives also involve detecting terrorist networks, evaluating future security challenges concerning climate change and artificial intelligence, and fighting against disinformation by foreign adversaries [28].

On the other side of the Ocean, the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC) gathers and analyzes intelligence; produces geopolitical, economic, and security reports; monitors threats from terrorism, organized crime, piracy, and social unrest; follows social networks; and lobbies [37,38].

2.4. Strategic Intelligence in Leadership and Neuroleadership

Effective leadership in any firm requires strategic intelligence [24]. Leaders must comprehend the competitive environment, risks, and opportunities to influence strategy and decision-making [11]. Strategic intelligence helps executives be proactive and get long-term insights [12]. Combined with cultural intelligence [39], SQ can also support the thriving of the new generation of knowmads and digital nomads and foster diversity and inclusion within multicultural leadership [6,40].

First, strategic intelligence gives leaders a comprehensive view of the strategic landscape [41]. This means assessing not just competitors but also political, economic, social, technological, and other trends that may impact the organization's vision and goals. Strategic intelligence utilizes various disciplinary lenses - geospatial, political, economic, cultural, and historical - to develop a holistic picture [41]. Leaders can, in this way, better analyze and plan systemic relationships and interdependencies [42]. This equips them to consider second and third-order effects when weighing decisions and potential courses of action.

Second, strategic intelligence enables leaders and managers to identify threats, risks and vulnerabilities early [43]. By collecting and analyzing warning indicators, leaders can foresee potential adverse developments while there is still time to prepare mitigation strategies. Emerging threats may stem from competitor innovations, policy changes, demographic shifts or environmental

pressures. Anticipating these changes prevents strategic surprises and shocks that could weaken the organization [43]. Leaders are empowered to be more proactive than reactive [42].

Third, strategic intelligence opens leaders' eyes to new opportunities for advantage [18]. Consumer trends, cutting-edge technologies, changes in the regulatory climate - these external shifts can all be turned into opportunities for organizations nimble enough to capitalize on them. Strategic intelligence provides the foreknowledge for leaders to take the initiative and place smart bets [18]. It allows them to build strategic plans ahead competition and to include within possible late move of challengers. This intelligence-led opportunism is critical to unlocking growth and new possibilities.

Fourth, strategic intelligence empowers leaders with information [44]. Before acting, good leaders gather all the facts and insights. Strategic intelligence informs planning and decision-making. Understanding strategic conditions, not assumptions or groupthink, helps leaders make decisions [44,45].

Finally, strategic intelligence enables leaders to prevent strategic surprises [46]. Leaders must adapt to a dynamic environment. They use strategic intelligence to connect dots and distinguish signals from simple noise. They can adjust to emerging trends and inflexion points before they gather momentum [46]. Strategic intelligence gives leaders the foresight to lead in a balanced manner [47].

The current context is the scene of permanent transformations and changes following new social, economic and political trends manifested on a global scale, as well as the digital revolution. These elements have generated an unprecedented dynamic shake of the entrepreneurial organizational ecosystem, which has become more complex and competitive [48], stimulating organizations to explore new horizons and levers for reinventing their activities in order to remain anchored in the current and daily changing reality [49]. Also, it encourages the permanent evaluation of perspectives and the design of a new vision, plans and strategic thinking in order to achieve organizational performance. The lack of certainty and knowledge, the gap between the known and the unknown and between the current situation of the organization and the horizon in which it projects its future [15], strengthen these approaches and support the rethinking of managerial and organizational approaches via strategic intelligence.

Previous research has highlighted a meaningful connection between leadership and strategic intelligence, which is essential for managerial and leadership success and implicit decision-making processes [7,8,50,51]. Strategic intelligence aims to discover specific models and trends, possible opportunities and threats, which facilitate the anticipation of changes and the adaptation process, the alignment with the dynamics of the organizational environment, maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage and the need for informed, substantiated decisions [7], through a systematic process, focused on obtaining, from internal and external sources, of specific data, evaluated by both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and the interpretation, evaluation and dissemination of relevant information for the strategy of an organization, its objectives on long term and its strategic decision-making process [7].

For an effective management and leadership, both strategic intelligence and the opportunities generated by the digital revolution - which generated the development of new disciplines and shaped new approaches following the application of neuroscience in the managerial and organizational spectrum - must be capitalized, making the transition from the traditional management approach to neuro-management, from economics to neuro-economics, from leadership to neuroleadership, from strategy to neurostrategy, from marketing to neuro-marketing and from planning to neuro planning [52,53], from business to neuro business - the new concept that incorporates the areas of business and organizational administration [54].

Neuroleadership, developed for the progress of leadership processes at the organizational level, focuses on managerial decision-making processes and how to solve problems, manage emotions, collaborate and approach and facilitate change [55], improving management practices, coaching, consulting and management training, change management, innovation and creativity, influence and commitment of people [55-58]. Neuroleadership, via SQ, facilitates a holistic approach to leadership, targeting areas such as strategy and organizational behaviour, decision-making processes, social

interaction and collaboration, cultivating trust, and targeting the entire human spectrum in the organizational environment [55].

To overcome the multiple challenges and difficulties faced by the organizational environment, it has become imperative to develop new ways of approaching management and leadership at the corporate level, which outline new ways of performing to generate organizational success. A culture of experimentation and implementation of innovative, complementary approaches is being encouraged [59].

Strategically intelligent neuroleaders will be able to overcome constant challenges through a continuous process of leadership development, effective decision-making processes, and the competitive advantage generated through coherent and sustainable measures that do not limit future opportunities, vision, adaptability, creativity, dynamism, and integrity. These will provide the platform for effective management leadership and organizational performance [59,60].

3. Data and Bibliometric Research on Strategic Intelligence

Our research is also backed by a bibliometric mapping of the SQ concept within the first generic and then leadership-focused contexts. The data was retrieved from SCOPUS on the 18th of February 2024 via an advanced search function, and the first SQ mention recorded by Scopus is dated from 1951. However, the first joint mentions of SQ and leadership were registered by Scopus only in 1986. Both searches for *SQ* and *SQ and leadership* were done in all Scopus fields, domains and periods in order to maximize relevance.

The SQ search returned 3269 results, of which 30.7% were published in the last four years (2020-2023), putting the SQ topic into the recent actuality agenda. The top subject area is social sciences, with more than 50% of publications, while the first source type is the journal, with a share of more than 65%. The top 3 SQ authors, as reflected by Scopus, are David R. Mandel (32), Stephen Marrin (18) and Gamboa-Rosales (17). The top SQ affiliations are composed of King's College London (60), The University of Manchester (28), and Georgetown University (28).

The SQ and leadership search returned 587 results, of which 250 (42.6%) were published within the recent period 2020-2023, enhancing even more on the major public interest of these connected notions within the last period – marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and its post effects. While the top subject area and source types remain the same in the SQ single search (social sciences: 51%, journal: 63%), this time, the top author's podium is composed of Lee, Y.I. (9), Peter Trim, R.J (7 and Michael Maccoby (6). The first SQ and leadership affiliation is the same as in our single SQ search, King's College London (13). However, the next 2 places are now occupied by the University of St. Andrews (7) and the University of Oklahoma (7). In Table 1 below, we summarise our bibliometric research:

Table 1. A bibliometric search of *SQ* and *SQ + leadership* into the Scopus database.

Searched Expressions	Search fields	Returned results	The first year of public mention recorded by Scopus	Returned results 2020 - 2023	Top subject area	Top source type	Top three authors	Top three affiliations
"Strategic intelligence"	all fields	3269	1951	1004 (30.7%)	Social Sciences (50.6%)	Journal (65.8%)	Mandel, D.R. (32), Marrin, S. (18), Gamboa-	King's College London (60), The University of Manchester (28),

							Rosales, N.K (17)	Georgetown University (28)
"Strategic intelligence" AND " leadership"	all fields	587	1986	250 (42.6%)	Social Sciences (50.9%)	Journal (62.9%)	Lee, Y.I. (9), Trim, P.R.J (7), Maccoby, M. (6)	King's College London (13), University of St. Andrews (7), University of Oklahoma (7)

Source(s): Authors own research.

The documents were exported from Scopus into a CSV file that captured all *citations*, *bibliographical*, *abstract* and *keywords*, *funding* and *other* – information. The CVS files were exported into VOSViewer (version 1.6.20) – a visualizing scientific landscapes software [61], in order to identify and build bibliometric maps with interconnections within main concepts.

The resulting maps reflect the visualization of theoretical concepts using nodes, words, and their connections. Nodes and words are sized based on their weights, representing factors like importance or frequency. Proximity between nodes indicates the strength of their connection, with shorter distances suggesting stronger relationships. Lines represent the co-occurrence of keywords, with thickness showing frequency. Clusters group nodes of the same colour that aid in identifying interconnected concepts. Table 2 presents the keywords co-occurrences of our two searches as a result of VOSviewer with a full counting method.

Table 2. Keywords and keywords co-occurrences of our 2 SQ related searches as reflected in VOSViewer.

Searched Expressions	Total number of keywords	Number of keywords meeting the threshold of 5	Number of keywords meeting the threshold of 2
"Strategic intelligence"	11336	683	2665
"Strategic intelligence" AND "leadership"	2153	55	340

Source(s): Authors own research.

Our first map of SV as reflected by VOSviewer is presented below in figure 1.

Table 3. Main concepts extractions from SQ map from VOSviewer. **Source(s):** Authors own research.

Item/s	From cluster	Link strength	Fields	Area	Total link strength	Total link strength share
knowledge	1	156				
knowledge based systems	1	75				
knowledge creation	2	20				
knowledge engineering	2	52	Knowledge			
knowledge sharing	2	25				
tacit knowledge	2	24				
knowledge management	2	409		Knowledge	4428	12.7%
information management	1	258		dynamics		
management information systems	1	80	Information and Data			
19 other <i>information</i> related terms	1,3, 5, 7	1491				
18 <i>data</i> related terms	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7	1838				
leadership	3	70	Leadership			
14 <i>management</i> related terms	1,2,5	1148		Leadership and management	2055	5.9%
2 <i>control</i> related items	1, 4	646	Management			
2 <i>governance</i> -related items	3	162				
coordination	1	29				
11 <i>decision</i> -making-related items	1	2039	Decision making	Decision making	2039	5.8%
22 <i>technology</i> related terms	1,2,3,5, 7	2267				
social networking (online)	1	137	Technology, AI and digital transformation			
artificial intelligence	1	294		Technology	2892	8.3%
AI	1	31				
3 <i>digital transformation</i> related items	1, 2, 5	163				
5 <i>performance</i> related terms	1, 2, 4	207	Performance / Profitability	Performance and profitability	238	0.7%
profitability	1	31				
12 <i>innovation</i> related items	1, 2, 3	1276	Innovation	Innovation	1276	3.7%
sustainability	2	212	Sustainability	Sustainability	508	1.5%
sustainable development	1	296				

Source(s): Authors own research.

We can see from the Table 3 that *knowledge dynamics* (KD) are a key driver of strategic intelligence, accounting for 12.7% of the total link strength of the SQ map. The pattern is kept as in the case of cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence, where KD plays a vital role [62,63]. *Leadership* and *management* are directly linked with SQ and cumulate a 5.9% share of the SQ map's strength, while *decision-making* structures account for 5.8%. In the same context, *technology* represents 8.3%, *innovation* is 3.7%, *sustainability* is 1.5%, and *performance* is 0.7%. Reformulating, we have demonstrated that within strategic intelligence, knowledge dynamics is essential for the leadership function to support and enhance the best decision-making outcomes based on big data and technology to deliver performance and foster innovation and sustainability.

Our second map portraying the joint presented of SV and leadership as reflected by VOSviewer is illustrated below in Figure 2.

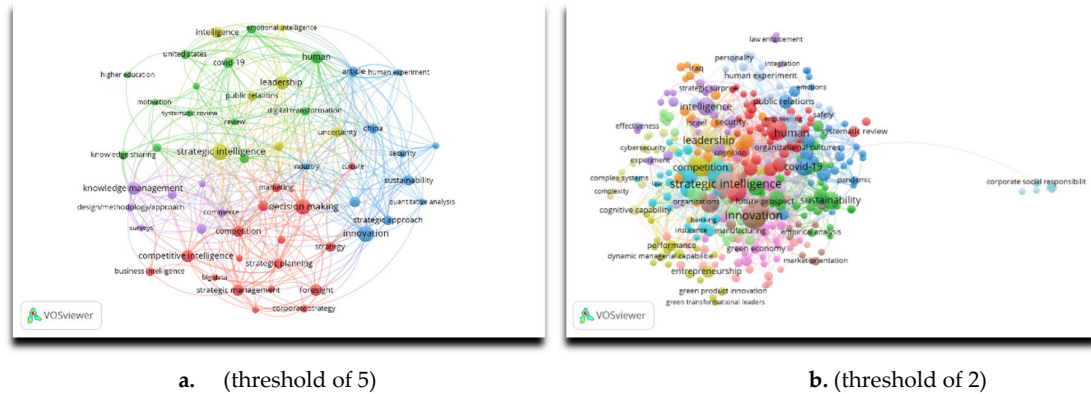


Figure 2. Strategic intelligence AND leadership map / all fields search / 587 results / 2153 keywords / 55 keywords with threshold of 5 (a) and 340 keywords with threshold of 2 (b). **Source(s):** Authors own creation.

We can observe that strategic intelligence and leadership regrouped together under the same cluster (yellow) – Figure 2a - this re-enforcing the direct connections of the two concepts underlined in table 3. Also, excluding the military and geopolitical approach from the global strategic intelligence map – the business intelligence component now clearly fuels the SQ's tactical, systematic and foresight planning (Figure 2b).

4. Results and discussions

This literature review offers knowledge about strategic intelligence's character, theoretical principles, and operational functions. Analysis shows that strategic intelligence is a complex notion involving the orderly gathering, interpretation and analysis of information meant to aid in decision-making and strategic planning. Theoretical underpinnings, including resource-based view and information processing theory, portray how strategic intelligence is related to the success of an organization. Strategic intelligence is used in a variety of domains including business, leadership, government, and national security, and is characterized by its flexibility and relevance in promoting competitive advantage, risk management, and innovation.

Strategic intelligence has exposed risks, opportunities, and the complex strategic environment for ages, helping leaders make decisions. Modern strategic intelligence uses worldwide data and analysis. High-quality strategic information gives executives timely, relevant, and accurate insights for long-term strategy, minimizing risks. As fast change makes the world more unpredictable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, strategic intelligence will rise.

5. Conclusions

Strategic intelligence is a key component of successful decision-making and strategic planning. Its multidimensional character includes both a process and result, depicting that it induces the collecting and analyzing of data in order to come up with well-considered strategies. The

perspectives on strategic intelligence emphasize its significance in geopolitical and business settings. Strategic intelligence enables organizations to achieve competitive advantage, risk minimization, and innovation. In the ever-changing business dynamics, strategic intelligence is still critical for the success of an organization.

It is an enormous task to evaluate the effectiveness of various intelligence forms, especially within the scope of strategic intelligence [64,65], especially within new E-business and AI-driven contexts [66]. Complexity arises from the diverse character of intelligence work, which includes secret analysis and operations, the result of which cannot always be seen at once. Besides, the success criteria of strategic intelligence in the leadership spheres are complicated, as they mostly go beyond the direct results to the shaping of the long-term policy and decision-making [67] processes. Hence, such a metric for measuring the effectiveness of SQ in leadership and management entails appreciating the direct and indirect effects of intelligence actions in relation to the company's both public and confidential targets.

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