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Strategic scanning: usefulness of « in-the-field” information for small and medium-sized businesses and industries looking for new outlets product/market

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RESUME.

Veille Stratégique : utilité des « informations de terrain » pour la PME-PMI à la recherche de nouveaux débouchés produit/Marché (Etude d'un cas)

Résumé : Les informations de veille dont il s'agit sont des « informations d'origine homme de terrain ». Ces informations sont les plus nombreuses et surtout les plus familières aux membres des PME-PMI. Nous proposons une définition originale du concept. Nous montrons l'utilité de telles informations dans le cas où la PME-PMI serait à la recherche de nouveaux débouchés produit/ marché. Nous présentons un cas réellement vécu par notre équipe (mais nous en avons vécu beaucoup d'autres). Il vise à illustrer le concept et à mettre en évidence l'utilité considérable de telles informations dans l'exemple traité.

Mots-clés : PME-PMI, Information de terrain, Veille stratégique, Chine, secteur des parfums, utilité de la Veille.

ABSTRACT.

Strategic scanning: usefulness of « in-the-field » information for small and medium-sized businesses and industries looking for new outlets product/market

Most publications concerning Scanning deal with information that is mainly or exclusively of documentary origin. Therefore, a whole area of information is left aside: we shall call this kind of information “information obtained from in-the-field individuals” (IOII). We shall define this expression in the following lines. In this article, our ambition is to suggest a new definition of the concept of IOII to highlight the importance of sensorial information, and to show the use of such information when a small or medium-sized business is looking for new outlets product/market. In order to be as precise as possible in the few pages we have at our disposal, we are going to present a real-life case observed by our team. We do not claim to draw general conclusions from the one case presented. This case only aims at illustrating the concept of “in-the-field information” (IOII), and to highlight the **significant usefulness** of such information in this specific example. As far as “research” is concerned, we stand in the context of a longitudinal research since it has a timescale of several months, and of an investigative research; and we finally stand from an epistemological constructivist view-point as regards the great involvement of the research worker who at the same time played an active part in the change presented in this case. The aims is to draw the reader's attention on the importance of “in-the-field information” (IOII), in the event of a medium-sized business looking for new outlets; To conceptualise what we have called “in-the-field information” (IOII); To suggest “*actionable knowledge*” and therefore suggest main lines of trainings aiming at developing people's capacities to hunt for sensorial information.

Keywords. : Small/medium-sized businesses and industries, « in-the-field » information (IOII), strategic Scanning, China, aromatic and perfume industries, usefulness of Scanning.

INTRODUCTION.

Most publications concerning Scanning deal with information that is mainly or exclusively of documentary origin. Therefore, a whole area of information is left aside: we shall call this kind of information “information obtained from in-the-field individuals” (IOII). We shall define this expression in the following lines.

A paradox. First of all, we should like to underline a paradox: the “in-the-field information” (IOII) is the most numerous, and, above all, the most familiar to the staff members of small and medium-sized businesses and industries. Most of these businesses do not have a documentary department, and spend little time to go over publications with a fine-tooth comb, and use little information of documentary origin. The information they possess concerning their environment mainly comes from the manager and his deputies, who are in contact with the business’s outside world, for example with customers, providers, competitors etc...

In this article, our ambition is to suggest a new definition of the concept of IOII to highlight the importance of **sensorial** information (and not only of information of relational origin), and to show the use of such information when a small or medium-sized business is looking for new outlets product/market. In order to be as precise as possible in the few pages we have at our disposal, we are going to present a real-life case observed by our team (but we have observed many others). We do not claim to draw general conclusions from the one case presented. This case only aims at illustrating the concept of “in-the-field information” (IOII), and to highlight the **significant usefulness** of such information in this specific example.

Research. As far as “research” is concerned, we stand in the context of a longitudinal research since it has a timescale of several months, and of an investigative research (an exploration of a kind of information rarely published about); and we finally stand from an epistemological constructivist view-point as regards the great involvement of the research worker who at the same time played an active part in the change presented in this case.

Aims. Our purpose is:

- To draw the reader’s attention on the importance of “in-the-field information” (IOII), in the event of a medium-sized business looking for new outlets.
- To conceptualise what we have called “in-the-field information” (IOII).

- To suggest “*actionable knowledge*”, after Ch. Argyris’s phrase (1996), and therefore suggest main lines of trainings aiming at developing people’s capacities to hunt for sensorial information (capacities in the fields of perception, watchfulness, alertness, and curiosity).

1 – CONCEPTS.

11. Definition.

We call “in-the-field information” an **Information Obtained from an In-the-field Individual (IOII)** -not from an office worker-, or an observation made by someone on a specific workplace. This information involves one or several senses of the observers. It can result either from a visual observation, from a sentence accidentally heard, from a sensation after touching something, from a fragrance smelt, or else from a sensation after tasting something. The initial sensor of information is therefore one or several of the five senses of the observer in question (sensorial information). Moreover, this information will have struck this person’s mind hard enough to spark off his careful **attention** and to register in his memory, at least at the very moment it is perceived. An “in-the-field information” is the result of someone’s **perception**. Moreover, sensing an “in-the-field information” requires the observer’s presence on the spot, outside “the walls of this office”. We sometimes use the word “tracker” to refer to the person who gathers such sensation, a word which our Canadian friends might find appropriate. It is easy to understand that an “in-the-field tracker” will be someone (either male or female) who senses his information in circumstances of poor comfort, instability, stress and even of risk.

“In-the-field information” is firsthand information, and therefore must be totally distinguished from information of documentary origin, which would have been read on one media or other. An “in-the-field information” (IOII) must be contemplated as totally prior to any possible circuit of information it may enter later on, and totally prior to a computerized information managing system.

12. Examples.

- a) A sentence heard in a train, during a conversation with another passenger, or even without there any conversation at all.
- b) A sentence heard, said by someone using his mobile phone in a loud voice in a public place.
- c) An unexpected noise, unrelated to the place where it is heard.

- d) A smell perceived on the occasion of the visit of a provider's – or a competitor's- workshop, or of a shop etc.
- e) A sensation felt as one touches some material in a workshop, a shop, or in a laboratory.
- f) A taste perceived as one brings to one's mouth a liquid or a solid.
- g) The sight of something read on a billboard in the street.
- h) The visual observation of a movement unconsciously made by someone ("body language").
- i) The perception of a change that something has changed since one's last visit.

The "in-the-field" trackers working for a business, for example, are its marketing people, in their exchanges and contacts with customers; its competitors; its retailers, etc. This kind of information is always informal, most of the time initially subjective, but that does not in any way detract from its usefulness, as we shall see in the case presented in the lines below.

13. Important remarks.

1 – In our opinion, an "in-the-field information" (IOII) can most of the time be compared to a signal which has not deliberately been sent by the person transmitting it, and which, at least, was not intended to the receiver (sensor) of the information. Besides, it is not impossible that someone may unknowingly send possibly unconscious signals, other than those related to the five classical senses.

2 – Most of the time an "in-the-field information" only amounts to a very small piece of information. But this small piece may be of exceptional importance to whoever is able to make the most of it.

3 – An "in-the-field information" may appear at any time in any place without the potential "tracker" of this information being forewarned. This implies that the sensor should be in a state of full non-influenced receptivity, or else in a state of "watchful wandering", according to Gaston Bachelard's phrase.

14. (WHY) Irreplaceable usefulness of "in-the-field information" (IOII), for a small/medium-sized business looking out for new outlets.

Small/medium-sized businesses and industries.

Fann and Smeltzer (1989) have noticed that the small and medium-sized business managers do not massively or systematically collect information about their competitors or their markets. They still carry out this collection in a rather informal way, as they grant a limited importance to the systematic analysis of their competitors and markets. Recent research about

small/medium-sized businesses (Julien, Andriambeloson, and Ramangalahy, 2002) highlights the importance of resorting to various networks, in order to obtain valuable information, and, therefore, gradually to adapt the environment of the businesses. The writers have used the phrase “osmosis with the surroundings”.

Innovation as a strategic aim.

The creative small businesses present some particularities that characterises them with a specific outline which is exceptional among all small and medium-sized businesses.

These businesses have become more integrated in the industrial fabric, and more open to the outside world. Innovating businesses are more successful. Their added value increases much faster (8.5%) than that of the non-innovating ones (3.4 %). As they invest more than non-innovating ones, they react much faster to any change in the economic situation. (De Lapasse et Loiseau, INSEE, 1999).

Therefore, several French public structures offer either scanning services intended to businesses, or a support to scanning actions outside the businesses.

The process of innovation is based on a “tests and mistakes’ approach”, in which tacit knowledge and individual initiatives of the people involved play a key-part (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998). Julien, Andriambeloson, and Ramangalahy (2002) underline the fact that *“the innovation in small businesses derives from all kinds of complex and cumulated information, often stimulated by their customers or by various changes in the raw materials and expertise of the organization. This information comes from or is completed by networks which can be connected to quite often informal scanning systems”*.

Anticipation as an aim.

The response period between the detection of a need (or the anticipation of a wish), of a market, of a customer, and the putting forward of the appropriate response has become an important indicator. The notion of speed can become more essential than the notions of profit or economic growth. (Richard, 1998).

“The perfumer has to be visionary. He must anticipate the great philosophical trends that will be the driving forces of the third millenary; he must immerse in the new emerging values, he must actively participate in the artistic and social life, travel throughout the world and the

cyberspaces of the web, in order to become better integrated in the new planetary dimension". (Roudnitska, Art&Parfum manager, Grasse, April 2002).

In their work prefaced by G. Koenig, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997) give examples of the existing link between physical experimentation in the field, and first-hand observations and information, and innovation.

Organizational culture: Pre-eminence of the oral and informal.

As far as the use of external information is concerned, it seems small and medium-sized business managers, often turn to rather informal sources (Cooper, Folta, and Woo, 1995), and mainly to their personal networks of acquaintances (Pineda and Lernier, 1998). The informal realities, such as mutual comprehension and the building-up of a capital of trust are often considered key factors of success (Hlady Rispal, 2002).

Some types of business activity (as will be shown in 2), as for example, the aromatic industries, rely on tacit knowledge, on "individual knowledge" (Polanyi, 1964).

In the olfactory sphere, tacit knowledge ("capacity to smell") is always learnt through collaboration with an experienced perfumer or flavorist; the olfactory memory thus obtained and structured must be worked and cultivated.

"To acquire an olfactory memory which will enable him to compose perfumes, the student perfumer, for a period of at least two years, will have to smell daily the scents of his future palette, composed of over 1000 scents. As memory is progressive, the composer will have to work on and on all through his career. For the composer of perfumes, the memory of scents does not refer to the visual image of olfactory sources, but to a mental representation of each scent. Therefore, he invents the substance of his knowledge: he invents scents and is able to create." (Gontier and Ellena, 2003, p. 102).

Other types of activities, particularly those in relation to the living, such as agriculture and its by-activities (Allain, 1999), for example the culture of vineyards and the making of the wines, rely on "in-the-field information".

We should like to recall our aim to put forward **actionable knowledge**. As an illustration, we shall present the case of a medium-sized industry of the Grasse area.

Let us come back to the above-mentioned **paradox**: small and medium-sized businesses should be familiar with this concept, but is it really so? And what about those who are indeed familiar with it: are they properly prepared to gather and capitalize on this kind of information?

Some writers have dealt with “in-the-field information” (IOII) and/or of sensorial information, in the context of scanning. Aktouf (1987), for example, makes a distinction between primary data generated by the “tracker” himself, and secondary data (already available somewhere: documentation, databases, Internet, etc.).

Small businesses should be particularly interested in our concept. As a matter of fact, these businesses are often said to be much more familiar with interpersonal relationships, with informal information, with in-the-field information. And much less familiar with documentary information, for which they have neither inclination nor resource.

The training of sensors of in-the-field information, of sensorial information has paradoxically never been mentioned by any author dealing with Scanning, at least to the best of our knowledge.

2 – STUDY OF A CASE: SMALL-SIZED INDUSTRY “GRASSOISE”.

21. Specific object of the activity: aromatic industry.

This small-sized industry is located next to Grasse, world capital city of perfumery, in the “département” of Alpes Maritimes in France. Its activity consists in turning into finished goods (aromas or perfumes) aromatic raw materials of a wide-ranging variety (about 10.000), originating from almost everywhere on the planet.

This activity requires a very specific expertise, relying on a tacit knowledge called “ability to smell”. This ability is a knowledge which is almost impossible to formalize, and which has passed on from generation to generation, by “compagnonage”, or trade guild: it is the result of collective learning.

The creation of new products is done through a practice of the “tests and errors” kind, until what was sought-after is reached. Every finished product is unique in its kind, and, in itself, constitutes an innovation. This innovation is the result of a process that, in the present case, has to be collective.

Example. Some workers carry out the extraction of an essence called « concrete ». They smell its scent as the essence comes out of the tank. In case of a doubt, they will go and see the person in charge of the quality checks, who will smell in his turn; if the difference between the obtained and the sought-after scent seems too important, they will then refer to a “nez” (or “nose”, a creator of perfumes): he will decide whether to keep the “concrete” for the production to be made, or to reject it and start the whole preparation again. This decision is taken collectively: everyone smells the same product in the presence of the others. There is no other way to proceed; the use of measuring devices is primarily reserved for research purposes. Everyone shares his tacit knowledge. There is no way to put such knowledge into words. People who work together in this sphere share a common feeling they express by saying, “*we agree to like*” or “*we agree to dislike*”. In this respect, nothing is quantitative. (Rasse, 1987).

Knowledge would therefore find its origin in, and be used by, a “community of practice”. (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

22. Description of the small-sized industry “Grassoise”.

The business we call “Grassoise” is a very innovative industry. This is due to its manager. This business is worldwide famous in the sphere of perfumery. It is a business with a high intensity of knowledge. (Baumard, 2002 (2)).

23. The case of the small-sized industry “Grassoise”.

231. Starting point. A great Chinese business specialized in the aromatic industry gets in touch with “Grassoise” (which was identified by its own Strategic Scanning).

The manager of “Grassoise”: *“I was approached by the Chinese to set up a joint venture in order to make luxury perfumes. Should I consider this offer positively? What are my chances of success?”*

232. Total uncertainty. “Grassoise” is thus approached to set off on a risky adventure, which can be summed up as follows: to make a new product for a new market. Its manager has got no information whatsoever to shed light on his decision (either positive or negative). He is in a totally uncertain position.

233. Huge financial consequences at stake. The decision to take will have huge financial consequences. Moreover, this decision will have to be taken quickly, for the Chinese representatives are, in this instance, in a great hurry.

234. Resorting to a Scanning service. The “Grassoise” manager gets in touch with an external Scanning provider, for its business does not have a Strategic Scanning service available (neither have all other small and medium-sized businesses in Grasse).

235. Secrecy. A critical problem of confidentiality arises. Resorting to an external service demands a total respect of secrecy and the “Grassoise” manager’s entire trust. The prospective “tracker” (a lady in this instance) presents several features that are suited to the situation: he is trustworthy, he has got an experience of China, and he has got an expertise in the olfactory sphere.

The approached tracker: *“To respond to your problem, it will not be sufficient to read documentation (should it exist). I shall have to go on the spot, “in the field”, in China, to acquire a suitable perception of local culture, of local scents, to memorize the fragrances which are familiar to Chinese ladies”.*

236. Preparation of « tracking » prior to working *in situ*.

“In order to get ready for this mission, I prepared a panel of formal and explicit information; this panel will be open and may be modified in the course of my future trip to China, so that I shall be able to complete the list of questions, confirm or reject some of them.”

The preparation can be summed up as follows:

a) A constructivist approach to the problem is conducted, involving both the “Grassoise” manager and the prospective “in the field” tracker. This collective work will result in a precise

list of questions that will have a deciding influence on the tracker's collection of observations and sensations when he is *in situ*, in China.

b) The "tracker" builds up and/or stimulates his own network of Scanning acquaintances. This is also a collective stage in his preparation process. Indeed, the sources of documentary information are of very little use in the present case: there are very few reliable and up to date data about China in the field of perfumery, and even less in any other language but Chinese.

"I set my own networks of relations to work. I get in touch (from a distance) with people on the spot, to prepare my own relational scanning network in China".

Transition from individual to collective work. A "tracker of in-the-field information" does not necessarily work on his own; in fact, it is rather the opposite, he does his job "outside the walls" of an office.

c) The "tracker" therefore builds up his own database and leaves to China.

Examples of questions.

1. What are the most widespread perfumes in China? What raw materials, what essential oils are they made of?
2. What capacity is there for of the market of luxury perfumes? What is its growth rate and what is its potential market for the ten years to come?
3. What is the distribution network of perfumes in China today? And what is the evolution of this network?
4. What is the minimum legal percentage of participation in a joint venture with a Chinese business?
5. What are the regulations applying to Chinese mixed companies?
6. What is their commercial mode of operation, how much can be investigated in this respect?
7. How could the business in Nankin (Nanjing) be granted a maximum amount of funds?
8. Who can buy luxury perfumes in China?
9. We think the Chinese target customer belongs to the Chinese jet set who lives in big cities such as Nankin. Who exactly belongs to the Chinese jet set?
10. What about the rich Chinese Lady? Who is she? What does she do? How does she dress? Where does she do her shopping? What are her favourite cosmetics and perfumes?

237. In situ, in China. (Gathering of « IOII », which mainly consists of visual and olfactory observations).

✓ Picking up, on the spot, of scents (and of information connected with them) which could be accepted by Chinese ladies in China. *“To achieve this, I have to have the appropriate ability to smell”.*

✓ *“My sensations, or the oral information I gather, help me to confirm or to reject the questions I had prepared before I left Grasse”.*

✓ Meeting people who could be potential customers for “Grassoise”.

The “tracker” uses his tacit individual knowledge, and completes it collectively by smelling various perfumes with Chinese ladies. “Cultural” information is stored up the “tracker’s” memory.

Moreover, the “tracker” visits shops to acquire a greater amount of visual and olfactory information. He observes that there are very few Chinese buyers in luxury perfume shops.

An in-the-field information (IOII): *“China is a country where people do not use perfume, but there are some familiar scents which are already inscribed on their memory.”*

Inference, individual interpretation by the “tracker”: Chinese ladies might accept a perfume which is in concordance with their olfactory memory, whereas other perfumes would be rejected, at least as things stand today.

“I store up in my head (I use my olfactory tacit memory) the scents I have smelt on the markets, in the streets etc. (Consciously or unconsciously)”.

The following lines are an example of “in-the-field” information (IOII) which was immensely valuable to the manager of “Grassoise” when he took his decision.

“I go to various department stores where perfumes are sold: I smell very expensive luxury perfumes. Surprise: these perfumes do not have the same smell as identical perfumes (of the same brand) sold in France. I point out this fact to “Grassoise”: this Chanel perfume does not have the same typical features here in China as in France.”

Criminal track: On checking, these perfumes turn out to be imitations. Hence “Grassoise’s” question: “See on the spot whether imitations of perfumes created by “Grassoise” already

exist on the Chinese market. Would it be possible “Grassoise” perfumes are copied in China? Wishing to answer this question, and taking some risk in doing so, the “tracker” discovers the existence of an almost industrial network of imitations of up-market perfumes.

Decision number 1. The manager of Grassoise decides as follows.

“I do not give up the idea of “going to China” (going on the Chinese market”), but I am going to set about it in a different way. I am not going to produce the perfume in China, contrary to what was first suggested to me. I shall compose the perfume in France, and then deliver it to China. Only the bottling and the distribution on the market will be done on the spot.”

This is a very different decision, indeed, from the one contemplated at the beginning.

238. Return to Grasse. The “Grassoise” manager sees his tracker. He expects from him **something more than a written report:** he expects a subjective, but well-argued interpretation. This also contributes to the preparation of his own trip to China. Manager and “tracker” “sit at the same table” and an oral interactive relation starts.

The manager: *“I have composed six new perfumes while you were in China. Smell them. Tell me which one, according to you, would “go through” and succeed in China, and which ones would not.”*

The manager and the “tracker” both smell the same perfume and compare their perceptions.

Answering the manager’s questions demands that the tracker actually went to China, on the spot, in order to immerse in a thousand informal sensations; it demands that the tracker acquired a perception of the local culture and of local scents, and stored up in his memory all the scents he smell/felt in situ.

The tracker smells the different perfumes and the manager observes his reactions. The tracker has to tell about his impressions, express his opinions: *“I like this one”* and *“I do not like that one”*. He plays the part of the first enlightened prototype customer.

On the basis of such expressed reactions, modifications of some of the prepared perfumes may have to be done.

Here is another example of visual information.

The Asian way to sell perfumes.

“As I was visiting luxury shops selling up-market perfumes, I realized that there were a lot of shop-assistants, a few or very few bottles of perfume, and no customer at all. I asked to smell the perfumes and I was handed over open bottles. This is absurd: a perfume cannot be properly smelt that way. I pointed out this fact to “Grassoise”. We set out three plausible assumptions:

1. The purchase of a perfume is not linked to the reaction of the perfume on the purchaser’s skin. Therefore, the purchase of a perfume is rather intended as a present for somebody else. Hence the idea of starting a new study, by “Grassoise”, to investigate about customers’ behaviour when they buy a luxury perfume in China.
2. There is no culture of perfume purchase in China. Therefore « Grassoise’s » main **target** is the “jet set”. In that case, it is absolutely necessary to **CREATE** a new range of perfumes (**INNOVATION**).
3. Asian shop assistants have to be trained. The following decision is: « Grassoise » will negotiate the training of shop assistants with its partners who distribute perfumes in China. This will mean a change of the organisational system of the Chinese partner, and that “Grassoise” will have to help him **conduct this change**.

Following this “in-the-field information” (IOII), “Grassoise’s” strategic project took a very different shape from the one the business manager contemplated at the first stage of this case.

239. Profitable consequences for “Grassoise”.

- a) “Grassoise” went on the Chinese market with new perfumes (new products) specially imagined for this (new) market.
- b) The joint venture was negotiated on solid foundations, which were accepted by the Chinese partner (highly increased negotiation capacity). It was actually set up in Nankin (China).

c) A Chinese perfumer composer (a Chinese “nose”) joined “Grassoise’s” network of perfume designers.

d) A special training of Chinese shop assistants for selling perfume was also set up.

3. CONCLUSIONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE STUDY OF THE CASE.

31. Main features of the “in-the-field information” (IOII).

Most of the information mentioned in the study of this case is indeed of sensitive origin.

This kind of information is always sketchy, incomplete, uncertain, and often ambiguous.

This information is of a “weak signal” rather than of a “strong signal” type. (Lesca, 2003).

32. Exploiting this information, in this case, means interpreting it; it appeals to heurism, and never to algorithm.

33. The usefulness of such information is very significant to small/medium-sized industries, with no possible comparison with the expenses involved to collect it.

34. The part played by the « in-the-field tracker » is fundamental. This person must have natural features appropriate to his mission (principally of a cognitive kind). He must master non-linear thought processes (lateral thought processes). He must be extrovert and capable of stimulating relational interactivity. He must be able to set up a suitable network of people, even prior to his tracker’s mission itself.

Moreover, the “tracker” must have been given a specific **training** allowing him to gain the ability to perceive: he must be prepared to perceive, he must show curiosity and watchfulness, he must be able to tackle information sources. Furthermore, he must be prepared to link fragmented observations together and must be taught how to make the most of lucky opportunities. A certain amount of intuition seems to be necessary.

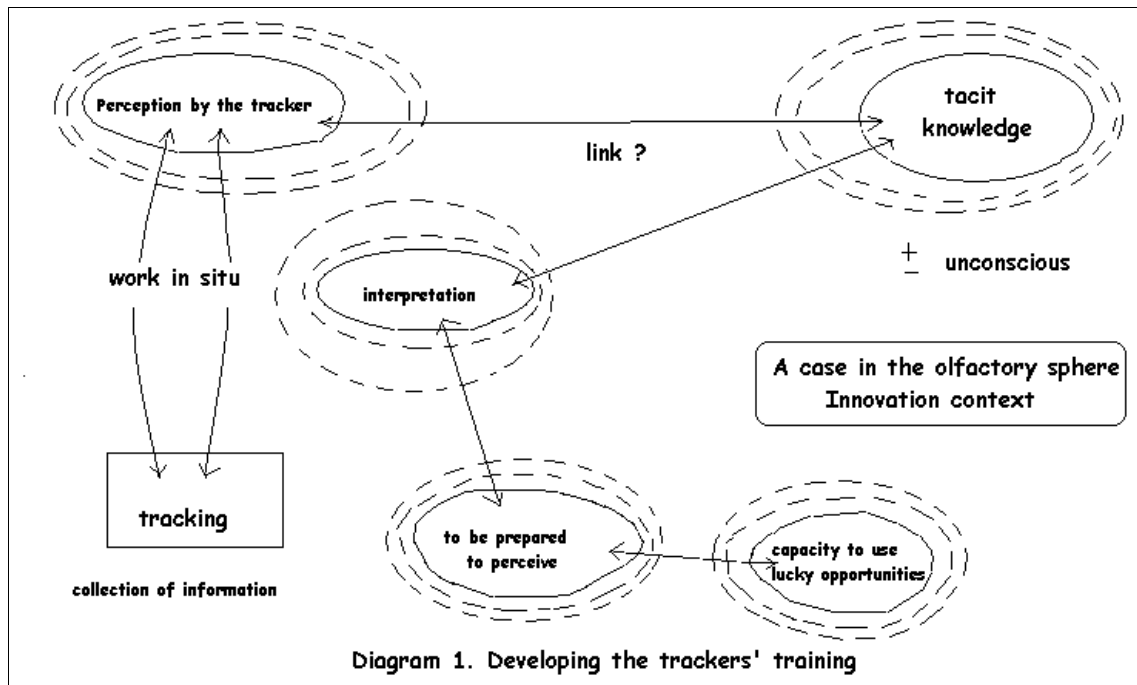
According to Kahneman (1973), the limit of individual cognitive resources, that is to say

- of the **capacity to perceive stimuli**

- as well as of the **capacity to make a meaning** out of them

leads to a selectivity in individual efforts to concentrate. Very few stimuli reach managers.

Diagram 1 highlights the importance of an intensive training to develop the “tracker’s” capacity to perceive.



Bergson (1946) points out that effort and work are necessary to the development of intuition: *“Thus, I repudiate facility. I recommend a certain manner of thinking which courts difficulty. I value effort above everything. In everything I have written, there is one certainty: my intuition is reflection.”* (p. 103).

35. In the end, the “Grassoise” case is rather different from other cases previously dealt with by our team (some of them are presented in Lesca 2003). Here are the main features of the “Grassoise” case:

- The greatest part of Scanning information is tacit and informal: Originally olfactory, it cannot be formalized later on. It constitutes an amount of information that is complementary to other information already put into words and gathered in a data bank. It is tacit information since every piece of it derives from an exchange of views between the manager and the “tracker” as they both smell and evaluate a new range of perfumes. (The two actions of “smelling together” and “exchanging views” are essential in the sharing of information.)

- Fundamental knowledge of both the manager and the “tracker” is tacit knowledge: It is practically impossible to express it in complete and rigorous wording. It would not lend itself to any knowledge and expertise management system, (KM), for example.
- The Scanning information brought back by the “tracker” cannot be stored in a computer, nor can it even be put down on paper. This information remains in people’s olfactory memory.
- There is no lasting Scanning plan of action. The Scanning “in-the-field” operation presented in this case has only lasted a few months, long enough for the manager of the small-sized industry to take his decision.

CONCLUSION

Let us recall that we do not claim that the conclusions drawn from this case should be considered universal.

We initially intended to:

1. Give a concrete expression of the concept of “in-the-field information. (IOII)
2. Illustrate the possibly huge strategic importance of such information.
3. Show that this kind of Strategic Scanning is well suited to small and medium-sized businesses.
4. Show also that this kind of Scanning stands remote from programming tools, although people who sell them claim that they are the miracle solution to Scanning.

To finish in a way as interactive as possible, we invite the reader to answer the following questions.

Question 1.

Would you say that “in-the-field” information is useful when you have strategic decisions to take?

Yes, I would rather think so.

No, I would not.

If your answer is positive, do you think improvements could be made in this sphere? in your own business?

Question 2.

Would you say that anyone can spontaneously play the part of an “in-the-field tracker”?

Yes, I would rather think so.

No, I would not.

If your answer is “no”, what conclusions can you draw from this negative answer?

Question 3.

Do you think that the “Grassoise” case is really very specific and of a much too limited significance?

Yes, I think this is rather true.

No, I do not think so.

Would you say that some of the conditions concerning the “Grassoise” case are not as restrictive as they seem to be at first sight?

Yes, I would rather say so.

No, I would not.

The readers who would like to get in touch with the writers might do so on the following site:

<http://www.veille-strategique.org>

Let us finish by quoting Bateson (1984): “*Nowadays children are taught a little bit of natural history and a very little bit of art, but this teaching is scarce and done badly, so that, at they are oblivious of their animal nature and of the beauties of life, they can become, as they grow older, good businessmen.*” (p. 148).

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