

## STRATEGIC SCANNING PROCESS AND SME' LEADERS' INFORMATION NEEDS: A CASE STUDY

## PROCESSUS DE VEILLE STRATÉGIQUE ET BESOINS EN INFORMATION DES DIRIGEANTS DE PME : UNE ÉTUDE DE CAS

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this exploratory study consists firstly to identify the information needs of SMEs' leaders operating in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou, secondly it looks at the strategic scanning process as an effective tool through which those leaders can respond to their information needs. In fact, the majority of SMEs studied have not integrated this informational process, for reasons enumerated by their leaders. These reasons relate to specificities of SMEs and those of their leaders. In this perspective, the solution could lie in the development a scanning observatory at the level of the Wilaya, in order to overcome constraints encountered by SME leaders when it comes to integrate the strategic scanning to fulfill their information needs.*

**Keywords:** information need, leader, scanning observatory, SME, strategic scanning.

**JEL Codes :** D81, L10.

### **Résumé**

*L'objectif de cette étude exploratoire, consiste à identifier en premier, les besoins en information des dirigeants des PME opérant au niveau de la wilaya de Tizi-Ouzou. En second, celle-ci se penche sur le processus de veille stratégique comme un outil performant à travers lequel la PME peut répondre efficacement aux besoins en informations de ses décideurs. En fait, la majorité des PME étudiées n'ont pas intégré ce processus informationnel pour des raisons mises en avant par les dirigeants. Des raisons relatives à la fois aux spécificités de la PME et de son dirigeant. Dans cette perspective, la solution pourrait émaner du développement au niveau de la wilaya d'un observatoire de veille afin de pallier aux contraintes rencontrées par ces dirigeants lorsqu'il est question d'intégrer la veille stratégique.*

**Mots clés :** besoin en information, dirigeant, observatoire de veille, PME, veille stratégique

**JEL Codes :** D81, L10.

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## Introduction

In any firm, and even in small and medium sized enterprises (SME), leaders have to collect, to process, to analyze, to diffuse and to use information to perform their daily functions, in trying to increase survival chances. So, we can consider that leaders and even employees always need information, indeed, both for organizational and individual level, information is vital, in particular, when it is question of decision making.

Nowadays, technologies of information and communication, have highly contributed to widen the amount of available information. Consequently, the firms are likely to be confronted to an overload of information. In such context, leaders should select necessary information from needless information. That can't be achieved if they won't know and express in detail the needed information.

Once that the need of the SME' leader is specified, it is crucial to respond and satisfy this last, so, strategic scanning is this informational process, which starts with the phase of information needs identification, in order to gather only information intended to satisfy the need expressed, and by doing so, enhances the quality of decision making. Since then, we posed as a problematic this interrogation: **What is the main information needs of the SME' leaders? How could they effectively respond to those needs?**

It should be noticed, that this exploratory study focuses first, on kinds of information needs of SME' leaders studied, second, on the strategic scanning process which can bring suitable response to this needs, and, last, on the suggestion of the development of a scanning observatory whether public or private, because, as a result, characteristics of studied SME, make that for this type of enterprises it is not conceivable to implement and exploit the strategic scanning process, then, it is also, not conceivable to meet their information needs.

## 1.- Literature review of the study

### 1.1.- information need within firms

Information is considered by most authors (DRUCKER, 1992; BES & LÉBOULCH, 1993; LESCA, 1994; HASSID *ET AL*, 1997; LARIVET, 2006; LEVET, 2008, ...) as one of the most fundamental resource of nowadays firms. In firms and business world, leaders, managers need and use information to assist them in running their organizations in a way to survive in this turbulent and complex environment.

Thus, all among its daily functioning, it is frequent that firm' managers, and in our case SME' leaders express information needs. This information needs conditions the demand for information, and simultaneously, creates information streams, and by doing so, generates the entire informational process, commonly, so-called strategic scanning. In fact, a need is defined as a feeling of state of lack (CIECHOMSKI & STROJNY, 2022, p 337). Therefore, an information need arises when a gap is detected between the information currently available and the information necessary to perform a certain task. CASE (2002), defines information needs to be recognition on the existing knowledge being not enough in order to reach the target (CASE, 2002, p 167). NICHOLAS (2000) states that it is the information a person should have in order to perform his tasks or solve a problem in a satisfactory way (Nicholas,

2000, p 46). So, information needs occur, in the situation, where the existing information within a SME is quite insufficient to lead it to fulfill its aims.

Numerous classifications of information needs can be distinguished in the literature. According to perception, information needs can be shared into objective needs and subjective needs (HOGLUND & PERSSON, 1985). Objective needs are those that are considered appropriate to realize a certain issue; it means, what is usually thought to be needed to solve a given problem. Whereas, Subjective needs, are needs that an individual himself thinks he needs in a given case to solve a problem.

From the point of view of management level, information needs can be absolute, basic and actual. Absolute needs reflect the whole complex of issues related to the functioning of the firm. Basic needs are needs of a specific group of people, department or unit, resulting from the tasks set before them. Actual needs, on the other hand, are needs which make it possible to solve specific problem (MRUK, 1999).

In addition for MARTINET & MARTI (1995), there are three types of information that influence the user's information needs. Information that is sought but not entirely necessary; such information is usually mainly a waste of the SME' resources. Information that is necessary but not sought, it is essential to obtain the information that is known to be needed, the effort and resources spent on this, is seen to be suitable, because it is considered to benefit the SME best. Finally, Information that is necessary, but not known to be needed; actually, it is a blind spot, which can cause surprises and carry a lot of confusion when the information will be revealed.

Besides, depending on the frequency of the SME's need for information, TCHOUASSI (2017, p 69-70) mentioned that it is possible to define two types of information needs. Firstly, permanent information needs, through the SME is permitted to scan the competitive and market environment, which will contribute to the achievement of long-term aims. On the other side, punctual information needs, which mainly enable to answer a usual question that arises.

Furthermore, information needs depend usually, on two situations, which can be met within every SME, in the circumstance, decide on information, and inform the decision-making (MOINET & DESCHAMPS, 2011, p 29-47). SME, often, looks for information and collect them, and so, it occurs, that the firm has to decide on information gathered on its environment' trends, and, may be more information will be needed. Firms are made of decision-making' processes both operative and strategic one, then, before, each decision-making, managers and staffs are required to inform a such operation, in this sense, they express information needs that are indispensable to satisfy, in order to, decide efficiently.

In both situations, it involves to define and describe in detail the scope of information needed by every decision maker. Elsewhere, information needs must be prioritized according to their importance for the SME's competitiveness, their urgency or the SME's resources ... In this instance, there is no sense, in wasting resources on acquiring information that does not actually benefit the decision makers and even the SME in any way. More, it is pointless to spend a lot of time in processing and analyzing information, when its efficiency, and the benefit to be had from it, is weak.

To avoid all of waste relative to gathering and using information in SMEs, it should indeed, that leaders define, express and even articulate, their information needs precisely, in detail, in a way, that needs could be fulfilled effectively, in the best conditions. In fact, to respond to its information needs, the leader can implement an informational process, basically, focused on looking for appropriate information as a function of identified needs, it is question of the strategic scanning process.

## 1.2.- Strategic scanning process

Although, right information is seen to be one of the premises for achieving a competitive advantage, there is a large volume of information which carries no advantage to a SME. The inadequate information may even hinders rather than helps decision makers. Strategic scanning process aims to satisfy the leader's information needs, and by doing so, it improves the SME's decision making, even creates decisive competitive advantage. Thus, SAWKA (1996, p 47-52) states that the strategic scanning to be focused on gathering specifically external information and predicting changes in the market situation.

COLLINS (1997), also, recognizes the strategic scanning as a process in which information about competitors, customers and markets is gathered by legal means and analyzed to support decision making (VUORI, 2006, p 123).

Strategic scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning organization's future course of action (CHOO, 1999, P 21).

For LESCA (2003, p10), the strategic scanning consists on this collective and proactive process by which members of the firm (or people solicited by it) track (perceive or provoke and choose) in a voluntary way, and use relevant information (data) concerning their external environments and fluctuations which occur in.

Some of the proposed definitions take as a basis the advantages that strategic scanning is likely to confer on the firm; these qualify it by the missions it is intended to accomplish. So, we have the definition of LARIVET (2006), for whom the strategic scanning is used to anticipate threats and opportunities, that is to say, to reduce uncertainty. For Chalus-SAUVANNET (2009), the strategic scanning aims to provide information and insight into the future and not the past or the present.

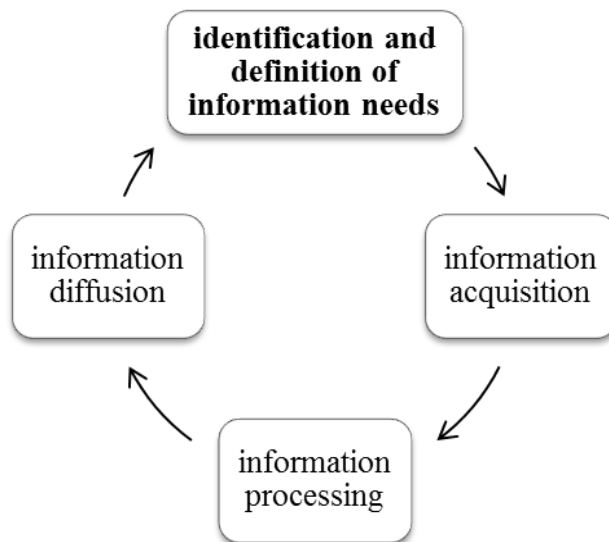
Beyond that, the majority of the definitions that we have consulted emphasize on the process' dimension of scanning. Nevertheless, the strategic scanning is considered as a process, to which inherent objectives are associated. So, in this sense, SADOK (2003) argues that strategic scanning is a particular information system of the firm, dedicated to support decisions making which are non-repetitive, and non-programmable.

According to above definitions of the strategic scanning, we emphasis on the fact that the ultimate goal of this informational process is to help the SME decision making, besides, it should be noted that ethics and legality of information gathering is also stressed.

In this study, the strategic scanning is considered to be a process by which a SME systematically tracks, manages, and analyzes information essentially needed by decision makers. It aims to provide information which should get the following attributes: timeliness, accuracy, relevance, reliability, certainty, unambiguity, usefulness, accessibility, consistency and completeness (LESCAN & CARON-FASAN, 2015).

It should be mentioned, that the strategic scanning process, include, at least phases of information needs analysis, information gathering, information processing, information dissemination. This, informational process functions as a continuous one of four interwoven intelligence phases, therefore, the last phase of this process leads to its first one, as shown in the figure below:

**Figure.01. A generic strategic scanning process.**



**Source: Self-effort.**

Specifying leader' information needs must be the starting phase of any scanning process in the SME. Somewhere else, the identification of information needs is the first phase in JAIN's (1984) scanning cycle, MILLER's (2001) model, CHOO's (2002) process model of information management and LESCAN's (2003) L.E.SCANning method. Nevertheless, defining identification information needs, like the first phase to be accomplished, constitute also, a convergent one in divers scanning processes presented in literature.

Still, there are difficulties and challenges related to the identification and definition of information needs, that the literature commonly acknowledges. Actually, it is often difficult for SME' leaders to express and even articulate their information needs. In this sense, WILSON (1999) underlines that no-one but the person himself can know his information needs unless he articulates them (WILSON, 1999, P 249-270). So, even the strategic scanning process can't identify a leader's information needs on his behalf.

Some SME' leaders are reticent (HERRING, 1999); it means that they are not good at asking and expressing their information needs in any way, then, the challenge in this situation, for the strategic scanning is to help the reticent leader to determine his need effectively. That is possible through the use of Taylor' five filters. TAYLOR (1968) proposes five filters allowing sifting through the leaders' request to best respond and satisfying their need for information, by considering:

- His subject of interest;
- His motivation;
- His personal characteristics;
- The relationship between his request and the organization;
- The answers he expects.

These five filters aims to reduce the incertitude relating to the identification and definition of leaders' information needs, in a way to detail information truly needed, and so, to orient the strategic scanning through its second phase of collecting information about its environment. An accurate identification of a leader' information needs, ambitions to diminish considerably the gathering of needless and useless information, and so, to reduce the overload information within the SME, as well as, it aims to select relevant information, which is truly needed from such overload information.

The second phase, called the information acquisition phase, generally involves the accumulation of a large volume of information, but three main issues need to be addressed during this phase: the scope of the scanning, which can be classified into operational and general environments. The frequency of the scanning is linked to the frequency with which the firm analyzes its environment to obtain relevant information. Information sources are of two types: internal and external (CASE, 2002, MCGEE & SAWYERR, 2003).

The important challenge of the third phase of the information processing is to structure and analyze the information. Indeed, the information collected must be processed and analyzed for topics and trends that can affect the firm, to help users better understand the external environment and thus make better decisions.

The final phase of information diffusion aims to ensure that the right information reaches the right people within the firm, in this sense ZHANG & al (2010, p 725) state that the information diffusion is concerned with getting the right information to the right person at the right time and in a suitable form.

It's important to bear in mind that each phase of the strategic scanning process can benefit from the use of information and communication technologies. By using appropriate software and technologies, the firm can save time and increase its efficiency in terms of collecting, processing and disseminating information.

## **2.- Experimental**

The research design which we adopted for this study is the exploratory type. The target population was leaders of the SME who were operating in Algeria, precisely, in Tizi-Ouzou province, which is located 100 km east of the capital Algiers. They were whether owners

and/or leaders of the SME. A total of 12 leaders of the SME, were selected to be interviewed in order to solicit information relating to their information needs. Activities performed by these SME, are indicated in the table below:

**Table 1. Activities performed by studied SME.**

SME	Creation' year	Activity
SME 1	1984	Flexible packaging manufacturing
SME 2	1987	Production of medical equipment and furniture
SME 3	2008	Production of medical equipment and furniture
SME 4	1992	Production of cheeses
SME 5	2001	Poultry feed manufacturing
SME 6	2002	Poultry feed manufacturing
SME 7	2004	Technical solutions for liquid, air and gas filtration
SME 8	2007	Industrial bodybuilder
SME 9	2008	Hydraulic and fire-fighting systems
SME 10	2012	Production of school items
SME 11	2014	mass retailing
SME 12	2016	Distribution of pharmaceutical and Para-pharmaceutical products

**Source: summary table constructed from the data collected.**

The face to face, in-depth interviews used open-ended questions designed to get a feedback from respondents' own perspectives about their information needs. Actually, the information solicited from the interviews covered kinds of information required for decision making whether operative and strategic.

In order to analyze collected data from realized interviews, we have proceeded in using manual qualitative data analysis, following steps below:

- Firstly, information needs designated by respondents were grouped into diverse categories, it should be noticed that, on average each SME' leader provided about three specific information needs, accordingly, we have categorized five categories, each one with its own information needs;

- Secondly, the number of respondents for every specific category of information needs is counted and assigned to the adequate category of needs;
- Thirdly, we have counted out the total number for all information needs expressed by SME' leaders interviewed;
- Finally, we have added the number of respondents under each information needs category, and count out the rate of number of every respondent for the total particular needs.

### 3.- Results and discussion

#### 3.1.- SMEs' leaders information needs

At the end, of the interviews conducted with the leaders of SMEs, we collected their information needs which we grouped in the following table:

**Table 2. SME' leader's information needs by category and rate of total specific needs.**

<b>Kinds of information needed</b>	<b>As % of total specific information needs</b>
Government regulations and policies	<b>31.25</b>
Competitors	<b>25</b>
Equipment, innovation, technology	<b>18.75</b>
Information on customers	<b>15.62</b>
Suppliers	<b>9.37</b>
All kinds	<b>100.00</b>

**Source: summary table constructed from data collected.**

The above table shows, the kind of information required by every SME' leader interviewed and the percentage of specific information needs in each information category. As it is seen, the kinds of information are listed on a decreasing order of rate. Besides, each rate reflects the relative significance of the information category compared to one other.

In fact, we have categorized all information needs expressed by leaders of SMEs that we have interviewed, into five categories, the most important of all, is the category of information needs relative to Government regulations and policies, which accounts for 31.25% the total specific information needs, it is the most common kind of information required by SME' leaders. Certainly, because more than half of leaders consider that the Government is this environmental actor which significantly impacts their activities, often, these SMEs depend on importation of raw materials, equipment, components ... they are under the mercy of Government regulation on imports. WONG & al (2014, p 41), state that obviously, a Government passes legislations that can impact how SMEs run their operations.

In the second position, leaders are interested on information relative to competitors, in particular, new entries, that constitute for them a real threat, which can reduce dramatically their margins, market share ... basically; they need to know, at the right moment, if there will be an imminent entry of a potential competitor, in order to react effectively.

In the third position, leaders of SMEs focus on innovation which concerns equipment, and in a broad sense technology applied to the production and marketing processes within firms in the world. Indeed, innovation is today, the major source of changes for firms, so, those which are up to date they can survive and even succeed, especially for SMEs, while other ones can perish because they missed the evolution imposed by a particular innovation whether it concerns a product, a service, an equipment, or a technology...

In the fourth position, information needs send us back to customers of SMEs; leaders of these firms consider that it is vital to know customers (Customer's needs, trends, tastes and habits, ...) and therefore the market well, with the view to at least retain the current customers base and even to attract more customers, then, tending to increase their market share in their domestic markets.

In the last position, few of leaders interviewed have articulated that is important for them, to gather information about suppliers, with the lowest rate of 9.37%, those leaders are interested in having suppliers' information, under this kind, the most common specific information need is on the offer of raw material, supply market trends, the availability of some particular raw material and the advent of substitutes.

Consequently, we have noticed through this study:

- First, all information needs that leaders have expressed, are action oriented information needs, so, every information need satisfied stimulate leaders to act, to make decision;
- Second, most of categories of information needs, refer to an environmental actor, already mentioned in the model of five competitive forces of Porter (1982), indeed, they are stakeholders of SMEs studied, so, we can state that SMEs have a narrow scope of scanning which focuses mainly on stakeholders already outlined.

### **3.2.- To Satisfy Information Needs Of SMEs' Leaders**

Leaders of studied have expressed their information needs, in this sense, they feel the need for information, in order to act, and to make right decisions, and then, it is fundamental to satisfy these needs. There is one way for leaders to fill expressed information needs; actually, it is through the process of the strategic scanning that it is conceivable to drain information they need.

Unfortunately, as a part of this study, we found that only one, of the studied SME, has integrated the strategic scanning; meanwhile, all others can't effectively meet their information needs because they don't have an operational informational process of scanning.

Many reasons are evoked by leaders interviewed, to explain why they don't have integrate the strategic scanning; in fact, we have grouped these reasons into three main types, the first type concerns the constraint of the small dimension of the SME, the second is relative to the unavailability internally of required competencies, and the last treats the constraint of the leader's busy schedule.

### **3.2.1.- The Constraint of the Small Dimension of the SME**

It is conventional to recognize that the SME is characterized by a smaller size than the big firm. The small size of the SME means, concretely, less workforce, less production volume, less market share, limited financial capacity (WELSH & WHITE, 1981, p 02), etc.

To a certain extent the modest dimension of the SME is the logical corollary of an insufficiency, or even a deficiency, in terms of resources (TORRES, 2003); moreover, this further accentuates its distinction compared to the large firm. Consequently, this lack of resources for the SME tends to limit its investments and its growth over time. In this view, more than a half of interviewed leaders have mentioned that it is not conceivable to integrate and formalize the process of strategic scanning within their SMEs, regarding the resource' unavailability, they consider that is not possible for them to do so, it is particularly, the case of the SME 1, SME 2, SME 4, SME 7, SME 8, SME 9, SME 11, SME 12.

Actually, leaders of the SME1, SME 2 and SME 4, have mentioned that they have not yet reach the critical threshold, to hope to rationalize the cost of the integration and the exploitation of this informational process, then, with a small dimension they are not allowed to spend much even in order to get the required information.

Whenever the dimension of the firm is modest, its resource predisposition is low, the cost that must be assumed to obtain the information is perceived by its leader as significant (DAMANPOUR & SCHNEIDER, 2009, p 495-522). He is therefore discouraged from integrating the strategic scanning.

PIMENTEL & al (2015) argue that SMEs due to its particularities, face many difficulties to carry out this process of the strategic scanning in a structured way, in addition, for these authors, there is a positive correlation between firm' size and structured level in scanning process, thus, as a SME grows, this last would need to develop a formal and structured informational process.

### **3.2.2.- The Unavailability Internally of Required Competencies within the SME**

The integration of of the strategic scanning process within the SMEs requires having competencies. In fact, accomplishing the divers' phases of this process involves setting up a team of employees responsible for carrying out every single phase of this strategic process. However, it should be noted, that every phase requires its appropriate competencies. The table below outlines competencies that employees responsible of the scanning must have in order to complete each phase:

**Table 3. Skills relating to tasks that must be completed, in each phase of the strategic scanning process within the SME**

<i>Phases of the strategic scanning</i>	<i>Skills relative to tasks that must be completed</i>
identification and definition of information needs	A. To dialogue with the interviewee (leader, decision maker, ...), interview them face to face to clarify their information needs; B. To identify the strategic challenges of the SME's environment to support leaders in their decision-making; C. To target and to define axes of scanning; D. To translate this axes into an action plan; E. To develop the appropriate procedure/approach (methods and tools).
Information acquisition	F. To identify sources and useful resources; G. To scan the emergence of new sources; H. To distinguish the publication circuits of different types of documents; I. To collect information via automated means (preferably); J. To select relevant information.
Information processing	K. To analyze the data and information collected, and to exclude irrelevant information, to enrich them via a first translation, synthesis, connect the information, put them into perspective, to adapt and to present/to visualize the information to facilitate the assimilation of the decision maker; L. To draw conclusions and trends; M. To identify and to process requests and feedback from decision maker/ leader on specific information in an iterative logic.
Information diffusion	N. To diffuse information to leaders. O. To diffuse information, in particular by producing press reviews, archiving guides, etc.

Source: adapted from

[https://www.leforem.be/content/dam/leforem/fr/documents/20191029\\_A2P\\_charge\\_de\\_vaille.pdf](https://www.leforem.be/content/dam/leforem/fr/documents/20191029_A2P_charge_de_vaille.pdf), Consulted Juin 2024.

It is obvious that that skills shown in the table above cannot be exclusively possessed by a single employee. This is why it is necessary to set up a team which will be responsible of the strategic scanning process. As well, a collective work (LESCA, 2003) will certainly enhance

the relevance of this informational process and so, information it diffuses to decision makers within SMEs.

However, most of interviewed leaders have indicated that actually they don't have required competencies within their SMEs, to adopt and to exploit effectively the strategic scanning. Some of leaders that we met, in particular, leaders of SME 1, SME 2, and SME 12, emphasized that, in addition to, basic skills that the team of strategic scanning must develop; it must also to develop the capability relating to good knowledge of the SME's business.

Consequently, as a result of this study, we have noted that even if leaders of SMEs are aware that they do not have the required skills among their employees to effectively ensure the strategic scanning, they and with the objective of meeting their information needs, often tend to centralize this informational process to take charge of it themselves, even in an informal and very unstructured way.

### **3.2.3.- The Constraint of the SME' Leader' Busy Schedule**

In the context of SME there is the predominance of an individual who is the leader; he influences the strategy, the structure and the performance, the firm is affected by leader's personal course (PIMENTEL, 2015).

Owing to the small number of employees of the SME, many activities relating in both operative and strategic, are carried out by the leader, creating a work overload for the latter, so that, the leader does not have time to perform the strategic scanning.

TORRES (2003, p127) recognizes two related effects, the microcosm effect and the egotrophy effect. The first effect highlights the leader's strong involvement in the SME, the affective intensity of his relationships, the urgency felt and the number of activities for which he is responsible. The egotrophy effect, in the other hand, traces this personalization of the management, which can be seen in the leader's willingness to make everything about him.

These two effects further accentuate the leader predominance in the SME, who fulfills both the role of guide and stimulator of energies within the firm through intense direct affective relationships with his internal employees, and even with his external stakeholders such as his customers and suppliers.

As consequence, the SME tends to be materialized in his leader, and for all this reasons, this one often has a busy schedule, then for lack of time and even resources, he tends to neglect the integration the strategic scanning.

Leaders of of the SME 2, SME 4, SME 6, SME 7 and SME 10 have stated that owing to their busy schedule and the lack of time, they still postponing the integration of the strategic scanning within their SMEs. Indeed, they are absorbed by performing their daily activities, so, they don't have time to consider even the way to fill their information needs. They enrich by outlining that with the growth of their SME, financial and human resources would be free up and it will be possible for them to integrate and to structure the strategic scanning process.

Reasons already evoked, are ones which the most of SME' leaders stressed on, for the latter, they still don't have integrated the strategic scanning because of the small dimension of their firms, the unavailability internally of required competencies, and finally, because they often have a busy schedule, so until now they always lacked time to manage information efficiently within their SMEs. Nevertheless, the SME presents many advantages of which leaders could take profit to integrate and to exploit this informational process, it is in particular, such as its easing of informality and flexibility, simple and small structure, its close proximity to its domestic environment, ...

## Conclusion

The exploratory study which we have conducted on the leaders of a number of SMEs in the wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, enabled us to highlight the main categories of their information needs, in this case, and in a decreasing order information relating to Government regulations and policies, to competitors, to equipment, innovation, technology, information on customers and last information on suppliers.

The result of this study confirms that SMEs have a narrow scope of scanning which focuses mainly on its stakeholders (Government, competitors, customers, suppliers). Also, all information needs that leaders have expressed are action-oriented information needs, so every information need is satisfied and will stimulate leaders to act and to make a decisions.

In order to meet SME' In order to meet SME' leaders information needs, the strategic scanning process, through its four generic phases of the identification and definition of information needs, information acquisition, information processing and information diffusion, provides accurate responses to these information needs.

However, only one of SMEs studied have integrated the strategic scanning, meanwhile, all eleven others haven't. Interviewed leaders have mainly stressed on three raisons which inhibit them to integrate this informational process, namely, the small dimension of the SME, the unavailability internally of required competencies and their busy schedule.

At this level, we maintain that, in order to solve the problems raised by SME leaders who have not integrated the strategic scanning, we need to move towards the development of an observatory for scanning at wilaya level, whether public or private, which will ensure the three phases of information acquisition, information processing and information diffusion to SMEs. Indeed, the initial phase of identification and definition of information needs of SME users remains an internal phase closely linked to the leader himself.

The development of a scanning observatory will enable leaders of SMEs to respond effectively to their information needs:

- This observatory could collaborate with each SME operating in Tizi-Ouzou, with the aim of collecting relevant information that meets its information needs. In this way, the critical threshold can be quickly reached, so, it can rationalize the cost of information for each SME involved, as the number of SMEs subscribing increases, the cost of information will be more rationalized, which is beneficial for the SME;

- A scanning observatory, could form and attract competencies required to perform information acquisition, information processing and information diffusion, at the same time, it could develop software technologies which can facilitate the work of the scanning team;
- The leaders interviewed stressed their busy schedules, so through the scanning observatory, they only have to express and formulate their information needs, and it's up to the observatory team to meet these needs, so that the leader can concentrate on other activities.

It should be noted that the development of a scanning observatory will require resources, particularly human, technological and financial, whether public or private the condition is that it must be endowed with adequate resources in order to create a lucrative organization responsible for responding appropriately to the information needs of SMEs leaders.

Finally, this study has two main limitations: firstly, it took into account only twelve SMEs operating in the wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou to explore the subject; the validity of this study could be improved if the sample size were larger. Secondly, these were exclusively SMEs operating in Tizi-Ouzou, so the results of this study could be different if the study were applied to SMEs operating in another wilaya, or applied to SMEs which only belong to the same branch of activity. Consequently, for these reasons the results of this study cannot be generalized.

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