



Chapter 16

Manufacturing Social Responsibility Benchmarks in the Competitive Intelligence Age

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I am in the competitive intelligence version of a witness protection program. After six years as a spy to the French eye and as a traitor to the American eye, I am becoming comfortable blending back in to the relatively monocultural population of unquestioning Americans. No accents, no suspicions, no guarded words, no misinformation, no handlers, no fauxpas, no culture shock—I have come in from the competitive intelligence cold. Although I can feel myself being reabsorbed into the warm American Emersonian oversoul, I am haunted by the guilt of the double agent. What damage did I do in the last six years?

The Americans believe I sold out the secrets of the American-dominated Fortune 500 for 30 pieces of Parisian silver. Why, they wonder, would a young business school professor (trained in the American heartlands of Utah, Texas, and Michigan) abandon the US economy to go work for another country? When I showed French MBAs, through Harvard Business School cases, that Harley Davidson, Corning Glass, and Caterpillar Tractor had weaknesses that could be skillfully exploited from outside the US, wasn't I being a traitor to my country's economy? When I taught French doctoral students the arcane arts of publishing articles in American business academic journals, wasn't I taking journal space away from American doctoral students? When I taught French executives how Americans built corporate strategies from thousands of small wins, wasn't I aiding and abetting the enemies of America's economic security? Finally, though, when I agreed to teach an elective course to my elite international students on strategic

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intelligence, didn't I commit the unforgiveable sin of raising up a generation of spies who might torment my country for years to come?

The French believe I was always under the control of CIA handlers. When, every year, I would ask for a raise, the response from senior colleagues would be that I didn't need one, since I already had two salaries: one from the CIA and one from the French business school. The French foreign minister started referring to the United States as a hyperpower. Graffiti started springing up around Paris saying "America dehors l'Europe" (Get America out of Europe). In that context, when I was caught in their libraries, studying their internship reports, and using their Reuters subscription, it was clear to the French that I was an economic intelligence agent for the US government tunneling for information on Totale, Danone, Schneider, Aerospatiale, Air France and Carrefour.

One case study that captures my six years as a competitive intelligence agent involved a meeting of French competitive intelligence officers from 40 large corporations. My French business school employers dipped into their training budget to send me to a seminar in downtown Paris on economic intelligence. For two days, 60 of us listened to 10 presenters explain the state of the art of economic intelligence. A pharmaceutical firm told us how they had transformed their sales network into a business intelligence system by developing electronic contact reports (Thietart & Vivas, 1981). An aerospace company explained how their small intelligence unit was using Web-clipping software to send information to relevant sections of their organization (Gibbons & Prescott, 1996). A big-picture thinker formerly with L'Oreal used Rene Magritte paintings to expand our minds toward the creative use of information. Hubert Lesca presented academic research he has conducted with his doctoral students at the University of Grenoble on removing blockages in the intelligence cycle. Yves-Michel Marti described the elaborate intelligence cycle his consulting firm uses to generate economic intelligence for their clients (Martinet & Marti, 1995). Bernard Besson explained, from his police background, how to conduct counterintelligence operations (Besson & Possin, 1997). Frederic Jakobiak knit the presentations together as a host and commentator.

Early in the two-day conference, one of the presentations came from a part-time instructor at Marne-la-Vallee. The professor explained that a large part of the operation at Marne-la-Vallee involved Internet surfing on the Web sites of American multinationals. They found, though, that some of the American sites were location sensitive, so that a search conducted from an American address would yield different screens than a search conducted from a French address. Furthermore, the young professor was horrified to discover that some of the American multinational Web sites used "sniffers" and "cookies" to try to

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