

## The Intelligence Cycle

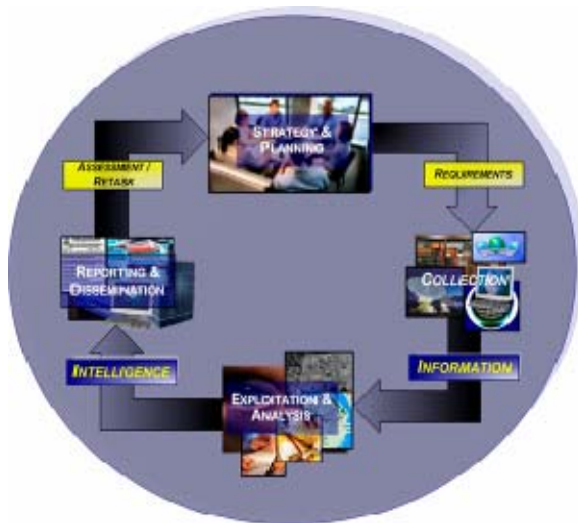


Figure 1: The Intelligence Cycle

### Introduction

The Intelligence Cycle has four key steps (Figure 1):

- Planning
- Collection
- Exploitation & Analysis, and
- Dissemination / Reporting

### Requirements & Planning

The “Five Ws” — *Who, What, When, Where, and Why* — are the start points for identification of intelligence needs into requirements. I usually add one other point: *How*. These points define the framework for decision makers who establish the Essential Elements of Information, and the planners and the intelligence staff. Typically, the intelligence resource or organization and the users together generate the intelligence *requirements* to drive the production process. The intelligence requirement translates customer

needs into an intelligence action plan. A quality of this relationship will determine whether the intelligence produced is responsive to the user needs. Government intelligence requirements are expressed in terms of foreign threats to national or international security. In the business arena, where intelligence is playing an increasingly important role, requirements will generally be expressed in terms relating to competitors, business environment, economy, or the source company activities.

Planning encompasses the entire intelligence process, beginning with the threat assessment phase and culminates with the delivery of the finished intelligence products. Plans are generated that are responsive to known or anticipated intelligence requirements.

*Intelligence is the process of gathering, processing, reporting, and disseminating finished, actionable intelligence to decision makers and other users with a need to know.*

### Collection

The collection *requirement* specifies exactly how the intelligence service will go about acquiring the intelligence information the customer needs. It is normal for a number of players in the intelligence community to be involved in formulating collection requirements. Collection requirements may be managed by a group of specialists acting as liaisons between users and the collection resources. In non government organizations collection management may be relegated to one person or team within an intelligence unit.

Collection requirements management entails much more than simple administrative duties. It requires analytic skill to evaluate how well the user has expressed the need; whether the collection assets are able to obtain the identified information, and how the collected information reaches the intelligence analyst.

Information from open sources are often a valuable collection resource in the business environment, including corporate publications, advertising, newspapers, periodicals, academic journals, foreign and domestic broadcasts, official documents and other published material. Government may add use of much more sophisticated technical collection assets as well as open source intelligence assets.

In the intensely competitive global economy today, acquiring scientific and technological information from other countries has become increasingly important both for nations and governments. Governments may rely on covert and or clandestine resources to perform this important collection tasks.

## Exploitation & Analysis

Exploitation and analysis involves a series of mental operations various types of collected information or data with close examination of related items of information to determine the extent to which they confirm, supplement, or contradict each other, and thus establish probabilities, relationships, and conclusions. Analysts in all operational programs use their knowledge of regional, national, and global trends to assess the quality of all types of information gathered, and organize it into a responsive, useful intelligence product.

The *purpose* of intelligence analysis is to reveal to a specific decision maker the underlying significance of selected target information. Frequently intelligence analysis involves estimating one possible outcome, given the many possibilities in a particular scenario. This function is not prediction although in some cases it might be seen as such. The analysis typically can involve forecasting, which requires the analyst to make explicit statements about the degree of confidence held in a certain set of judgments. There are different levels of analysis associated with the production process, usually with results in corresponding levels of conclusions.

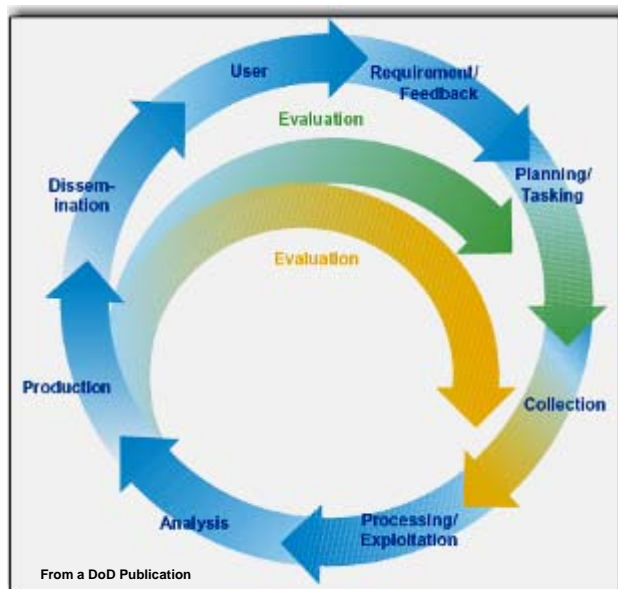
In intelligence analysis, the analyst typically does not have direct access to the observable subject, but, instead, gathers information from a variety of sources then proceeds to generating tentative explanations for a subject activity, event, or phenomenon. Each hypothesis is examined for plausibility and compared against the acquired information, in a continual process toward reaching a conclusion. Often the intelligence analyst tests several hypotheses at the same time, generating potential scenarios, and testing each using a rigorous mental processes, subject domain knowledge, experience, and a variety of other associated background “skills.”

The successful intelligence analyst brings to the discipline:

- Certain requisite knowledges and abilities,
- Has necessary aptitude for specialized training,
- Is able to perform the specific tasks associated with the job, and
- Exhibits personality traits compatible with intelligence analysis work.

This profile is valid in any setting of intelligence activity.

The previously-described steps of the cycle are necessary precursors to intelligence production, but it is only in this step that functionality of the whole process is achieved. *Production* results in the creation of intelligence, that is, value-added actionable information responsive to the users needs. In practical terms, production refers to the creation, in any medium, of either interim or *finished* briefings or reports for use by other analysts, decision makers, or policy officials. The general production principles apply to both government and private sector intelligence operations.



## Reporting and Dissemination

The production of intelligence is without relative value unless it is timely and reaches the prospective users in a form that allows exploitation of the intelligence. Like the battlefield, the business environment today is extraordinarily dynamic, with the result that information and intelligence is time sensitive, at highest value at the time of acquisition and depreciates rapidly from that moment. Actionable intelligence is perishable, although it may serve well as historical information too. The key, then, is expedited production and dissemination for action.

The intelligence process does not end with delivering the product to the customer. Instead, it continues in with dialogue between producer and user. If the product is to be useful, dissemination involves feedback. Intelligence producers need feedback from end-users. They need to know what is useful and not useful to meet the intelligence requirements. Then producers can modify their practices to further develop those activities that served the user well, and improve or eliminate those that did not.

Feedback should include key questions, such as:

- Is the product usable?
- Is it timely?
- Was it in fact used?
- How ?
- Did the product meet expectations? If not, why not?
- What next?

The answers to these questions will lead to refined production, greater use of intelligence by decision makers, and further feedback sessions. Thus, production of intelligence actually generates more requirements in this iterative process.