

10 practical tips for setting up an Intelligence Cell

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Many organizations are just opening their eyes to the value of business intelligence. For others, they have seen the potential, went at it, but fell short to realise it. This is a list of 10 practical tips, in my experience the most important ones, to meet the challenge of establishing an intelligence cell. It is the result of over ten years of professional experience in the implementation of intelligence cells.

1. Intelligence needs leadership from the top

The intelligence function in an organization, to have a real impact, needs full support from the CEO. The CEO must, by emphasising its importance and by the allocation of resources, send a clear signal that intelligence is important to the survival and growth of the organization. Visibility and independence of the intelligence function is crucial. While all organizations do perform the intelligence function, for most this process is ad hoc, inefficient and haphazard. At this time, the CEO or his right arm must talk to other CEOs or specialists who have gone through the process of establishing an intelligence function, to learn from their successes and mistakes. For those who have seen these successes and mistakes first hand, you may recognise some of the elements listed in this article.

2. Choose a good champion and form a strong team.

You must choose a talented, credible and enthusiastic individual to champion the intelligence function. Depending on your type of business, this champion may be a generalist or a specialist. It is often better to hire in-house, but if no suitable candidate can be found, hire carefully outside a dependable and energetic individual. A good mix of people in his team would often require some expertise in the business you're running to create useful analysis, an information professional to exploit sources and data-warehousing and an information technology specialist to manage your network applications. Try to attract very curious, independent, mature, sociable and persuasive individuals. These may be part-time on the project, depending on your resources. Make sure they are well trained. A specialist may help you in this important task.

3. Identify your intelligence needs

You must, before doing anything else, define what you expect from the intelligence function. This will drive the whole process. Identify users, type and scope of intelligence needed. The WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW must be tackled. The most important users are the organizations decision makers. In identifying your intelligence needs, always bear that in mind. Intelligence drives decision-making, period.

4. Perform an intelligence audit

This is done to chart your intelligence and information sources, inside and outside of your organization. Know-how, know-whom and expertise must be captured to plan your intelligence collection effort and to help you focus for the next step. Also, a majority of business intelligence professionals believe that in most cases, more than fifty percent of your information and intelligence needs can be found within your organization.

5. Involve and motivate the troops

While the creation of an intelligence cell is primordial, no really useful intelligence function can be sustained in the long run if you do not mobilise your entire organization to contribute. This is where your champion and his team must animate, drive and support the thirst and exchange of knowledge and intelligence. You must promote information-seeking and sharing to fully reap the benefits of business intelligence. It can be helped, for example, by making it part of the job description, giving it support, creating incentives and rewards. You may need to give some awareness or specialised intelligence training. Emphasise its importance. Remember tip #1.

6. Remember: information is raw, intelligence is sweet

As the saying goes, too much information is like too little. What you desperately need is intelligence. Intelligence is *processed* information. Too many organizations gather too much information without collating, evaluating, analysing, integrating and interpreting the information to turn it into intelligence. The mission is not to build a library, but to find pertinent information and create usable intelligence. For that, involve your experts and, if needed, branch out to academics, consultants or other types of outside content experts.

7. Intelligence is a shared commodity

Good Intelligence needs to be disseminated to the right person, in the right format, at the right time. Need I say more? Well, yes. Everybody knows: information is power. Intelligence must then be some kind of superinformation. This means that for information and intelligence, sharing must give more power to the individual who volunteers it, than to the one who keeps it to oneself, for your organization to create a useful intelligence function that can help you prevent disasters, lost opportunities and find new ones. This is, in some organizations, the most daunting task to achieve. You may need a professional to accomplish this. The act of information-seeking, analysing and sharing should not be a yearly, quarterly or monthly task but a continuous process done routinely every day. Finally, you need to provide the means to disseminate and share effectively. An intranet would, in most circumstances, supply the means for this.

8. Dont get bogged down in pricing the intelligence function

While it is important to evaluate the performance of your intelligence team and its network, for making it better and more responsive, it is an impossible task to pinpoint your ROI in the intelligence function. Can you pinpoint the cost of not having it? Can you cost an unknown missed opportunity? Too often, CEOs and directors take this dollars and cents approach that is missing the point.

9. Be open, you may not like what you hear

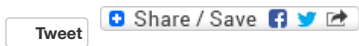
A good intelligence officer will sometimes challenge deep currently held beliefs. Provide immunity for him. His job is to tell you the truth, not to please you. Beware if all you hear and see does not go against your business or

personal beliefs. However, your intelligence officers assertions must be based on thorough analysis, not guesses or hunches.

10. Last but not least Security and ethics

The competitor is often not stupid. He may also be crooked. Your employees may, by not knowing better, negligence or mischief, give away your secrets. Good security will help to prevent this. Also, when implementing the intelligence system in your organization, make sure you establish and disseminate a code of ethics to guide them in their intelligence activities. Not doing this, like proper security, may bring you down.

CONCLUSION This list does not contain everything you wanted to know, but were afraid to ask, about how to establish a successful business and competitive intelligence cell. I urge you to find out more about this often unknown or forgotten, but crucial, business function. In hope that this list will prevent a lot of headaches, good luck!



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