WTF? V.5.1: The Strategic Analysis Framework (A Unified Approach to Intelligence, Critical Thinking, and Decision-Making)

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1 Executive Summary

Elevator Pitch

The Strategic Analysis Framework (WTF?) is a comprehensive methodology designed to empower analysts and decision-makers to navigate complex challenges with greater clarity, rigor, and foresight. By integrating diverse intelligence disciplines, structured analysis techniques, and iterative refinement, this framework transforms raw data into actionable insights, enabling better-informed and more strategic decisions. WTF? provides a structured, repeatable, and defensible process for analyzing any problem to create actionable insights.

Target Audience

WTF? V.5.1 is ideally suited for intelligence analysts, business strategists, market researchers, policy advisors, academics, and students seeking a powerful and unified approach to critical thinking and strategic decision-making. No prior deep expertise is required, but a foundational understanding of research principles helps.

Problem Statement

In today's volatile and information-saturated world, organizations and individuals face an unprecedented level of complexity. Traditional decision-making approaches often fall short, leading to missed opportunities, poorly managed risks, and ineffective strategies. This is due to several challenges including narrow sources of intelligence, siloed disciplines, and limited critical and holistic synthesis that accounts for risk and the long term. The framework aims to prevent these challenges.

Competitive Advantage

Unlike traditional methods that emphasize specific disciplines in isolation, WTF? V.5.1 leverages a novel, scientific method-driven approach to strategic analysis. By explicitly integrating key intelligence disciplines, over 50 validated critical thinking methodologies, and a focus on practical, data-driven insights, WTF? helps analysts uncover a level of nuanced understanding others are blind to.

2 Understanding the Framework (A "Quick Start" Guide)

What is WTF? V.5.1?

The Strategic Analysis Framework (formerly code-named "WTF?") is a comprehensive, multi-faceted methodology designed to address complex problems and support strategic decision-making across various domains. It uniquely integrates diverse intelligence disciplines (Artificial Intelligence, Business Intelligence, Open-Source Intelligence, and Human Intelligence) with a structured application of over 50 validated critical thinking methods, all guided by the principles of the Scientific Method. This iterative process transforms raw data into actionable insights, empowering users to navigate uncertainty, mitigate risks, and achieve desired outcomes.

How It Works

The framework is structured as a 7-step iterative process:

- 1. **Observation** Define the problem.
- 2. **Question** Create research questions.
- 3. **Hypothesis** Predict the outcome.
- 4. **Experiment** Gather and analyze data.
- 5. **Analysis** Run 50+ critical thinking methods.
- 6. **Conclusion** Build the report.
- 7. **Reiteration** Constantly evolve.

Benefits Summary

Using the Strategic Analysis Framework provides a clear, structured, and rigorous approach to:

- Enhanced Decision-Making: Provides a more complete understanding of the problem space, leading to better-informed decisions.
- Reduced Risk: Systematically identifies and assesses potential risks and threats, enabling proactive mitigation strategies.
- Comprehensive Analysis: Integrates diverse data sources and perspectives to avoid blind spots and biases.
- Improved Strategic Foresight: Uses trend analysis, scenario planning, and predictive modeling to anticipate future challenges and opportunities.
- Enhanced Creativity: Leverages creative problem-solving techniques to develop innovative solutions.
- Efficient Communication: Provides a structured framework for communicating complex findings to stakeholders.

Glossary of Terms

Open Source Intelligence

OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) Information collected from publicly available sources.

HUMINT (Human Intelligence) Information gathered through interpersonal contact, such as interviews and discussions.

BI (Business Intelligence) The process of analyzing business data to identify patterns, trends, and insights.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence.

Scientific Method An objective and systematic approach to gaining knowledge through observation, experimentation, and testing of hypotheses.

Iterative Process A process that repeats a series of steps until a desired outcome is achieved.

3 The WTF? Framework: A Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Observation – Defining the Problem & Scope ("WTF is X?")

Goal: This first crucial step sets the stage for the entire analysis. A clear definition prevents wasted time and focuses the analytical efforts.

Objective: Clearly and concisely define the core problem, issue, or phenomenon (referred to as "X") that will be the focus of the investigation. This establishes the scope and boundaries of the analysis.

Action Steps:

- 1. **Identify the Core Issue:** Determine the central challenge, event, or question that needs to be investigated. *Example:* "The decline in market share for product Y."
- 2. Utilize the 5W+1H Framework: Systematically explore the core issue using the 5Ws and 1H to gather preliminary observations.
 - What? What is X? (Define the problem and scope to the most concise form.)
 - Example Questions: What are the key characteristics of the problem? What are its components? What metrics are currently used? What is excluded to keep the scope tight?
 - Who? Identify key entities and stakeholders.
 - Example Questions: Who is directly affected? Who is indirectly impacted? Who are the decision-makers? Who are relevant experts?
 - Where? Determine the geographical scope.
 - Example Questions: Where is the problem occurring? What regions are affected? Are there similar issues in other locations?
 - When? Establish the timeline.
 - Example Questions: When did the problem begin? Are there historical events or dates to consider? What is the analysis timeframe?
 - Why? Explore motivations and impact.
 - Example Questions: Why is the problem occurring? What are the underlying causes? What is its short-term and long-term impact?
 - How? Outline mechanisms, methods, or operations.
 - Example Questions: How does the problem manifest? How is it being addressed (if at all)? What methods or tactics are in use?
- 3. **Template Resource:** [Downloadable Template for 5W+1H Analysis]

Output: A concise and clearly defined **Problem Definition Statement** that encapsulates the core issue and its scope. *Example:* "Product Y market share has declined by 15% in North America over the past year, impacting overall profitability and requiring an understanding of competitive pressures and changing customer preferences."

Step 2: Question – Defining the Key Research Questions

Goal: Move from a general understanding of the problem to specific, testable questions that will guide the investigation.

Objective: Formulate a set of clear, structured research questions that address the core issue and its various dimensions. These questions should be answerable through research and analysis.

Action Steps:

- 1. Break Down Sub-Questions for Each 5W+1H Component: For each element identified in Step 1 (What, Who, Where, When, Why, How), generate more specific sub-questions to guide the research process.
 - Example (Based on the "Product Y Market Share Decline" example):
 - What: What are the specific features and benefits of Product Y compared to its competitors? What are the current marketing strategies for Product Y?
 - Who: Who are the key customer segments for Product Y? Are there emerging customer segments? Who are the main competitors, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
 - Where: Where are Product Y sales declining most rapidly? Where are competitors gaining market share?
 - When: When did the market share decline begin? Are there seasonal trends in Product Y sales?
 - Why: Why are customers choosing competitors over Product Y? Why might current distribution and marketing strategies be failing?
 - How: How are competitors marketing their products? How are customers using Product Y and how has this usage evolved over time?
- 2. Frame Hypothesis-Driven Questions: Develop questions that can be tested through research and analysis, designed to challenge or refine initial assumptions. Ensure these questions are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

• Example Questions:

- Data-Driven: What patterns or anomalies exist in the sales data for Product Y? Is there a correlation between marketing spend and sales decline?
- Comparative: How does Product Y compare to its competitors in terms of price, features, and customer reviews? How does its marketing strategy differ?
- Risk/Opportunity: What risks does the market share decline pose to the organization? What opportunities exist to regain market share or enter new markets?

Output: A well-defined list of high-priority, researchable questions, organized and categorized (potentially aligned with the 5W+1H framework) to guide the subsequent investigation.

Step 3: Hypothesis – Predictive Model & Initial Assumptions

Goal: Develop testable explanations and models based on initial knowledge, setting a clear direction for research and analysis.

Objective: Develop one or more working hypotheses that offer potential explanations for the core issue ("X") and can be tested through subsequent research and analysis. These hypotheses

should be informed by initial observations and include predictive statements outlining expected outcomes.

Action Steps:

- 1. **Formulate Hypotheses:** Develop potential explanations about X's nature, function, or impact based on preliminary observations. Each hypothesis should be clearly stated and falsifiable.
 - Example (Based on "Product Y Market Share Decline"):
 - Hypothesis 1: "The decline in market share is primarily due to increased competition from a new, lower-priced competitor offering similar features."
 - Hypothesis 2: "Changes in customer preferences toward alternative product categories are driving the decline in Product Y sales."
 - Hypothesis 3: "Ineffective marketing and advertising strategies are failing to communicate Product Y's value proposition effectively."
- 2. **Predict Outcomes:** Based on each hypothesis, predict the expected outcomes if the hypothesis is correct. Use historical patterns, business intelligence, and open-source information to support predictions.
 - Examples:
 - If Hypothesis 1 is true: Expect to see a significant increase in sales for the new competitor, with customer reviews highlighting a price advantage.
 - If Hypothesis 2 is true: Market research should indicate a trend toward alternative product categories, rendering Product Y's features less relevant.
 - If Hypothesis 3 is true: Data may show lower engagement rates and negative customer sentiment towards Product Y's marketing efforts.
- 3. **Identify Variables and Influencing Factors:** Determine key variables that could affect the outcome of your analysis and the validity of your hypotheses, such as market size, competitor pricing, customer demographics, and economic conditions.

Output: A structured hypothesis (or set of hypotheses) that includes:

- A clear statement of the proposed explanation.
- Predictive statements outlining expected outcomes.
- Identification of key variables and influencing factors.
- A description of the methodology required to validate or invalidate the hypothesis.

Step 4: Experiment – Research & Data Collection (Multi-Source Intelligence Gathering)

Goal: Obtain relevant, comprehensive, and reliable data from multiple sources to rigorously test the hypotheses developed in Step 3. This data serves as the evidentiary foundation for the analysis.

Objective: Systematically gather information from a variety of sources, employing both automated and manual techniques, to build a comprehensive dataset that supports the analysis of "X" and enables the testing of hypotheses.

Action Steps:

- 1. **AI-Powered Search & Research:** Utilize AI-driven tools to automate the search for relevant information and identify key trends.
 - Automated Searches: Employ search engines (Google, Bing), specialized databases, and AI-powered research tools (e.g., Consensus, Elicit, Perplexity.AI) to identify relevant articles, reports, and datasets. Use specific search phrases from Step 2 to optimize results.
 - Semantic Analysis: Use Natural Language Processing (NLP) and other semantic analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. Tools such as Lexalytics or MonkeyLearn can assist with this analysis.
- 2. Business Intelligence (BI) Research: Collect and analyze internal and external business data to understand market trends, competitive landscape, and industry dynamics.
 - Market Trends: Research market reports (e.g., from Gartner, Forrester, McKinsey) to assess market size, growth rates, and technological disruptors.
 - **Financial Data:** Analyze company financial statements, economic indicators, and industry forecasts to gauge the financial performance of key players.
 - **Industry Impact:** Identify key competitors, their business models, and the impact of their actions on the industry.
- 3. Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) Collection: Gather information from publicly available sources, including news media, government databases, social media, and academic publications.
 - News Sources: Monitor articles, press releases, and blog posts for relevant events, trends, and opinions.
 - Government Databases: Utilize official databases (e.g., census data, regulatory filings, patent databases) to gather factual information and policy changes.
 - Social Media: Analyze social media trends and sentiment related to "X" using tools like Brandwatch or Mention.
 - Academic Research: Consult academic journals, research papers, and conference proceedings for in-depth analysis and expert opinions.
- 4. **Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Interviews:** Gather firsthand insights from experts, industry leaders, affected stakeholders, and other knowledgeable individuals.
 - **Structured Interviews:** Conduct interviews with experts, customers, competitors, and other stakeholders to gain unique perspectives.
 - Expert Opinions: Consult with industry analysts, consultants, and academics to validate findings from other sources.

Output: A comprehensive, well-organized dataset containing:

- A curated collection of relevant articles, reports, and datasets.
- Summaries of key findings from business intelligence research.
- Transcripts or notes from expert interviews.

• Data visualizations (charts, graphs, maps) illustrating key trends and relationships.

Note: Utilize tools like "Google Data Explorer" as a test-bed to ensure data consistency and integrity.

Full List of 50 Critical Thinking Methods

Below is a comprehensive list of 50 critical thinking methods, organized into five categories for clarity and ease of selection.

1. Deductive Reasoning

Application: Validate known principles to eliminate improbable hypotheses.

Limitations: Only confirms what is already established. More Info

2. Inductive Reasoning

Application: Generate generalizations from specific observations.

Limitations: Risk of overgeneralization. More Info

3. Abductive Reasoning

Application: Develop the most plausible explanation based on incomplete data.

Limitations: May not always yield the correct answer. More Info

4. Syllogistic Reasoning

Application: Use logical structures (syllogisms) to derive conclusions.

Limitations: Relies on the validity of the premises. More Info

5. Bayesian Analysis

Application: Update probabilities as new data becomes available.

Limitations: Requires accurate prior probabilities. More Info

6. Falsification Principle

Application: Attempt to disprove hypotheses to test their robustness.

Limitations: Difficult to conclusively prove a negative. More Info

7. Counterfactual Reasoning

Application: Explore alternative outcomes by considering "what if" scenarios.

Limitations: Can be highly speculative. More Info

8. Comparative Analysis

Application: Compare different scenarios, hypotheses, or datasets to identify differences and

similarities.

Limitations: Requires comparable metrics and quality data. More Info

9. Logical Fallacy Identification

Application: Detect errors in reasoning to improve argument quality.

Limitations: May not capture all nuanced fallacies. More Info

10. Critical Inquiry

Application: Systematically question assumptions and explore alternative perspectives.

Limitations: Can lead to analysis paralysis if over-applied. More Info

11. OSINT Analysis

Application: Aggregate and analyze publicly available data.

Limitations: Information can be biased or outdated. More Info

12. **HUMINT Collection**

Application: Gather insights through interviews and interpersonal interactions.

Limitations: Subject to human error and bias. More Info

13. SIGINT Analysis

Application: Analyze signals and communications data for intelligence insights.

Limitations: Requires specialized tools and expertise. More Info

14. Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT)

Application: Use geographic information systems to analyze spatial data.

Limitations: Dependent on high-quality spatial data. More Info

15. Social Network Analysis

Application: Examine relationships and influence patterns within social networks.

Limitations: May oversimplify complex social structures. More Info

16. Data Triangulation

Application: Validate findings by cross-verifying data from multiple sources.

Limitations: Time-consuming and may still leave gaps. More Info

17. Content Analysis

Application: Systematically analyze text, images, or media content for recurring themes.

Limitations: Can be subjective in interpretation. More Info

18. Discourse Analysis

Application: Examine language and communication patterns to uncover underlying meanings.

Limitations: Highly qualitative and interpretive. More Info

19. Interview Analysis

Application: Analyze qualitative data gathered from structured or semi-structured interviews.

Limitations: May be influenced by interviewer bias. More Info

20. Forensic Analysis

Application: Investigate data and evidence to reconstruct events or understand anomalies.

Limitations: Requires specialized expertise and is limited by available data. More Info

21. SWOT Analysis

Application: Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Limitations: Can be overly simplistic and subjective. More Info

22. PESTEL Analysis

Application: Examine external factors—Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environ-

mental, and Legal.

Limitations: Can be broad and unfocused if not properly scoped. More Info

23. Value Chain Analysis

Application: Analyze each stage of production to identify value creation and inefficiencies.

Limitations: Requires comprehensive and accurate data. More Info

24. Market Segmentation Analysis

Application: Divide a market into distinct groups of potential customers.

Limitations: May not capture overlapping or evolving segments. More Info

25. Competitive Benchmarking

Application: Compare a business's performance against its competitors. Limitations: Relies on the availability of comparable data. More Info

26. Financial Ratio Analysis

Application: Evaluate financial performance using key financial ratios.

Limitations: Can be affected by differing accounting practices. More Info

27. Trend Analysis

Application: Identify patterns or trends in data over time.

Limitations: Past trends may not always predict future behavior. More Info

28. Scenario Planning

Application: Develop and assess possible future scenarios to guide strategic decisions.

Limitations: Highly speculative and reliant on assumptions. More Info

29. Porter's Five Forces

Application: Analyze the competitive forces within an industry.

Limitations: May oversimplify complex market dynamics. More Info

30. Business Model Canvas Analysis

Application: Visualize and evaluate the components of a business model.

Limitations: Can be too static for dynamic business environments. More Info

31. Monte Carlo Simulations

Application: Model probabilistic outcomes to assess risks under uncertainty.

Limitations: Complex to implement and interpret. More Info

32. Decision Tree Analysis

Application: Map decisions and their possible consequences using a tree-like model.

Limitations: Can become unwieldy with numerous branches. More Info

33. Risk Matrix & Mitigation Planning

Application: Evaluate risks by plotting their severity and likelihood, then plan mitigations.

Limitations: Subjective risk assessments may skew results. More Info

34. Cost-Benefit Analysis

Application: Compare the costs and benefits of various options to support decision-making.

Limitations: Intangible factors can be difficult to quantify. More Info

35. Sensitivity Analysis

Application: Determine how variations in input affect outcomes.

Limitations: Highly dependent on the chosen variables and assumptions. More Info

36. Pareto Analysis (80/20 Rule)

Application: Identify the most significant factors contributing to a problem.

Limitations: May oversimplify complex issues. More Info

37. Root Cause Analysis (5 Whys)

Application: Drill down to the underlying cause of a problem by repeatedly asking "why".

Limitations: Can be biased by initial assumptions. More Info

38. Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (FMEA)

Application: Identify potential failure points and assess their impact.

Limitations: Resource-intensive and may not cover all possible scenarios. More Info

39. Delphi Method

Application: Gather iterative expert opinions to reach a consensus.

Limitations: Time-consuming and may be influenced by dominant voices. More Info

40. SWOT-Revisited

Application: Integrate traditional SWOT analysis with risk assessment and strategic plan-

ning.

Limitations: Can become overly complex without clear guidelines. More Info

41. Lateral Thinking

Application: Approach problems from unconventional angles to generate new ideas.

Limitations: May lead to impractical or unrealistic solutions. More Info

42. TRIZ (Theory of Inventive Problem Solving)

Application: Apply systematic innovation principles derived from engineering and technology.

Limitations: Requires training and familiarity with its methodology. More Info

43. Brainstorming Techniques

Application: Generate a wide range of ideas quickly through free association.

Limitations: Risk of groupthink and lack of focus. More Info

44. Mind Mapping

Application: Visualize ideas and their interconnections in a diagrammatic format.

Limitations: Can become cluttered for complex topics. More Info

45. Design Thinking

Application: Use human-centered design to solve problems and innovate.

Limitations: Time-consuming and requires iterative prototyping. More Info

46. SCAMPER Technique

Application: Stimulate creativity by prompting changes: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Mod-

ify, Put to another use, Eliminate, and Reverse.

Limitations: May generate ideas that are not feasible. More Info

47. Morphological Analysis

Application: Systematically explore all possible solutions by varying key parameters.

Limitations: Can be complex and produce an overwhelming number of options. More Info

48. Concept Mapping

Application: Organize and represent knowledge as a network of interconnected concepts.

Limitations: May oversimplify the relationships between concepts. More Info

49. Analogical Reasoning

Application: Draw parallels between similar situations to generate insights.

Limitations: May lead to incorrect conclusions if the analogy is weak. More Info

50. Innovation Tournament

Application: Evaluate and refine multiple innovative ideas through a competitive, iterative process.

Limitations: Can be resource-intensive and may favor more conventional ideas. More Info

Step 6: Conclusion – Final Report Production & Intelligence Reports

Goal: Translate the analysis into clear, concise, and actionable intelligence reports that effectively communicate findings to decision-makers.

Objective: Synthesize the findings from the analysis phase into a set of structured, well-organized intelligence reports tailored to different audiences and purposes.

Action Steps:

- 1. **Develop Targeted Reports:** Create a series of reports addressing specific aspects of the analysis, tailored to different stakeholders. Common report types include:
 - Executive Summary: A high-level overview of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations (1-2 pages).
 - AI Intelligence Report: Insights and predictive analytics derived from AI-powered tools.
 - BI Business Report: In-depth analysis of economic, financial, and market impact factors, with data-driven insights.
 - **OSINT Report:** Comprehensive summary of findings from open-source intelligence gathering, including key trends and potential risks.
 - **HUMINT Report:** Documentation of insights from expert interviews and field investigations, ensuring anonymity where necessary.
 - SWOT & Risk Report: Structured assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, along with a risk matrix and mitigation strategies.
 - Strategic Mission Report: Long-term strategic plan outlining goals, objectives, and recommended actions.
 - Business Plan & Operational Blueprint: Tactical blueprint for implementing recommendations, including specific action items, timelines, and resource allocation.
 - Final Recommendations & Next Steps: Concise summary of key recommendations and proposed next steps for decision-makers, including areas for further investigation.
- 2. **Assemble the Reports:** Ensure each report is clear, structured, and tailored to its intended audience.

Output: A comprehensive multi-report package that effectively communicates key findings, insights, and recommendations to stakeholders.

Step 7: Reiteration – Iterative Review & Continuous Refinement

Goal: Ensure the framework and its application remain relevant, accurate, and effective by continually reviewing and refining the process based on new data and experience.

Objective: Apply continuous learning and a scientific mindset to improve the framework and refine its application over time, establishing a virtuous cycle of improvement.

Action Steps:

- 1. Reevaluate Findings and Assumptions: As new data becomes available, revisit findings and assumptions. Challenge initial conclusions to identify any gaps or inconsistencies.
- 2. **Identify Gaps or Inconsistencies:** Analyze the results to pinpoint areas where data is lacking, where assumptions are unsupported, or where inconsistencies exist.
- 3. Implement Updates to Intelligence Models: Refine analytical models and techniques based on new insights, incorporating lessons learned to improve future analyses.
- 4. **Assess Effectiveness:** Regularly evaluate the framework's effectiveness in achieving its objectives, identifying areas for further improvement and optimization.

Output: A self-correcting, continuously improving methodology that remains relevant, accurate, and effective over time.

4 Case Studies

- Overview: Include detailed examples of how the framework has been applied to real-world problems, showcasing applications across different industries and types of analysis.
- Structure for Each Case Study:
 - a. Initial Problem: Describe the challenge or issue that prompted the analysis.
 - b. **Application of the Framework:** Outline the steps taken using the framework, including key actions and methodologies employed.
 - c. **Key Insights:** Summarize the major findings, patterns, and relationships uncovered during the analysis.
 - d. **Recommendations/Actions:** Detail the resulting recommendations or actions taken as a result of the analysis.

5 Competitive Analysis (Optional)

- Overview: Compare WTF? V.5.1 to other commonly used analysis methods.
- For Each Method:
 - a. **Key Advantages of WTF? V.5.1:** Highlight the strengths, such as its integrated, multi-disciplinary approach, scientific rigor, and iterative methodology.
 - b. **Potential Downfalls of the Compared Method:** Outline limitations or shortcomings.
 - c. **Strengths of the Compared Method:** Note any areas where the traditional method excels.

6 Final Notes on WTF? V.5.1

- Unified and Structured: Follows the New Scientific Method by integrating multiple intelligence disciplines (AI, BI, OSINT, HUMINT) into a coherent analytical process.
- Comprehensive Application: Applies over 50 critical thinking methods systematically to generate data-driven insights.
- Iterative Process: Incorporates continuous refinement, ensuring the framework remains adaptable and effective in evolving contexts.
- Actionable Outcomes: Produces detailed, tailored intelligence reports to support strategic decision-making.

7 Appendix

- Glossary of Terms: Detailed definitions of key terms used throughout the framework.
- Templates and Checklists: Downloadable resources such as the 5W+1H analysis worksheet and method selection checklist.
- Additional Resources: Links to external information, further reading, and reference materials.
- Changelog: A record of updates and revisions made to the framework over time.