

There are three levels of threat intelligence: strategic, operational, and tactical. The levels should be used as a reference guide to remember that different audiences have different requirements of threat intelligence.

Threat Intelligence CONSUMPTION

Strategic-level players such as executives and policymakers should look for an understanding of the wider threat landscape to identify the risk to the organization and changes that can be made in investments or the corporate culture.

Operational-level personnel should look to translate strategic objectives into tactical efforts and vice versa by identifying the overarching goals or trends of an operation or campaign. They should also aim to be aware of adversary campaigns instead of single intrusions, identify organizational knowledge gaps, and share information with peer organizations to alleviate those knowledge gaps.

Tactical-level intelligence is often consumed in the form of indicators of compromise (IOCs) and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). This helps drive the security of an organization and enable it to hunt down threats and better respond to them. Consider using models such as the Active Cyber Defense Cycle.

Active Cyber Defense Cycle

The Active Cyber Defense Cycle is a model to consume threat intelligence. It focuses on bridging various security teams to take a security operations focus on identifying and countering threats. It can start at any phase of the cycle, with the phases continually feeding into one another in order to create an ongoing process.

Threat Intelligence Consumption analysts should be aware of their organizational goals and needs as well as the information attack space. They should be able to look into the wide range of threat intelligence available and find what is relevant to their organization. Information such as IOCs can be found to help search for threats in the environment.

Threat and Environment Manipulation analysts often perform activities such as malware analysis; however, the threat does not always use malware. Analyzing the threat allows for the creation of better IOCs and an understanding of the threat and its impact on the environment and the organization. Recommending changes to the environment when possible – such as fixing a vulnerability or making a logical change like DNS sinkholing – can help reduce threat effectiveness.



Network Security Monitoring focuses on hunting threats in the environment and is comprised of three phases: collect, detect, and analyze. In the collect phase analysts should gather data from the environment such as network traffic, system logs, and security device logs. In the detect phase analysts should look for abnormalities and use adversary IOCs and TTPs to hunt for adversaries. The analyze phase helps to confirm that the threats are real and not a false positive. This helps reduce incident response false positives.

Incident Response should focus on scoping the impact of the threat and any malicious activity while containing and eradicating the threat. IOCs should be used to understand and fix the true scope of the problem to avoid reinfections.

Threat Intelligence Generation

Organizations that want to generate threat intelligence should have well established security practices and be able to gather data from successful and attempted intrusions into their organizations. Generating threat intelligence should start with clear requirements and proceed to taking advantage of internal knowledge, such as intrusion data, and external knowledge, such as openly available reports and information. The key is empowering trained analysts to interpret information and produce knowledge about observed threats while detailing technical information that can be used to help enhance security operations and incident response.

The Kill Chain

The Kill Chain highlights steps that adversaries usually perform to complete their objective. It should be used as a reference model to understand adversary activity and observable indicators of compromise (IOCs). Categorizing and identifying indicators and patterns across large numbers of intrusions can reveal connections in intrusion activity including an adversary's campaign.



A Sample Process from SANS FOR578*

Determine the Intelligence Requirements

Does the organization need better technical knowledge such as IOCs and adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to increase incident response and threat detection? Or does the organization need knowledge about adversary campaigns and guidance to executives on the organization's threat landscape? Are these goals specific to certain threats or to safeguard specific data in the organization? Requirements guide what you collect, what and how you analyze it, and the final product disseminated.

Analyze Internal Information

Have incident responders, enterprise security teams, malware analysts, and other members of your organization provided data and information on previous intrusions into the organization? Analyze the intrusions against models such as the Diamond Model or Kill Chain to extract indicators and to identify adversary patterns. Organizations should have a minimum of 60 days of logs to generate useful data. Lastly, remember that the best data is internal to your organization.

Enrich the Information

Utilize open-source information with tools such as Google, ThreatMiner.org, or professional tools to determine if others have seen the technical indicators or adversary TTPs before. Attempt to avoid duplicating efforts – use existing information.

Validate the Information

Open-source information exists in abundance and it needs validating. Not all information is correct or relevant to your organization. Simply taking a threat feed or data source and using it blindly will generate false positives and overload analysts. Have processes for retiring indicators and information that is no longer useful. The hoarders' approach to indicators will always fail over time.

Store the Information

Store the information using a common format and ensure that analysts can also add notes and identify relationships between technical indicators. Make sure internal security personnel can quickly access and utilize the information. Additionally, seek feedback from the consumers to help improve the intelligence processes while confirming that the feedback is useful. Consider CRITs, MISPT, Threat_ Note, or professional platforms. Always be ready to tailor your storing platforms as they are starting places, not out-of-the-box solutions.

Share the Information

Translate the common format internal to your organization into sharable formats such as STIX/TAXII to make it available to peers or government organizations. Ensure that in a sharing relationship you get the information back so you can use it to validate or enhance your knowledge.

Productize the Information

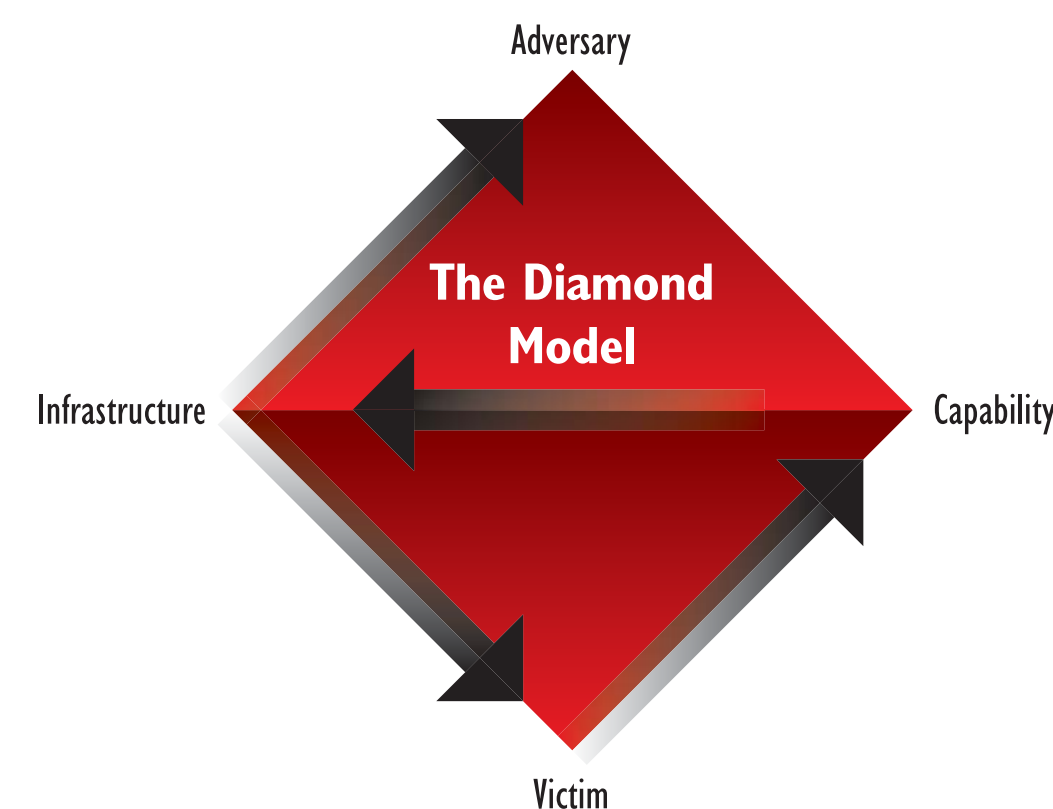
When an intelligence assessment is required, analyze the competing sources of information to make assessments about the threat and its impact on your organization. Utilize models such as Analysis of Competing Hypotheses to help defeat analyst biases. Use language such as high, medium, and low confidence for your assessments because intelligence is always an assessment and not a definitive conclusion. Productized intelligence is usually delivered in the form of a report or briefing.

What is a TTP?

An adversary tactic, technique, or procedure (TTP) is the means by which adversaries accomplish their goals. TTPs often consist of patterns of adversary activity that those adversaries routinely perform. As an example, if an adversary consistently gains access to unauthenticated VPNs in an environment and then leverages PowerShell within the environment to steal off intellectual property documents, that pattern could be observed as one of their TTPs. In the future, if you identify that adversary is using PowerShell in your environment, you may want to quickly safeguard intellectual property documents while identifying and removing unauthenticated VPNs. At a bare minimum TTPs should include descriptions of observed adversary activity (such as the analysis of indicators) with perceived adversary goals.

The Diamond Model

The Diamond Model of Intrusion Analysis identifies the four core components of any malicious event: the victim, the capability, the infrastructure, and the adversary. It is a stand-alone model but can also be applied to each phase of the kill chain. Performing this type of analysis allows organizations to start with one component they can identify (such as the victim) and work towards uncovering the other three components. This helps understand adversary motives as well as the infrastructure and capabilities they use.



References and Suggested Reading

Kill Chain:

<http://dfir.to/KillChain>

Diamond Model:

<http://dfir.to/DiamondModel>

The Sliding Scale of Cyber Security:

<http://dfir.to/SlidingScale>

Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (Chapter 8):

<http://dfir.to/CompetingHypotheses>

Sherman Kent and the Profession of Intelligence Analysis:

<http://dfir.to/ShermanKent>

SANS Cyber Threat Intelligence Summit Presentations:

<http://dfir.to/CTISummitArchive>