



Chapter VII

Understanding Key Intelligence Needs (KINs)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains how to translate an organization's strategic aims into key intelligence needs (KINs) and how to prioritize and categorize the needs. It argues that an essential aspect for any competitive intelligence (CI) professional is to gain the confidence of management to determine what information about the environment should be collected in order to produce intelligence. Furthermore the author hope that understanding how to determine a set of KINs as derived from an organization's vision, mission, and strategic objectives and how to break down KINs into general and specific KINs will assist CI professionals to understand what their internal customers want to know about, need to know about and should know about and why, when they need to know it, and who needs to know it by identifying KINs. The application of KINs in a practical situation is illustrated in a case study of a South African company in the furniture industry.

INTRODUCTION

In the knowledge economy, the survival of organizations depends on their ability to see the bigger picture within their competitive environment, to track and scan that environment continuously in search of emerging threats and opportunities and to react to such threats and opportunities swiftly. To ensure focused information gather-

ing, organizations must be able to identify the variables within their competitive environment accurately. These are often their key intelligence needs (KINs).

The most fundamental concept in the field of competitive intelligence (CI) is the intelligence cycle (planning, gathering, analysis, dissemination). The cycle contains all of the elements required to produce actionable intelligence. In

the planning stage, the strategic information requirements are stated and it is the task of the CI professional to determine what information on the environment should be collected in order to produce intelligence. This step then drives the subsequent activities of gathering, analysis and dissemination. The CI cycle is initiated through a request from management. Requests come in many forms. An essential aspect for any CI professional is to gain the confidence of management so that they will continuously bring requests. The sum total of these requests represents management's KINs, or in other words, key areas of intelligence (Prescott, 1999).

The objectives of this chapter are to explain how to translate an organization's strategic aims into KINs and how to prioritize and categorize the needs. Attention will be paid to the following aspects:

- An explanation of the concepts KINs and taskings
- How to determine a set of KINs as derived from an organization's vision, mission, and strategic objectives
- How to break down KINs into general and specific KINs and how to develop taskings
- KINs as the direction giver of an organization's CI analysis effort
- The importance of regularly interviewing managers to update the set of KINs

Finally the application of KINs in a practical situation will be illustrated through a case study of Just Wood, a South African company in the furniture industry.

KINs AND TASKINGS

Managers have a need to know about key events, changes, trends, and news in and affecting their environment. They need to understand the im-

plications to make decisions and act accordingly. Managers benefit only from information that they regard as useful and meaningful. It makes no sense to spend resources to acquire intelligence if it is not to be used in decision-making. One of the problems of identifying information needs is that it is very hard for managers to articulate their information needs. A frequent reason for this is that managers do not know what information is available or they do not understand how it is obtained or used. The information needs of managers may also be subconscious. These subconscious needs cannot be assessed even with the best methods because they usually surface only in a decision-making situation. To overcome these problems, CI professionals in an organization need to understand what their internal customers want to know about, need to know about and should know about and why, when they need to know it, and who needs to know it. CI professionals have a formal process they use to answer these questions—identifying KINs. The initial responsibility of any CI professional is to conduct a stakeholder analysis to determine whom the key intelligence users are, what they will use intelligence for, when it is required, why it is needed, and how the intelligence will be used.

According to Marrs (2005) every function within an organization has KINs, even if that function does not specifically codify it. He explains that there is a primal, overarching need to see, analyze, understand, decide, and act on what is happening in the present and anticipate what might happen in the future.

According to Sewlal (2003) KINs are business issues that are of critical importance to an organization. Management is responsible for defining the KINs, based on decisions they need to make and these KINs provide the necessary direction to the CI effort, ensuring that the operation focuses on collecting and analyzing only key data relevant to the KINs.

Robinson (2005) explains that determining KINs is the most critical and difficult step in the

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