

Intelligence analysts as communicators

Workshop development and intelligence analysis for national security
purposes: A Workshop

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Who Am I?

- Expert in organizational and strategic communication
- Best known for work on strategic ambiguity and organizational culture
- View communication not only as transmission but as meaning making
- Significant research and teaching experience with government agencies (NASA, 911 Commission, CDC, USSOCOM)

The literature suggests that successful analysts have expertise in three areas: subject matter, analysis, and communication (B. Fischhoff, 2011).

Some Problematic Assumptions about Communication

- That it has occurred (handoffs, communicative attempts)
- That knowing the facts is enough (enactment and framing)
- That others share your vocabulary and world-view (definitions and language communities)

Universal Communication Challenges

- **Managing massive amounts of data in the information age** (classified and unclassified, evolution of predictive analytics (Appian), changing role of the SME)
- **Team collaboration across function, specialty, and agency** (including virtual teams; critically dependent on the quality of relationships)
- **Making regular and disciplined use of iterative feedback in sense-making** (communication culture and checking for grasping)

Key Principles and Best Practices

- Audience analysis and relationships

Dr. Christopher Ford, Hudson Institute (2010), Lessons from Iraq and WMD: “The lesson is that it is vital to maintain analyst/customer relationships characterized by a highly skeptical, probing sort of substantive engagement. This requires effort and understanding from both sides.”

- All communication—and indeed all policy-making—has multiple goals
- Focus on both facts and frameworks

In a non-conventional geo-political environment, we are long on facts and short on theories and frameworks to explain their significance

Key Principles and Best Practices (cont.)

- **Interpretations very often follow action** (retrospective sense-making)
- **Interpretations are strongly constrained by perceived available actions** (e.g., triage and psychiatric referrals)
- **Data clearinghouses do not work** — focus on creating just in time pathways for peer-to-peer communication

Key Principles and Best Practices (cont.)

- **Create clear markers of degree of uncertainty** (e.g., “work in progress”); use new visual tools to better represent stochastic risk assessments (e.g., spaghetti plots)
- **Make your thinking visible to better invite dialogue and collective sense-making**

Great communicators argue like they are right and listen like they are wrong. They share their reasoning, not just their conclusions, and invite others to do the same. They regard those who disagree with them with curiosity and inquire “why do you think that?” They recognize that soliciting multiple perspectives strengthens the accuracy of any assessment.

Questions and Discussion