Is It All About the Analysis That Drives Decisions and Actions?

by Andrew Beurschgens
Practitioners from across continents reached out to understand what competitive analysis methods drive decisions and actions. Just because the analysis is strong and robust does not mean that decisions and actions naturally flow. This article from a practitioner’s perspective argues that other soft skills are required to complement the importance of analysis. In my experience, a stakeholder has never asked for an analytical framework. They have tended to ask for inputs. It is our gift to break that down into a business decision to be reached and then use the analytical frameworks as the enabler - the means to the end rather than the end.

Tip 1 | Take advantage of the abundant ‘how to’ analysis texts

If we had tried to source ‘know how’ texts to help with our analysis before 2000, the range of texts available then was not as numerous as they are today. Authors like Babette Bensoussan, Dr Craig Fleisher, Richard Heuer, and Randolph Pherson, among others, have diligently put pen to paper to share with us the structure of this article, but it focuses on eliminating the analysis of whether they are fit for the task at hand or not. The best analysis is useless unless it is communicated, believed, and acted upon. To get to this state, the analyst must shift his/her perspective through a change of attitude. Fellow practitioner, Joost Drieman, ex-Cisco and now Vice President Intelligence Consulting and Communications Business; they are not in the consulting and communications business; they are not in the consulting and communications business. A CI Director once said that “CI/MI analysts are in the consulting and communications business; they are not in the analysis business.” The best analysis is useless unless it is communicated, believed, and acted upon.

Tip 2 | Analysis is imperative

If we had several analysts in a room and asked them to define analysis, many definitions would emerge. What is clear is that the ability to analyse is a skilled application. Individuals interpret data and information to produce insightful intelligence findings and actionable recommendations for decision makers. According to Fleisher and Bensoussan, analysis is imperative, as it is the process used to create the intelligence findings or ‘insights’. As a practitioner, I believe analysis is imperative, for it allows you to differentiate the poor man’s substitute, ‘Google & send,’ and prove your value. Analysts will naturally have their favourite analytical frameworks. However, analysts should stop themselves from getting into a tool rut, namely using the same approach for every problem regardless of its fit and applicability. Again, Fleisher and Bensoussan have successfully segmented a wide range of analytical approaches to help the practitioner to fine tune a range of approaches given their CI program’s specific focus or business problem at hand. That might be more strategic than customer; it might be more environmental than evolutionary; or, it might be more financial than enterprise related. You master the one best suited to the problem at hand at that particular time. Figure 1 outlines some of the tools available to the practitioner, neatly segmented to prevent swallowing the elephant all at once!

Tip 3 | You cannot swallow the elephant all at once

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Tip 4 | Recognize analysis pitfalls and avoid them

According to many analysts, decision makers and CI/MI program stakeholders do not ask for an analytical framework. They ask for recommendations, choices, options. According to other experienced analysts and authors several pitfalls can emerge and it is within the gift of the analyst to avoid them. These include the incorrect problem definition leading to the wrong analytical framework; lack of project planning; an error in the data gathering and research piece; synthesis error and a poorly accepted briefing due to the weakness in the communication. Furthermore, analysts can get rather used to specific tools; all the problems they see are through the lens of their favourite tools, regardless of whether they are fit for the task at hand or not.

Tip 5 | FAIMS mnemonic to drive the right outcome built ‘around’ the analysis

The FAIMS mnemonic stands for each of the stages around the analysis to ensure the intelligence product meets its goal. It stands for Frame Analysis Insight Message and Structure (FAIMS). Frame means ensuring the question’s context is understood, what is driving it, what is known already, what needs to be understood, by whom and what should it look like. Analysis is the focus of this article, but it focuses on eliminating the analysis pitfalls, especially picking the wrong framework and then collecting to that wrong end game. Insight focuses on the synthesis and addressing an active ‘so what?’. Message means being able to focus on a single core message - what is your analysis’ core message or meaning? Think of your audience when you structure your intelligence briefing. Are you going to structure the message deductively or inductively?

Tip 6 | Approaches to becoming a trusted advisor to companies’ decision making

A CI Director once said that “CI/MI analysts are in the consulting and communications business; they are not in the analysis business.” The best analysis is useless unless it is communicated, believed, and acted upon. To get to this state, the analyst must change his/her perspective through a change of attitude. Fellow practitioner, Joost Drieman, ex-Cisco and now Vice President Intelligence Best Practices at mBrain, presented his tips and tricks to becoming a trusted advisor at the 2011 European SCIP Conference in Vienna. Drieman’s take-aways and guidance are outlined in Figure 2.
Networking Event Series

The SCIP UK Chapter hosts a series of webinars throughout the year. These events bring together practitioners from all corners of the discipline: service providers, consultants, academics and practitioners to address topics as identified from the previous events’ feedback. The webinar format has also proven to attract a wider audience and reduces the barrier to participate because no additional travel is required during the working day.

The series aims to increase the understanding and awareness of desired themes among SCIP members and non-members as well as take the discipline to different business practices through co-hosting opportunities with other professional organisations and membership bodies. It is about creating an environment to discover, enhance, exchange and problem solve. To understand the previous networking events’ discussion themes, go to the SCIP UK chapter page for a complete running order as well as the link for the many that have been published in SCIP’s Competitive Intelligence Magazine article, helping to form SCIP’s Body of Knowledge.

The SCIP UK Chapter is grateful to all speakers’ passion and ability to share, without whom there would be neither a networking event/webinar nor the creation of a rich exchange of ideas and learnings. The opportunity to speak at these events is open to anyone, United Kingdom-based or just passing through, subject to meeting the growing list of event topics. Engagement with attendees is typically around five streams, centred on case studies to bring out applied learnings, namely: ‘Innovative Integration of Analysis’, ‘Analysis in Action’, ‘Mastering Information Overload’ and ‘Communicating with Impact’.

We encourage others to come forward to introduce the group to new perspectives, experiences and learning. Everyone’s application of CI brings new perspectives as CI from one company to the next is different. What links all the prospective speakers, regardless of their background or role within the competitive intelligence profession, is a passion for the discipline. Along with all the volunteer speakers to date and those that have yet to take advantage of the opportunity, they are all unique examples of characters continuing to fix the discipline more firmly on the map! What is the next step? Register your interest and details with Michelle Winter mwinter@scip.org to explore speaking opportunities and/or to be proactively kept abreast of forthcoming events in the UK.

References

1. ‘Business and Competitive Analysis – Effective Application of New and Classic Methods’, Craig Fleisher and Babette Bensoussan, Financial Times/ Prentice Hall
3. ‘Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysists’, Richard Heuer and Randolph Pherson, CQ Press

Source: Drieman, 2011 SCIP European Summit, Vienna

Figure 2: Becoming a Trusted Advisor

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors to Becoming a Trusted Advisor</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Change your attitude</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Build trust</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Create the opportunity</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Adapt your engagement style</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Understand the management dilemma</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Get to the need</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Use ‘and’ instead of ‘but’ to keep the conversation open</td>
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Beurschgens is the Head of Market Intelligence at BT Group, the UK incumbent operator for consumer and enterprise customers and home to the BT, EE and Plusnet brands. In cooperation with other volunteers from both the practitioner and supply side of the discipline, Andrew is acting Volunteer Chair of the SCIP UK Chapter. He is a Catalyst Award winner, recognised for his volunteer services to the profession and its members, a Distinguished SCIP Member Award Winner, a former SCIP Board Member and recent inductee into the Council of Competitive Intelligence Fellows.