With the development and validation of the Competitive Intelligence Professionals’ Competency Framework™ the field of competitive intelligence (CI) has taken a giant stride towards professionalization. Beginning in June of 2007 and continuing for 18 months, the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) and the Competitive Intelligence Foundation (CIF) undertook a comprehensive study of the current and future state of knowledge and practice in the field of competitive intelligence.

The primary objective of the Body of Knowledge (BOK) project was to identify, define and validate the current and leading-edge competencies drawn on by CI professionals and their organizations. The BOK project defined competencies as clusters of skills, abilities, and behaviors CI professionals must possess to perform their responsibilities in an effective and professional manner. We were particularly interested in developing a set of competencies that differentiated the CI profession from related professional disciplines so as to further legitimize of our profession.

The resulting CI Professionals’ Competency Framework™ (sidebar 1) contains seven competency domains and 86 individual competencies. The entire set of competencies can be accessed at: http://www.centraldesktop.com/prescott/competitiveintelligencebodyofknowledge.

THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE PROCESS

Using a highly interactive process, the BOK initiative combined:

- The expertise of an international task force comprised of CI subject matter experts from industry, government, and academia (see Sidebar 2).
- The inputs of an international group of CI experts from over 30 countries.
- The judgments of an international sample of competitive intelligence professionals who completed the validation survey.

We based our methodology on the validation processes crafted by the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999) and involved four phases. In Phase 1 we reviewed the business, government, and academic intelligence literatures and job descriptions with a focus on identifying professional practices and competencies. Literally hundreds of articles, reports, books and job descriptions were examined. Phase 2 consisted of interviewing experienced practitioners and trendspotters. We conducted ten in-depth interviews with experienced CI professionals focusing on defining:

- The core responsibilities associated with professional practice.
- Specific tasks required to fulfill these responsibilities.
- The knowledge needed to effectively implement the core responsibilities.
Phase 3 included the CI Professionals' Competency Framework and validation survey. Drawing on the results of phases 1 and 2, the task force developed and refined a comprehensive list of behavioral-based CI competencies. Through a series of conference calls and a day long face-to-face meeting we distilled, crafted, and organized the list into seven major content domains and 86 individual competencies. The task force then drafted and refined a survey to validate the framework. An independent panel of CI practitioners then reviewed and refined the survey.

In Phase 4 we presented the validation survey to an international sample of CI professionals, including the entire SCIP membership. We used the results from a return sample of 358 respondents to validate the competencies based on frequency and importance ratings. We performed a variety of analyses and discussed the results with the task force through a series of conference calls. Upon conclusion of the review, the task force affirmed that the CI Professionals' Competency Framework was validated in accordance with the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999).

APPLYING THE CI PROFESSIONALS’ COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Having developed and validated the competency framework, its actual value to the CI profession will be realized through its use and application. Currently, we envision four core applications for the competency framework (see Figure 1). These are aimed towards enhancing the professionalization and legitimization of the field of competitive intelligence. We look forward to the identification of additional applications of the framework and the ongoing development of the CI body of knowledge.

Certification and Training

SCIP’s board of directors has committed to developing a certification program and the competency framework will serve as an organizing structure for this program. While the details of the certification program are yet to be defined, the results of the validation survey provide some direction as to how a certification program can be structured. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of a certification exam that should be devoted to each of the seven competency domains. The top four domains in terms of percentages were:

- Conduct intelligence analysis and delivery processes (24%).
- Conduct intelligence collection and manage information resources (16%).
- Manage CI projects (16%).
- Implement needs assessment and manage client relationships (14%).

We also included an additional twelve in-depth interviews with trendspotters to identify the major trends expected to affect the CI profession over the next five years and the competencies needed by CI professionals to address the trends.
Respondents also rated these four domains highest in terms of their frequency of use and importance. Thus, one approach is to first develop additional training seminars and courses in these domains and then move to the other three domains.

**CI Careers**

If an individual is interested in competitive intelligence as a career, how would she develop a career path? A few organizations such as Motorola under the direction of Joe Goldberg have developed career paths for their CI professionals, but this is the exception rather than the rule. And while job descriptions for CI professionals are common, no systematic process has identified and defined different CI job classifications.

The competency domains and their associated 86 competencies can provide the basis for developing job interviewing guides, creating job descriptions based on combinations and weightings for the 86 competencies, identifying competency gaps for CI professionals, and mapping career paths.

**Academic Curriculum and Research**

A significant limitation to the CI field’s legitimacy is the paucity of formal CI courses and research programs in academia. A core aspect of the professionalization of a field is developing close relationships between it and professional schools in universities. Currently professors who might be interesting in developing a CI course have few textbooks available. The competency framework provides a structure for developing not only textbooks but also syllabi, CI case studies, experience-based learning exercises, a core set of CI concepts, and terminology.

Closely related to the need to develop teaching materials is the lack of CI-focused research and publications in peer reviewed journals. While the competency framework does not provide a research road map per se, it does provide a framework for developing one.

**SCIP Publications**

The Competitive Intelligence Foundation (CIF) has as part of its mission the ongoing development of a CI body of knowledge. The validation survey’s results can help identify targets for “writing” opportunities. It would be an instructive exercise to classify SCIP’s publications and articles according to the competency domains and individual competencies. The popular series of CI books (e.g., Tradeshows) being developed by the CIF might use the competency domains.
as a template for linking its publication mission to the CI certification initiative.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
The task force developed a set of guiding principles for the BOK project. Four of them merit a brief discussion. First, the end product of the initiative should demonstrate conclusively how the field of CI differentiates itself from other related professions. This was an important principle since many managers ask “what is CI’s unique value proposition?” While many answers are plausible, our answer is that the unique combination of the set of seven domains and the 86 individual competencies is both how we differentiate our field and how we define our value proposition.

A second guiding principle infused an international perspective throughout the methodology. While this principle was achieved in many ways, the CI community should have access to the growing CI literature from many countries.

A third principle developed a framework that is generalizable to all types and sizes of CI functions as well as a variety of CI roles and responsibilities. One group of CI professionals relatively underrepresented in our validation survey was information professionals. We need to collect additional data from information professionals to fully achieve this principle.

A fourth guiding principle was to focus on behaviors and not personality traits. Linking personality traits with the competency framework would be a fruitful area of further inquiry.

The completion of the CI Professionals’ Competency Framework™ represents the work of almost 400 volunteers from all parts of the CI community. Managers and analysts, government and academia, vendors and consultants have come together to provide SCIP with a validated competency model. Their contributions have laid a solid foundation for current and future generations of CI professionals.

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