

# UK NETWORKING EVENT SERIES

## THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION STYLES FOR MORE EFFECTIVE CI!

■ Andrew Beurschgens ■

Effective CI depends on communicating with others – from primary research interviewing to interpreting and reporting the results of research. Individuals differ in their communication styles as they relate to how a person perceives his or her world – for example, is she a “big-picture” person or does she prefer detail. Applying one’s own assumptions on others can lead to critical mistakes – whether this is because of a difference in basic communication style or because of cultural differences. A failure to communicate effectively can lead to CI failures. “The board refused to accept our findings,” may be because the findings weren’t communicated in a way to convince the board.

Recognition of communication styles should be part of the CI skillset – from research design to results analysis and reporting. Who better than to address the chapter’s second networking event within the Communicate with Impact stream than Arthur Weiss in response to communication being identified as important as analytical rigour and investigative skills in ‘Taking the Pulse of the CI Discipline, How Have We Evolved from 2010.

### PLAYING BACK TO PERCEPTION STYLES WITH THE CI PRODUCT

One big idea behind Arthur’s presentation to the chapter attendees was that the CI analyst has to be aware of the ways stakeholders perceive their world, of which there are three main types. The CI analyst should recognize the ‘Visual’ perception driven by the respondent’s use of phrases like, ‘I see what you mean,’ ‘what’s your view on...’ or ‘we need to shine some light on.’ These comments make ‘visual’ references. The second perception, ‘Auditory,’ is detected by the use of phrases like ‘I hear what you are saying,’ ‘it sounds like you want to ...’ and ‘this message is loud and clear.’ The last perception ‘Touch’ is detected by phrases like ‘I have got a handle on that,’ ‘we need to touch base’ or ‘I feel that we...’

To better relate to the stakeholder’s perception style, and therefore deliver the more appropriate competitive intelligence deliverable, the CI analyst must understand their stakeholder’s thinking styles, some of which are outlined in table 1, in the analysis. [Table 1: Thinking Styles & Analysis]. What stood out for some of the attendees was





the difference between a CI analyst who is good at spotting patterns versus those who can spot differences. In today's climate there is an argument that the advanced analyst needs to be able to do both and swap between his/her lens relative to the stakeholder type they are engaging. Are they visual, are they auditory, or are they kinaesthetic?

|                                  |                                                    |          |                                   |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| Approach to Risk                 | Go for opportunities                               | ↔        | Move away from threats            |
| Problem Solving                  | Look for options/flexibility                       | ↔        | Look for single approach/solution |
| Timeframe                        | What is needed 'now'                               | ↔        | What is needed long term          |
| Comparisons                      | Spot patterns                                      | ↔        | Spot differences                  |
| Perspective                      | See the big picture                                | ↔        | See details                       |
| Need for 'Sense'                 | Abstract ideas                                     | ↔        | Concrete experience               |
| Need for Evidence                | Make decisions on minimal evidence (even gut feel) | ↔        | Need lots of evidence to convince |
| Primary Way World is Experienced | Visual                                             | Auditory | Touch (Kinaesthetic)              |

**Table 1:** Thinking Styles & Analysis  
*Source: Aware*

## COMBINING PERCEPTION STYLES WITH USE OF LANGUAGE

While perception styles will help the analyst establish the right brief as well as be in a position to structure the deliverable back to the stakeholder, without the appropriate use of language, the communicated deliverable will count for nothing. Arthur offered several tips to be effective here, namely match or mirror the style being interviewed. For example by using the same words as your interviewee, you can build a rapport with them. Arthur also referenced John Nolan's title *Confidential* in which the author outlines twelve techniques to elicit information. For example, "in which way is the service better?" is a questioning style that seeks clarification when something important has been left out. Arthur also used role play with the audience to explain why that is and how to keep a conversation going. It allows the analyst to co-create with the stakeholder which is a very powerful relationship to have. However, if the speaker uses the word 'but,' it is a sure way to close a conversation down and creates a negative sentiment.

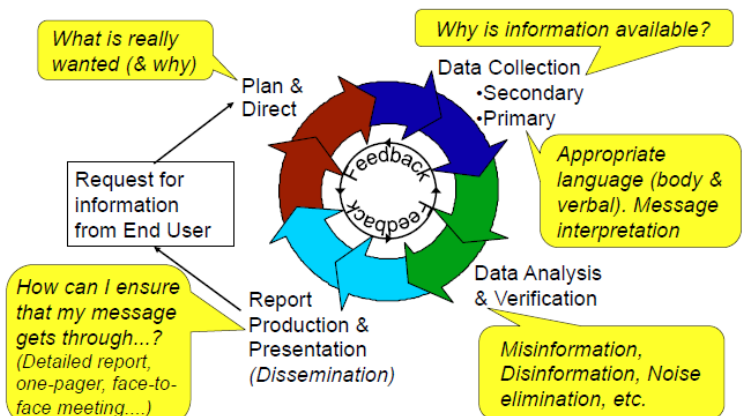
## REMINDER OF KEVIN ALLEN'S HIDDEN AGENDA!

During the networking event, memories came flooding back of Kevin Allen's book *The Hidden Agenda* [See Figure 1]. One of the poignant issues to establish at the KIT/briefing stage is to understand the context of that KIT. Does the business perceive the focus to be an opportunity or a risk? Is the stakeholder thinking life half-full or half-empty? Many of these issues were similar to the ones that Arthur was highlighting to the assembled audience. *The Hidden Agenda* also explores the laddering technique that allows the interviewer to explore the hidden agenda, whether that is a want, a need, or a value.

## WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE....

When it comes to the use of language rather than as the phrase concludes 'when we first practice to deceive.' Overlay onto that the impact of overseas cultures as well as the linear, spiral and circular communication styles and indeed it can, at times, feel like a web has been woven. Figure 2 outlines the core roles communication styles at play in each stage of the traditional CI process, whether that is getting to the hidden agenda at the planning and directing stage, the elicitation techniques of John Nolan when collecting primary information and lastly ensuring our intelligence deliverable back to our stakeholder reflects their visual, auditory or kinaesthetic perception styles. Arthur left the audience in no doubt about the benefits of better communication. [Figure 3: Conclusions].

### The "Traditional" CI Process & Communication



**Figure 2: What a Tangled Web We Weave**  
**Source: Aware**



"Behind every decision to buy – whether the item is a service or a product, an argument or an idea or a latent need for competitive intelligence – is an unspoken emotional motivation. This is the hidden agenda" writes Kevin Allen. People buy from companies, hire others or promote brands or individuals because those companies and individuals understand their values, wants and needs. To create a powerful and lasting connection, it's essential to discover the bond that will resonate with that hidden agenda.

**The hidden agenda is based around three agendas:**

- **unspoken want** – based on ambition, confidence, and a positive point of view of what the future might bring. However, there is an inability to articulate what the future might look like but looks forward to it
- **unspoken need** – based on fear and desire for something that is lacking or missing. There is a sense of urgency surrounding the hidden agenda of needs
- **unspoken value** – based on deeply held beliefs, measuring their actions in accordance with their belief system

**Figure 1: The Hidden Agenda by Kevin Allen**  
**Source: [blogbusinessworld.blogspot.com](http://blogbusinessworld.blogspot.com)**



Figure 3: Conclusions  
Source: Aware

| Communication failures lead to CI failures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Better communication....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ KITS – failure to understand the business question and its hidden agenda</li> <li>▪ Secondary research – failure in interpretation of data</li> <li>▪ Primary research – failure to build rapport with interviewees/understand gathered intelligence</li> <li>▪ Analysis – failure to understand gathered intelligence, prioritise and verify it and reject mis- and disinformation</li> <li>▪ Reporting – failure to communicate findings in a way that will make them actionable</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understand and recognise differences in communication styles               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your style, end users &amp; intelligence resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Consider perceptions &amp; thinking styles</li> <li>▪ Build rapport, match styles</li> <li>▪ Use appropriate language styles when clarifying KITS, when questioning sources and on reporting results</li> <li>▪ Take into account cultural differences</li> </ul> |

## SO WHAT FOR THE AUDIENCE?

Attendees left this networking meeting with a fresh perspective on how they could improve the value of their CI/MI to their business having understood some of the softer skills around communication styles to improve the impact of their deliverables with their stakeholders, be that at design/brief taking stage right through to debriefing the insight. Audience take-aways included:

**'Blindspots'** on 3 levels - assumptions, business myth and business taboo, as discussed by Ben Gilad in his book "Business Blindspots"

**Focus** more on visual/body language clues

**Communication** style

**Spectrum** of thinking styles and analysis

**The visual** - auditory - touch spectrum

**Map** out how to communicate effectively

## NETWORKING EVENT SERIES

The SCIP UK Chapter hosts a series of networking events. These events bring together practitioners from all corners of the discipline: service providers, consultants, academics, and practitioners.

The series aims to increase the understanding and awareness of desired themes and take the discipline to different business practices through co-hosting opportunities with other professional organisations and

membership bodies as well as with SCIP's UK-based members. It is about creating an environment to discover, enhance, exchange and problem solve. Previous networking events' discussion themes and presentations can be downloaded from its former branded UK Competitive Intelligence Forum website after registering at the site by setting up a username and password.

The SCIP UK Chapter is grateful to all speakers, passionate characters like Aware's Arthur Weiss, without whom there would be neither a networking event nor the creation of a rich exchange of ideas and learnings. The opportunity to speak at these networking 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 around five themes, centred on case studies: innovative integration of CI within the business, professional growth in CI, analysis in action, managing information overload and communicating with impact.

We encourage others to come forward to introduce the group to new perspectives, experiences and learning. What links all the prospective speakers and panellists, irrespective 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](mailto:mwinter@scip.org) to explore speaking opportunities and/or to be proactively kept abreast of forthcoming events in the UK.

## REFERENCES

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'Communicate with Impact; Tips to Increase Influence with Intelligence Assessments'

'Taking the Pulse of the CI Discipline – How Far Have We Evolved?' was a look at how the CI discipline had evolved by exploring how practitioners had kick started their careers, how they are improving their positions, measuring their value and continuing to invest in themselves compared to 2010

John Nolan, 'Confidential'

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/006661984X/ref=kinw\\_rke\\_tl\\_1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/006661984X/ref=kinw_rke_tl_1)

Kevin Allen, 'The Hidden Agenda'

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hidden-Agenda-Proven-Business-Following-ebook/dp/B007JBBNKY/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1405499255&sr=1-1&keywords=Kevin+allen%27s+hidden+agenda](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hidden-Agenda-Proven-Business-Following-ebook/dp/B007JBBNKY/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1405499255&sr=1-1&keywords=Kevin+allen%27s+hidden+agenda)

*Arthur Weiss is the CEO of AWARE, specialising in CI analysis, research & training. Arthur has worked in CI since the 1980s initially with Dun & Bradstreet and now with AWARE, established in 1995. Arthur is known as an expert in online intelligence; a particular interest is understanding competitor behaviour and cultural aspects impacting CI. He has written widely, lectured, led workshops on CI as well as shared his unique insights on game theory and social media's value to CI with the UK chapter with excellent feedback. Arthur is a chartered member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, and holds a BSc. in Biochemistry and an MBA.*

*Andrew Beurschgens is the Head of Market Intelligence at the UK mobile network operator, EE, the JV between Orange and T-Mobile. In cooperation with other volunteers from both the practitioner and supply side of the competitive intelligence discipline, Andrew is acting Volunteer of the UK Chapter. He is both a Catalyst Award winner as well as individually recognised for his volunteer services to the profession, its members and currently serves on the SCIP Global Advisory Board. He can be reached at [info@ukcif.co.uk](mailto:info@ukcif.co.uk)*