

TITLE: Defining Analyst Productivity

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*Objective evaluation  
of the subjective*

## DEFINING ANALYST PRODUCTIVITY

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The Directorate of Intelligence has centered its attention on improving organizational productivity by emphasizing the increased flow of high-quality memorandums. While the goal is straightforward the measurement of success—at least in terms of quality—is not. The evaluation of product quality is subjective; more often than not the determination is made within the organization rather than by intended consumers. Moreover, it is difficult to weigh the relative contributions of various types of intelligence production. The debate between the respective merits of current reporting and in-depth analysis has persisted for years. It is similarly difficult to address the relative contributions of written monographs, oral briefings and, increasingly, videotaped presentations.

The problem of improving DDI production is exacerbated by the relative inexperience of DDI analysts and first-line managers. Our business in many ways requires a complex and often subtle set of skills. Specifically, accomplished intelligence officers have developed a unique set of research, analysis, and expository talents along with a clear appreciation of policymaker needs. These talents have traditionally been developed and honed by extensive on-the-job experience; the trick is to accelerate this process.

A number of steps have been taken to address the issue of improved DDI productivity. To better ensure a consistently high-quality product, DDI intelligence production receives an in-depth high-level review. Concomitantly DDI managers have been encouraged to develop a rapport with their major consumers as a means of both gaining an understanding of intelligence community needs and nurturing honest criticism of Agency production. A number of management and analyst training programs have been initiated to increase the skill base at the working level. The subjective nature of the product, however, has made and will continue to make productivity improvements difficult.

### **Intelligence Directorate Product**

A full discussion of the DDI “product” could easily fill several pages. Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, and the product, by design, takes many forms—daily and weekly periodicals gisting key events for high-level recipients, the dissemination of in-depth monographs on specific topics of interest, individual briefings, and informal dialogue with working level colleagues in the intelligence consuming agencies. It is not my intent to provide a definitive description of DDI production but rather to establish a baseline definition

which sets the stage for the ensuing analysis of productivity. For purposes of discussion therefore, I would assert that:

The Intelligence Directorate exists to analyze and report to high-level policymakers on foreign political, military, and economic trends and activities. The quality of DDI products is determined by their relevance, prescience, analytical foundation, and the cogency and incisiveness of exposition.

### Criteria for Measuring Productivity

Judgments regarding analyst productivity have differed both among and within DDI offices. In part, these differences stem from varying office perspectives on the nature of their contribution. Some place great stock in preparing analysis for the daily periodicals while others put great store by the development of a cadre of experts capable of providing sophisticated analysis upon request.

Line managers, in turn, have traditionally drawn from personal experience when guiding analyst development and deciding upon criteria for analysts' performance appraisal reports (PARs). As a result, analysts have differing perceptions regarding the nature and quality of their individual contribution and how it can be improved. Reviewers of analyst files—particularly from other offices—must often guess at the ability of analysts to function within the reviewers' respective environments. DDI management courses, while going into detail on the performance evaluation process, offer less in the way of clearly delineating those criteria that distinguish analyst productivity.

I believe clear guidelines addressing analyst productivity would be a major step toward alleviating these problems, benefiting analysts and managers alike. The former would gain from a set of performance criteria which accurately capture their expected contribution and thereby give them a clear determination of their relative strengths and weaknesses. The latter would be forced to validate their judgments of analyst performance in terms of a standard definition of productivity.

The following five criteria, allowing for variations in wording to reflect individual circumstances, capture what I think is the essence of analyst productivity within the DDI. While the following exposition is pertinent for political economists, the PAR criteria could easily be altered to take other disciplines into account. The criteria are:

- The research of political/economic phenomena within assigned areas of responsibility.
- The analysis of those phenomena.
- Written and oral exposition.
- Awareness of policy interest in assigned areas of responsibility.
- Participation in the coordination and review process.

*Productivity*

While research, analysis, exposition, and policy relevance can be discussed independently, there is a strong synergistic relationship among the four. A good understanding of policy needs focuses information collection and the thrust of the ensuing analytical effort. Good research and analytical skills lend themselves to a cogent exposition, while good expository talents, in turn, help focus the analytical thrust of the paper. This synergism is perhaps the main reason behind the difficulty in delineating analyst productivity; it is what makes our business an art rather than a science. Nonetheless, by paying specific attention to the factors described below both analysts and managers can better identify strengths and weaknesses and, in so doing, improve the quality of future work.

*Research.* Research skills, in their broadest sense, are evidenced by the breadth and richness of the material that individual intelligence analysts are able to bring together as part of the analytical effort. Specifically, good research skills bring to the analyst's desk policy-relevant information which might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The analytical process, in turn, determines the direction and scope of additional research. In other words, the parameters of the analytical effort are often determined by the initial base of information while the outcome of analysis is influenced by the research tools utilized. To this end good research minimizes the potential for errors of omission or commission which can debase the credibility of otherwise excellent analysis.

In my estimation, an analyst's research capabilities are determined by his/her:

- Imaginative use of intelligence community collection and information retrieval systems, including the development of fruitful dialogues with intelligence collectors.
- Use of automated data processing capabilities and the resources of programming specialists to optimize data management and analysis.
- Ability to adjust the duration and sophistication of research endeavors in line with topic complexity and system-imposed time constraints.
- Proper filing of intelligence data and imaginative use, as appropriate, (b)(3)(c)
- Active review of relevant analysis conducted elsewhere within the government or within the private sector.

*Analysis.* The analytical process is understandably the most difficult to evaluate in an objective manner. The diversity of subject matter and product does not lend itself to broad generalizations and the analytical process is appropriately different for each line analyst. Nonetheless there are characteristics that affect the quality of intelligence analysis across the DDI. These include the analyst's:

- Ability to work independently or as part of a group.

- Creativity to do analysis based on incomplete data.
- Vision to look forward in time.
- Character to make judgments when all the facts are not known or to state when there is insufficient information to support a judgment.
- Acceptance of the need to incorporate divergent opinions into individual analysis and the willingness to seek alternative viewpoints from both within and without the US intelligence community.
- Ability to tackle complex issues in depth as well as do short-fuse policy support.

*Exposition.* Analysts often underestimate the importance of clear exposition to the quality of the final product and the positive role they can play in this process; many find the review process onerous and counterproductive. Rather than working diligently to improve their writing skills so as to minimize editorial changes, they accept extensive review as a necessary cost. Similarly, analysts and managers often pay insufficient attention to strengthening briefing skills as a means of improving the impact of the analysis on the policymaker. The following criteria, while targeted toward written exposition, can be easily amended for those whose product is presented orally. These skills include:

- Cogency and clarity of exposition.
- Ability to meet short deadlines and length limitations.
- Imaginative use of charts and graphs.
- Policy focus of the presentation.

*Policy Interest.* If our product is to have any impact or, for that matter, to be read at all, it must be pertinent to policymaker interest. This holds true both for the general subject and the focus of our analysis on the subject in question. Too often analysts, and for that matter first-line supervisors, relegate policymaker contacts to upper management; research plans, the timing of papers, and the focus of analysis are determined with only a general sense of the need downtown. There is, in fact, a major role that can and should be played at the working level. Dialogue with potential consumers serves to locate specific policymaker interests, to identify gaps in his knowledge base, and to suggest the appropriate timing of the product. This same dialogue will serve to elicit honest criticism and comment that serve to improve future intelligence production. To this end, analysts should be judged, in part, on their:

- Development of working level contacts within the intelligence community and with government agencies that make and carry out policy.
- Review of open press coverage—newspapers and periodicals—discussing policy interest on assigned areas of responsibility.

**Productivity**

*Coordination and Review.* An analyst's productivity goes beyond his personal research, analysis, and drafting. Analysts, and often first-line managers as well, tend to lose sight of the corporate nature of our business. The product should reflect the full knowledge of the Directorate. Our readership deserves no less while our masthead indicates that this, in fact, is the case.

The coordination and review process can substantially improve quality by incorporating additional facts, judgments, and perspective and by improving the paper's exposition. An analyst's productivity is significantly enhanced by his positive and creative participation in this process. Many analysts, however, tend to be very parochial about their work, making the review and coordination process contentious and laborious. The resulting frustrations, over time, often lead to an equally undesirable throwing up of the hands and increasing analyst detachment from—and thereby a declining commitment to—his paper as it winds its way through the review process.

The full participation of analysts in coordinating papers authored by others is equally important. Too often analysts regard coordination responsibilities as a drag on their own efforts. If the paper does not threaten their own "turf," coordination tends to be superficial; gross errors or omissions are highlighted, but differing perspectives or the availability of additional information are not communicated. The coordination of papers touching on turf, in contrast, is often dominated by confrontation, nitpicking, and other obstructionist tactics; all too rarely can competing analysts sublimate their respective egos to the greater end of a fully integrated product. Those analysts who do play an active and positive role in the coordination process often have a significant impact on the quality of the Directorate's product; their contribution in this area, however, often goes unrecognized by line managers.

**Role of the Line Manager**

The role of the line manager is critical in identifying analyst strengths and weaknesses and otherwise nurturing analyst improvement. To play a credible role in enhancing productivity, the line manager must have a clear understanding both of the factors his office considers most pertinent to measuring productivity and of how his analysts stack up against these criteria. He must subsequently impart this information to his staff; specifically, he must make sure his analysts understand the productivity criteria and, accordingly, their strengths and weaknesses. The PAR system provides a vehicle for such discussions but does not mandate them. It is significant, in my opinion, that managers are forced to quantify analyst productivity as part of competitive ranking exercises but need not relay this information to the analysts. While I would agree a manager-analyst discussion of the competitive ranking criteria could prove unduly confrontational and counterproductive, a clear and honest discussion of analyst productivity should not be left off the table.

Improving analyst productivity need not be an onerous and confrontational process. Strong analysts seek guidance on how to further improve their skills while weaker ones benefit from constructive and specific guidance from the line supervisor. The process fails when either the analyst is not made fully

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aware of his relative strengths and deficiencies or—if informed—is not given concrete guidance on ways to improve his performance. Such breakdowns in communication often can be traced to the inability of line managers and analysts to clearly understand the nature of the productive process. This discussion offers one man's views on how to ameliorate this problem; other guidelines may be equally appropriate.