

Platt's Law

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All old-time analysts in the profession have heard of Platt's Law; few are familiar with its exact terms. Like Darwin's theory of evolution, it has often been distorted or misrepresented, giving rise to grave errors. For the guidance of the young we publish herewith the original formulation of this seminal discovery, as recently exhumed from ancient files.

25 August 1951

Mr. Sherman Kent

Office of National Estimates, CIA

My dear Mr. Kent:

As one of the earliest purchasers and most constant readers of your classic on "Strategic Intelligence," I am writing to invite your attention to the omission from your (otherwise) excellent book of a fundamental principle in the production of intelligence.

Assume the following situation:

1. You have prepared after much thought and wide discussion the first draft of an Intelligence Estimate. This draft contains certain details and statements which your careful study of the problem leads you to believe should be included.
2. This first draft is reviewed by the first echelon above your own. Members of this echelon read your details. After thus getting the benefit of your explanations, they find these details self-evident and so eliminate them from the paper along with many of your other pet phrases. So the second draft is prepared stripped to the bare essentials.
3. The second higher echelon, on reviewing the second draft thus cut to the bone, finds many of the bare statements lacking in proper justification or background. This second echelon therefore insists on the inclusion of more explanation and details. So the third draft is prepared, restoring the details and pet explanatory phrases which echelon No. 1 cut out.
4. In turn, the next higher echelon reviewing this third draft and receiving the benefit of the explanations now once more included, finds these details unnecessary and cuts them out. ...
5. And so on, from echelon of review to echelon of review ad infinitum.

General Principle derived from the above universal experience:

Whether or not the necessary explanatory details and pet phrases of an intelligence paper appear in the paper as finally published, depends entirely upon whether the number of higher groups which successively

review the paper is even or odd respectively.

I have, Sir, the honor to be your humble follower in the study of
fundamental intelligence principles,

Washington PLATT
Brigadier General USAR-Hon.

one-time AC of S, G2 Armored Force
" AC of S, G-2 XIX Corps in ETO
" Commanding General 98th Infantry Division
now Lower echelon Intelligence Officer, OSI-CIA

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