

The Profile of a Successful Private Sector Intelligence Analyst

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Abstract

A number of genres are represented within the private sector intelligence sphere, including technical, protective, business, and geopolitical intelligence. Thus, a variety of organizations benefit from these intelligence professionals' work. Technology firms, the oil and gas sector, media and entertainment conglomerates, startups, restaurants, hospitality organizations, and nonprofit businesses have all expanded to utilize private sector intelligence in their strategic decision-making. As a result, the cadre of professionals in the field has grown, and the profile of those who best fit the job continues to evolve. Today's successful private sector intelligence professionals come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences - for example, former government personnel often have experience at organizing data effectively and identifying useful resources, while journalists are often adept at investigating themes, asking appropriate questions, and writing concise and compelling pieces.

This piece identifies five key attributes that cut across the private sector intelligence community to set an intelligence professional up for success. At the heart of an intelligence professional is a strong intellectual curiosity, a collaborative mindset, adaptability, and excellent communication and time management skills. When paired with core competencies such as research proficiency, analytic aptitude,

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and subject matter expertise, these attributes are the building blocks of success.

Keywords: Private Sector; intelligence analyst; adaptability, analytic aptitude, collaboration, research proficiency, subject matter expertise, intellectual curiosity, communication

Introduction

Whether we think about supply chains, global markets, multinational partnerships or international technology platforms, the impact of geopolitics and the dynamic pace of business on companies - large and small - have increased in scope such that having an intelligence capability has become integral to strategic decision-making. In many companies, this capability helps to forecast key trends that could impact a business's bottom line or mitigate personal security or brand risks; in others, it serves as a strategic advantage across sectors: identifying new markets, limiting liabilities, and enabling decision-makers to direct operations with greater insight. In this context, as the cadre of professionals in the private sector intelligence arena continues to grow, the profile of those who have the necessary skills to be successful in the field continues to evolve, as well. Moreover, given the number of sub-fields within this genre (including technical, protective, business, and geopolitical), many organizations benefit from these intelligence professionals' work. Technology firms, the oil and gas sector, media and entertainment conglomerates, startups, restaurants, hospitality organizations, and nonprofit businesses have all expanded to utilize private sector intelligence in their strategic decision-making. At the same time, many companies also maintain a unique organizational culture, meaning that there are a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences that can make an individual a best fit for a given organization, in addition to having the skills that will set them up for success.

According to Fahey and Herring, "an intelligence team is a group of individuals who work together to develop a deep understanding of a specific business issue with the intent of developing strategy-relevant insights, action possibilities, and recommendations."¹ Fahey and Herring further note that team members are drawn from diverse functional departments or organizational units charged with generating insights that "add significant value to decision making." There is significant latitude in this description, but the core component is an understanding of a company's decision-making needs at any given time, and the ability to contribute relevant insights. Thus, when building an intelligence capability, identifying the right individuals with the requisite skills is a necessary first step. The intelligence field - both within the government Intelligence Community (IC) and the emerging corporate world of intelligence professionals - is full of individuals who have excellent research skills: people who know how to dig for information via both conventional and unconventional means, identify useful sources, and validate information. Most intelligence professionals also have a solid analytic competency, with the ability to synthesize large amounts of data into a digestible format that adds value for the consumer; these analysts know how to create insights