

# From Prescription to Opportunity: An Evolutionary Model for Corporate Intelligence

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## Abstract

*The current concept of intelligence in the corporate sector is fundamentally flawed and self-limiting. A predominant focus on providing security-centric insights results in a form of intelligence that, while it may purport to follow its practices and processes, fails to harness the full scope and accretive power of the discipline. Countering this pernicious trend requires a better framework for summing – and dissociating – various ‘modifier intelligence’ functions as they relate to the needs of business. To this end, we propose three distinct waves in the evolution of corporate intelligence: ‘prescriptive intelligence,’ the myopic first wave, strives to answer tactical requirements for a security audience. ‘Risk intelligence,’ a second, proto-strategic wave, aspires to answer larger enterprise concerns in the geo-political realm, but is constrained by its mooring in security and risk. ‘Opportunity intelligence,’ a fully mature third wave, leverages the full scope of a company’s internal resources, along with external expertise, to empower enterprise-wide decision flexibility as a solution to the strategy paradox in business planning. We argue that opportunity intelligence, which alone carries the potential for revolutionary innovation to drive business growth, should be the sine qua non of private-sector intelligence programs for any serious enterprise operating on a global scale.*

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## Introduction

Around the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, C.E., a consensus arose among Islamic jurists that their combined power of interpretation had reached its limit, that all determinative questions of Islamic law had been thoroughly debated and settled. What followed was, as scholars have described it, the *insidad bab al-ijtihad*, the closing of the gate of independent reasoning. In mainstream Islamic jurisprudence, this represented the fixed moment beyond which, “all future activity would have to be confined to the explanation, application, and, at most, interpretation of the doctrine as it had been laid down once and for all.”<sup>1</sup> Although the reality of the subsequent evolution of Islamic legal practice may to an extant call into question how tightly the gate of *ijtihad* was in fact sealed, the relatively conservative character of the main schools of Islamic law owes itself to the establishment of this orthodoxy more than a millennium ago. The practice of intelligence as a professional discipline in the corporate sphere is (one certainly hopes) hardly to be compared to a religion; however, the field suffers under a prevailing paradigm that, like the *insidad bab al-ijtihad*, has been broadly taken to preclude anything other than finding novel, eye-catching ways to implement entrenched doctrine.

As common sense and common practice in the private sector would have it, intelligence belongs exclusively in a security vertical<sup>2</sup>; answers almost exclusively questions of significance to tactical decision-making and immediate threat mitigation; and is prescriptive in proscribing even the most non-exclusive risks, down to the level of individual employees. Both this status quo and the approach to corporate intelligence underlying it are deeply flawed. Yet, even large and sophisticated global enterprises, among them Fortune 500 companies, continue to pursue intelligence programs within these pinched parameters, often at significant cost and to little demonstrable benefit beyond the perennial argument-from-the-negative of “loss avoidance.” In the absence of a dynamic model of intelligence in the corporate setting, the staid and self-limiting orthodoxy continues to prevail.

In this article, we propose to decouple the realities of security from the art of intelligence in a corporate context. We frame a more flexible, evolutionary model rooted in a radical, if surprisingly rudimentary, driver: leverage information to create opportunity, not mitigate risk. The three-wave model we propose *de novo* will thus not be entirely unfamiliar to practitioners of intelligence as a function of state actors; it is in fact meant to provide C-suite executives the type of decision advantage and decision confidence heads of government expect from their intelligence apparatus, albeit by differing methods and for different ends.