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Intelligence ideals

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Abstract
This paper is a call for a new research agenda for the topic of intelligence counterbalancing the present domination of research in the art and function of intelligence. Pursuing this path will help the intelligence academics connect to theoretical developments gained elsewhere and move towards establishing an intelligence science.

Keywords: Ideal informative flow, Ideal organizational thinking, Intelligence science, Intelligence scholars, Intelligence academics, Organized intelligence.

1 Introduction
In this paper I’m discussing two different perspectives on intelligence research: intelligence as a topic respectively intelligence as an art and a function, where I argue that both are in need but that the research on the topic so far is underdeveloped. Unfortunately the current focus on the art and the function has created a strong inside perspective that unnecessarily limit our understanding of what intelligence contains, does and mean to organizations.

In accordance with this reasoning I also suggest a more critical stance towards the intelligence cycle, the most used model for explaining intelligence. The cycle has severe deficits as it’s created within a functional perspective on organizations and in conjunction with theories of formal decision-making. It supports a false belief that an ideal informative flow not only can be created but also is of utmost importance to organizations. Alas the poor empirical fit leaves us with an array of intelligence aspects unaccounted for.

The continuous use of the intelligence cycle might therefore seem puzzling, but it can be explained by its conceptual values (It's easy to use and understand) and that it works as a rational symbol bringing legitimacy both to those organizations implementing formal intelligence activities and to the intelligence professionals who manages this idealized informative flow.

Taking this stance I argue that there will never be a true science of intelligence until the field opens up to other research questions and traditions than those currently in favor. Several initiatives can
support this development, where I especially hope for the development of arenas that will allow dialogues on the topic of intelligence to prosper. To find and agree upon a term depicting the unit of study, free from those currently in use, will also enable this development. My own suggestion for this term is organized intelligence work. Researchers adhering to this call will also strengthen their positions as intelligence academics, counter-balancing the present domination of intelligence scholars.

In addition I argue that we must accept different and complimentary perspectives on the function of organized intelligence work. Instead of just supporting formal decision making through an informative flow apparent in the intelligence cycle, it's also possible to view organized intelligence as for example a function for supporting an ideal organizational thinking and thus the competiveness of the organization. Viewing intelligence in different ways we will be able to explore several other aspects of intelligence that the cycle fail to disclose.

2 Research as we know it

Discussing intelligence research one often come to the conclusion that the present status is everything but satisfying. Solberg Søilen [2005:16] writes, "The study of private and public intelligence has barely started as a positive area of a research, 'a science' probably being too big a word." Several researcher claims there's lot to be done. There are arguments for more systematic research [e.g. Ganesh, Miree and Prescott 2003; Svensson Kling 1998], more quantitative studies [e.g. Calof 2006], or just better research [e.g. Fleisher, Wright and Tindale 2007].

Some research areas also seem to have been neglected. In the Call for papers to this conference one could read "there has also been a tendency to focus on the larger enterprise such as multinationals, with less attention being paid to business development and business creation, or entrepreneurship." And I'd like to add non-profit organizations and NGO:s.

According to just these few examples, it seems apparent that there's a need for more (and better) research. But to me, this picture of an immature field of research is not at all enough. The most prominent problem is, to my judgment, that it has limited itself to the art and function of competitive intelligence and therefore is constructed too close to the practice.

The effect is a prevailing emphasis on practice theories - how to do and organize intelligence - and insufficient creation of organizational theories - what intelligence mean and do to organizations. Not to mention societal effects due to the continuous expansion of organized intelligence activities. The current research tradition will therefore create results with only limited value to those researchers and laymen who are not familiar with the subject of intelligence.

Regardless of this, one might argue that we at least over the years have developed a deep understanding of how we ought to do intelligence, but I'm not that sure. Even though current research is focused on how-to-do-intelligence, too often presented studies fall back on definitions of the art or the function that are not solidly grounded.

The abyss of the problem becomes apparent when Jonathan Calof [2006:11-12], summarizing an academic track on a SCIP conference, states that there is a need to investigate what intelligence managers exactly does and that "it's been suggested that the [intelligence] model may be prescriptive, not descriptive." To me this is not barely a suggestion but a fact, and in that perspective Calof's statement can be read that more or less all research up to 2006 (at least) is based on a questionable prescriptive model together with other ungrounded assumptions of what intelligence managers does. It is not built on unprejudiced empirical studies of what is actually being done. The thought is breath taking.
3 What support and what decisions?

But, as some might argue, there are theories about what intelligence does to organizations; it supports the decision-making processes inside the organization.

Even though I agree to some extent with this description, I’d like to pose two important questions: Is this all that intelligence do to organizations, and does it really support all kinds of decisions? These questions are of course rhetoric, but still important as they question the normal way of defining intelligence. Intelligence and those creating it does a whole lot of other things in and with organizations, but current descriptions of intelligence as decision support tend to limit the intelligence subject to more formal decision-making, leaving all other kinds of activities unaccounted for.

Already from this brief overview we can derive a possible explanation why intelligence appears to be prescriptive instead of descriptive, and why this creates problems for researchers. As long as we chose to describe intelligence in the context of formal decision-making, intelligence will be nothing less than the logic and deductive result derived from an idea that organizations are controlled by formal decision. Intelligence will in this perspective be explained as the process that makes formal decision possible, feeding correct information to the decision-makers so that rational choices can be made.

Theories come before empirical data, which in consequence will allow a poor fit with reality. In consequence we will only be able to study those aspects that theory permit us to study, at the same time we will be blind to aspects that are not accounted for in the theories guiding our understanding. This deductive way of reasoning will favor those aspects that are apparent in the intelligence cycle, the model that comes with the favored theories. It will not give a viable account of reality, which is where most research is conducted, why it will also give researchers problems in handling data that do not comply with guiding theories.

Unfortunately for those who still like to limit the field to this restricted view on intelligence, the value of formal decision-making has long been discussed and questioned since the upspring of empirically based decision making theories in the late 1950's. Lindbloms [1959] article *The science of muddling through* and March and Olsens [1979] *garbage can theory* are just the starting points of a discussion of how organizational decisions really are made. We could also add Simons [1945, 1982, 1991] extensive work on *bounded rationality* leaving all humans with just one option: to seek satisfying decisions instead of ideal decisions. What these theories are saying is that rational decisions can't be made. They are ideals resting on obsolete perspectives on organizations that surfaced about 100 years ago with Weber, Fayol and Taylor. The only places where we will find them nowadays are in our dreams; and in textbooks on strategy Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel [1998] would add.

To resolve this troublesome situation we'd better accept the limitations of formal decision-making [see e.g. Brunsson 2002; Mintzberg 1973; Mintzberg et al. 1998], but also accept that most decisions inside organizations are of other types, as Lord and Maher [1991] argues. Besides this, focusing on decisions we will not fully understand what other organizational activities are in need of intelligence, and how they are related to one another.

Of course there are still formal decisions, and they do count. But, according to my research (interviewing different intelligence professionals and their clients) the big formal and strategic decisions are exceptions to the rule, not the rule itself.

What my research has brought into light is that the art of intelligence, just like the art of management, is the art (not science) of muddling through. It's much more focused on the everyday troubles of the
intelligence clients where the intelligence staff struggles to make their clients take more contextual aspects into account in their work, instead of relying on their present limited understanding of things.

It's also a much more symbiotic relationship where information not only is retrieved, analyzed and disseminated. Instead, information is much more shared in a two way game, and analysis is created within conversations expanding beyond the formal intelligence function. As an example, one of my informants let the analysis evolve through letting it pass through different discussions where each discussion added different perspectives to the analysis but also helped to decide what the next step would be and who else to involve. At the same time those involved shared their information and ideas (aka knowledge) of the subject at hand, and in this manner created a common and actionable understanding of things.

4 An ideal way of organizational thinking

Judging by my empirical data a complimentary view of what intelligence professionals actually do is to say that they are supporting an ideal organizational way of thinking. That is a thinking that will contribute to the wellbeing of the organization, which can be defined in three dimensions:

- Think beyond what’s happening right now. Expand your reasoning into possible future developments.
- Think beyond those aspects closest at hand and the actors and organizations that are directly affected by each issue. Expand your reasoning to aspects, actors and organizations that are indirectly affected.
- Think beyond your own and your organizations' interests. Judge the situation from several perspectives and chose the path that's the best for your organization, not for you.

Through their actions, products and tools intelligence professionals aim at making people expand their reasoning in these three dimensions: beyond their own bounded position in time, room and interests. But it's also about making their clients aware of their shortcomings, to never be satisfied with their present understanding of things, and acting to do something about it.

The products, the artifacts of intelligence, are just tools to accomplish this changed reasoning. Just because intelligence artifacts exist doesn't mean that they have a real value as ends in themselves. They are means not ends. Regretfully we are likely to view them as ends if we rely on the intelligence cycle as the main model for describing intelligence (as many tend to do, according to Ganesh et al. [2003] and Treverton [2004]).

Relying on the intelligence cycle, it's quite easy to argue that the effectiveness of intelligence can be found in its material output, as the cycle defines intelligence as a production process. It's a seductive stance that invites us to think intelligence can be easily described, controlled and measured. As this view rests on an assumption of functional rationality one might also claim that the intelligence professionals set to work in this process are neutral, putting together objective intelligence for the outspoken need of others. But once again, these are just ungrounded ideas that crumble in contact with reality. All people who deal with information are limited to their own bounded abilities to search, value and analyze information [Simon 1945, 1982, 1991]. But that's not all, where Jeffrey Pfeffer [1992] writes:

"Our belief that there is a right answer to most situations and that this answer can be uncovered by analysis and illuminated with more information means that those in control of the facts and the analysis can exercise substantial influence. And facts are seldom so clear cut, so unambiguous, as we might think. The manipulation and presentation of facts and analysis are often
critical elements of a strategy to exercise power effectively. [247-248]"

This is a most troublesome statement for those who like to believe that intelligence professionals serve decision-makers with non-biased information and analysis [e.g. Furustig and Sjöstedt 2000; Murphy 2005]. But if we instead chose to see intelligence professionals as organizational agents for an ideal organizational thinking this problem dissolves. In this perspective intelligence professionals are supposed to influence and exercise power. They are supposed to manipulate the information to make their clients change their thinking, reaching beyond their present understanding of things.

That my informants engage themselves in war games and workshops is in this perspective nothing strange. Instead these two examples can be viewed as most effective tools to reach the main objectives of intelligence: to help people think and act better. This is the true mission of intelligence work, not the production of intelligence artifacts.

Viewing intelligence as something that goes beyond the material output and the clear-cut boundaries of the intelligence function will open up several unexplored dimensions of intelligence. Dimensions that will add to our understanding of what intelligence managers exactly do (to comment on Calo’s statement above) and what intelligence does to organizations. These dimensions have no definite end, and intelligence will accordingly never be fully explored, not to say easily defined and measured.

5 Intelligence is bubbling

This calls for another note of caution as most writers in the field of intelligence indirectly suppose that the art of intelligence is restricted to those who have it in their job descriptions. This is not at all true, as I argue above. But I'm far from first. John Prescott noticed this 20 years ago [Prescott and Smith 1989] but has also touched upon in later studies [e.g. Gibbons and Prescott 1996]. Even more explicit is Sven Hamrefors [1999] who forcefully argues that all people inside an organization seek the meaning in their specific situation creating their own intelligence if no one else helps them with it.

Unfortunately these important studies are more or less neglected by other researchers. What this research tells us is that intelligence is created everywhere. "It bubbles", as one of my informants put it, continuing to explain that it was her job to support this bubbling intelligence. And this is not a small remark at the side of the page. What this tells us is that we can't restrict the intelligence subject just to those who have it in their job descriptions.

Furthermore it also tells us that at least some intelligence professionals right now strive to support the creation of useful intelligence wherever it might surface. Stating this, it becomes apparent that we no longer can't limit the creation of intelligence to some specific formal unit and the use of intelligence to some other formal place. Because if we do, we're in the business of adjusting empirical data so it will fit with our favored theories.

To raise the stake I'll argue that for most organizations the informally constructed intelligence is much more important than the formal intelligence [see also Gibbons and Prescott 1996]. This is mainly because the informally constructed intelligence is created closer to the user, those who are supposed to act on it. Acting is much more dependent on what we feel and think and not on so-called impartial information, especially if it comes in writing [Brunsson 2002].

With reference to Hamrefors [1999] it can also be argued that informal intelligence activities always precede formal intelligence. Therefore it's not surprising that most of my informants actively seek to involve their clients in the analytical processes of intelligence. Remember, the intelligence processes and artifacts are just tools to support a strive for an ideal organizational thinking. To make the
organizations members do intelligence, and do it better, is inside the normal definition of the job.

The intelligence I'm describing is the intelligence carried out in live organizations, not theoretically restricted organizations. The live situation is also what real intelligence professionals adapt to. They do not adapt to artificially prescriptive ideas of how intelligence is supposed to work according to some dominating theories on intelligence (unless they're formally or mentally circumscribed).

Furthermore, intelligence is in its adaption a much more emergent task than planned. My informants are pretty much left to themselves to create results that make a difference [see also Treverton 2004, 106]. To view them as simply answering to the commands and whims of formal decision makers is not to make them or their profession justice. This is actually also one of Benjamin Gilad's [2008] main points when he spurs the new intelligence professionals to go for the fun.

6 The importance of water

But how does this agree with the normal way of describing intelligence? Can intelligence still be regarded as restricted to intelligence managers preparing analytical support for formal decision-making?

With this question comes a choice. It's quite possible to answer "yes", but with this yes comes an obligation to clearly state that the knowledge searched and gained is only viable within a restricted part of a wider field of research. Those who pursue this path cannot at the same time state that they cover the whole intelligence field. Those who make this choice will also be of little help building an intelligence science, covering other aspects and perspective on intelligence that their outspoken position will hinder them to acknowledge.

As I've argued a more becoming answer is "no", as this will allow us to explore intelligence more candidly. Unfortunately there are many writers and researchers who don't agree with me, where the most outspoken seem to be Benjamin Gilad [e.g. 1988, 1996, 2003]. Even though Gilad often takes a pragmatic stand, his writing usually revolves around formal structures for the creation of formal intelligence for formal decisions at the top levels of organizations.

To carry it further, Gilads works can be viewed as important contributions in a writing tradition that focus on practical advice and analytical aspects of intelligence, according to Solberg Søilen [2005]. With this I agree, but I must disagree when Solberg Søilen asserts that we should stick to this tradition in building an intelligence science, especially as Solberg Søilen states "It should be a positive science in the sense that it should not mix science with too much philosophy."[Ibid:14]

On the contrary, I must dispute, if we want a true science to emerge we need to accept different philosophical foundations for its knowledge constructs. But that's not all. There will never be a true science of intelligence as long as researchers fail to recognize the existence of different knowledge interests, and/or just keep researching the art and function of intelligence. The problem with this path is that it most likely will hinder those pursuing it to create a fertile distance between themselves and the subject their researching.

As a lot of intelligence research is constructed today it lacks in independence from the practice and in consequence will never gain the trust of academia. The how-to-do-intelligence tradition of the field has created an inside perspective that works like a paradigm for how to think and do research on intelligence. Of course people on the inside might call this a science, but this doesn't mean that those on the outside will agree.

The media theorist Marshall McLuhan [1995:35] once said that "we don't know who discovered water, but we are pretty sure it wasn't a fish." Building on this metaphor it can be argued that as long as most researchers are swimming in the
same water as the practitioners, they will never be able to discover how much the water's influencing both their perception and their chances to give a viable account of what intelligence is really about.

Of course there is a lot of good things to be known about the swimming habits of fish, but it will not tell us anything useful about the water or how seagulls regard fish (except that fish better stay clear of the surface). What we need is a reflective division between the practice and the science, where we once again can use the idea to divide between the topic respectively the art and the function.

To find ideas how to make this division we can learn from others who already have done it. My suggestion is that we turn to the subject of marketing.

7 Learning from the emergence of marketing

Ingmar Tufvesson [2005] describes how marketing over a hundred years became both a practice and a science. The marketing subject was formed in the 1950's but it was not until the 1980's a more independent and critical research tradition formed [see also Vironmäki 2007; Svensson 2007].

One of the problems slowing down the process was that both practitioners and researchers shared the same theories, models and concepts but due to different knowledge interests put different meanings to the symbols and words used. Tufvesson illustrates this clash of contexts in figure 1. Due to this conflict a lot of time and energy got wasted in disputes over how marketing was to be approached and understood. A conflict that in retrospect could have been resolved sooner if those involved would have shown a more benign attitude towards one another.

Over the years more and more researchers took an interest in marketing, more business schools put marketing on their curriculum, and after a while independent periodicals emerged. These periodicals were very important as they allowed the researchers to develop their ideas independent from more practical demands from the marketing professionals. Today a situation has developed where business schools, according to Vironmäki [2007], incorporate both "marketing academics" (focusing on marketing as a topic), and "marketing scholars" (focusing on marketing as a function). Both are in need as they serve different knowledge interests, Vironmäki concludes.

8 Intelligence academics and intelligence scholars

I believe there are some important things that the field of intelligence can learn from the development of marketing.

First, we must accept that the process of creating a science will take time.
Second, there is most likely a need of both intelligence academics and intelligence scholars, and that both have a rightful place in the business school environment not to mention creating knowledge about intelligence. Although a clear division between scholars and academics is to be regarded as a theoretical simplification for the sake of argument. Nevertheless, this also poses a question how these two groups balances today? Judging by my research, most of contemporary writing focuses on the art and the function of intelligence, not the topic, and therefore can be classified as knowledge constructs for the intelligence scholars. The writings and knowledge for the intelligence academics are thus in wanting. The situation is maintained through a limited amount of intelligence academics, but also through the lack of independent periodicals and conferences where the topic of intelligence can be discussed without the influence of more practical aspects.

Fleisher, Wright and Tindale [2007] touches upon the problem with present intelligence writing when they encourage researchers to produce better articles: "The field would be better served in both the short and medium term [...], by articles appearing in well established disciplinary and cross-disciplinary outlets. It could be argued that until, and unless, high level research is carried out and published through well-accepted or well-read outlets, CI will never achieve its place at the board table or in the curriculum of degree-based programs at top business schools. [44]"

Although the authors solution is to make intelligence studies fit into already existing outlets, they indirectly argue that most intelligence research today haven't got the right qualities for getting published elsewhere than SCIP:s periodicals.

Another way of putting it is that most of present research isn't interesting enough for other academics. It fails to connect.

SCIP:s ongoing project of redesigning the Journal of Intelligence and Management, so that it will become more accepted in academia, is a most welcome initiative. But, I must regretfully admit that I do not think this will do at all. As long as SCIP is mainly a practitioners’ organization, there will always be restrictions for its periodicals to become the main arenas for discussions on the topic of intelligence.

I also like to stress that I don't suggest that neither SCIP nor its periodicals should change. The point is instead that those of us who are interested in the topic of intelligence can't expect someone else to do the job for us. Instead we have to form our own forums but also start to question existing and limiting ideas of the field, the normality that is maintained by the prominent inside perspective. Those who adhere to this call will at the same time attract attention to themselves, and in due time an avant-garde of intelligence academics will form.

9 Coming to terms with organized intelligence work

Returning to the example of marketing, intelligence is not a field that has come together over one single denominating term. Numerous are the discussions if the intelligence field should be labeled competitive intelligence, business intelligence or something equivalent.

I suggest that we leave all the existing labels of the art or function to the practitioners. Instead we, the intelligence researchers, have the opportunity to find a term of our own. A term that separates the academic field from the intelligence practice, but also allows us to embrace all intelligence activities that are carried out regardless of the label. Let us focus on what's actually being done instead, and find a term that describes what we study.

My own suggestion is that we should use the term organized intelligence work. Today this term is unaccounted for and relates to one of the first (and still viable) academic works on intelligence: Harold
Wilenskys book *Organizational Intelligence - Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry* [1967]. Unfortunately Wilenskys term *organizational intelligence* is used in a discussion about organizations displaying human like intelligence (smartness), constraining the direct adoption of this particular term.

Picking up the term *organized intelligence* work we will also free ourselves from unnecessary restrictions that epithets as "business" or "competitive" brings to mind. Hence giving us a chance to research the field without being forced to accept, or worse adapt to, current definitions set by practitioners.

10 Out of the water

Taking this necessary step out of the water, addressing questions about the meaning of organized intelligence, I’ve conducted extensive reading of current CI-literature and literature on organization, decision-making and leadership.

In addition I’ve collected empirical data of intelligence from four different Swedish multinational companies. These studies were carried out in 2003 and 2006; encompassing twenty semi structured interviews. The final results are to be presented in my thesis *The myth of the rational flow* [Hoppe, *Myten om det rationella flödet*, 2009] October 2nd. Some of the arguments I've put forward in this paper are based on this research and writing, but there is more to be extracted.

I’ve already discussed the idea of an ideal organizational thinking and touched upon the idea of an ideal informative flow. I will now expand a bit on the latter as it can help us understand why many organizations use the intelligence cycle to explain why they chose to implement organized intelligence activities. In this discussion I’im distancing myself from the intelligence function, getting closer to the topic of intelligence.

11 The idea of an ideal informative flow

Supposing decisions makers knew what they needed to know, that sufficient intelligence could be collected to fulfill these needs, that all organizational interests could be satisfied in each decision, that decision makers could agree on the meaning of the collected intelligence and gain a common understanding of things, and that the rest of the organization easily would adhere to the decisions taken - only then would the intelligence cycles give an exhaustive description of how intelligence is created and used.

As both practitioners and academics know, these occasions are rare. Still, many organizations use the intelligence cycle for explaining the adoption of intelligence, and one might ask oneself why?

New institutional theory will provide us with an appealing answer. All organizations are in need of symbols that tell their interest holders that the organization is run in a rational way and that the management is in control [Brunsson 2002; Meyer and Rowan 1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Røvik 2000; Sjöstrand 1997]. To implement intelligence describing it in accordance with the intelligence cycle - as a function for formal decision-making - is just the type of easily used symbols of rationality organizations crave for. That the true organization and true intelligence doesn't live up to this ideal is of less importance to an organization in need of legitimacy.

To the intelligence professional the intelligence cycle also come in handy to describe what intelligence conceptually is about and why intelligence professionals, like themselves, are important to the organization.

According to my research these are the most important aspects (besides unreflected tradition) explaining the continuous use of the intelligence cycle. In this respect the cycle follows a political logic, not the logic of empirical description. As
the intelligence cycle, the idea of an ideal informative flow, has a political value it will most likely live on for a long time. What we, the intelligence researchers, should do is to simply accept this, but also recognize that we need other complimentary models and descriptions of intelligence: models and descriptions that will give us the freedom to develop an empirically grounded intelligence science.

12 Summery

In this paper I've compressed a vast and difficult discussion that revolves around some major problems with contemporary intelligence research but also the possibility of forming an intelligence science.

With inspiration from the emergence of marketing I've suggested that our understanding of intelligence can become better if we'd work together exploring the topic of intelligence, hence building a foundation for intelligence academics.

Doing this, the first step would be to acknowledge the existence of different, but still, legitimate knowledge interests and the second to find a term that depicts the unit of study for those interested in researching intelligence. For this second purpose I promote the term organized intelligence work.

We also need to find other models and perspectives on intelligence that will allow us to view this most important organizational phenomenon in new ways. The prevailing reliance on the intelligence cycle is most unfortunate as it rests on theoretical ideas that exhibit severe drawbacks confronted with empirically grounded data. To solve this situation I suggest we'll pay less attention to the material output of intelligence and instead focus on intelligence as a tool for supporting an ideal organizational thinking.

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