

Beyond Screening and Security

In a 2010 article, psychiatrist David Charney took a step beyond traditional screening models, proposing that regardless of motivation, once insider spies have crossed the line into espionage they tend to follow similar thought patterns that manifest in predictable behaviors.²⁵ Based on personal interviews with incarcerated spies, Charney postulated that the decision to spy is based on “an intolerable sense of personal failure, as privately defined by that person.” Once the spy has made the decision to engage in espionage, Charney identifies what he calls The Ten Life Stages of the Insider Spy: 1) the sensitizing stage, 2) the stress/spiral stage, 3) the crisis/climax/resolution stage, 4) the post-recruitment stage, 5) the remorse-morning-after stage, 6) the active spy career stage, 7) the dormancy stage(s), 8) the pre-arrest stage, 9) the arrest and post-arrest stage, and 10) the brooding in jail stage. Each stage represents a development in the spy’s effort to deal with their sense of personal failure by taking what they consider decisive action to boost their sense of worth. This is initially effective, but eventually the spy succumbs to second thoughts, feelings of regret, of being trapped, loneliness, and dependence on their handler. Charney’s theory also postulates that certain stages present windows in which, given specific incentives, the spy may choose to reveal their activities to an appropriate authority.

Finally, while not specifically a work of psychology, security expert Nick Catrantzos offers a method of dealing with the insider threat based on group psychology that is essentially independent of the motivation of the insider spy.²⁶ In recognizing the necessary role of security professionals in any organization, Catrantzos offers a method that focuses on the group dynamics of an office in an effort to promote specific group behaviors and values. He postulates that the insider spy operates in the “dark corners” between the efforts of security professionals and the measures that institute and insider’s fellow employees, who may not only feel security is not a loss they need be concerned with but may also be hostile to security practices they consider unnecessary or a hindrance. Catrantzos’ offers ideas on how both groups can work together in an effort to close those security gaps and allow no space where the insider spy can comfortably operate.

Problems in Understanding the Psychology of Espionage

Despite the significant threat spies pose to national security, relatively little published material is available to the general public regarding the psychology of espionage. Naturally, some research is and should remain classified in order to protect sources and methods. Other information may be withheld for legal reasons. What is available, however, still suffers from one key problem: there are (fortunately) not that many spies accessible to psychology professionals on which to base research. Statistical conclusions (such as the traits that would identify a propensity toward espionage) are less valid when based on a small sample size. When compared to the hundreds of thousands of cleared individuals who never commit

²⁵ Charney (2010)

²⁶ Catrantzos, N. (2012) *Managing the Insider Threat: No Dark Corners*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press

