The effective analyst

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In this 2nd article in a series of four articles, Janet takes us through the findings of research by her and Mark Kebbell on what makes intelligence analysts effective.

In the last issue I described how three themes emerged in the process of understanding what constitutes an effective analyst. In this issue I am going to explore in some detail the first theme as an indicator of an effective analyst, the *Analytical product.*

I find it difficult to reflect on the effectiveness an analyst without wanting to ask what they produce. I am not alone because of the thirty subject matter experts who contributed to the study all wanted to know about products. Responses were categorised into product development and the skills required to disseminate the product. Here the focus is developing the analytical product.

Four main arguments emerge when assessing analysts' effectiveness in relation to developing products. The first is **the analyst as a competent thinker**. It creates a picture of an effective analyst as a person who is capable of lateral thinking, creative thought and "thinking outside the box".

The second conceptualises **the analyst as a problem-solver** who provides inferences and recommendations for action moving the role from that of technician to decision makers associate, as described in the first article of this series. In summary the decision making aspect of the role includes mental processes resulting in the nomination of several justified alternatives for action and Mark Lowenthal (2009) describes intelligence as existing solely to support policy makers and that the analyst contribution should be to support decision makers.

The third is that life experience counts for a lot in assessing analyst's effectiveness. This study clearly identified the **analyst needing a diverse range of experiences** that they can draw on for their analysis. These experiences included but were not limited to being well travelled, extensive work experience and being exposed to many situations or experience within policing, being trusted and respected by peers and superiors or experience in the criminal investigations department. Everyone in the study describe a need to have something to draw on to be effective.

The last is **the need for training**, mentioned by some but not emphasised.

What this tells me is when I am looking to recruit an analyst I need to make sure they can think well, "thinking outside the box" and they use their life experience to inform their thinking.

When I reflect on the recruitment processes I have used I am not sure a one hour written test adequately captures how well someone thinks particularly if I am trying to capture outside the box thinking. Equally knowing someone has collected many life experiences may not translate into something meaningful in a single interview. The question I leave you with is: do your current recruitment practices really test what you think, and research suggests will make an effective analyst? I am not sure mine have!

What is also apparent is how important thinking was rated in comparison to training. Training was mentioned but thinking was emphasised. This poses some what of a dilemma because changing someone's ability to think laterally or creatively is a much bigger challenge for organisations than training an analyst in a technique or software but if thinking is an underlying element of effectiveness we need to recruit it or develop it.

Again I pose a question. How do we measure thinking skills and how do we develop them? •