



How the CIA Intelligence Process Can Impact Your Revenue Growth Objectives

Incorporate a Proven Intel Gathering
Strategy to Fortify Decision-Making
and Drive Revenue Results

MBDⁱ White Paper

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Introduction

Intel is the valuable collateral residing within a firm that drives Business Development and strategic revenue growth. One of the significant drivers of a successful BD process and decision-making is the ability to develop client “intelligence”.

While there is an abundance of information available on how to develop intelligence around a technical opportunity, business opportunity, or financial opportunity, little data exists on how to gather Intel regarding the actual individuals involved in a relationship, outside of some government entities. It is important to understand that a good BD system or process continuously develops and validates personal Intel. An effective professional in Business Development focuses on individual relationships, making every effort to understand the prospect and their problems from the prospect’s perspective, not their own. The BD professional understands the importance of gathering specific information relating to the individual and how that Intel affects the purchase.

From over three decades of experience, we’ve learned that departments, agencies and companies don’t buy. *People buy*. It stands to reason then, that Business Development relationships are built around people and the resulting “human” relationships. In order for successful BD to take place, it isn’t how much the prospect or customer knows about you. It’s how much you know about them.

The following discussion outlines the process the Central Intelligence Agency uses to gather Intelligence, and it’s a good one. Implementing these steps into your Business Development organization’s processes can positively impact your decision-making on opportunities and validate your revenue growth efforts.

The Intelligence Cycle

Intelligence is so crucial to the U.S. government that it established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), world-renowned for its capacity to collect, separate data and analyze intelligence to give the United States a strategic advantage. This advantage might be in providing security or information to pro-actively pursue high-priority targets of interest, i.e., the “bad guys.”

Within corporate America you will be hard pressed to find many companies with a group called “The Intelligence Department.” Generally, the Business Development organization is entrusted to gather “Intelligence,” which may or may not be utilized by other areas within the company. However, much of what BD gathers is flawed and is usually more data than real intelligence. This flawed data is often utilized in “Black Hats” or “Color Team reviews” and does not assist with making good business decisions but rather supports what is appropriately described as “drinking the company Kool-Aid” or “drinking our own bath water.” The difference between companies that make good “Pursuit/No Pursuit” decisions is generally the ability of their business development personnel to gather real intelligence vs. just data early on. The ability to access and understand the real needs of a prospective client earlier on in the process has many benefits, it allows for better solutions to be developed, it allows for shaping of requirements and it allows you to drop the opportunity should it not be the right match, before you becoming emotionally and financially dependent on it. Gathering intelligence is an art and a science; some individuals are born with it, but just about everyone can develop the skills necessary to be as good as some CIA agents.

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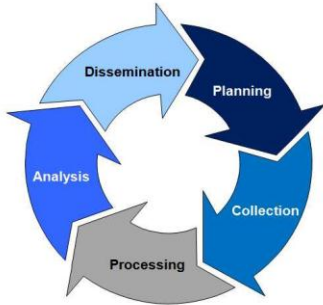
So what can the CIA teach us about real “Intelligence and how to gather it?”

Actually, a lot.

It follows a five-step process called the *Intelligence Cycle*, a system of checks and balances that ensures things are done correctly which should equate to better intelligence. This cycle is easily transferable into a corporate environment and serves as a template that could be utilized by companies to ensure that the decisions to pursuit opportunities are

valid and based on information that is real and vetted. Valid Intel is particularly critical in the early stages of the Business acquisition or Capture processes.

The Intelligence Cycle



The five stages of the Intelligence Cycle are:

1. Planning
2. Collection
3. Processing
4. Analysis
5. Dissemination

Planning

The CIA spends a proportionally large amount of time on this stage. Plans are utilized to document what needs to be done, which individual will do it, what is known, what information is unknown, needs to be gathered and where it can be found. Discussions are held about who can provide the needed information, who might be best to gather it and other issues that may impact the ability to procure it. Various scenarios are also discussed on what contingency plans might be developed should the initial plan not deliver the needed intelligence results.

The CIA then develops a tactical plan to achieve the specified objective. This is then broken down to a call-plan level, where it documents who they are engaging and what questions need to be asked to procure the needed information. On occasion, this can be rather complex as the CIA may be required to contact a number of individuals in order to find somebody who can answer its questions. Sound familiar? This is very similar to the tactical planning that occurs within a Business Development organization; who do we need to call? What do we need to ask, know and find out?

More time is invested in this planning stage than any other because critical resources can be better harnessed when utilizing a plan. Having a plan assists in understanding what is required and who to contact to procure the needed intelligence. Often BD

personnel are more comfortable with execution and don't plan as well as they can and should. This has repercussions and will affect the quality of the intelligence gathered. For example, if you are on a call with a client and happen to bump into the CEO in the hallway (sometimes you get lucky), do you know the one important question you should ask or do you simply pass and miss the opportunity altogether?

Collection

This is the stage where the hard work starts and where many choose to begin or end the intelligence gathering process. The CIA compiles information overtly and covertly. It utilizes many different techniques in collection, from reading foreign newspapers to studying satellite images. The level of effort required in the collection stage is directly proportional to the difficulty of the objective.

As a Business Development professional, you also have a number of sources available to you as you begin collecting intelligence. No single source will be more important than the prospective client. This HUMINT_{SM} (HUMAN INTelligence) will form the core of the intelligence you receive, and being first person/personal Intel, this should theoretically be the most credible information you compile. However, your ability to solicit information by asking appropriate questions will also directly affect the quality and quantity of the intelligence you receive. Being perceived as a peer and trusted by your prospect will directly impact how open they will be to discuss their situation with you, and will directly impact how detailed they will be in providing quality responses to the questions you'll ask.

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The collection of intelligence falls into two categories, primary or direct Intel and secondary or indirect Intel. Primary information is often referred to as "HUMINT." This is the Intel which comes directly from a human source, preferably the decision-maker or influencer within an organization. Secondary intelligence is information publicly available to everyone, so it's available to your competitors, too. Examples of this include utilizing Internet search engines, engaging with consultants, reviewing past awards and competitions utilizing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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The collection of information is an area where organizations have invested much time over the years to ensure gathering is done in an ethical manner. Focusing on your Primary sources of information will generally keep you on the right side of the ethics debate. Business Development professionals who are engaged with their clients in a trusted business relationship do not need to employ unethical practices to gain an advantage. They understand the clients' needs and wants from their perspective. Professionals are comfortable asking any and all questions in order to fully comprehend how decisions will be made, what the specific requirements are and what funding is available. Armed with this first person/personal Intel, they possess all the relevant information required to influence or shape any of these areas if necessary.

Processing

It is in the Processing stage that the CIA compiles all the information collected and produces an intelligence report. The report will generally have a variety of sources and a range of different perspectives to assist in vetting the information. This information could vary from a translated document to a description of a satellite photo. In Business Development, this area is one where many organizations fail, since call or contact reports are not always completed at the level of detail required to make the gathered intelligence useful. Frequently, BD personnel do not possess the skills to gather the required intelligence, or they are anxious to move onto the next client and fail to *capture the real intelligence* as opposed to merely *gathering data*.

To illustrate, documenting that you made a good call results in a great opening line in a call report. But this assertion does not add any value to the intelligence gathered and is certainly of no benefit when it comes to making tough business decisions. One way to address this shortcoming is to be more diligent in preparing call scripts and call reports. Utilize your plans to develop your scripts, know why you are making the call and what Intel you need to gather. As you write your call report, be specific; list the intelligence you needed to gather, what information you actually were able to collect, and what the next steps in your engagement with this contact might be. All of the pertinent information should then be captured in a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) or other knowledge sharing system where everyone in the organization has access.

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So it makes sense for the organization to value the information and make it accessible to everyone who may need it.

Many companies do not consider Intelligence as a corporate asset. Often management is more concerned about the number of BD calls being made, and is neither interested in the quality of the information being gathered nor its governance. There is a cost associated with every piece of intelligence that is gathered, i.e. salaries, travel and time.

So it makes sense for the organization to value the information and make it accessible to everyone who may need it. If this is not occurring in your company, then your BD people are simply developing their network. When — not if — your BD people leave the organization, they will take all of this intelligence you have paid for and use it to further their careers with your competition.

Ensure that you have procedures in place to document calls and the intelligence gathered. Make certain that your BD leadership reviews these documents and provide coaching as necessary to assure quality Intel is being procured, and that it is valued as highly as some of your organization’s proprietary processes or trademarked products. This information is the lifeblood of your organization and deserves to be treated as such.

Analysis

During Analysis, the CIA takes a closer look at all of the information, determines how it fits together, and ensures it is able to answer the original inquiry with the Intel. It assesses what and why it is happening, what might occur next and how it affects the country’s interests. A Business Development professional needs to be able to think in this manner, too. Analysis at this level requires that the quality of the Intel be excellent, since it’s difficult to make good decisions based on weak intelligence. Factor in where you gathered the information, the strength of the relationship with the informant along with their credibility, and whether you are able to validate the information gathered from others.

All information must be considered in order to corroborate the intelligence received. This is a critical activity because at this stage the threads of intelligence begin to weave together to help make informed decisions in your stage/gate or color reviews. It can also be used to provide competitive intelligence during your “*Black Hats*”, or could provide vital Intel on the specifics required within the technical sections of your proposal.

Dissemination

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The Dissemination stage could just as easily be named the Decision stage. There is a review of the analyzed intelligence, and a determination is made whether enough Intel has been collected to address the initial objective or if additional questions need to be answered.

The CIA then gives the final written analysis to the policymaker who started the process. After reading the final analysis and learning the answer to the original question, the policymaker may return the report with more questions. The whole process is then repeated.

Corporations use the written analysis to support decision making during “stage/gate” or “Color Team” reviews. It is during these reviews that the quality of the Intel should be evaluated and a determination made on whether there is sufficient and valid Intel to make the required decisions. Often the intelligence gathered is insufficient or needs further refinement. Thus more questions are scripted and the process begins again, with the plan being updated, contact list refined and questioning becomes more targeted and specific. Moving through the capture process, the intelligence generally goes through a number of iterations where it becomes more specific and hopefully increasingly accurate. General information is normally adequate for an opportunity to move into the Pipeline and the further you move through the capture process, the more targeted and specific the intelligence should become in order to make good business decisions.

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Your grasp of their challenges needs to match their understanding.

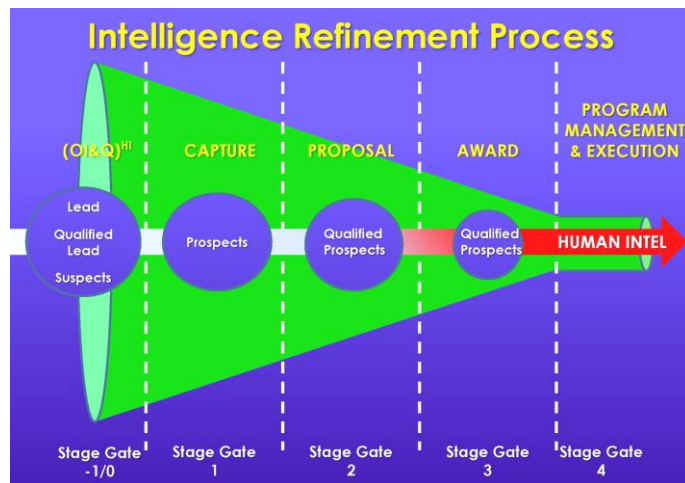
It's easy to understand how the Intelligence Cycle that allows the CIA to keep America safe can be applied within your Business Development organization. The ability to find and analyze credible Intel is the real difference between highly successful customer centered organizations and those that tend to be more internally focused. The client is almost always the best source of intelligence! They make decisions for their own reasons and to solve their problems or issues, although they might not be able to articulate them well. Your grasp of their challenges needs to match their understanding; and to be successful, you must view their problems from their perspective.

The ability to gather Intel is especially important for newly identified opportunities that need to be qualified as real.

The information required to qualify them is critical to ensure resources are not wasted on opportunities that have little probability of success.

In the end, don't assume anything. Don't believe that just because they told you something, that it's the truth. People are human and have been known to lie (especially to sales people). Be skeptical of everything you hear and try to corroborate the information from more than one source. Doing this will improve the quality of the Intel gathered and the results will become evident in the decision you make.

The skills needed to gather robust Intelligence are critical to both Business Development and Capture Personnel. These skills can be learned, and MBDⁱ has a number of curricula that will assist in addressing these skill gaps. Intelligence is the fuel that should drive all decisions within your business acquisition process. The ability to gather Intel is especially important for newly identified opportunities that need to be qualified as real. The information required to qualify them is critical to ensure resources are not wasted on opportunities that have little probability of success. Without robust intelligence, crucial decision-making in a firm's pursuit/capture process is compromised.



Skimping on these steps means simple data reporting supplants the in-depth analytics needed to deliver key insights concerning whether a “suspected” opportunity is in fact viable. These suspects masquerade as revenue growth prospects, but they can waste resources, personnel effort and the most limited component of all, time. Resources invested in suspect opportunities come at the cost of pursuing other qualified prospects that may be a better match for your organization’s capabilities. And, as such, they can offer a higher probability of a win and resulting revenue growth.

During these changing, uncertain and challenging times, it's foolish and irresponsible not to be using a robust intelligence gathering and analysis process. Most business acquisition processes are aligned to utilize intelligence as opportunities move through each of the steps. We have found the main challenge of BD personnel to be the inability to ask the right questions to gather relevant intelligence that can be implemented to make good business decisions.

Everyone can learn these skills. The most successful Business Development professionals understand how to prepare for a call, know what needs to be accomplished, possess empathy and interviewing ability, and developed active listening skills to actually hear what the prospect is sharing with them.

If your BD personnel are not developing quality intelligence, which in the end drives your revenue growth, then it's time you provided them with professional training in the necessary skills to be able to do this effectively. Without a doubt, the return on your investment will be significant.

About MBDⁱ

Who We Are

MBDⁱ is a Business Development Management Company, focused exclusively on Business Development and Revenue Generation services. We are specialists within the Government Services Industry. Our consultants average 30+ years of Business Development Leadership experience and expertise.

Mission

Our Mission is to drive revenue growth through organizational change by providing Business Development resources, elevated thinking, knowledge, processes and skills, while remaining committed to the core values of accountability, integrity, trust and mutual respect.

What We Do for Government Services Companies:

- Build, Integrate and Turn Around Business Development Organizations
- Specialize in Turn-Key Business Development Assessment & Implementation
- Conduct Revenue Effectiveness Business Development Assessments
- Develop and Implement Strategic and Tactical Business Development Plans
- Assess Long Term Viability of Markets Being Addressed
- Evaluate and Source Business Development Leaders and Teams
- Design, Build and Implement Business Development Processes for Guaranteed Revenue Growth
- Design, Develop and Deliver Business Development Curricula

We Assist Government Services Companies to Attain Accelerated Revenue Growth by Partnering to:

- Preserve Their Current Revenue Base and Generate Organic Growth
- Drive Strategic Growth to Assure a Robust Pipe-line
- Merge and Integrate Diverse Business Operations and New Acquisitions
- Leverage Existing Personnel, Capital, Client Relationships and Resources



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