Jim Mathews Award & Fellowship

2019 Medalist's Award-Winning Essay

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Essay Question

For decades, skills or traits like curiosity, persistence, critical thinking, and analytic capability have served intelligence practitioners well, but some observers think that newer or emerging traits, like humility, computational thinking, cross-cultural or social intelligence, or virtual collaboration, might serve their organizations better in the next decade (-s). Please describe at least six (6) new skills, knowledge, abilities, traits or experiences (aka, competencies) that you believe will be significant to an intelligence practitioner's success in the 2020s and beyond. Illustrate how each of these competencies is being or would be utilized in real-world business contexts. b) Choose what you view to be the most important of these traits you listed (and explain why you picked this one over the others) and make a powerful case for how it can be developed, what practitioners should be doing now to acquire/enhance it, and how it might be measured and assessed.

The Comfort of Discomfort

In a recent workshop at the University of Queensland, a guest speaker asked the question: "how do you teach people today to be more comfortable with ambiguity?"[1] In a rapidly evolving and unpredictable business environment, the success of business intelligence is tied to traits that produce foreknowledge when the future is unclear. While we can track intelligence traits for the last decade or even vastly longer, the truly successful intelligence practitioner has been already assessing the qualities of the future.[2]

Think back to the days of VCRs, landline phones and happily working on a typewriter. While analytical capability has been the hallmark of intelligence for decades, the 21st century has emerged to make solely analytical capability far from the only trait a worker needs. Like older technologies, it is functional, but slow. Basic analytical skills are futile without the support of emerging traits and competencies that produce a well-rounded analyst. These newly embraced skills include cognitive flexibility, cultural competency, social intelligence, media literacy, collaborative skill, ethical intelligence, and of course, comfort with ambiguity.

In the rapidly changing intelligence landscape, it is paramount that one's brain responds appropriately to changes in our culture and business organizations. As the world leans more toward rapidly rising trends – social media, environmentalism, globalization – intelligence practitioners must be equipped with **cognitively flexible** brains that adapt to analyze surroundings in an opened minded way. Cognitive flexibility keeps up with business of the time to see macroenvironmental trends and industry shifts, and to avoid culture lag or dissonance. This has become increasingly important as the pace of work in the corporate world accelerates. Indeed, the need for CI has been characterized in large part by our fast paced, imitation based knowledge economy. In the intelligence world, cognitive flexibility has been linked to "fluid intelligence [more] unbinding" in terms of perception and action, as well as pattern recognition through advanced divergent thinking.[3][4] This has ramifications all across sales, marketing, finance and so on. It is the flexible brain that can spot the trends and lead the business to make the first move.

This iconic White House picture has been used by various agencies to showcase the type of people we should look to in mirroring intelligence skills in the 21st century.

We must next consider **cultural competency**. There are vast differences between global cultures that are central to business practice and therefore impossible to ignore. A business professor once told me the story of his grandfather fighting in the First World War. He found himself on a remote Pacific island with the native people. The women on the island were all topless as was custom for them. The army commander, being concerned about the effect this would have on his soldiers, insisted that the women cover up and provided t-shirts for each one to do so, explaining that in his culture a t-shirt was the only appropriate attire. In response to this the women took the t-shirts and obliged to wear them. The next day they appeared, t-shirts on all, but

having totally missed the point. Each one was feeding children and had cut two holes to expose their breasts through the shirt.

A traditional Samoan wedding ceremony, where breasts are not sexualized as in the Western world. Failure to be aware of cultural nuances in business can lead to poor intelligence that compromises relationships and profit.

This story demonstrates the need for understanding of the practices of others that are central to any culture or business. A traditional t-shirt never would have sold on that island. But more importantly, any intelligence from the army commander would have failed to take into account the culture of the people. As U.S. intelligence was culturally incompetent toward Japanese thinking at Pearl Harbor, so was Taco Bell in its multiple failed attempts to launch its chain in Mexico. [5] Competitive analysts need training to understand their inherent cultural bias and see beyond it. With increasing business diversity alongside a political climate that calls for cultural sensitivity, cultural competency is a buzzword. But in the context of business intelligence it is even more so. We make pitiful intelligence mistakes when we do not see the differences in others, particularly when we try to do business with them in a way that is only 'our way.'

This leads directly to the subsequent topic of **social intelligence.** Social awareness is paramount to all areas of leadership, including getting the best out of others, extracting information, being astute to business goals, and advancing the work of a team. A business can live or die based on how it relates to society. The best analyst is a people person, and this skill is not easy to learn. However, even the most skilled person in this arena has been forced to change to accommodate the social skills of this age. Social platforms are now numerous. Social intelligence expands nowadays to a clever cyber presence, with particular attention as to how the business interacts across social platforms. If foresight is the key to actionable intelligence, social interaction is what goes hand in hand for this key to have any effect. It is not enough for analysts to be smart; they also need to be clever in shrewd or astute thinking. The more we relate to and connect with a customer, the more we can understand what they see as value. This is as much socially constructed as it is rational. Therefore, the social analysis of a CI team can bring new insight. It is the job of each business member to uphold this public success of a team with their individual social skills.

This highly coveted social intelligence is directly linked to a skill which I have identified as **media literacy**. Media literacy is perhaps easier to learn and can be defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and act using all forms of communication interdisciplinary by nature."[6] In a world characterized by tweets that deliver both opinion and policy, an onslaught of fake news, bots from foreign or competitive adversaries, and real actionable information, only the highly skilled can sift through and find what is required for business goals. Moreover, media literacy enables an analyst to determine the potent information from the communications of rivals. Data literacy that allows for deep analysis of numbers and statistics is just as central.[7] Where curiosity and persistence can uncover information, it takes a certain type of mind to interpret it. It is media literacy that makes information meaningful or makes it *intelligence*. Conferences, war gaming and structured practice may be the best methods here, and thankfully this skill can generally be learned by will and repetition.

The Intelligence Community is a multifaceted collection of 17 branches. Like in the case of business silos, information sharing has been sub-par at various points throughout history.[8] For this reason, a skill that cannot be overstated is the ability to work collaboratively and with information sharing capacity. Without the **collaborative skill** of open-minded employees, interests of the business will likely suffer. Where one person can bring expertise to a business, multiple people make a business a success. According to the Business Insider, self-awareness, teamwork and an employee's ability to accept change are all directly tied to opportunity for collaboration and

This graph has been used to demonstrate the impact on ambiguity on an analyst. What this essay seeks to outline is that it is not ambiguity itself that is inherently damaging, but how a person responds to it, either for better or for worse.

experience with it.[9] This again relates back to ambiguity – how we make employees comfortable with change of position, department, team or practice. This is done by breaking down business silos that fence people in to one area. Indeed, it is likely that if a competitive intelligence practitioner could bring well-honed collaborative skills to their firm and its colleagues, the wider intelligence community could have a lot to learn from them.

Finally, **ethical intelligence** draws this all together. Without moral standards the intelligence community lacks any credibility to stand upon and can fall prey to the unethical tactics used against it. The same can be said about any business community. It is the role of all practitioners to carry out the aforementioned skills using ethical standards developed from a place of moral virtue. As workplace benchmarks change in light of critical movements such as #MeToo or global calls for improved working conditions, ethics change too. A successful practitioner must showcase ethical intelligence that works for their firm and its goals. In the words of businessman Henry Kravis, "If you don't have integrity, you have nothing. You can't buy it."[10] And as Wells Fargo has seen in recent months, it is almost impossible to change a culture of rampant amoral behavior if employees are not intrinsically held to ethical standards.[11] Ethics must then be a hallmark of each position.

In essence, the world of business intelligence has accelerated in a way that places new demands on each of us. The most important of all these skills we are called to acquire is **comfort with the ambiguity of this world.** Perhaps the draw of traits like curiosity, persistence and critical thinking is their familiarity - they have served businesses well for decades. However, a business should strive not for what serves well, but what serves best. Ambiguity is the mainstay of intelligence and without it intelligence would be redundant. Thus, uncertain circumstances should be embraced in a way that breeds opportunity.

In order to acquire and embrace this skill, intelligence practitioners must develop a mindset of uncertainty as power. When the future is not fixed, we can influence it. It is unsecured, not aimless, and open, not meaningless. In the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "As for the future, your task is not only to foresee it, but to enable it."[12] This distinctive skill is assessed in how an intelligence agent can work with guidelines and
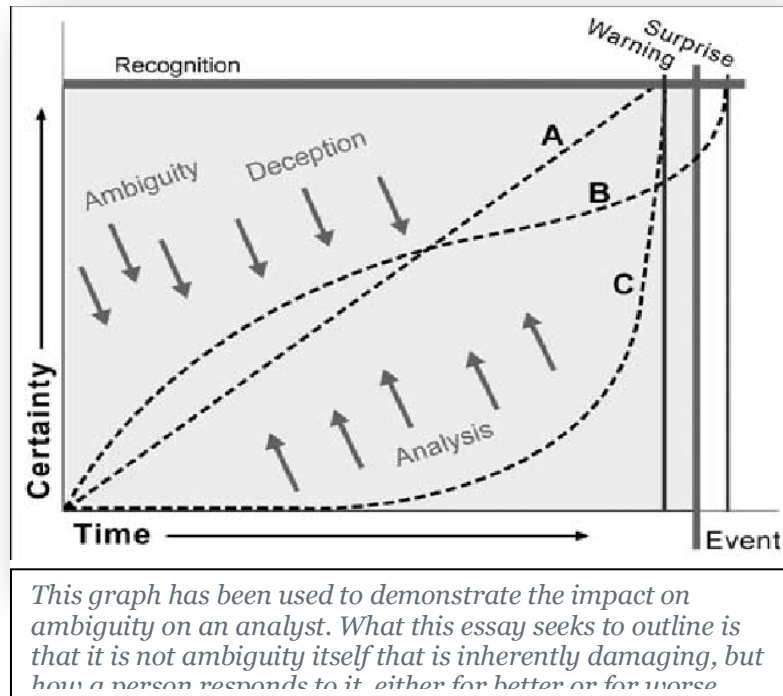
accept timelines and directions that leave them space. It is bolstered by employee empowerment and useful feedback. Decision makers need to give certainty with what is required but give the freedom to allow an analyst to do what they do best. Comfort with ambiguity comes from confidence within oneself and within the work environment.

Most of all, tolerance with ambiguity manifests itself as an ability to derive intelligence from various situations and mediums in an ethical way that accounts for culture, bias, and social and team-based interactions. In conclusion, competencies that have served well in the past have done so for a reason. That said, no practitioner can enjoy complete success without possessing the newly emerging skill set of modern analysis. Intelligence is patience and pattern. Any practitioner must know themselves and their business well enough to ride the storm of doubt, deceit or delay toward what they are really looking for amongst the uncertainty of the business world. This ready acceptance of ambiguity is complemented by critical skill – in ethics, social intelligence, flexibility, collaboration, cultural awareness and media literacy. In promoting such, business intelligence will live on to see an increasingly successful future.

About the Author

Marina R. Boyle is this year's recipient of the Jim Mathews Award and Fellowship for Intelligence Excellence. She is a sophomore at Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pennsylvania, where she studies Business & Competitive Intelligence. For her, a career in CI is an opportunity to pursue what she loves. Her goals include working for many years in the CI field and then becoming a global entrepreneur. Travel and tourism are my main interests and she hopes to eventually set up an NGO abroad. She run's Mercyhurst's International Student Association, works closely with Erie's refugee population, and writes for the university newspaper. Service and volunteer work are close to her heart and she would love to see intelligence being used more for humanitarian work. When looking at a career in enterprise and service, she sees competitive intelligence as the key to commercial and personal success. She can be reached by email at mboyle91@lakers.mercyhurst.edu

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Visual Citations

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Biographical Sketch of James E. Mathews

James E. (Jim) Mathews spent more than 30 years in the Defense Industry, and the last 14 in Competitive Intelligence (CI) and Price-to-Win (PTW). His whole career was centered on winning new business and he was the Lead CI Professional and/or PTW leader/co-leader on some of the largest winning proposals in recent years. His resume wins included the realignment of NORAD and Cheyenne Mountain (ISC2), the Joint Strike Fighter (The F-35), Coast Guard Deepwater (Recapitalization of all Coast Guard's assets), High altitude Airship, the Littoral Combat Ship (fast fighting ship for the shallow waters of the littorals), War Fighter Focus (Live, Virtual, and Constructive Training for the Army for the next 10 Years), and a multitude of Service Jobs and Classified Projects. Jim was medically retired from the US Air Force where, at one time, he was an Airborne Voice Controller for the Apollo program for NASA.

Jim received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from the University of Florida and a Master of Science Degree in Contract and Acquisition Management from the Florida Institute of Technology. Following a successful career at Lockheed Martin, he retired early in 2003, and joined Raytheon for just over three years as Director of Deal-To-Win, followed by Northrop Grumman TASC for 5 years as Director of CI/Position-To-Win before joining Booz Allen Hamilton in December 2010 as a Principal on their GO Team.

He and his wife Bonnie resided in the McLean, Virginia area, and were die-hard Florida Gators fans. Jim had a passion for seeing young people succeed in their careers, and was always a willing mentor to professionals of any age who had a desire to learn.