

# HIRING A NEW RECRUIT

ARTHUR WEISS, *AWARE*



Dear Arthur,

I currently have a vacancy in our competitive intelligence department. What characteristics should I look for to fill this position?

It all depends on what the vacancy is. Different characteristics are needed for the different competitive intelligence (CI) roles, and you would be extremely lucky to find one person with everything.

The first thing you should do is draw up a job specification. What do you want the new recruit to do? There are several options. The skills required for secondary or desk research are quite different from those needed for primary research. Great researchers often are not competent analysts or communicators, and not everybody can manage or run a department. At the same time, you may need somebody who can fill several functions, and so require a compromise candidate who has a spread of skills but is not outstanding in any particular one.

Some psychometric tests have been used to evaluate candidate qualities — Belbin team-types and MyersBriggs Type Indicators (MBTI®) are two of the best known. Although these tests can help, they should not be the deciding factor. In fact, relying totally on tests such as these would be quite foolhardy. The tests identify potential but do not show experience, or fit with your organization and its culture.

Most tests also will not be good at helping you decide whether the recruit is honest and ethical — crucial for competitive intelligence recruits. Worse, an unscrupulous but clever candidate can cheat on most standard tests and give the answers you want.

## FIRST STEPS

The candidate needs to fit into your organization. What is your organizational culture? (See sidebar.) You should look for someone who is likely to match it.

For example, if your organization is multinational and you expect people to move around a lot, then a person who has worked only for small organizations in one place may not be the right person. Similarly, if the atmosphere is very formal, a candidate used to working in a more laid-back environment would probably quickly become unhappy. These criteria are over and above any particular skills the candidate possesses.

## THE JOB-REQUIREMENTS

In a large competitive intelligence department, you may have the luxury of searching for candidates who can specialize in one or two areas among secondary research, primary research, project management, and financial analysis. In most cases a compromise is needed, and the objective should be to prioritize the key attributes based on what is currently done and what you would like to be done.

If most competitive intelligence work carried out in house revolves around desk research (perhaps because primary research is outsourced to a consulting company), then this should be the main role for the new recruit. Similarly, if the expectation is that the new person will be coordinating the internal source collection process, then look for somebody with the interpersonal skills required to communicate with a variety of internal contacts.

## SECONDARY RESEARCHERS

Secondary researchers need excellent computer skills and should be comfortable accessing a variety of online and offline data sources, as well as the Internet. It is a fallacy that everything can be found by everybody on Google. In fact, most information available on the Internet is not even indexed by the likes of Google, Yahoo! and Teoma, but resides in what is sometimes called the deep web. Even this information is dwarfed by the content of database services such as Dialog, LexisNexis, Hoover's, or Factiva.

To access this variety of content efficiently and effectively requires not only logical and analytical skills, but also the ability to think laterally to find hidden nuggets and an ability to sort out the wheat from the chaff — or in data terms, the whimsical from the critical. Not everybody has these as innate skills, and although training can help, certain personality types make better secondary searchers.

Secondary searchers are less likely to be “people” people and are more likely to be introverted and task oriented. They may also have a tendency toward not knowing when to stop searching, so time-management skills are important if the secondary researcher is expected to work without a lot of supervision. Good secondary researchers are less likely to make great primary researchers, although this is not a hard-and-fast rule.

## PRIMARY RESEARCHERS

Primary research involves speaking to people, so Someone who doesn't enjoy working with people is unlikely to make a good primary researcher.

Primary researchers need excellent listening skills and should be able to empathize with their contacts and make them want to communicate. Primary researchers can get contacts to talk, teasing out information that may not have been mentioned to most people.

Key primary research skills include the following:

- An ability to mirror the contact's body language or voice.
- Quick understanding and an awareness of how to direct a conversation without overtly controlling the conversational flow.
- Strong networking skills, allowing the researcher to build a database of potential contacts.
- Tip-top written communication skills for written or email contact.

The last skill is particularly important for internal research, which may depend to a greater degree on written regular communication.

### ANALYSTS

Requirements for analysts are similar to those for secondary researchers, but analysts must also have a level of strategic insight to interpret results and see patterns, trends, and anomalies. In fact, a strong ability to spot both patterns and anomalies is unusual. Some people are very good at spotting patterns, but less so at noticing the exceptions, and vice versa. Some people find it easy to work with minutiae but balk at taking a wider perspective. Others find the small details tedious but are excellent at seeing the big picture. Several tests can pick out these tendencies, and unless you have several analysts in the department, you are better off selecting someone who is in the middle. You may miss a few hidden patterns or not notice minor oddities, but this is preferable to dwelling on the similarities or differences, which those on the extremes excel at.

The competitive intelligence analyst's main role is to synthesize the data gathered and convert them into something comprehensible to end users. This requires business savvy and an awareness of the overall business and industry background to put findings in context. CI analysts often have a business degree, but they may also come from a technology or science background, depending on the business. They should also be excellent written communicators, as the results of their work will feed into the general decision processes of the organization.

### OTHER ROLES

Several other roles are linked to competitive intelligence. These include managerial roles that require skills in staff motivation, leadership, training, or project management. Crossover also often exists between roles, with

people adopting several of them. In fact, it is unusual to have a department with no crossover. Such a department is probably dysfunctional in that the secondary researchers are not able to communicate with the analysts, the primary researchers, and others.

In fact, communication is crucial and is the bread and butter of the effective competitive intelligence department. Each member should be aware of the strategic issues and share this awareness with other team members. Moreover, members should also be able to respond to inquiries outside their immediate roles and draw their own conclusions from gathered intelligence.

### FILLING THE VACANCY

In reality, the ideal candidate for a competitive intelligence vacancy is multi-skilled. Primary researchers

### SIDEBAR: CLASSIFYING COMPANY CULTURES

Several models of organizational culture can be used to classify company cultures. One of my favorites is the Goffee-Jones model (Harvard Business Review, Nov-Dec 1996). This suggests that corporate culture can be described by the relative degree of loyalty employees feel to the organization (or the solidarity or commitment to the company) as opposed to the social aspects or friendliness of the company (sociality). The model predicts four corporate types:

- **Networked:** Friendly and social companies, where the emphasis is on helping colleagues, and thus helping the firm, rather than any corporate loyalty per se. ("Of course you can take the day off — family needs are important.")
- **Communal:** Friendly and social companies with a lot of loyalty and pride in the firm. ("I'd love to join you at your family event — we can both make up the work later.")
- **Mercenary:** Focused on a common purpose with loyalty to the firm coming above friendship with colleagues. ("What do you mean you need a day off for junior's first day at school?")
- **Fragmented:** Low levels of inter-staff contacts and little pride in the organization as a whole, with most employees working autonomously. Typified by "virtual companies" but also some law and professional service firms where partners operate on their own without needing or wanting interaction with colleagues. ("I'll work from home today so I can listen to the match on the radio. Nobody will notice as long as I get the work done.")

should be able to locate contact names and background intelligence, enabling primary interviewing to take place. Secondary researchers should be able to understand the import of data gathered and communicate this to analysts and end users, especially for time-critical intelligence, which may not require much formal analysis. Thus, the new recruit should have a mix of the above skills, but his core strengths should match the skills required for the role or be an amalgam of different skills in cases in which a single candidate is expected to be both primary and secondary researcher as well as analyst, project manager, and communicator.

General skills that all competitive intelligence staff should possess are abilities to look beyond the obvious and think laterally. Curiosity and nosiness are assets, although they need to be controlled so that time is not wasted on wild goose chases. Competitive intelligence personnel also need to be patient and able to cope with not finding anything and starting over.

CI personnel must also be objective and honest, both in their relationships

with others and among themselves. Competitive intelligence staff should not be afraid to communicate bad news — even in organizations with a “shoot the messenger” response type or a “Cassandra complex.” This is a tendency to not believe bad news, as it is preferable to turn a blind eye and hope the unpleasantness will go away, rather than act to correct it. The term comes from Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam of Troy, who was ignored when she warned the Trojans about Greeks bearing gifts.).

In fact, in organizations with these failings, it is even more important that competitive intelligence is communicated effectively. The main way of overcoming such problems is presenting a convincing and unassailable case, and suggesting how the “bad news” can be countered. Another important talent is imagination, so that what-if scenarios can be considered, and hypotheses thought out and tested.

Finally, remember that nobody will be perfect in the beginning. People need to grow into their jobs, and this requires

managerial support depending on the job seniority and organization

As the joke says, even Superman got it wrong sometimes. Otherwise, he would have known not to wear his underwear outside his costume!

---

*Arthur Weiss is managing partner with AWARE, a leading UK competitive intelligence consultancy. His answers do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of either CI Magazine or SCIP. For more information, visit the AWARE web site at [www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk](http://www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk). Part of the AWARE site includes a free online consultancy, where AWARE answers questions posted on a variety of marketing and business-related topics.*