

DECLARE YOUR INDEPENDENCE

Abstract:

Competitive intelligence professionals move from dependence to independence before reaching complete interdependence stage. At the same time information management evolves from a centralized to decentralized policy before power networking becomes a reality. The environment sinks into chaos with increasing demand for homeostasis and a defensive resort to groupthink. Conformity becomes a disadvantage at this time. The competitive intelligence professional must respect prevailing group opinion while advancing the case of cultural diversity and change to nudge management from their comfort zones.

Critical thinking skills are crucial to competitive intelligence professionals. The ability to analyze is particularly important. Reasoning is a process that links analysis to conclusions, bringing an answer to the strategic questions asked by the executives.

1- THERE IS A PARADOX BETWEEN WHAT EXECUTIVES SEEK AND “INFORMATION” REALITY.

To cope with uncertainties, executives need linearity, stability, predictability, order and control in a world dominated by complexity, systemic thinking, interdependence, disorder and change. They seek a “social order” to perform and maintain normal change in the internal environment, to cope with uncertainties, adapt to external change and create internal conditions that will allow the organization to continue to live, function and grow properly.

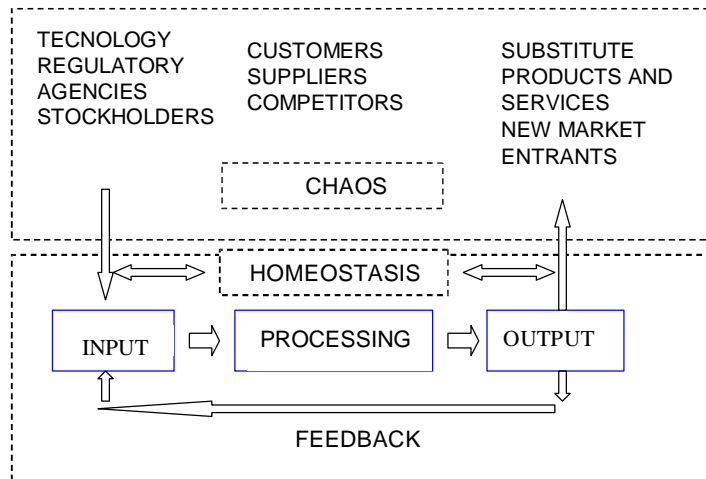
Table 1

WHAT EXECUTIVES SEEK : HOMEOSTASIS	REALITY : CHAOS
1. SIMPLICITY	1. COMPLEXITY
2. LINEARITY	2. SYSTEMIC THINKING
3. EVOLUTION	3. REVOLUTION
4. STABILITY	4. INSTABILITY
5. CERTAINTY	5. UNCERTAINTIES
6. CONTROL	6. INTERDEPENDENCE
7. CLARTY	7. AMBIGUITY
8. PREDICTIBILITY	8. IMPREDICTIBILITY
9. REGULARITY	9. IRREGULARITY
10. ORDER	10. DISORDER

2- THE GOAL OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS IS TO RESTORE “HOMEOSTASIS”

The term “homeostasis” is used by physiologists to mean maintenance of constant conditions in the internal environment. The different functional systems of the body contribute to homeostasis through control mechanisms, adaptive systems and automaticity.

Figure 1

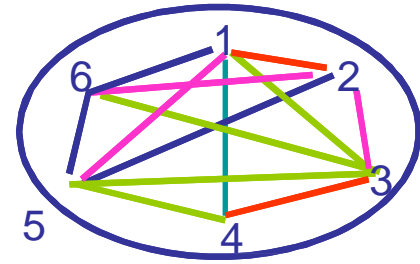


Competitive intelligence professionals seek to restore “homeostasis”, bringing clear answers to external variations, trends and clues anticipating the future with little, if any, tolerance to failure. Their main contribution to group performance is to help adjust the internal environment to external change. This can be done through the capture of raw data (input), its conversion into added value information, in a form that is more meaningful and “actionable” (processing), and finally the distribution of the processed information to the people or activities where it will be utilized (output). By helping executives analyze problems and visualize complex subjects, competitive intelligence professionals create value and competitive advantage.

3- THE CHOICE BETWEEN “ACCEPTABLE” AND “UNACCEPTABLE” CONCLUSIONS

A broad open- minded approach to different problems is needed if competitive intelligence professionals wish to attain credibility and understand how the component parts of an issue relate to the whole.

Sometimes the final report conforms with the organization's vision of the future and is "acceptable" even with contradictory viewpoints. But what happens when the result is considered "unacceptable" because its content deeply challenges prevailing ideas within the organization - when competitors chose different strategies using arguments that contradict those the experts within the organization continue to develop? **"Intellectual cohesiveness" is threatened.**

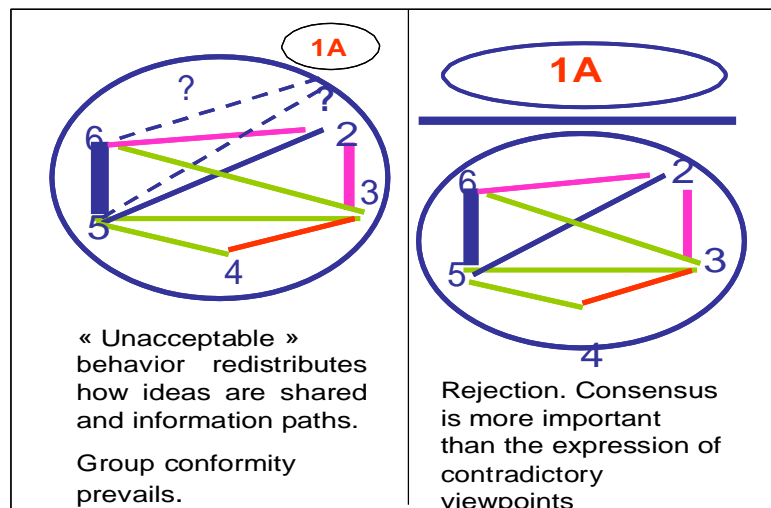


Group conformity enhances group exchange
Figure 2

As Asch's experiments demonstrated, many individuals will feel alone and upset if their contribution does not correspond to those of the group. Many will therefore yield to group pressure and clearly deny the conclusion(s) they believe to be correct. Rather than focusing on environmental patterns of change, their objective becomes to avoid the group sanctions that may vary from mild disapproval to complete rejection.

Those who have a strong need for structure or certainty, those who are anxious, low in self-confidence or concerned with the approval of others will seek group conformity, adapt their conclusions to remain within the "comfort zone" where nothing happens unless in conformity with prevailing group opinion. Those among us who strongly believe in their contribution to the group's performance will fight to implement new idea, structures and change at the risk of being denied the right to evaluate, to interpret or to judge information or data unless their interpretation strengthens the shared realities within the organization.

As shown by the dashed lines in figure 3 , "unacceptable" information will progressively isolate 1A. Information will be shared within the organization but only among those who have accepted to seek constant agreement and move within the limits of uncertainties that have been decided by the group's leaders. If consensus is not respected, that rejection will put an end to the performance of 1A whose ideas have little if any importance to the group.



4- COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS AND GROUPTHINK

Groupthink is the tendency of group members to seek agreement at the cost of critical thinking. The group views itself as powerful and omnipotent. It shuts out information that does not conform to increasing the pressure toward uniformity, and rejects the expression of contradictory viewpoints. Even trusted outside opinions are adapted to maintain conformity and prevail against cultural diversity. Many authors compare groupthink to repetitive behaviors or controlling acts that are used to reduce anxiety. These acts are intrusive, yet involuntary - although incompletely controlled.

Like ritualistic cleaning behavior, such as washing one's hands or checking things over and over, groupthink is an attempt to prevent the occurrence of a feared and disastrous event, which is the failure to adapt, adopt, control uncertainty, change, and perform out of one's comfort zone.

- In organizations with tendency toward groupthink, competitive intelligence is "tolerated" if it fulfills the "group conformity" mission.
- In organizations with tendency toward groupthink, competitive intelligence professionals are encouraged to seek group approval and please others with "acceptable" conclusions.
- In organizations having a tendency toward groupthink, competitive intelligence professionals are invited to rely on "comfort zone leaders". Their beliefs are typically followed without discussion or dissent, driven by the "no way back " mentality of the organization, which views no reasonable alternative other than the one favored by the "leaders".
- To resist conformity carried to its extreme, competitive intelligence professionals must adopt a constructive attitude, use trusted outsider advisers and internal mentors and support, a positive disposition towards information sharing, analysis and synthesis. Such measures contribute added value and performance to free the organization from groupthink.

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