
Analytical Standards in the Intelligence Community: Are Standards Professionalized Enough?

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Analytical Standards in the Intelligence Community: Are Standards Professionalized Enough?

Abstract

Analytical standards and its impact is a topic compelling the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) toward a discipline of proficiency and structure comparable to other professional fields is an evolutionary process. Following the creation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), Intelligence Community Directives (ICDs) became the feature through which guidance and a consensus on a topic became methods of aligning entities within the IC. The research questions about the usefulness of ODNI's ICDs on the individual analyst and IC member agencies as the intelligence profession emerges are intriguing. Therefore, practitioners should consider several approaches and criteria to evaluate analytical standards. This article outlines methods for determining the analytical standards and the impact standards creation has had on intelligence analysis, furthering the professional development of the discipline through a qualitative methodology using a descriptive and explanatory approach based on an organizational theory foundation. Using multiple case studies and a structured approach evidence supports the creation of standards while examining the various professional structures that can provide guidance.

Introduction

Critics continually appraise intelligence analysis for the need to evaluate itself on accuracy, timeliness, insightfulness, objectivity, and relevancy according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) website.¹ Since the terrorist attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001, the ODNI's office has since endeavored to align the Intelligence Community (IC). However, the office has somewhat unclear responsibilities and authorities with little actual control and direct oversight over the 18 entities, including the ODNI, that make up the IC.² However, despite a clear description of control, the issuance of Intelligence Community Directives (ICDs) may have similar effect to other fields such as medicine, law, and library science as the profession matures as a discipline. There is a paucity of research about the ODNI's influence on IC analysis and its transformation from a vocation to a profession through new principles and guidelines.³ Due to the limited range of the ODNI's responsibilities, analytical standards fall in a range of applicability, previously based on individual organizations, which were open to interpretation. Therefore, the question this research will answer is how has the ODNI been effective in its effort to improve intelligence analysis across the IC? Furthermore, as the IC becomes a professional discipline with analytic standardization, practitioners can determine the effect of IC analytical prowess and improvement since the creation of the ODNI by emulating practices employed in other disciplines.

Literature Review

ODNI Limitations - Responsibility Without Authority

Preceding the establishment of the ODNI, most prior standards studies took a comparative approach assessing analytical standards of the IC as a whole. The effects of creating guidelines that came with the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) were intended to apply to the entire IC.⁴ ODNI was also envisioned to head and speak for the IC to the President, manage the National Intelligence Program (NIP) with no direct control over full allocation efforts, which contends with the Secretary of Defense, create intelligence priorities that are understood and achievable for analysts, and oversee the IC in general regarding a number of topics.⁵ Previously, with Executive Order 12333, the Director of Central

Intelligence (DCI) had two main principal issues, which took 50 years to the eventual switch from aligning under the ODNI as a centralized organization.⁶ The two issues consisted of conflicting interests, with the DCI having "responsibilities as both the nominal head of the intelligence community as a whole and as head of the Central Intelligence Agency, one of the agencies in that community."⁷ The ODNI has attempted to clarify issues by issuing various ICDs, including ICD 203.⁸ However, the ODNI does not have clearly defined responsibilities or control for much of its oversight.

As Harknett and Stever described, the agency was originally meant as a transformative agency over time, but not enough effort was placed toward this impact and therefore resulted in the agency being more "visionary" overall.⁹ Without full control and publicly available intelligence appropriations, ODNI is still at the mercy of covert funding departments as the agencies are required to disperse their own budgets through these apportionment limitations.¹⁰ From a DoD perspective, IRTPA only "provides extensive budgetary and management authorities over these agencies to the DNI, it does not revoke the responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense for these agencies."¹¹ Because of overlapping roles with DoD, decisions by the DNI require a certain amount of "close coordination and cooperation" with multiple agencies. Shared decision making processes can eventually devolve into turf wars, as has been seen throughout the IC even before the ODNI.¹²

Harknett and Stever echoed this sentiment, while adding that ODNI "does not have the power to implement structural reforms," even though that was originally what the act's intention was proposed to create.¹³ As Clark asserted, "Congress still had not bestowed the DNI with enough authority to control and unify" the individual agencies that make up the IC.¹⁴ Therefore, some IC leaders view the ODNI's role as one of coordination and facilitation, vice the leader of the IC.¹⁵ As a roadblock to itself, others IC leaders feel the ODNI needs to "overcome entrenched bureaucratic mindsets, enforce vague authorities, demonstrate added value, and rapidly adapt to the diffuse threat environment of the post-9/11 world."¹⁶ Furthermore, Marcoci et al. have described the effectiveness of policy enacted, as:

"further research is required to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the success of IRTPA and ODNI's Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) office in creating a reliable and valid quality control process for the IC."¹⁷

Formalization from Craft into Profession

However, a professionalization discussion of the ODNI enables a new perspective for comparison to other disciplines despite its limitations. After the ODNI's creation, it focused on training while maintaining the context of professionalization. Analysts now present both craft and profession since craft requires understanding a skill acquired through experience and learning. At the same time, analysts represent a profession due to the vast knowledge its practitioners provide and a tangible benefit that can be passed on to new employees through structured methodologies, such as educational training.¹⁸ Previously, the IC had been managed by individual agencies under general SECDEF guidance as a craft instead of a profession. As a result,

intelligence analysis has neither well defined systemic formal knowledge—such as a coherent doctrine or theory—nor standards that are formulated or enforced by other members of the profession. Knowledge regarding intelligence analysis methods has not been cumulative, and the various attempts to improve organizational performance have remained isolated from other efforts.¹⁹

Marrin further explained that intelligence “spontaneously” began to move toward formal structuring practices within a few areas with the idea that a focus on topics, such as ethics and certification, must be addressed before assessing personal or organizational performance.²⁰ In addition, Marrin asserted, “the broader professionalization process is an effort to formalize some of these other factors.”²¹

As a whole, managers administered the IC in a near indiscriminate manner prior to ICD 203, while still providing untold results, as the successes are closely held and rarely shared, while failures become news of the day.²² The various agencies have had training of many kinds. However, IC leadership, U.S. policymakers, and the individuals who review the

information are familiar with the analytic pitfalls that plague intelligence analysts. For example, "under time pressure with information that is incomplete, ambiguous, and sometimes deliberately deceptive, analysts become vulnerable to a wide range of well-known sources of analytic error."²³ The use of the ICDs, structured analytical techniques (SATs), and understanding the psychology of bias helps "sidestep some of the known analytic pitfalls, and explicitly confront the problems associated with unquestioned mental models or mindsets."²⁴

Professional Standards

Various other tradecrafts and professions include characteristics where scholars point to an analogy that is comparable and can be useful for the IC when "developing or legitimizing, formal professional standards for analysts," which is something the ODNI has attempted to start.²⁵ A significant factor at the national level is creating wide-reaching standards with analysts' input, while allowing for considerations of other aspects of professionalization such as the training initiatives, personal development, joint duty assignments, and including a code of ethics similar to other professional disciplines such as medicine, law, and library science. While change occurs in some areas,

"the downside of this kind of top-down professionalization process is that it would likely be evolutionary by building on programs and practices already in existence and would not provide a mechanism for improving intelligence analysis at the state or local levels or in private industry."²⁶

Moreover, Dr. Greaves has previously argued for the creation a new expanded discipline of "Strategic Security, which consists of three sub-disciplines of intelligence, counterterrorism, and protection," and that standards are a requirement to increase the IC's capability to answer security threats against a broad range of issues.²⁷

The 2007 uniform standards of ICD 203 also enabled the body of analysts aspire to work toward professionalization. Researchers, such as Bruce and George, point out "one hallmark of any profession is that members adhere to common rules governing the conduct of professional duties."²⁸ Before the ICD 203 mandate, most agencies taught and enforced its tailored

guidance for products, which intensified bias within an organization, and precipitated a "reluctance to acknowledge the quality of work done by analysts in other IC components."²⁹ Of the assigned responsibilities under IRTPA conferred upon the ODNI, Fingar points out that "none is more important...than the mandate to integrate the IC."³⁰ Under the IRTPA, Congress mandated the ODNI to set standards for training, career developments, and educational programs for the IC by consulting with the individual agencies to tailor specifics as needed.³¹ The mandate for change was the first unintended step toward moving the IC to become a professional discipline. ICD 203 also helps establish basic tradecraft, which focuses on source reliability, addresses uncertainty, and separates assumptions and analytical judgments into products that can also include alternative analysis. These aspects of analysis are essential for professionalism in each discipline.³²

For the IC to move toward professionalization mirroring medicine and law, for example, teachers and trainers need to be able to break down

"the educational infrastructure necessary to improve the analyst's performance. Furthermore, if a link can be made between the educational program and increased proficiency, the foundations then exist to begin requiring that program for all practitioners."³³

Educational programs also have a long-standing record of greater attention paid toward tradecraft efforts while contributing to the sense of collegiality or fraternity that accumulates.³⁴ Since 2004, IRTPA has boosted analysts' professionalism. However, Bruce and George agree, "it will fall well short of developing the kind of analytic cadre that will be needed to deal with the complexities of an emerging multipolar and highly dynamic world that the IC anticipates it will be facing."³⁵ Gentry considered mandated changes will do little to alter individual analysts' behavior, as there is a disconnect for the reforms to individual analysts and criticize ODNI's efforts regarding shortfalls in intelligence.³⁶ Coulthart further asserted although thousands received training, "there is no solid evidence on how often or why analysts use SATs."³⁷ Therefore, it is essential to note that, while the ODNI is making progress, researchers contend the IC itself blocks "core issues" for determining intelligence excellence since the "structure of independent, confederated agencies,

with proudly distinct cultures and incentive systems, remains largely unchanged."³⁸

However, Marcoci, Vercammen, and Burgman claimed the ICDs created actual change in analytical practices.³⁹ Immerman asserted there were “radical” and “revolution[ary]” transformations, while Cardillo observed “codified good analytic tradecraft.”⁴⁰ Gentry had a “positive” perspective of the ICDs as well as work with intelligence evaluators for ODNI.⁴¹ Due to the continued discussion of intelligence analysis being a separate intelligence discipline, few researchers have studied the effects the ODNI has had in moving IC analysis toward its professional enterprise, creating standards, or the status of analysts contributing to analysis as a whole outside of the IC. This study fills the gap prior research failed to assess.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This article relies on the bureaucratic perspective of organizational theory as its theoretical framework because the theory enables an in-depth narrative about the analytical standards as compared with other professional disciplines while working toward intelligence professionalization.⁴² Manning described that “bureaucracy is just one of many ways to organize collective human behavior.”⁴³ The hypothesis is the ODNI’s creation of generalized analytical standards for the IC elements, through ICDs improved intelligence analysis thereby professionalizing the IC. Based on a descriptive, qualitative case study approach using multiple-case examples, this article presents a contemporary real-world understanding of other professions that explains various activities of the ODNI’s move toward professionalism. Punch asserts “a descriptive study sets out to collect, organize and summarize information about the matter being studied [while...] an explanatory study, on the other hand, sets out to explain and account for the descriptive information.”⁴⁴ Therefore, the case study model using three disciplines as cases—medical, legal, and librarian or scholar—enables an investigation of in-depth methodologies for the IC, as a community of organizations, can forge ahead adhering to policy and guidelines while enabling the practice of intelligence analysis to be more of a professional discipline it is presently.

Each discipline included in this research excelled at creating a community of highly functional, ethical, and organized professions, with publications

for its members. According to a current understanding of the various fields, the primary researcher assessed each of the three disciplines using peer-reviewed journals and publications because of the parallel with professionalizing the intelligence field. Additionally, the primary researcher will explain the current variations of standards application by amplifying the measures the ODNI has in place. This strategy provides a method to understand if analytical standards increase professionalism across the IC while determining the level of general effectiveness within published intelligence analysis.

Using "an organization theory approach to the public sector assumes that it is impossible to understand the content of the public policy and public decision-making without analyzing how political-administrative systems are organized and their modes of operation."⁴⁵ This model's gaps are the application of the current standard and, by explaining various instances where the efficiency, productivity, and usefulness of ICDs, helps establish regular baseline threshold for establishing a professional discipline. Evidence was taken from secondary literature and peer-reviewed journals or publications, with some reviews that have already been conducted on the topic, since each field has its own guidelines and methodologies. The approach and methods used in this study pose no ethical issues and comply with commonly accepted academic research protocols. Potential bias may come from personal employment within the IC and previous work as an intelligence analyst. However, to prevent confirmation bias the primary author submitted the research to peer reviewers. The limitation for this study included a fixed course duration, the sample size, and focus only on the ODNI's legislated responsibilities regarding direct application of standards. Other influences could influence the study if time allowed for the use of additional case studies across other disciplines.

Analysis and Findings

The case studies below present a comparative analysis of the IC and the other professions with examples supporting the proposed hypothesis. Although few standards are comparable to the rigorous standards of the American Bar Association (ABA) and American Medical Association (AMA), intelligence analysts have the ODNI's foundational initiatives to set the general standards needed, process testing and certification of new analysts, and control the administration of training and various

educational avenues.⁴⁶ According to Bruce and George, “the development of professional standards, best practices, consensus statements, and practice guidelines are the logical result of this risk mitigation,” and the disciplines of medicine, law, and other scholarly fields have reached a level of development from previously unfettered practices that were performed in unintended atmospheres.⁴⁷ For the medical and legal professions, practitioners must attain a level of education with basic skills and knowledge for the new member to enter the profession. Thus, new members, “use that academic credential as a way to regulate the expertise of their practitioners.”⁴⁸ Declassified products represented a significant comparison for previous approach methodology, and decades ago analysts used few of the tradecraft elements currently employed today. Simultaneously, “intelligence gaps and assumptions were noted in only one of the declassified NIEs” (National Intelligence Estimates) during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁹ Additionally, few IC analytical standards evaluation programs were in existence at all before 2006. Besides the Sherman Kent initiative, that later became the *Center for the Study of Intelligence*, a greater effort is needed to transform the IC further using professional business like methodology, which follow scientific methods of analysis.⁵⁰ The following case studies expand on established business models that can be used for the comparison.

Field of Medicine

Using medicine as an illustration can be complicated due to the extreme level of correctness throughout training required, when compared to other fields. However, this level of applied inspection represents a reasonable and lofty goal long term and is an excellent starting point for potential paths that ODNI has started taking regarding the IC.⁵¹ The medicine analogy contained useful ideas and was a formal profession started through the labors and successes of the AMA, “which facilitated the accumulation of knowledge, structured improvement in techniques and practices, and the transference of best practices from generation to generation.”⁵² This practice is an example of ODNI’s actions. By structuring in comparison to the analogy, a building mechanism for combining the IC and its separate agencies, various disciplines move toward becoming a conglomerate, whole community in more than a name. Marrin asserted, “the medical profession can bind its different specialties together under the overall mission of improving the health of the patient

and uses its code of ethics to do so.”⁵³ The IC with guidance could easily continue shifting toward this model.

A significant pillar of professionalism for becoming a discipline is the use and ability to access a deep and thorough body of scholarship. The parallel for intelligence may apply readily due to the very nature of urgency that each group faces and as it "confront[s] difficult challenges of decision making in life-or-death and high-risk situations."⁵⁴ Other parallels include the type of problems, the various processes, and applying different solutions based on what information is available to the individual when a decision is or needs to be made. Improvement requires learning from past practices, understanding the various problems other professionals confront and then being able to identify potential solutions. Intelligence and medicine "entail similar cognitive approaches and are vulnerable to similar failures, and the solutions that each has developed to overcome those failures may have applicability in the other domain."⁵⁵ Strategies are used to remove bias, increase knowledge to improve decisions or analysis and generate positive results or correct conclusions. Moreover, "best practices can flow in both directions between professions since medicine shares strong parallels with intelligence in the analytic process. Methods for counteracting bias in intelligence analysis can be useful in medicine and vice versa."⁵⁶

Additionally, the intern and resident apprenticeship model is one that both fields use, which inherently had failure in that faulty had no control of preceptors in medicine during the late-nineteenth-century.⁵⁷ However, many subject-matter experts in intelligence still today also confront issues with training new analysts in tradecraft while attempting to concurrently carry out daily work with many demands of different levels of urgency due to the generally unstructured teacher to student pairing.⁵⁸ As a governing body with oversight functions, the ODNI already has assisted in compensating this gap or weaknesses through the tradecraft standards and publications that assist in analytic skills and training aspects. For the AMA, it was not until 1901 that these gaps began to be addressed with the apprenticeship model, after creating the Council on Medical Education, which generated "standardized education requirements" and developed idyllic medical curriculums.⁵⁹ In addition to medical professionals, lawyers also represent a field in which the ODNI has a model of professionalism to work toward.

Field of Law

As a discipline, the law contains organized resources and a plethora of research methods, with governing entities that have created professional standards. The ethics enable proper education and "boards [are] impaneled to assure that appropriate levels of education and competence preceded admission to the bar earned the profession its modern-day stature."⁶⁰ Similar to the AMA, lawyers represent a relevant comparison to IC analysts as each may be overwhelmed fighting against diverse and assorted challenges when working against a world of external organizations or governments in attempts to keep them unbalanced.⁶¹ Therefore, "the urgent call for systematizing both resources and methods persist if intelligence analysis is to achieve 'discipline' status with all the rigor, tenacity, and high standards such a designation connotes."⁶² For lawyers, the codification and organization of its legal knowledge, coupled with the development of methodologies for finding it began converting the legal professionalism from "dilettantism to discipline."⁶³

This first began through the restoration of law to the educated and under a regulation that became bar associations, especially the ABA in 1878.⁶⁴ In similar size and same voice as the AMA, the ABA also has its principal instructions in its *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*.⁶⁵ Previously, the profession lacked uniformed and codified ethics or conduct guidelines that existed for lawyers, with few organizations for the collective effort of creating them. However, eventually, "the organization had successfully drafted legislation, set standards for law reform, and...established the requirements for legal education in America."⁶⁶ The ABA's Model Rules embody many principles that the ODNI has put forth.⁶⁷

The professionals themselves also parallel intelligence in many ways, such as dealing with imperfect knowledge or misdirection, comparable to human intelligence. Similarly, lawyers also have a complicated relationship with scientific uncertainty. The method of expressing that "subjective uncertainty" evolved into a "reasonable degree of precision: namely, the standard of proof."⁶⁸ To blend the two examples, medical personnel's legal testimony also includes a level of uncertainty, which is equivalent to intelligence and has generated a language equivalency of assessment values into a formulation that, with some modifications, could

easily be used in intelligence products. Examples include testifying that a fact is a “reasonable medical certainty,” which is like “reasonable indication” that analysts would use and have equivalent language for all the degrees of certainty.⁶⁹ The ODNI attempted to codify such language through defining terms in ICD 203 and the degree of specific usage for certainty are comparable when used consistently by members of different agencies. Previously, when analysts used the same words, the meaning had may have meant an entirely different percentage, out of 100, that reflected the analysts’ confidence in the assessment.

Library Science, Curators, and Scholars

The final case includes various but similar fields of librarians, curators, and academia. As Marrin described, these professions “may provide better models for the professionalization of intelligence analysis, particularly in terms of the profession’s educational practices.”⁷⁰ The acquisition and organization of resources that these fields use, or the employment of systematic research and methodologies enable the analyst or a user to fully gain the most from tools, which are at the center of a library’s purpose.⁷¹ Similar to the medical and legal fields, librarians personify the example of a discipline deeply rooted within the systems and repeatable methodologies for training, gaining credentials, and “subspecialty pursuit.”⁷² Compared to policymakers, who use a library as a perusing customer, intelligence analysts act as a guide to the vast breadth and depth of information across multiple channels to answer questions regarding other countries’ capabilities or limitations. The ODNI created the semblance of standardization, comparable to cataloged systems, to categorize types of threats and ensure analysts all understand the tradecraft basics to assist in providing accurate assessments, timely, and relevant. Bruce and George asserted, “frequently among the most judicious, discerning, and skeptical consumers of information as well, a good librarian is often a patron’s best hope of finding exactly what he or she needs in a sea of information where quality, value, and accessibility are often unknowns.”⁷³ Over the decades, the librarian profession evolved and arrived at its “present democratized iteration” in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁴ However, it has been based on the capability to effectively convert information to those who need the information but are much less familiar with the organization and find valuable answers from those research findings.⁷⁵

Curators in general are also akin to the level of direction that the ODNI has set forth for the IC, because the IC is absent perfect systems or software that can search only within portions of intelligence. An increased amount of information to comb through can be challenging. However, by using the tradecraft standards, analysts can structure the stream of various information input so that "future IC analysts who are curators and brokers of knowledge will be more valuable to policymakers than an army of filterers awash in data."⁷⁶ Much like an analyst, the position of a curator with a gallery or other institution such as a museum, is to be informed on the information collected, be able to articulate to those who are less knowledgeable, and converse in a manner that increases interest in a topic while providing insight based on previous records of sourcing.⁷⁷ "Similarly, an analyst-curator understands the range of opinion on a topic, the viewpoints they bring, the relative track record of sources, and ways to communicate all this information to customers and to drive insight."⁷⁸

Finally, the scholar analogy exemplifies strategic intelligence's very nature, as it has no current accreditation standard for new members. As Gentry described, "yes, a professor at a research university needs, for entry into the club of tenured faculty, to have a terminal degree; be a good teacher; have a good publication record with the promise of future research successes, and adequately perform 'service' to the university and a disciplinary specialty."⁷⁹ However, beyond this general terminology and criteria, which can also be applied to curators, professionals have vague standards to the performance of individuals, even though many do produce quality work. "Scholars often produce useful materials displaying the intelligence product characteristics of predictive accuracy, uncertainty reduction, and policy-relevance."⁸⁰ Despite the lack of a significant amount of "current intelligence" in this field, it still deals with the same intellectual standards and peer review formatting with constant requests from various clientele.⁸¹ ODNI's role plays at the heart of scholarship but with a different subset of information not readily available outside the IC or with the same standards in place following its issued guidelines and policies.

Therefore, whether intentional or not, the various levels of the ODNI's efforts that have led to standardization and IC-wide training efforts also inherently improve intelligence by moving the IC toward its discipline and

profession separate from others. Professionalization of intelligence analysts creates a solidified method of transferring knowledge outside of the apprenticeship model or a mentor aspect, which gives longevity and a standard of ethics that new analysts can understand with little help. While some aspects may not be getting the IC to the point of separating into a profession, the steps taken already have benefited not only newcomers but also those who have been in the field for decades and are familiar with the various SATs or methodologies, which are used every day or just infrequently as needed.

Conclusion

The discussion of the ODNI and its application of analytic standards beg continued research and scholarship. The IC can become much closer to occupations like those in the medical profession or lawyers. Using a qualitative methodology and the multiple case study approach, to examine previous research on the ODNI's implementation of the ICDs, the research supported the hypothesis. Case studies demonstrated that, as with other disciplines, the ODNI has moved the IC forward by improving some aspects of analytical tradecraft through the creation of an environment with standards that parallel other fields. Additional studies on the value of ICDs within each agency may further this research. An effort to determining to what extend individuals interact and apply standards within the IC will also assist the greater intelligence community by helping to create a systematic approach of implementing additional changes while avoiding the difficulties of outliers. The analytical standards that can be applied within all agencies determine the level of an impact this has on analysis becoming a separate discipline altogether. This expansion is a topic worth developing further into for IC members. The multiple case studies detail that each profession can become established and better through standards and oversight, which are the ODNI's responsibility for the IC. This research provided insight into the current level of professionalism, and examples which can be pulled upon for future IC development. The ODNI has steered the IC in a new direction of creating better assessments and understanding through its creation, and moving in the direction of a maturing profession will likely continue improving analysis.

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