



The Seven Secrets to Guarantee Competitive Intelligence Impact and Longevity

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Now more than ever, CI functions must be seen as adding tangible value to their organizations. While CI practitioners know full well that an economic downturn is exactly the wrong time for organizations to scale back or eliminate their CI functions, corporate financial officers often think just the opposite. Does your CI function have the staying power to help navigate your company through the current tumult and avoid the budget chopping block?

We have identified seven secrets that every CI function must possess to position for longevity and impact. These secrets address the fundamental organizational, structural, and competency-based elements top performing CI functions require. Without them, we find that CI functions fail to consistently meet internal expectations, deliver tangible value, and achieve sustainability over the long-term. The seven secrets are:

1. Executive champions and evangelists at multiple levels that provide resources and organizational support, and create demand among their peers for CI services.

2. An early warning capability to alert management to new competitive threats and developments; this is one of the most oft-cited benefits of CI programs by top corporate executives.

3. The ability to provide insightful, forward-looking judgments, not just repackaged information. We believe at least 60% of CI deliverables should consist of original analytical judgments, not re-hashed data.

4. Consistent hiring practices and clear career development for CI practitioners. Sound CI staffing isn't about selecting whoever happens to be available to man a CI function, but must include thoughtful skills assessments and hiring and retention practices.

5. A CI production strategy tied to strategy development. High performance CI functions have a

suite of recognizable CI products, each with a well defined purpose.

6. Critical thinking capabilities, adaptability, and an ability to display findings in creative ways. CI functions that are built to last must be provocative, adapt to changing external and internal conditions, and be creative in how they communicate their judgments.

7. Ongoing access to the latest CI best practices and methodologies to avoid CI function stagnation.

The Principal Financial Group's CI function -- in existence since 2000 -- embodies the seven secrets and, as a result, has achieved sustained levels of performance and impact few other CI functions can match. How? By behaving more as internal decision-support consultants to top management, and as CI methodology thought-leaders to business-unit intelligence practitioners.

Working with Outward Insights, The Principal has pursued on-going skills development, followed targeted hiring practices, and conducted regular reassessments of executive needs and expectations. Doing so has allowed it to weather substantial external market shifts and internal management turnover and repositioning. The function's placement alongside the corporate strategy team, and visible support from the CEO has enabled the CI function to develop into an organizational necessity.

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