

essence of good critical thinking. Stop and reflect when you are at your desk but also when you are exercising or getting up in the morning. How do you know you are generating a high-quality product? You can measure your success by tracking what your clients do, how often they seek your input, and the extent to which what they do is based on what you have said or written.

1

Who Are Your Clients?

SETTING THE STAGE

The importance of pausing at the start of a job or a project to identify explicitly the primary recipient of your analysis cannot be overstated.¹ When preparing a briefing, the answer to this question is usually obvious, although you may need to target your presentation to a larger group with several subsets of clients, interests, and desired outcomes. When writing a product, however, this question is often overlooked—and the cost to analysts and their organizations can be substantial.²

The *raison d'être* for analysts and analytic organizations is to bring a broader range of information to bear on difficult questions, select that which is most significant, then tailor and package it for decision makers. These functions are similar for analysts working in national security, homeland security, law enforcement, or private industry.

Most clients, however, have much more on their minds than absorbing the details and historic data in which analysts are immersed. Successful analysts translate their expertise into forms that “sing” to busy clients and respond to their needs and interests without the client having to ask. The first step is to understand the clients’ responsibilities, problems, pressures, and preferences as receivers of information.

LOOKING MORE DEEPLY

As you begin a new job and read to familiarize yourself with the subject matter, make a list or draw a diagram of those who are interested in or will be counting on your analysis to help them carry out their responsibilities. This client base will guide the questions you formulate, the information you seek and monitor, and the products you generate. Most of your analyses should be targeted at a specific client, but you may prepare reports intended for large audiences interested in your organization’s authoritative judgment. The more specific you can be in defining the individuals or positions you support, the better. Be sure to include those in your chain of command as well as those

Ideally you have met some of your clients, learned about them from colleagues, or know about them from the media. Make every effort to visualize those for whom you are preparing your briefing or paper and what they will be doing as a result of your analytic conclusions. The one thing they most likely have in common is insufficient time for processing and absorbing all the data they need to make effective decisions. They are counting on you to do some of the thinking and anticipating for them, giving them insights so they can “grab it and go.”

UNDERSTANDING BUSY CLIENTS

The more senior your clients, the broader their scope of responsibilities and the less time they will have to read your analysis. Senior clients share several characteristics that you should take into consideration in your products and other support.

- *Their time is limited and precious.* Senior clients might be given a hundred pages of information to read each morning. You should expect them to move quickly through volumes, keying off words that catch their attention and interest. Your products should be focused and easily digestible with a prominent “So What” that points the clients to the implications and options for decisions they will make.
- *They depend on you to prioritize what is important.* Your selection of topics helps clients manage their time and focus their intellectual energies on what is most critical. The human brain, however, can follow only a limited number of topics at any given time. Do not assume your clients read or remember previous products. A good strategy is to insert simple graphics or provide supporting or explanatory data in a separate text box.
- *They expect transparency in your facts and your analysis.* Source summaries and the rationale behind why you know what you know and how you came to your conclusions create the backdrop for your clients’ acceptance or rejection of your work. This makes it difficult to present assessments with which you know they will disagree. In most cases, they will simply disregard your hard work. You may never know you missed the opportunity to change their thinking or inform their knowledge base.
- *They “use” information from “trusted” analysts and organizations.* Your organization’s “brand name” can determine the weight your clients give to your products. Just like we develop preferences for credible service providers, information sources, and commercial products, clients pay more attention to the producers they believe are more thoughtful, reliable, and accurate.
- *You are only one source of their information flow.* Busy executives—

multiple sources of information, many of whom may be closer to the issue than you are. Never assume you are the only or even the most knowledgeable source; know what you have that is different from the others.

Box 1.1 Social Intelligence: Empathizing With Your Clients

The most valuable analysts are able to view issues from their clients’ perspectives, empathetically “seeing the world through others’ eyes.” Excellent salespeople or managers are empathetic because they recognize and respond to the needs of clients, customers, or subordinates. They are easy to approach and probably approach you first with interest in your wants and needs. They “get it right,” making you feel they understand you even if they do not have the color shirt you want or are unable to accommodate a request to shift time schedules. Empathy is at the core of successful social interactions, facilitating communication, compassion, and cooperation.

How do you know you are empathetic? Psychologists have entire workshops on assessing and developing capacities for empathy, but here is the shorthand answer: Empathetic people accurately sense how they are perceived by others because they intuit another’s perception of them and adjust their behaviors so they are seen in ways they want to be seen.

Here are some steps you can take to build empathy with your work colleagues and consumers:

- *Listen actively.* If we focus on clarifying what we see or believe is needed rather than judging, then we can move more quickly toward broadly applicable solutions. Active listening implies we are paying attention to others and can repeat, paraphrase using similar words, or reflect on what we have heard using our own words to express key messages.
- *Take personal responsibility for improvement.* Those who are “stress hardy” exhibit three characteristics:
 1. Commitment (rather than alienation) that gives passion and purpose to their lives
 2. Perception of challenges as opportunities
 3. Willingness to devote time and energy to situations over which they have some control or influence
- *Ask clear, forward-looking questions about things that matter.* Try to define the problem or issue with the following questions:
 1. Address a specific need, containing the actionable “So What.” What will someone do with your solution and what is the impact?
 2. Include the specifics of the issue: Who, What, How, When, Where, and Why. Think about the difference between process and substance in your solutions: Will things be better by doing them in a different way, by looking at the problem differently based on the data, or both?
 3. Fit into one sentence.

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4. Have an answer, at least theoretically. The best questions are puzzles and not mysteries. For example, what I had for breakfast this morning is a puzzle that someone else can figure out. It happened; there are clues. What I will have for breakfast a week from now is a mystery because even I don't know.
- *Track and collect accurate data.* Ensure that you have good sources for your data. Read the speeches or statements from leaders within your organization or that relate to your problems; be familiar with the laws, regulations, and policies that underlie your organization's operations; and pay attention to the surveys, assessments, and reports that provide the data that can strengthen your arguments.

*Suzanne Kobasa, Salvatore R. Maddi, and Stephen Kahn, "Hardiness and Health: A Prospective Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42 (January 1982): 168-177.

ASSESSING CLIENT NEEDS

The best technique for gauging your clients' needs is to put yourself in their shoes through Red Hat Analysis,³ focusing on their responsibilities and interests. The more you internalize their priorities, burdens, and goals, the better you can discern the questions they need addressed and target your analytic responses. The following questions can help guide your assessment:

1. *What is their role?* Your clients' responsibilities are the most important input to determining the analytic products that will help them do their jobs. Do they deal with specific issues or geographic areas? What kind of analysis are they looking for—a compendium of facts, an evaluation of developments, or a projection of future trends? Who do they report to, what decisions must they make, and who do they serve? In Washington, for example, senior government officials respond to their cabinet secretary, the White House, Congress, and the media. In corporations, executives may have to respond to stockholders or product consumers as well as to their own chain of command.

2. *What are their interests?* Be alert for hints about client interests in all your interactions, meetings, and readings. Are they seeking specific data that supports their current policies or asking you to help frame the problem for them? If you are fortunate to have firsthand contact with your clients, they may tell you about their interests. More likely, you will have to figure it out by reaching out to their staff, briefers, or your chain of command. You can learn a lot by reading press reports, congressional testimony, Web sites, and other source and analytic reports. Once you know the decision maker's interest, you can determine why the issue is important; whether the issue is an opportunity,

threat, or decision point; and how best to shape your response.

Calendars are an excellent source of information about what is driving clients' immediate concerns. Are they preparing for a meeting or trip or for negotiations rather than just following an issue? How does your analysis affect those preparations?

Your analysis should focus on clients' core interests while addressing other concerns in the broader context. Some argue that analysts' focus should be on the specific, hard questions of their primary clients rather than on simply tracking developments in their account. This means analysts would start their days by reviewing feedback and tasking from clients rather than first reading the morning traffic.⁵

3. *What is their expertise?* Understanding the depth of clients' knowledge of the topic is critical in crafting analytic responses. This level of knowledge will determine whether terms need definition, how much evidence is needed to support claims and judgments, whether historical details should be included, and how much context is necessary. For example, clients who are already experts in their fields require only quick turnaround information about a new development. In these instances, analysts need to focus on how they can best add value in an era of information abundance. Other consumers are generalists who will need more context and often a full introduction to an unfamiliar topic.

In some cases, your clients may have firsthand knowledge of a situation or a personality that varies from what you portray in your analysis. You should expect probing questions and disagreements from your most knowledgeable clients. Prepare for this by ensuring that your sources and judgments are carefully selected and accurately portrayed (see Chapter 6 for dealing with analytic disagreements).

In both situations, informing the policymaker or decision maker about unknowns, uncertainties, and contradictory information is essential to meeting the client's needs. As Carmen Medina, a former Deputy Director for Intelligence at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), noted, "The analysts' real value increasingly will lie in identifying discontinuities that shatter precedents and trends."⁶ Moreover, client needs and preferences change rapidly, as does the environment in which analysis operates, requiring analysts to constantly reassess how best they can respond to clients' needs.

4. *How do they absorb information?* The President's Daily Brief produced by the Director of National Intelligence, for example, changes with each President to reflect the chief executive's information processing preferences, tolerance for detail, and interest in intelligence. Does the client prefer to receive information written or orally? Should the product be short or long,

"21st century analysts will need to become less independent and neutral in favor of greater tailoring to customer needs."

—Carmen Medina

"What to Do When Traditional Modes Fail: The Coming Revolution in Intelligence Analysis"⁴

in paragraphs or bullets, with few or many graphics, delivered in hard copy or on a tablet?

5. *What is the interaction with your organization? Did the client ask a question? Are you trying to educate, convince, or alert? Is there an action to be taken or options to be considered? Analysts should not formulate or recommend policy but should be aware of circumstances in which they can alert their clients to opportunities for beneficial action or avoidance of danger.*

Analysts should always seek to know the circumstance for a request, even if they do not get a clear response in return. It helps to know if the client is responding to a crisis situation, a strategic challenge, or an ongoing issue. Are requesters seeking to learn more about a new situation, or are they already well informed and just checking to ensure they have full command of the most recent facts and analysis before making a decision?

If you are concerned that the question you have been given is poorly formulated or just plain wrong, seek clarification before drafting your response. Often a question will be reinterpreted or revised multiple times as it moves down the chain of command. Try to reach back to the initial source—preferably directly or through institutional channels if necessary—to seek clarification. Answering the wrong question is a waste of everyone's time.

6. *What other sources of information do they consult? Do the clients read specific publications or watch certain news channels? To which blogs or news feeds do they subscribe? Do they have experts in your field on their staff who filter or explain your analysis for them? This is particularly a challenge for analysts who write on technical topics; your clients may rely on others to interpret your material rather than reading it themselves.*

Do you have concerns about the sensitivity of your information and how it might be used? Could that have an impact on your analysis or use of sources?

7. *What will your client do with your information and insights? The actions that will be taken based on your work help determine the questions you will answer, the level of detail you will include, and the frequency or turnaround for your products. Imagine what reactions you would have if you were in the client's job receiving your analysis, and consider what actions you might take. You can categorize their actions along a set of dimensions, such as *inaction to action, indirect to direct, or positive/negative*, to develop a second sense for the potential impact your analysis might have. Your understanding of the broader context within which you perform your analysis will improve your ability to empathize with your clients and craft products that respond to their needs.*

Do not get swept away in the quest for the perfect prediction; we are convinced this is an exercise in futility. The principal goal of analysis is to properly frame the problem, accept that multiple outcomes are possible, and help the decision maker better understand the underlying forces, factors, or key drivers

that are most likely to shape the final outcome. Only if policymakers and decision makers are armed with that knowledge can they perform their roles effectively.

Figure 1.1 provides a simple client checklist analysts can use to ensure that they have considered all aspects of a client's needs.⁷ The checklist also helps to focus attention on what matters most and to generate a rigorous response to the tasking at hand.

FIGURE 1.1 Knowing Your Client Checklist

The following questions will help you explore how best to serve your ultimate client:

1. Who is the key person for whom the product is being developed?
2. Will this product answer the question the client asked? Did the client ask the right question or is it more important to place your answer in a broader context?
3. What is the most important message to give this client? What value-added contribution can you make?
4. How is the client expected to use this information?
5. How much time does the client have to digest your product?
6. What format would convey the information most effectively?
7. Is it possible to capture the essence of your message in one or a few key graphics?
8. What is the client's level of tolerance for technical language and detail? Can you provide details in backup materials, graphics, or an annex?
9. Does distribution of this document need to be restricted? What classification or handling caveats are most appropriate? Should you prepare different products at different levels of restriction?
10. Would the client expect you to reach out to other experts for assistance in answering this question? If so, how would you flag their contribution in presenting your product?
11. To whom might the client turn for other views on this topic? What data or analysis might others provide that could influence how the client will react to what you are preparing?
12. What perspectives do other interested parties have on this issue? What are the responsibilities of the other parties?

8. *Can you bound the problem to tell clients what they do not need to worry about?* Analysts often ignore the strategy of focusing clients on what is most important by telling them what is *not* important. Busy people value being told what issues will not require their attention. Some of the most positive feedback the authors received from senior policymakers at the cabinet and subcabinet levels came when we provided analysis on why a government was unlikely to fall or a particular situation would not devolve into a crisis.

IDENTIFYING KEY CLIENTS

When starting to work on a specific project, list your principal client and what he or she might do as a result of reading your analysis. This will start you on the right foot by establishing a clear focus up front and enabling detailed discussions about your analytic plan of attack with your supervisors, reviewers, and mentors.

In some cases, your analysis will be geared toward serving a variety of clients and customers. At the Department of Homeland Security, for example, analysts usually have to address the needs of several very different customers—the Secretary of Homeland Security, state and local law enforcement officials, private industry, and their Intelligence Community counterparts. In these circumstances, analysts should consider drafting two or more distinct products that are tailored to the specific needs of each client or customer set. In general, researching, drafting, and sourcing different products for each client or customer set can be accomplished most efficiently as a parallel process. Simultaneous production of tailored products helps the author address the specific—and sometimes unique—needs of each client and helps ensure that each client receives the information that is of greatest value to him or her.

EXPECTATIONS FOR FEEDBACK

Busy clients are consumed with responding to multiple demands on their time and are focused on their problems rather than on providing feedback to their analytic support. Many analytic organizations structure themselves to solicit and receive feedback from readers of assessments and periodic publications. But analysts rarely get as much feedback as they would like, particularly from their most senior clients.

We urge analysts to keep in mind that our brains are wired to overestimate the impact of our analysis on others and for decision makers to underestimate the value of analytic support of their decision processes. Be thrilled when you get a compliment and pleased when you have evidence your analyses have been read. If you put yourselves in your busy clients' shoes, you will understand why their feedback can be sporadic and sparse. Your objective should be to provide analysis of sufficient value that your clients keep coming back asking for more.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- When starting work on a new issue or account, analysts should take a moment to identify the client base and how the various users will apply and benefit from the analysis.
- This few minutes of reflection will result in a more focused product that will move more quickly through the editing and coordination processes.
- Busy clients have limited time to read analysis, are dependent on analytic products to help focus their attention on what is important, and expect transparency in facts and sourcing.
- Analysts can build empathy with their clients by understanding their roles, interests, expertise, information processing, and predilection for action.
- The goal of analysis is to properly frame the problem, accept that multiple outcomes are possible, and help the decision maker better understand the underlying forces, factors, or key drivers that are most likely to shape the final outcome.
- Analysts should look for ways to tell clients what is not important and what they do not need to worry about.
- Specific projects should be directed to a principal client. If analysts need to support a varied customer set on the same issue, they should consider simultaneous researching, drafting, and sourcing of parallel products tailored to each client or customer set.
- Analysts should appreciate, but not expect, feedback from busy clients.

CONSIDERING THE CASE STUDY

Review Case Study V, “Yemen: An Expanding Security Threat?”

- Does the situation continue to pose a serious threat to US interests?
- Who would you consider the principal client or clients in preparing this report?
 1. What would be the most important issues for the White House and the President's counterterrorism advisers?
 2. How would you define the key issue for the Secretary of State?
 3. How would you define the key issue for the Secretary of Defense?
- Should the issue be posed as a threat, an opportunity, a key decision point, or some combination of these?
- Are there critical unknowns, uncertainties, or contradictory information that should be highlighted?

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter—and this book—we have opted for the term *client* as opposed to *customer*. *Client* infers an established relationship and some degree of interaction between the producer and consumer of the analysis. *Customer* commonly describes those who simply receive products and have little interaction with the producer. *Client* is a more appropriate term for a service-based industry and *customer* for a manufacturing-based culture. We firmly believe that analytic support entities are most successful when they are client centered and service oriented.
2. The information used in this chapter is adapted from Pherson Associates training materials (www.pherson.org).
3. A description of the Red Hat reframing technique can be found in Richards J. Heuer Jr. and Randolph H. Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press/SAGE Publications, 2015), 223–227.
4. Carmen Medina, “What to Do When Traditional Models Fail: The Coming Revolution in Intelligence Analysis,” *Studies in Intelligence*, April 14, 2007, www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no3/article03.html.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. This checklist appears in Heuer and Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques*, 51–52 and was revised for this publication.

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What Are the Key Questions?

SETTING THE STAGE

Most poorly written analysis lacks focus. The reader is left wondering, “What is the point of the product? Where are we going with this story? What is the thesis or the key argument?” A well-crafted analysis is tightly focused on a single primary message. Articles on fast-breaking events should be directed to answering a single key intelligence or policy question. More extensive and less time-sensitive articles should be designed to answer a key question and several closely related subsidiary questions. In the government, Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs) guide analysts in their research, monitoring, and analytic production. These questions usually are more general and overarching than the ones you will generate to focus your products because they are used for a variety of purposes, including resource allocation and collection priorities. Nonetheless, they provide a good starting point for developing the questions and issues that you will address in your products. In business, analytic products should focus on a specific, well-defined issue.

“In order for answers to become clear, the questions have to be clear.”

—Abdolkarim Soroush
Islamic Philosopher¹

LOOKING MORE DEEPLY

Often the key intelligence or policy question is provided by the client or your boss. In this case, you must understand exactly what is needed. Do not be shy about seeking clarification if the question appears overly broad or poorly formulated. For example, a question that asks for “everything you know” about a particular subject is a disservice to both the analyst and the requester. These questions usually mask much more specific needs but the requester has not had the time or does not have the knowledge to research, think, or articulate these needs.