How to Have a Conversation:

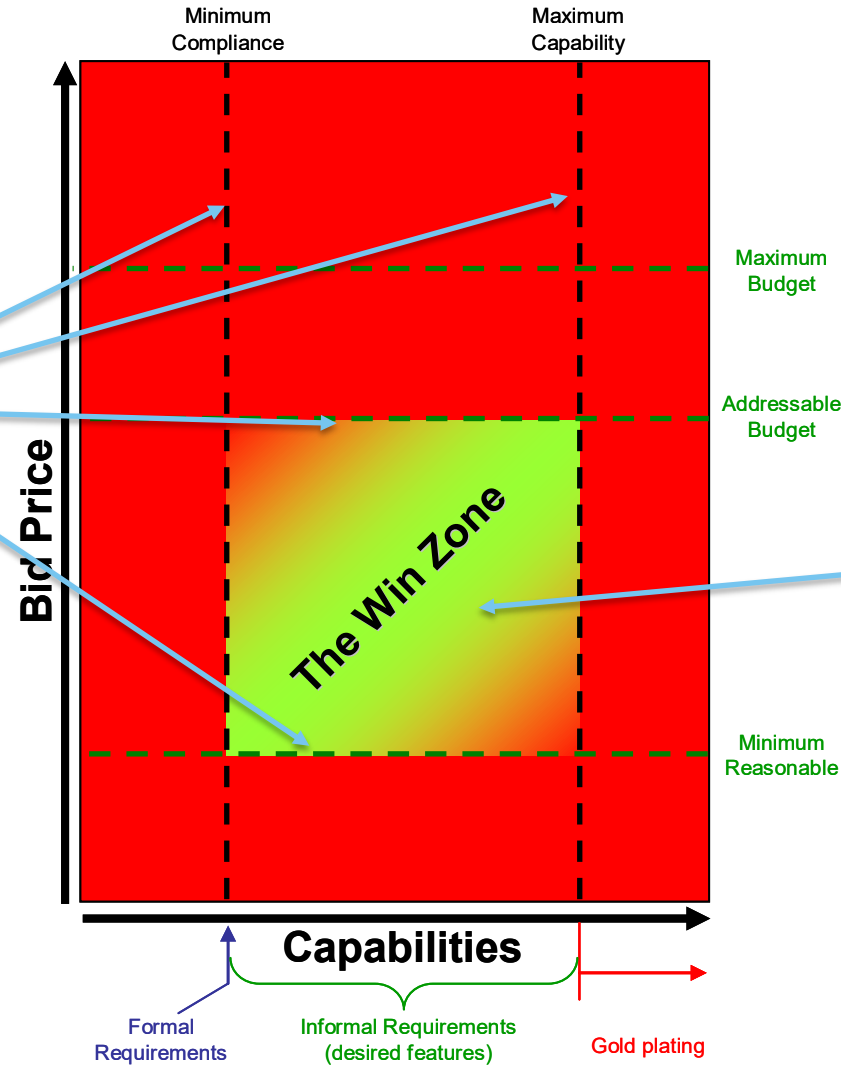## *Eliciation Techniques for Competitive Intelligence*

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First of all – why??

Elicitation Techniques for
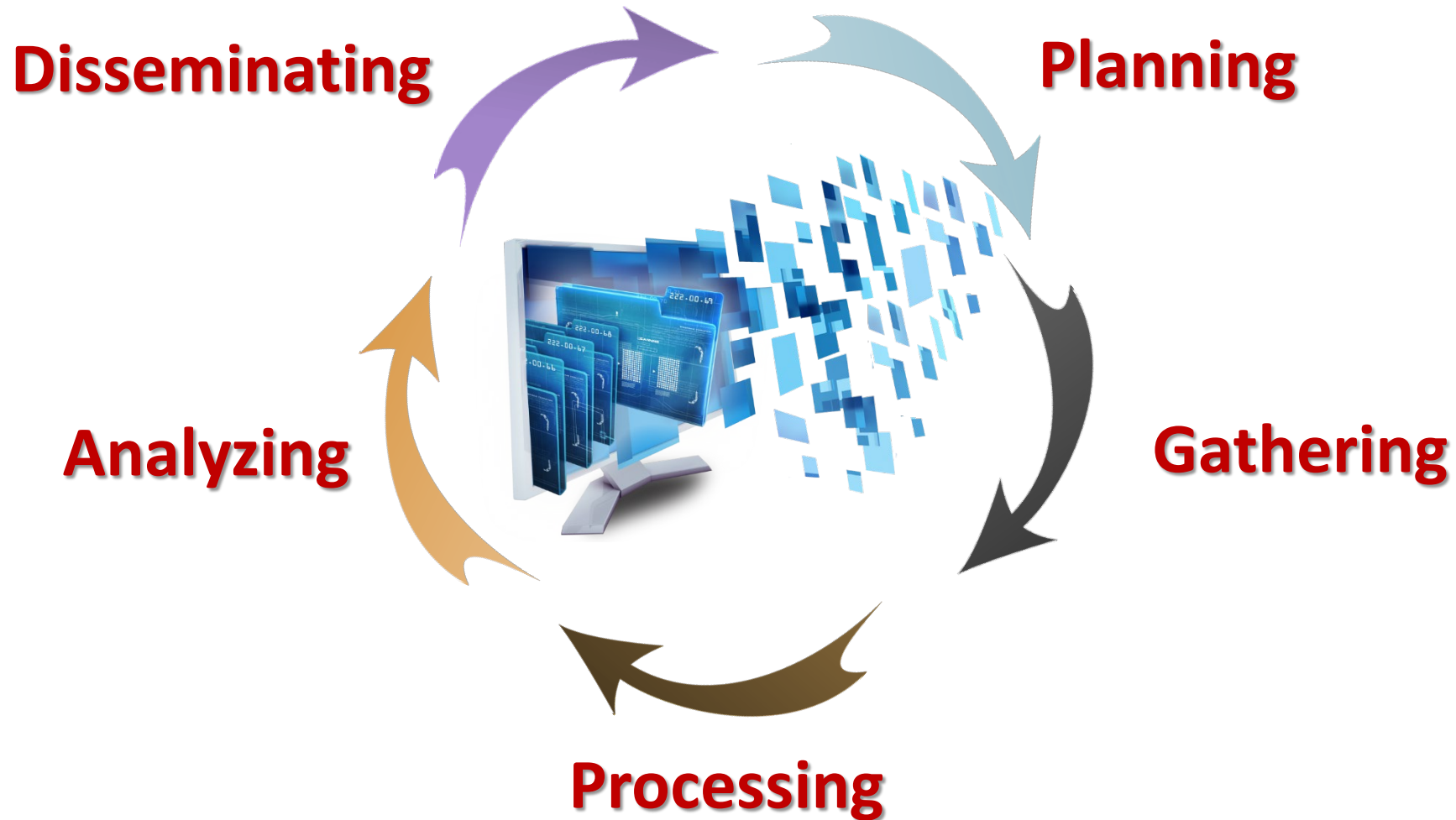Competitive Intelligence

What Is Competitive Intelligence?

Elicitation Techniques for
Competitive Intelligence

The Intelligence Process at a Glance

Disseminating

Planning

**Analyzing**

Gathering

Processing

Elicitation Techniques for
Competitive Intelligence

Collection Targets

- Collection targets are the bits of information you seek
  - Strategic targets: long-term, big picture, market-focused
  - Tactical targets: focused on specific opportunities, competitors, and capabilities
- Collection targets should be...
  1. *Focused:* Align targets with Key Intelligence Topics (KITs) and Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs)
     - What do you most need to know about a company?
     - What do you most need to know about a customer or opportunity?
  2. *Actionable:* Why is the information needed?
     - If it doesn't impact a decision, it is useless trivia
  3. *Limited:* Less is more; you cannot boil the ocean
     - Too many targets reduces chance of success
  4. *Prioritized:* Begin with the targets that are most important, then move on to the secondary and tertiary targets; lack of prioritization increases the risk of failure

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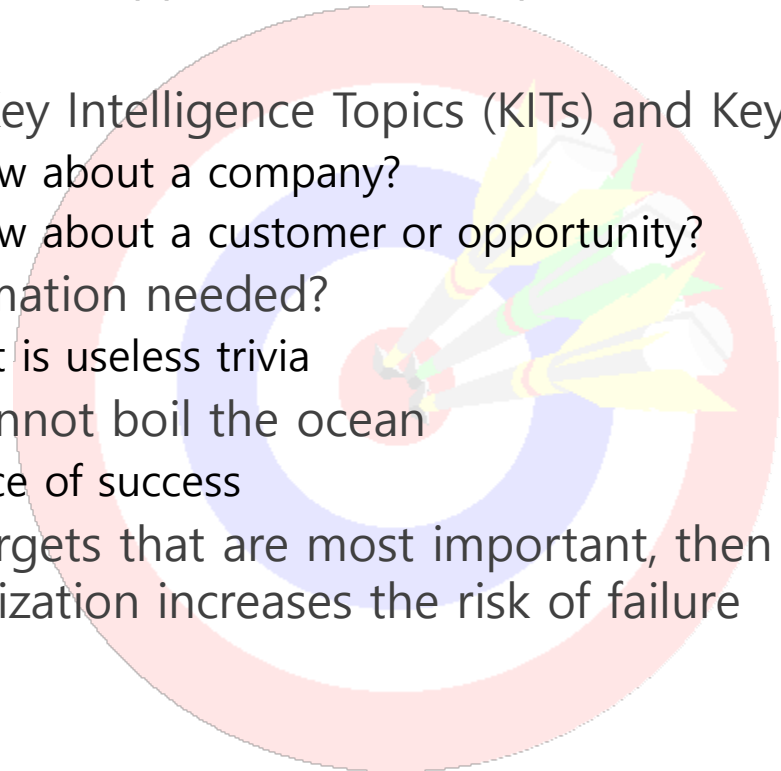
Identifying Sources

Assume:	The information <u>exists</u> AND is <u>accessible</u> (legally and ethically) to someone in <u>your</u> position
Therefore:	It is logical to conclude that a person or process <u>has stored</u> the information in a certain place (or places) for a specific reason (or reasons)
Response:	Identify <u>all possible sources</u> and prioritize those <u>most likely</u> to contain the desired information

Q: *But **HOW** do I determine what sources are most likely to contain the desired information?*

A: You must develop an understanding of:

1. The various common sources of competitive intelligence data, and
2. The various strengths and weaknesses of each

The following section will shed light on these two areas

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Identifying Primary Sources

Questions to consider:

- Who would have access to the information, either in whole or in part?

- Who would be willing to share the information <u>with me</u>, and under what conditions/circumstances?

- What approach should I use for asking/seeking?

- Who would be willing to share the information <u>with someone else</u> to whom I have access? (Relay method)

- What are the legal and ethical boundaries?

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Common _Primary_ Sources of Competitive Data

- External:
  - Industry contacts (via emails / social media / phone calls / in-person meetings)
  - Company websites
  - Direct government communication
    - SAM.gov
    - IT Dashboard
    - Agency-specific sites (Army IBOP, NASA AIS, NRO ARC, etc.)
    - Government budget sites
  - Industry events (e.g., Industry Day, Conferences / exhibitions. customer presentations. trade shows, association meetings, company presentations)

- Internal discussions (i.e., within your company):
  - Phone calls
  - Brainstorming discussions
  - Black Hats

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Primary Sources
Strengths/Weaknesses

Source	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal discussions (e.g., phone calls, black hats, etc.)	• Harvesting of "free" indigenous knowledge • Ease of access (no resistance)	• Pro-company, anti-competitor bias – prone to blind spots • Danger of ethical lapses
Phone Calls	• Direct information and/or indications from customers and/or competitors	• Highly dependent on skill of caller • Labor-intensive • Potential for resistance/ disinformation
Company Websites	• Organizational structure; leadership bios • High-level capabilities • Job vacancies indicate interests/gaps	• Marketing "spin" on information, including bias; exaggeration • Details typically limited to "innocuous" info
Gov't Procurement Sites (e.g., SAM.gov)	• Opportunity-specific information • Company interest w/ contact info	• "Canned" info with little color • Equal availability to all
Industry Events (e.g., industry days, conferences, trade shows, exhibitions, association meetings, etc.)	• Opportunity-specific information with color • Company contacts & interest indicators • Insights into teaming, solutions, capabilities, past performance, strengths, weakness, etc.	• Equal availability to all • Potential for disinformation (from industry personnel) • Marketing "spin" on information, including bias; exaggeration

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Elicitation
How to Have a Conversation

Elicitation is "a process which… *avoids direct questions* and *employs a conversational style* to help *reduce concerns and suspicions*… in the interest of *maximizing the flow of information*"
-- John Nolan

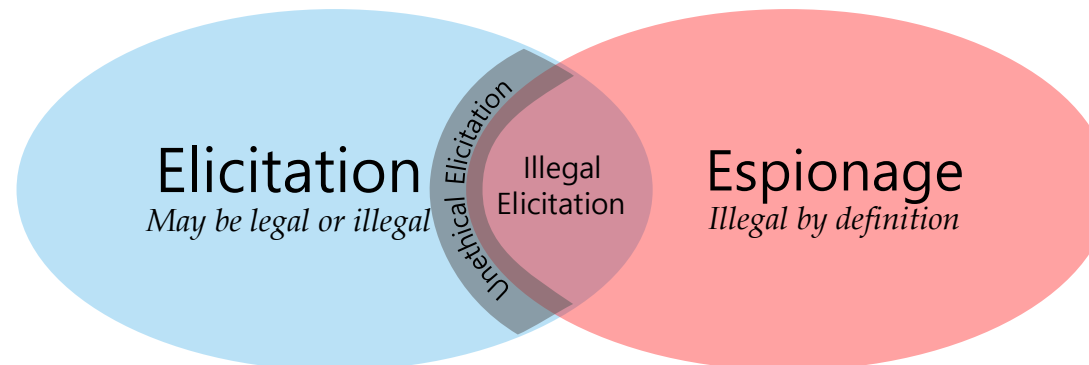Elicitation Techniques for Competitive Intelligence
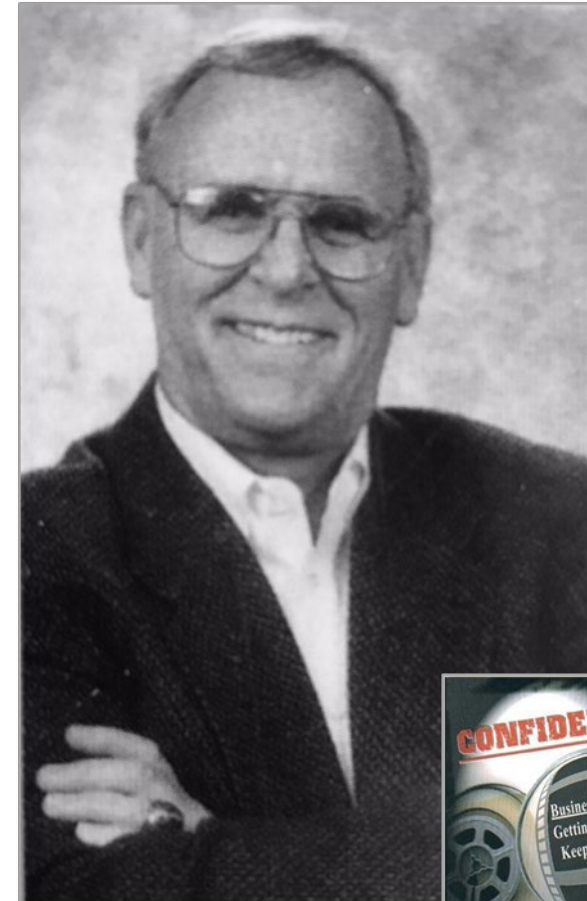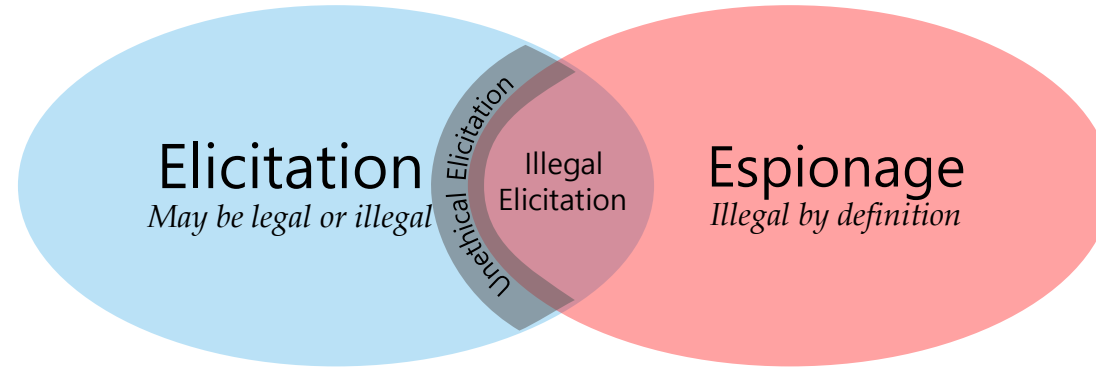
Elicitation vs. Espionage

- The difference between elicitation and espionage is about _understanding_ and _respecting boundaries_
  - <u>Elicitation</u> occurs whenever a collector successfully obtains potentially valuable information via conversation
  - <u>Espionage</u> occurs when legal boundaries are crossed, knowingly or unknowingly, for example:
    - Secret government information passed to another government
    - Proprietary or competition sensitive information transferred between competitors
  - Not all espionage involves elicitation (e.g., imagery, wiretapping, documents)
  - Not all elicitation is espionage (e.g., respects legal and ethical boundaries)

Elicitation
May be legal or illegal

Unethical Elicitation

Illegal Elicitation

Espionage
Illegal by definition

  - And not all _legal_ elicitation is <u>ethical</u>

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Ethical Do's and Don'ts

Elicitation
May be legal or illegal

Unethical Elicitation

Illegal Elicitation

Espionage
Illegal by definition

Do...
- Identify yourself and your employer
- Gather non-proprietary information
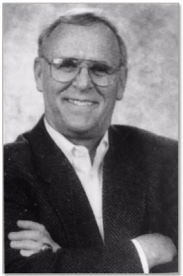- Guard what you know very carefully

Don't...
- Conceal or misrepresent yourself or your company
- Pursue OR accept proprietary or classified information
- Disclose your own sensitive information

If it feels wrong, it probably is wrong

Elicitation Methodology

General.

Specific.

General.

Approach

Exit

- People remember the beginning and end of conversations more vividly than the middle.
- So... *confine CI topics to the middle* of a conversation

- Questions are psychologically more threatening or alarming than statements
- So... *avoid questions* (yes, people DO respond to statements!)

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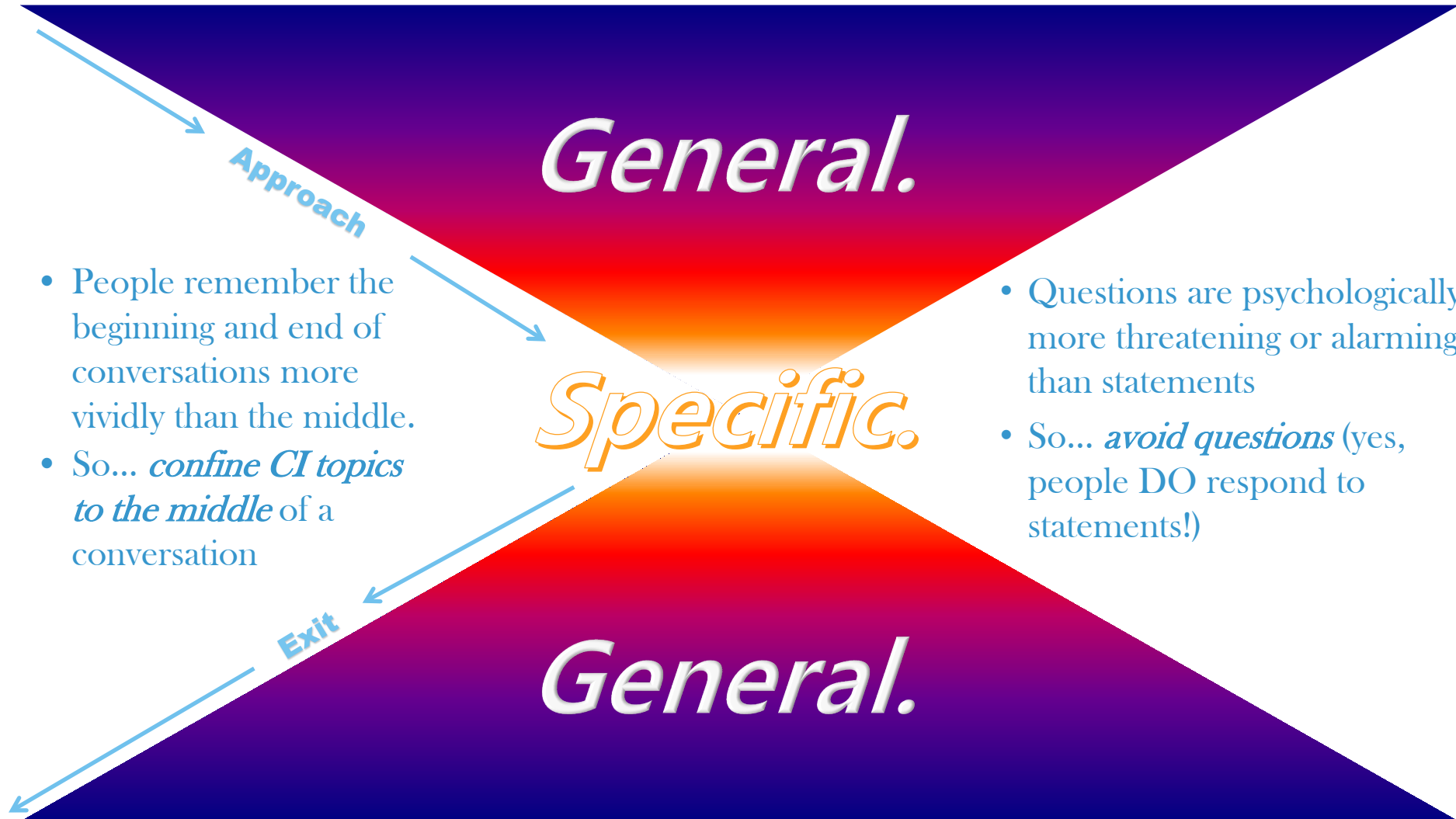
Team Exercise
Asking … Without Asking

- Translate the following questions into eliciting statements:

  - *"What is your business' approximate annual revenue?"*
    - I'm guessing your business probably brings in somewhere north of $10 million a year."

  - *"Is your company bidding on the UGLI program?"*
    - "Lockheed says they're a shoo-in for something called the UGLI program."

  - *"Is the Army currently fielding and/or testing this system?"*
    - "I'll bet the Army guys love this!"

  - *"Do you have capabilities in the area of widgets?"*
    - "I hear you guys are big into widgets." OR "I hear you guys are getting out of widget design."

  - *"Are you bidding low-cost or technically superior?*
    - "Customer budgets are constrained … I hear this customer is particularly cost-sensitive."

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Elicitation Tips
Building Rapport

- Build a collegial professional rapport

> Definition:
> **Rapport** – *n.*, relation; connection, especially harmonious or sympathetic relation

- Get to know the person:
  - Ask about how they feel, and then LISTEN!
  - Be friendly
  - Be relaxed
  - Be professional
  - Be appropriate
- Use affirming statements to convey trust and that you are on the "same side"
- Dialog should be two-way, reciprocating
- Keep questions disarming and open-ended

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Elicitation Techniques for Competitive Intelligence

Listen!

5/17/2022

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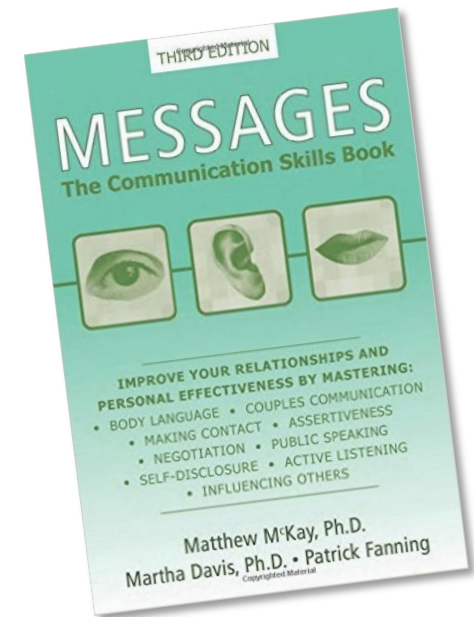Competitive Intelligence
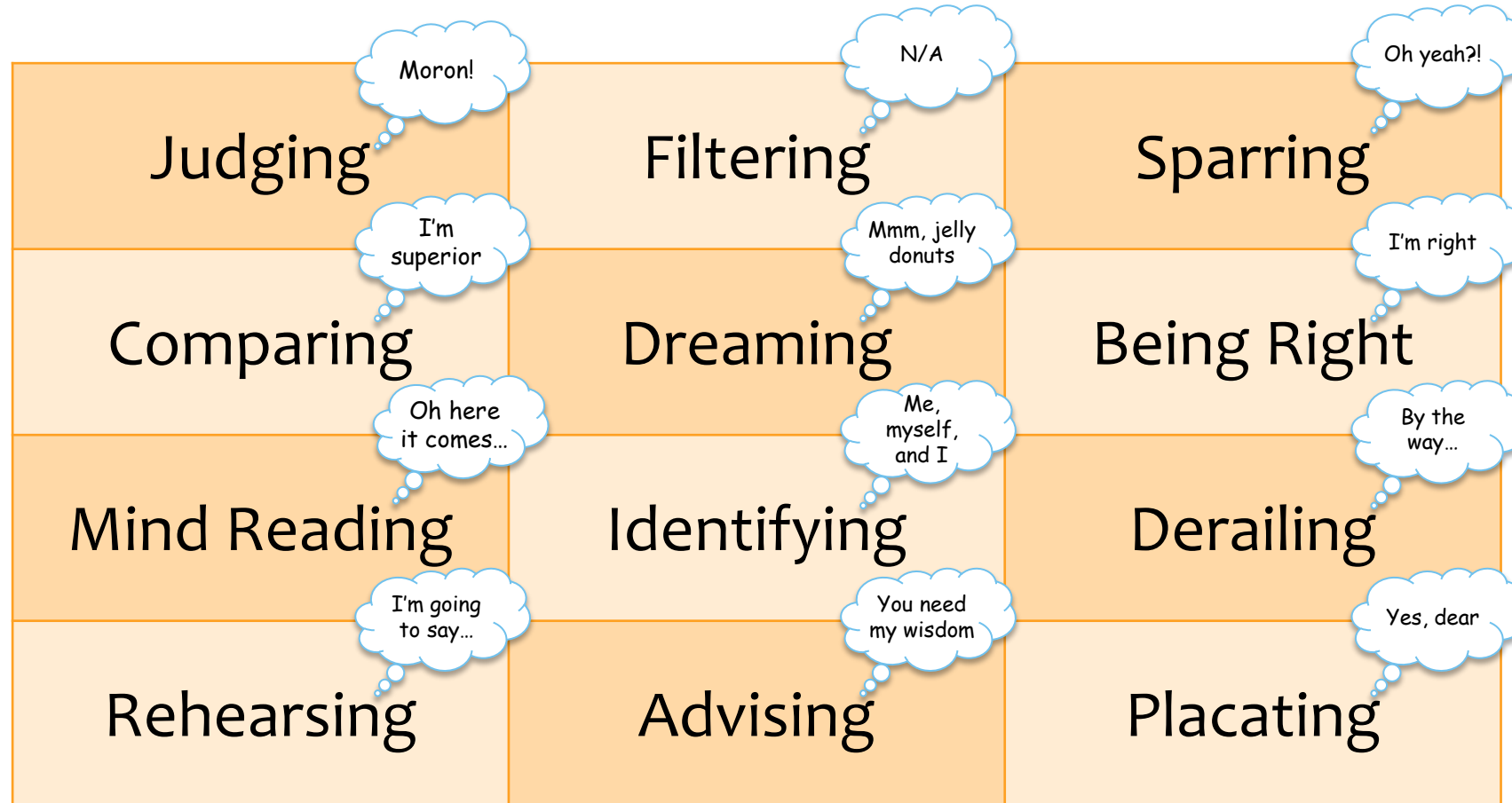
Elicitation Tips
Tactical Listening

- Important ingredients:
  - Eye contact (in moderation)
  - Eliminate distractions (e.g., smart phone, laptop, note pad)
  - Pay attention to body language
- Paraphrasing – state what you think someone just said
  - Keeps you engaged and forces you to listen
  - Examples:
    - "What I hear you saying is …"
    - "In other words…"
    - "So basically how you felt was…"
- Clarifying – ask questions!
  - Show that you are willing to work to understand
  - e.g., scope review, filling gaps
- Giving feedback – share what you thought, felt, or sensed
  - Important not to judge, spar, or identify
- *Silence* when the speaker is talking
  - Conveys respect for the speaker, and values what they are saying

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Elicitation Tips
Tactical Listening

- Avoid "blocks" to listening:

Judging	Filtering	Sparring
Comparing	Dreaming	Being Right
Mind Reading	Identifying	Derailing
Rehearsing	Advising	Placating

Elicitation Techniques for Competitive Intelligence

Elicitation Tips
"Push-to-talk" buttons

- Leverage human tendencies (i.e., "push to talk buttons")
  - **To correct mistakes/errors (truth/accuracy)**
    - Incorrect statements create an almost irresistible urge for a knowledgeable person to correct them
    - *EXAMPLE:* Try to confirm an RF device operates in the VHF spectrum by saying "... since it operates in the UHF spectrum"
  - **To prove someone wrong (competitiveness)**
    - Create an artificial contest where the subject has to "win"
    - *EXAMPLE:* Try to elicit parameters by saying "I don't think your prototype performs as well as [Competitor]'s"
  - **To gossip (judgmentalism)**
    - People love to talk about other people – so elicit customer and competitor information from all sides
    - *EXAMPLE:* "I hear those [Teammate] guys are hard to work with." OR "If only those guys at [Customer] could figure out what they want."
  - **To be recognized as an expert (ego/pride)**
    - Everyone has an ego – stroke it
    - *EXAMPLE:* "You seem like someone who knows what you're talking about."

Elicitation Techniques for
Competitive Intelligence

Elicitation Techniques and Defenses

Technique	Defined	Defense
Silence	Lack of speaking to provoke those who cannot stand a void	Stay silent
Provocative Statement	Statement that provokes another to ask you a question about a topic that you want	Don't react
Quid Pro Quo	Offering something of apparent value to prompt someone to return value in kind	Respond with questions about the offered information
Flattery	Complimentary statement about another's skill or company that prompts humble or boastful elaboration	Say "thank you"
Complainers	Comment showing camaraderie to a common problem that gets another to share similar experiences	Ask a question or defend the object of complaint
Word Repetition	Repeating a word or its meaning to suggest that you don't understand and need more explanation	Don't bite and continue with conversation
Quotation of Reported Fact	Referencing a news item about a topic to provoke a more complete explanation	Ask a question about it or plead ignorance
Purposely False Statement	Quoting a made-up claim to provoke an explanation of why it is false	Plead ignorance
Naïveté	Feigning or genuine ignorance in a topic to get a helpful education	Assume knowledge
Criticism	Casting aspersion to provoke a loyal defense	Don't bite
Bracketing	Using wide quantitative numbers to provoke a correction that is nearer the truth	Plead ignorance
Disbelief	Feigning or genuine disbelief in a fact or claim to get a deeper explanation of why it is true	Don't bite and continue with conversation

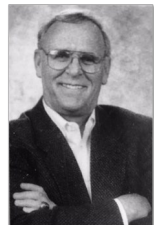Elicitation Techniques for Competitive Intelligence

Elicitation Tips
Pitfalls to avoid

- Using contradictory techniques
  - You cannot be naïve and knowledgeable at the same time
- Overusing one technique
  - Too much naiveté will start to seem suspicious
- Using too many different techniques
  - Use only those techniques you are comfortable with
- Being overly pushy
  - Be careful not to interrogate the target, as this will make them uncomfortable and give away your interest
- Being greedy
  - Limit the number of topics to avoid raising suspicions; leave and come back later if you need more
- Yes or no questions
  - Yes/no questions stifle discussion and limit flow of information; keep questions open-ended
- And always watch out for elicitation being performed on YOU

5/17/2022

Elicitation Techniques for
Competitive Intelligence

Elicitation at Trade Shows

Approach

- Show: size, location, food, best giveaways
- Informative customer briefing
- Recent press release
- Tired feet

General

Nolan's elicitation methodology:

- People remember the beginning and end of conversations more vividly than the middle – so *confine CI topics to the middle* of a conversation
- People remember questions asked of them more vividly than statements – so *avoid questions*

- This demo looks interesting.
- I hear you guys are big in _____.
- I guess you no-bid the X competition.
- I bet the Army guys love that.
- Company re-org.

Specific

Exit

- "Can't wait for lunch"
- "I'll have to look into that later"
- "Where did you say that giveaway was?"
- "I hear it's supposed to rain all day tomorrow"

General
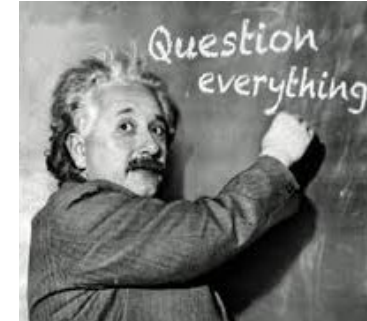
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Best Practices: Validation and Verification

- Validation and verification are absolutely essential to any intelligence collection effort


> Definitions:
> **Validate** – *v.*, check or prove the validity or accuracy of something
> **Verify** – *v.*, make sure or demonstrate that something is true, accurate, or justified

  - No single data source should EVER be regarded as 100% true
- Objectivity is a myth
  - Everyone has assumptions – what are they?
  - Everyone has biases – what are they?
  - "Cui bono?" (who benefits?)
- Misinformation / Disinformation
  - Not everyone tries to be honest or accurate
  - Some people are naïve, deceived, or ... clueless!
- Credibility
  - Not everyone knows what they're talking about

"Triangulation"

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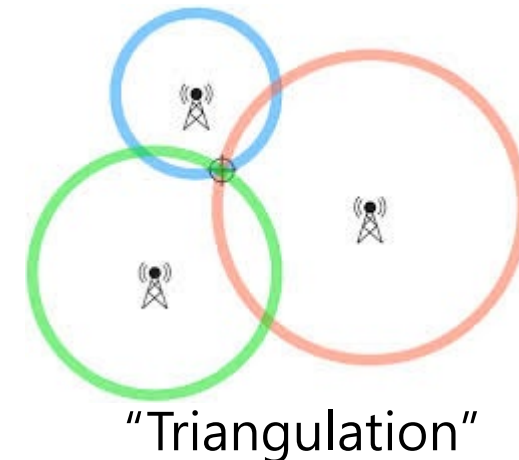
Best Practices: Validation and Verification
Example

Sometimes everyone gets it wrong

... for a long time

Elicitation Techniques for
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Remember…

- Always ensure your intelligence collection efforts are **focused on informing decisions**
- Always **plan,** based on intelligence needs and your available resources
- Always use the **right tool(s)** for the job
- Always do the **right thing**, and stay out of the grey area
- Always strive to be a **good listener** and try to see the world through the other person's perspective
- Always **protect your information**
- Always be a **responsible analyst,** validating and verifying whenever possible

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