

# Introducing the Fundamental Five of Intelligence Analyst Performance

By Prof. Mark Wilson on May 1, 2020

Several years of LAS research under Project WESTWOLF have yielded intriguing new insights into how analysts view performance. Our findings clearly show that analysts have a more nuanced view of performance than psychological research predicts, which may have implications for efforts to improve or adjust individual and team performance. We plan to find out! Future research using the "Fundamental Five" performance elements, in combination with other data, is planned.

## A Large Field Study

Over several years we collected data on how nearly 1000 intelligence analysts conducting signals intelligence at multiple cryptologic field centers viewed nine areas of performance (Mission Understanding, Impact Knowledge, Strategic Alignment, Impact Ability, Efficiency, Focus, Customer Engagement, Empowerment & Autonomy, Performance Recognition, see definitions below). An exploratory factor analysis of these data identified five distinct performance factors (IK=Impact Knowledge, SA=Strategic Alignment, IA=Impact Ability, F=Focus, and EM=Extrinsic Motivation). Both the Empowerment & Autonomy and Performance Recognition areas equally define a single factor we are calling Extrinsic Motivation. While these findings correspond with psychological theories predicting that knowledge (eg. IK, SA), skill (eg. IA, F) and motivational (eg. EM) dimensions are the key determiners of performance, it is clear that analysts make more fine grained and nuanced distinctions in both the knowledge and skill domains than what would be predicted from psychological theory. A number of indicators detailed in a forthcoming technical report make us quite confident in the stability and veracity of these findings.

## Proposed Relationship Among the Fundamental Five

While we are confident in the presence of all five factors when intelligence analysts consider performance, we are only beginning to understand the relationship among these five factors. Future efforts to examine these relationships are described below. Based on our findings so far, we propose that intelligence analyst performance (IAP) can be summarized in the formula listed below as a starting point and foil to be tested.

$$IAP = ((IK+SA/2)+(IA+F/2))*EM$$

While there is some support in the psychological literature for equations like the one presented here, we admit that it is based on little more than an educated guess. A key element in this prediction is that Extrinsic Motivation serves as an accelerant to composites of knowledge and skill factors. A clear implication of this prediction is that allowing Extrinsic Motivation to decline could have very negative effects on intelligence analyst performance.

## Future Efforts

We plan to study the relationship between the fundamental five and analyst views on their work activities, and we already have data to do so. Small scale regression tree studies have provided evidence that how analysts rate work activities is related to how they rate performance. We have plans to collect significant events (specific examples of very good and very bad performance) from large groups of analysts. One question to be examined is how easily subject matter experts can sort the events into the fundamental five. We also plan to study the relationship between these five factors, customer feedback data, and analyst competency data. As a next step, we would like to do a large field study where we integrate and test the relationships among all the types of data described above to determine the relationships, relative importance, and potential leverage points for those seeking to improve intelligence analyst performance at the individual and team levels.

## Conclusions

We feel we have identified what determines intelligence analyst performance. We have made several predictions that we plan to test in the near future. The potential implications and practical value of this research is sizable.

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## Definitions

**Mission Understanding:** Knowing how your efforts fit in to the mission of your team, branch, division and organization and being able to specifically state the mission relevance of all of your efforts.

**Impact Knowledge:** Knowing what really matters in terms of the most desirable outcomes and being able to demonstrate when they have been achieved.

**Strategic Alignment:** Making sure that individual work efforts fit into the broad strategy of the organization as a whole.

**Impact Ability:** Having the skills necessary to achieve the most desirable outcomes that really make a difference.

**Efficiency:** Making good use of resources with little waste or room for improvement. Slack resources are minimal.

**Focus:** Understanding the highest priorities at all times and being able to concentrate the most effort on what really matters.

**Customer Engagement:** Engaging with customers is a central and regular part of activity to both check our assumptions and hypotheses and track our performance.

**Empowerment & Autonomy:** Having the necessary authority to proceed quickly and without hesitation or need to check in.

**Performance Recognition:** Identifying and rewarding those who perform above and beyond expectations.