

## How to get management to use analysis

### **The biggest hurdle for a business analyst: getting his or her output used**

During a recent holiday I reflected on what I see as the most complicated task for an analyst delivering competitive intelligence output to management. After some thinking I decided that it makes sense to distinguish between things that are within your control as analyst and things that are not. The former things - e.g. collecting good data - may be challenging, but are not the most complicated. Here, practice makes perfect.

The complications start with the things that you cannot control, e.g. the mind of your customer, the decision-maker. A decision-maker may order competitive intelligence work to be done. However, she may also collect her own inputs, or may be offered inputs by sources you do not know. Her own collection may also build up a picture of what there is to know. It is only at the time of delivery of your painstaking work that you discover that she has already made up her mind about the topic you report upon. Hence, she may choose a decision other than the facts that you offered seemed to hint at. How do you, as an analyst and business professional, handle that?

### **What is true in business also holds true in the world of government**

My highlight during my holiday break was when I discovered that in business, we are not alone in facing this challenge. Keren Yarhi-Milo in her dissertation called “Knowing the Adversary – leaders, intelligence and the assessment of international relations” reports how intelligence agencies and Western Governments operate remarkably similar to ourselves as professionals in business. Many of us in business will probably instantly recognize Keren’s observations and identify with her insights<sup>1</sup>. That is at least what I did.

### **What you see for yourself makes the biggest impression**

A key insight of Keren’s work relates to what is known as the vividness bias. When a decision-maker has vividly experienced new information, the impact of this experience on her perception of the topic at stake is such that she normally is often no longer too open to change her views.

No matter how balanced the analysis was that the CIA during the Cold War provided to the US President on the intentions of Soviet Russia, one short meeting of the President, any President, with his Soviet counterpart mattered most to how he viewed those intentions.

In business, for a CEO that visits a new country and sees one or two shops selling your firm’s categories, this matters more to his views than a balanced market share analysis provided after weeks of intensive market intelligence work. The shops he saw for sure were not representative. The CEO’s picture from now is probably biased, but the damage has been done. The persuasiveness of the format of the CEO’s acquisition of this intelligence (a foreign trip, a new country, a good experience, a lively host) easily beats your balanced report with many sophisticated tables.

### **How to make the vividness bias work for you as analyst**

When analysis is your business, I believe you have two options: to get cynical or to get inspired. The first option is not a great idea, so I suggest the second one. Why don’t we, as business analysis professionals, offer our customers vivid experiences, when we deliver our content?

When did you last provide your output in video-format – with moving pictures, in which you for example interviewed your customers for the top brass to see – to create that memorable experience?

When human psychology relates vividness with persuasive impact, we are better off when we do not fight against it, but rather make it work for us. After all, it serves the right cause: maximizing the return on insight of your company by making insights being used to underpin your management’s decision-making.

---

Note

- .1. the vividness bias is only one of several insights that justify a market intelligence professional to study Keren’s work: Yarhi-Milo, K. [2014], Knowing the adversary, Princeton University Press, Princeton.