Setting the Standards for the Professionalisation of Competitive Intelligence Practice

Fleisher & Wright

Dr Craig S. Fleisher
Windsor Research Leadership Chair &
Professor of Management
Odette School of Business
University of Windsor
401 Sunset Ave
Odette Building 508
Windsor
Ontario N9B 3P4
Canada
Phone: +1 519 253 3000 Ext: 3455
E-Mail: fleisher@uwindsor.ca

Sheila Wright
Principal Lecturer
Department of Marketing
Leicester Business School
De Montfort University
Leicester
LE1 9BH
United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0) 116 207 8205
E-mail: swmar@dmu.ac.uk

BIOGRAPHIES

Craig S. Fleisher holds the Windsor Research Leadership Chair and is Professor of Management (Strategy and Entrepreneurship) at the Odette School of Business, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. He is the immediate past-president and a Fellow of the global Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP), inaugural chair of the Competitive Intelligence Foundation (Washington, DC), and was founding Editor of the *Journal of Competitive Intelligence and Management*. An active researcher of topics in the business intelligence field, he has authored many articles and popular books including *Business and Competitive Analysis* (FT Press, 2007), *Strategic and Competitive Analysis* (Pearson, 2003), and *Controversies in Competitive Intelligence* (Praeger, 2003).

Sheila Wright is a Principal Lecturer at Leicester Business School, De Montfort University where she leads the Competitive Intelligence-Marketing Interface Teaching and Research Initiative (CIMITRI). She holds an MBA from the University of Warwick, has served on the board of SCIP and is Co-Editor for the Journal of Competitive Intelligence and Management (JCIM). She is a Fellow and Chartered member of CIM, and has authored or co-authored articles published in Marketing Intelligence & Planning, European Journal of Marketing, R & D Management, Journal of Marketing and Comportamento Organizacional e Gestao, Strategic Change and the Journal of Competitive Intelligence & Management. Numerous CI related research projects have been undertaken under her supervision and she is a regular speaker and Workshop leader for CI and marketing related projects.

ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the five commonly accepted and applied standards required for a particular activity to be termed as a legitimate profession. The background to the use of standards to denote professionalism is identified and discussed. These are then applied to the current situation enjoyed by today's CI profession in a corporate environment. CI is measured against each of the five standards and is awarded a pass on one, a bare pass on one other, and a fail against the remaining three. A comprehensive list of recommendations makes it quite clear what employers, practitioners and scholars are now required to do to at least meet, and then exceed the five standards. It is suggested that without a concentrated and continuing effort, CI and CI practitioners will find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to secure equal status with the well established, traditional professions, already resident in a corporate environment.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Competitive intelligence (CI) practitioners have long sought to achieve broader acceptance from individuals outside their field. This particularly applies to those individuals who work in enterprises alongside other competent practitioners from the more established or recognized business functions such as accounting, finance or marketing. This leads to the question which practitioners are constantly asked: "Is CI a profession?". This leads colleagues, employers and other recognized professional bodies to wonder if those who currently practice CI can genuinely be considered as professionals. The intention of this paper is to identify and discuss several central issues which must inevitably be addressed if CI practitioners wish to see themselves, and have others recognize them, as members of a legitimate profession.

The questions asked of practitioners or stakeholders, by others, are not trivial, yet the most difficult question to answer for most, is that which is asked on a fairy regular basis: "What exactly do you do?" The problem is that even when a suitable answer has been given, few will understand what the words mean. This is not a problem which faces Accountants, Doctors, Engineers, or Lawyers, all of which are readily understood by the general public.

Practitioners in recognized professions derive both tangible and intangible benefits such as prestige, respect, work competency, task proficiency, and a positive image. Conversely, professional marginality implies lack of respect, questioning of roles and undefined competence, a situation which is often insulting to a field's practitioners. The learned professions, for example engineering, law, and medicine, take their status very seriously. They also exert dedicated effort into the maintenance and protection of their privileged "professional" status. In a more enlightened society which recognises expertise outside of the "traditional" professions, many organised vocations attempt to achieve the title of professional status, but few are able to.

Organised vocational groups may desire professional status for both self-serving and/or other purposes. "True" professions perform some public service that requires specialized

knowledge or skills; thus those members can powerfully control how their services should be performed. Regardless of their true motivations, a professional occupation exists partly through public need and acceptance and partly through its own persuasive authority to determine the shape and content of its service. The results of increasing a vocation's professionalism can benefit society by institutionalising a field's best practices and establishing standards of quality that better serve the public interest.

In an attempt to stimulate debate, Fleisher (2003) questioned whether CI was a profession and concluded (at that time) that the field had not yet met the essential criteria for meeting the definition of a profession. The underlying purpose of this paper is to re-assess corporate CI against criteria commonly associated with professionalism, and to subsequently examine the degree of progress made by the field over the last five years. The authors also aim to monitor the future and ascertain potential alternative directions stakeholders such as practitioners, associations, or educators in the CI field may go in seeking to professionalise CI.

BACKGROUND

What defines a "professional" or a "profession"? Definitions of these terms are many, both in theory as well as in practice, although a universally agreed-upon definition has to date eluded scholars. Scholarly literature, especially studies in the sociology realm, abounds with research on professionalism. Sociologists have sought to identify the essential components of a profession, as well as the characteristics that distinguish one occupation from others.

There has been a moderate degree of consistency afforded to the construct of "professionalism" by relevant stakeholders. Many associations have attempted to link their credential and accreditation processes to professional standards. For example, the U.S. insurance industry defined six pre-requisites of a profession when it established the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters (CPCU) certification (Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters Society 2001). These are:

- commitment to serve others
- adherence to a published code of ethics
- mastery of specialized knowledge
- generalized knowledge of other, related fields
- standards for measuring knowledge
- active participation in a professional society

Other than Fleisher's (2003) effort and a few papers which addressed individual components of the CI field's growth, such as education or certification (Calof, 1999; Merritt, 1999; Prescott, 1999; Fleisher, 2004; Bukowski, 2007), CI has had little scholarly attention vis-à-vis this phenomenon. Nevertheless, CI practitioners have had ample opportunities to consider CI "professionalism". Acknowledging the risk of oversimplification, the forthcoming analysis uses five criteria as reasonable tests by which to consider whether, or not, CI is indeed a profession. These were not arbitrarily chosen. The criteria are common to a number of scholars studying professions, professionalism, and Professionalisation. Consequently, the selected criteria were variously drawn from the writings of Barber (1963a, b); Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933); Goode (1961); Hurst (1950); Kultgen (1988); Merton (1982); Pellegrino *et al* (1991); Raelin (1986); Sokolowski (2000); Wilensky (1964).

The selected criteria stay close to the previous definitions offered within the literature but do not define the construct with any variables already labelled "professional". We believe that defining a construct by the construct alone only serves to cloud the discussion and leads to inconsistent definitional standards. Consequently, variables such as "professional" values or membership in "professional" organisations have been omitted.

THE STANDARDS FOR CI PROFESSIONALISM

The tests offered in this paper are not intended to be mutually exclusive or exhaustive but we would argue that they do provide a satisfactory means of appraising the state of CI professionalism. Individuals, viewed as leading CI practitioners and groups or associations, can use these criteria to assess their competency levels and also improve the professionalism of CI over time. The five criteria, and their indicators, are explained below:

Standard 1: Collective Service Orientation

This criterion seeks to determine whether there is a clear, defined scope and purpose for the field. For example, professionals in the "traditional" fields know what they can and cannot accomplish by using their specialised knowledge and understanding. It seeks to assess whether the practitioners understand their obligations to the welfare of others in society beyond their own self-interests. Therefore, if CI were to meet this test, it would suggest that CI practitioners understand and meet their obligations not only to their corporate employers and stakeholders, but also, and especially, the public policy institutions in which they practice. Nearly every established profession also maintains a code of ethics or standards of ethical practice to which its professionals should adhere. This code explains the professional's obligations in his/her dealings with others and the responsibilities inherent in these relationships. Additionally, the code is supported through some form of oversight and enforcement.

Standard 1: Collective Service Orientation

Under this criterion, the CI profession or professional:

1. performs a service or makes a product that improves the human condition
2. exalts service to society and others above personal gain
3. exhibits a philosophy of performing a service benefiting others
4. serves as an organisation's primary liaison between an organisation and its stakeholders
5. is proactive in raising actual and expected stakeholder concerns to their organisation's decision makers
6. attempts to harmonise or align their organisation's and stakeholders' interests
7. belongs to a collegial membership organisation sought out by other institutions for input in their decision making processes
8. serves on institutional boards associated with public policy environment matters
9. will be recognised by public policy decision makers as offering valuable inputs within their range of industry and organisational expertise
10. has opportunities to make organisational and public policy environment contributions regardless of demographic background

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Standard 2: Position of the Occupation in the Labour Force

"True" professions are common career paths towards positions of decision-making responsibility. Certain stakeholder groups, particularly University students and post-secondary educators, are usually aware of the knowledge, skills and attributes which employers are seeking and as such, find it relatively easy to deliver such education. Future practitioners

usually have to compete vigorously for entry positions in their chosen profession. There are many similarities among the "job descriptions" of people practising in the field and clients of the profession can describe, with some clarity, the kinds of qualities they expect to be demonstrated by incoming staff. Entry barriers exist in that membership of the profession is limited to an individual meeting strict performance standards across a number of competencies. Once in the profession, practitioners are given opportunities to use their unique skills and abilities to influence important matters in the larger context within which they practice. Practical experience further enhances the professional's role and responsibilities as they achieve higher levels of competence. There is an understanding among stakeholders outside the profession that practitioners play a valuable role in contributing to the success of an enterprise. Professions ordinarily retain privileged positions in the total labour force. The public also recognises, has confidence in, and is willing to remunerate members of the said profession for their services, and this increases at a rate comparable with their status within their profession.

Standard 2: Position of the Occupation in the Labour Force

Under this criterion, the CI profession or professional:

1. receives a salary of comparable levels to others at equivalent levels of the organisational hierarchy
2. experiences increasing demand for their skills, as evidenced by vacancy advertisements.
3. will be viewed by others outside their own area as important or instrumental contributors to strategic decision making
4. is seen by others outside their own area as important or instrumental contributors to critical organisational actions
5. has direct access to the senior decision makers in their respective organisations
6. is required to demonstrate increasing credentials (e.g., experience, skills, training) and to acquire upwardly mobile positions
7. has established methods by which to measure the contributions of CI practitioners and groups within the organisation
8. maintains agreed-upon job descriptions for practitioners
9. offers numerous opportunities for "professional" advancement both within and outside their particular employing organisations

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Standard 3: Abstract/Specialised Knowledge

This standard determines that the knowledge held by any particular body of professionals is unique. Professionals are viewed as "experts" in displaying competence by possessing and applying a specialised set of skills, knowledge and/or abilities. Quite often this unique set of concepts, methods and theories will comprise what is known as a "body of knowledge" or BOK. A BOK is derived through scientific inquiry and scholarly learning and is constantly tested, extended and updated through research. The BOK is acquired by undergoing rigorous preparation, typically at the final year undergraduate or post-graduate level of University programmes. Most professions also have numerous venues for accessing education and training in the required abstract knowledge areas as well as through continuous in-service training, continuing professional development (CPD) schemes and personal growth after successfully completing a formal education and/or qualification programme. When a BOK exists, practitioners in a named profession can measure their knowledge and learning against the various facets and standards derived from the BOK.

Standard 3: Abstract/Specialised Knowledge

Under this criterion, the CI profession or professional will demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities in:

1.   planning CI projects, key intelligence question/topic (KIQ/KIT) development
2.   primary data collection processes and techniques
3.   secondary data collection practices and techniques
4.   environmental scanning, monitoring and analysis
5.   analysis methods and processes
6.   ethical approaches to CI practice and processes
7.   knowledge of legal aspects relevant to CI practice
8.   company, customer, industry, competitor, and macro-environmental research
9.   decision-making, marketing and planning support activities
10. methods and systems for storing and disseminating CI-related information

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Standard 4: General Knowledge of Other, Related Fields

Even though every profession has a literature or BOK of its own, it must also draw on knowledge and skills from other contiguous areas of knowledge. All professions interact within networks of other professions or vocations and are interdependent within the institutionalized contexts of society. As such, professions often share a variety of knowledge bases generally associated with other professions. This education is typically offered through advanced educational institutions although that does not necessarily mean it has to be University based. The generalized knowledge held by professionals enables them to efficiently and effectively utilize their specialized knowledge in a way that makes the profession relevant to recipients of the professionals' services.

Standard 4: General Knowledge of Other, Related Fields

Under this criterion, the CI profession or professional will demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities in:

1.   budget management/financial numeracy
2.   communication, oral and written, face to face
3.   critical thinking/analysis/synthesis
4.   decision making
5.   diplomacy/etiquette
6.   ethics
7.   goal and objective setting
8.   leadership
9.   management approaches and techniques
10. negotiation
11. organisational culture and politics
12. persuasion
13. planning and organising
14. problem solving
15. project/campaign management
16. research
17. speech preparation and writing
18. teamwork/interpersonal relationships
19. technology (information, office suites)
20. time management

Standard 5: Active Participation in a Recognized Membership Society

No modern profession exists outside of a collective body of individuals who provide the governance structure and direction for its individual members. National or international policy-making bodies typically require a collective body to represent a profession within public policy debates and discussion. Membership societies can serve a number of important, public tasks such as: providing a means of regulating member behaviour through issuing sanctions to individuals who abridge standards of practice or ethics, updating and upgrading member knowledge and skills; providing networking opportunities to allow professionals to share knowledge and practices; and/or serve as a central means for documenting and transmitting the BOK as well as the subsequent standards for measuring performance. Some professional bodies and associations are afforded a mandate of delegation by public policy-makers and the public itself, to serve as a licensing, certification or accreditation agent. This not only reduces the need for Government to intervene, but places the day to day management of the profession into non-political hands which provides day-to-day oversight.

Standard 5 - Active Participation in a Recognised Membership Society

Under this criterion, the CI profession or professional:

1. raises and maintains ethical and practice standards
2. acts as a facilitator to confer with those in the occupation to ascertain their collective views
3. helps members improve their practice and ethics
4. promotes confidence in CI practice and acts as an advocate or spokesperson for CI practice
5. allows for continuing education/skill development/training and provides the means to continually upgrade standards of CI practice
6. educates potential clients of CI practitioners by establishing the reputation of members
7. ensures that members understand, agree to, and abide by published standards of practice and provide the means to dispel those who do not
8. encourages socialization and greater understanding of the CI practitioners role
9. monitors and responds to perceptions of the occupation amongst key opinion leaders
10. provides discussion forums for key occupational issues

FINDINGS

It is instructive to provide a contemporary assessment of the field of corporate competitive intelligence vis-à-vis these five criteria. A number of detailed analyses of professionalism in other aspiring business- oriented fields such as human resources, management accounting, marketing, policy analysis, public management, purchasing and total quality management have taken place since 1990. To our knowledge, other than the Fleisher (2003) paper, these comprehensive analyses have not taken place in fields commonly associated with competitive intelligence.

No definitive claims are made that the discussion which follows would be agreed upon, or even accepted, by every CI practitioner. However, we believe that a detailed examination of a representative global sample of corporate CI practitioners would affirm and provide empirical support to the arguments being presented here. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper

to perform this empirical assessment, the authors aim to provide some constructive direction to those individuals who might undertake this task.

Standard 1: Collective Service Orientation

The CI field has a long history, although one that is often not adequately documented (Juhari & Stephens, 2006). The field in its more modern context has existed for a little more than three decades in the United States and is closely associated with the formation of the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) in 1986. The growth of CI should in no way be viewed as only a North American phenomenon. Indeed, CI in Europe and Asia arguably has as long, if not a longer, history than its North American counterpart (Wright & Calof, 2006; Wright, 2004; Fleisher, 2002). The socio-political cultures in some European and Asian nations, has created more CI receptivity among their businesses and businesspeople (Wright, 2004; Fleisher, 2002). Nevertheless, the only membership body which exists in the CI field is SCIP, which remains primarily dominated by North American practitioners and North American practice (SCIP 2001a)

A substantive test posed under this standard is whether "professional" CI practice genuinely betters the human condition. CI practitioners should be valuable in that they help improve the competitiveness of their organisations. CI practitioners can theoretically offer decision-makers accurate and reliable information which should enable them to make better informed, high quality decisions. In times of increasingly lean resources available to senior decision makers, CI practitioners can be vital to their ability to perform effectively. Few others in the organisation maintain the expertise and skills needed to serve critical intelligence roles and it could be argued that organisations without a CI effort would, at least conceptually, become less competitive and less able to meet the demands of customers and employees. This all sounds fine in theory, but practice suggests a different story. It is suggested that few members of the general public would be able to cite one widely known example of how CI bettered the human condition and even many veteran producers, or consumers, of competitive intelligence would also struggle to do so.

As in many fields, difficulties arise when ethical considerations occur between public and private interests. Such occasions emerge when a company puts its own self-interest in market matters ahead of the so-called public interest. In CI, this occurs whenever there is a breach of law, ethical code, or code of conduct, whereby the practitioner crosses the ethical line into the "grey area" of espionage or illegal activity. Another assault on CI professionalism comes from critics who note a number of questionable practices to gain information, such as dumpster diving, manipulated communication, phantom interviews, interception of cell-phone transmissions, posing as students or engaging in blatant misrepresentation (Fehringer and Hohhof, 2006).

Although these activities are seen as being well outside of SCIP's Code of Ethics and most CI practitioners' views of legality and ethics, professionalism in the CI field suffers to the extent that such unethical and/or illegal practices do occur. These are then viewed, rightfully or wrongfully, by both the public, and the media, as being associated with normal commercial CI practice. Some commercial CI practitioners learned their trade in a government or security service environment, which have different expectations and standards than are present within organisations competing in the private sector commercial environment. The field will suffer in its march towards professionalism as long as CI remains closely associated in public perception or actual practice with the world of retired law enforcement officers, criminal or

federal agents and political agendas. The perception of CI's value to the firm, and the skills of CI practitioners would significantly rise were the image to be less linked with questionable practices. The modern corporate world is no longer enamoured with such activity and one could even argue that if such distancing does not take place soon, then the future for CI practice and practitioners looks bleak.

Standard 2: Position of the Occupation in the Labour Force

Outside the Organisation:

Over the past 20 years, the field of CI has seen ebbs and flows in its position in the labour market. This can be measured in several ways, most notably in the number of CI jobs being advertised. Year-to-year differences in SCIP membership numbers, relative CI budget size or staffing are also keen indicators of activity. Using an admittedly flawed proxy of SCIP member number, the number of corporate CI practitioners grew steadily throughout the 1980s and '90s, only to decline in the early 2000s in reaching a current state of about 3000 members around the globe. SCIP membership grew from 1,156 members in 1989 to 6,901 in 1999 (Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals 2001a), and average growth rates of over 20% during the 1990s were witnessed with a peak growth rate of 51% between 1995 and 1996. This growth rate has seen considerable decline in the late 1990s, slowing to single-digit levels in the late 1990s, a trend that presently continues.

Increasing salaries and level of responsibility are also an indicator of a field's "Professionalisation". CI practitioner salaries increased during most of the 1990s and into the early part of the present decade, mirroring SCIP membership growth. Surveys by the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals and Lexis-Nexis (2000) and SCIP (2004) found that the average salary level for samples of between 300–800 CI practitioners surveyed by SCIP was:

> US$ 57,000 (1995)
> US$ 69,000 (1997)
> US$ $67,400 (2000)
> US$ 78,064 (2003/4)

Over half of the 2003/04 SCIP survey respondents, and fifty-four percent of the year 2000 survey respondents stated that their organisations had one, or less than one, full-time CI practitioner, despite the fact that four out of ten of these respondents worked in organisations employing over 10,000 employees worldwide. Over half of these respondents held a Masters degree qualification and averaged over 15 years of work experience. Another notable trend seen in these surveys conducted between 1995-2000 was that CI practitioners generally did not stay in their CI positions for extended periods of time. As recently as 2003/04, almost half of the nearly 500 respondents to a SCIP survey claimed to have been in their CI position for less than two years (SCIP, 2004), while sixty-six percent of the 2000 survey respondents had only been in their position for two years or less (Competitive Intelligence Foundation, 2006; Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals and Lexis-Nexis 2000).

One continuing trend in corporate CI is the relative absence of the entry-level management-track CI position. Few corporations employ graduating students direct from University into management-track CI positions. Corporate organisations are more likely to employ a practitioner once they have "cut their teeth" for a few years in an agency, consultancy, not-

for-profit, or governmental-intelligence department. This trend runs counter to many established professions, whereby the means are established for graduates to engage in the practice immediately on completion of their University studies. However, there has been a global increase since the early 1990s in the number of postgraduate courses offered for mid-level executives, a trend expected to continue into the near future to meet the demand for evolving CI and management knowledge.

Within the Organisation:

Senior managers are familiar with the term "analyst", but they don't always fully understand the roles held by these individuals. What is often remarkable is that individuals who hold a title such as industry analyst, business analyst, CI analyst, market analyst and the like, can have difficulty communicating what they do to line managers and operatives. This may be a somewhat ironic feature of CI, in that it is very adept at communicating the position of the organisation in its external marketplace, but often those same communication skills are less evident when trying to position the function within the organisation.

There are very few, if any, senior or executive vice-presidents in global corporations with CI as part of their job title, although there are executives with marketing or strategy-oriented job titles which require them to oversee organisational CI as part of their portfolio (SCIP, 2004). CI committees at the board level remain rare. Contrast this situation with other functions such as finance, human resources, legal or marketing. Not only do a number of prominent corporations have all of these functions represented at Board level but they have both senior and junior executives serving decision makers at all subsequent levels.

The question of whether CI career paths exist within most typical organisations is also debatable. Only a small percentage of corporations have established formal CI career paths, and these typically are only the largest of global MNEs. The relatively short duration of time that practitioners spend in CI positions reinforces this observation (SCIP, 2004). Compare this to the finance profession, where a new graduate begins their corporate experience in an entry-level position, moves into junior, then senior, and eventually executive management, typically staying within the finance function. Some finance professionals have soared to the peak of their firms, indeed many see that as an attainable goal, but this is a feat highly unlikely to occur for CI practitioners.

Standard 3: Abstract/Specialised Knowledge

Proficiency:

There are a number of business concepts and analytical techniques that are uniquely applied by CI practitioners that are not commonly found in other business disciplines. These include counter-intelligence, HUMINT (human intelligence), intelligence assets, intelligence cycle, intelligence maps, intelligence system, key intelligence questions/topics, open source, PHOTOINT (photographic intelligence), shadowing teams, strategic and tactical intelligence, war gaming, war rooms. Nevertheless, none of these concepts has become ubiquitous or second-nature to others in the corporation. For better or worse, the evidence is that few of these are used frequently or regularly by disciplines other than CI (Bukowski, 2007).

Few other vocations require their practitioners to be proficient in: obtaining CI requests; primary and secondary data collection techniques; numerous analytical and synthesis

processes; knowledge of information and communication systems; and having deep industry knowledge and networks, just to name a few (Calof 1999). However, there is undoubtedly some degree of overlap with the marketing function here.

Whether these capabilities need to be gained through training and education as opposed to being acquired through experience is a necessary professional question. It is entirely possible for a practitioner to succeed in corporate CI, at least in the short term, using on-the-job experience and accumulated personal contact networks. Whether that same success can be achieved over the long run is less clear, in today's increasingly complex corporate CI environment.

Education:

Occasional courses are offered in CI, mainly among business or management schools and schools of library and information science. However these are typically elective classes as CI is not a required topic of study in most business or management schools. Nevertheless, schools are teaching CI-related techniques in their core business curriculum, and general management degrees such as the ubiquitous MBA (Prescott, 1999). Even then, these concepts are most commonly subsumed into a general business policy or corporate strategy module with the resultant emphasis being on the application of strategic models rather than understanding the finer techniques of analysis or data acquisition. One could reasonably argue that the former is impotent without the latter but this, of course, is harder to teach in the absence of opportunities for application in practice.

There is no permanent, voluntary oversight body devoted to determining standards of CI education. The field is still nowhere near a "critical-mass" level of scholars, and there may even be a major supply-side shortage which will inhibit future growth. A review of post-secondary theses and dissertations showed that less than a dozen per year on average have been conducted during the 2003-06 period (Fleisher, Wright and Tindale, 2007). Furthermore, the vast majority of the individuals that completed these major efforts of scholarship can now be found either in consultancies, corporations or vendor organisations, further diminishing the supply of qualified professionals to teach the next generation at established Universities.

Even an examination of the 2006 SCIP membership database shows less than two dozen full-time Professors affiliated to a University. There are no permanent University- based research centres dedicated solely to the study of CI, although developments since 2004 at Mercyhurst College appear to be moving toward reaching this level. Additionally, recent efforts made by Dr. Jonathan Calof and Sheila Wright to develop a web presence for teaching and research at University of Ottawa have materialised in the form of an Intelligence Research and Teaching Network (INTRAN), located at www.intelligence.management.uottawa.ca), There is also the Competitive and Marketing Intelligence Research and Teaching Initiative (CIMITRI) at Leicester Business School, De Montfort University, UK, led by Sheila Wright which is yet another indicator that greater formalisation may occur.

There are few, if any, books that are suitable for use in a University classroom and there is currently only one academic journal specifically dedicated to CI, the *Journal of Competitive Intelligence and Management.* An examination by Fleisher, Wright and Tindale (2007) highlighted those Journals which accepted scholarly output during the period 2003-2006. It is worth noting that only 149 articles were published during that time, in 65 different academic Journals with just 5 titles managing a score in excess of 5 over the three year period.

Journal Title	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
Journal of Competitive Intelligence and Management	11	18	11	5	45
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	2	3	5	1	11
International Journal of Technology Intelligence and Planning			2	8	10
Journal of Knowledge Management	3	2		2	7
South African Journal of Information Management	5			1	6

Beyond the accredited post-secondary educational institutions, a number of organisations have also tried to offer educational services targeted to CI practitioners. Groups like the Academy of Competitive Intelligence (ACI), Institute for Competitive Intelligence (ICI) and SCIP offer a calendar of multiple CI courses. Whether these organisations can maintain momentum in growth and participation over an extended time period remains to be seen.

Continuing Professional Development

The body of knowledge (BOK) underlying a true profession does not remain static and is routinely challenged through both practice and research. This is a primary reason that professionals also require combinations of education, experience, and continued learning. This is most commonly framed as CPD (continuing professional development) and is the vehicle through which the professional is granted continued use of the designatory letters after their name and retain certain standings among their peers. Failure to undertake CPD at the required level can bring sanctions from the governing body, leading to loss of membership and in some cases, employment in many of the recognized professions.

Body of Knowledge

Last but not least, most CI practitioners and scholars would agree that a standardized BOK does not yet exist in the CI field. SCIP oversaw efforts to establish a BOK in the mid to late 1990s, which instead generated a listing of CI competencies (Fleisher, Wright, and Tindale, 2007; Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals, 2001b). Whilst this was of some interest to the CI community and resulted in several conference presentations, it only provided one facet of a BOK. Attempts to integrate these competencies in to the field's existing literature or a formalised and widely accepted educational programme were not achieved. More recently, the Competitive Intelligence Foundation (CIF) has reinvigorated this task with the goal of having a BOK produced and disseminated sometime during 2008. It remains to be seen whether this latest effort, will produce any greater insight, or more significant output, than was accomplished at the first attempt.

Standard 4: General Knowledge of Other, Related Fields

Increasingly, general knowledge of related fields is typically acquired by taking some form of post-secondary education. It is usual for senior corporate CI practitioners to have acquired a university education. SCIP membership surveys have demonstrated that educational attainment is important to achieving more senior levels of corporate CI practice. Again, 59%, representing over 500 respondents, held at least a Master's degree (SCIP, 2004). The average number of years' work experience held by today's CI practitioners is sixteen (SCIP, 2004).

Combine this with the level of education within the field and a reasonable argument could be put forward for CI practitioners being regarded as highly experienced, highly educated, the most comprehensive observers and analysts of corporate activity, the best evaluators of the firm and its competitive environment, not easily replaced, and as such, highly valuable contributors to marketplace success within the firm (Rouach & Santi, 2001). To this should be added the previous knowledge which many bring from other functions into their CI work and their intimate understanding of the potential impact of decisions made on differing activities. On this evidence, it would seem that those within the CI field would have demonstrably little difficulty in meeting this particular test of professionalism.

Standard 5: Active Participation in a Membership Society

Apart from the obvious and continuing presence of SCIP, there has been growth in the activity of other CI associations. A number of new associations dedicated to promoting the interests of CI practitioners were born over the past 15 years, including the CI interest group of the special Libraries Association (SLA), Association for Global Strategic Information (AGSI), SCIP Australia (SCIPAust), Competia (Canada), South African Association of CI Professionals (SAACIP), and Society of Competitive Intelligence China (SCIC). Each of these associations once made or continues to make strides to increase the visibility of CI in their respective countries or beyond. Not all have been able to stand the test of time though, and some, such as AGSI and Competia, were either dissolved or reformed under a new name.

The 'shifting sands' nature of such organisations, and in some cases their limited life span, does not help to give others outside of CI an impression of stability, consistency of purpose, or cohesion. To the sceptic, it seems that anybody wishing to start an organisation containing the phrase 'competitive intelligence' is welcome to do so, without reference to anything or any other recognised body. There is no control over who can call themselves a CI practitioner, or announce their CI initiative as being legitimately connected with the CI profession and this has to be an important concern for genuine practitioners.

In addition to the CI associations mentioned above, a number of other for-profit groups maintain various efforts in the CI field. Groups such The Conference Board, Frost and Sullivan, International Institute for Research (IIR), International Productivity and Quality Center (IPQC), and Marcus Evans, amongst others, have all held several CI-specific courses in the last ten years. These are more commonly a forum to discuss key occupational issues, encourage socialization among individual practitioners, help members improve their practice, and monitor perceptions of the occupation among key opinion leaders. Theoretically, they also provide the ability for governmental bodies to confer with the occupation, although the leadership of most of these groups has generally chosen to avoid taking up vigorous advocacy roles. Each of these groups offers products and services in the form of meetings, networking sessions, workshops and/or seminars designed to upgrade people's awareness of trends and practice.

These groups do not provide the means for assessing whether practitioners have met minimum standards of professional competence in these areas. At least in part because of their for-profit nature, few of these groups ensure that members agree and abide by published standards of practice or provide a means to sanction those individuals or organisations that contravene these standards. Although virtually all the CI-associated groups raise ethical concerns and issues during their meetings, none would volunteer to take on the role of disciplinarian should it be required. They would not see this as their role and would never

entertain acting as such as this could affect their commercial offerings. As a consequence, we have many organisations who have rather smartly realised that this is a market opportunity where there is a keen desire to "belong" coupled with a thirst for training, knowledge and best practice.

Despite its longevity of over two decades, SCIP has also experienced several periods of unevenness in its resourcing and support of CI professionalism. For example, SCIP leadership had witnessed great growth in local chapter activity and organisation in the 1990s. At one time, it had approximately 70 chapters in the US and international centres of good standing. Subsequently, it has witnessed a decline in the number of active chapters, reduced to 25 in 2007 and is now absent or somewhat lethargic in some major centres of the US and Canada. Commercial activity in areas such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, or Montreal is weak. SCIP's efforts at developing "local" networks outside the US has experienced even greater turbulence, having once been actively engaged in major European centres, only to be reduced to 2 formalised European affiliates in 2007: Frankfurt and the Czech Republic. The evidence is that whilst CI practitioners are keen to participate for the good of the profession, there remains a need to achieve more even and effective leadership, networking, resources development and standard setting by the primary global membership association of CI practitioners. Despite attracting over 1000 participants to its 2007 Annual Conference in New York and almost 300 delegates to its European Summit in Germany, there remains a lot of work to be done to mobilise the profession.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding analysis of how well CI currently fares against the five tests is instructive. The field passes the test on Standard 2 and on Standard 4 but there is still work to be done. It falls short on Standards 1, 3 and 5.

CI Professionalisation Scorecard

Performance against the Five Standards

Standard 1: Collective Service Orientation	*Fail*
Standard 2: Position of the Occupation in the Labour Force	*Bare Pass*
Standard 3: Abstract/Specialised Knowledge	*Fail*
Standard 4: General knowledge of other, related fields	*Pass*
Standard 5: Active participation in membership societies	*Fail*

It is clear that if the field is to move closer toward professional status and build on the progress it has made during the last 20 years, then the leading membership associations, practitioners, employers and educators of CI need to come together to accomplish this, for the common good. The direct involvement of those who are most likely to be affected by any change is likely to hasten successful implementation. It is suggested that the following actions need to be taken to rectify the current situation. Each is designed to address one or more of the shortfalls which CI as a profession currently experiences, measured against the 5 standards.

Standard 1: Collective Service Orientation	
Action Needed	**Element**
CI practitioners to exercise their considerable intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities on a voluntary basis in order to assist not-for-profit, charitable and related worthy causes aimed at making the world better and safer	1, 2 & 3
Recognition by senior executives, of the benefits which effective CI brings to the firm	3 & 4
Overt appreciation of the unique value and understanding which a CI practitioner brings to the firm, through a proactive awareness of the firm's immediate and future competitive environment	5
Employers and other professionals to recognise the potential for CI output to significantly affect a firm's understanding of its competitive landscape and for the individuals providing this insight to be regularly afforded a seat at the decision making table	5 & 7
Employers and other staff advisory professionals to appreciate the unique ability which CI staff have to work across boundaries within the firm, to cross fertilise disparate data and turn this into intelligence	6
Recognition of the role which a CI practitioner typically plays in providing coherence between differing and diverse information management techniques, often within a multi-faceted, multi-directional, multi-national firm	6
CI professionals to seek out, and secure, non-Executive Director roles and to aim to be seen as of at least equal value to, if not more than, the members of the established commercial professions who typically take on such roles, such as lawyers, accountants, marketers, engineers, or scientists	7
CI professionals also recognise their unique industry and organisational expertise and to leverage this via input to public policy debates, public advocacy, industry level think-tanks" and national productivity debates	8 & 9

Standard 2: Position of the Occupation in the Labour Force	
Action Needed	**Element**
CI salaries to be set at a level commensurate with the unique cross functional and industry knowledge skills typically present in a CI practitioner	1
Status and benefits which recognise the irreplaceability of the unique multi- dimensional information assimilated by an experienced CI practitioner at both the conscious and sub-conscious levels	1
Organisations to realise that the lack of a CI function, however primitive, is as commercially damaging as the absence of an Accounting or governance function, and to recruit accordingly	2
Recognition by employers that the question is not about the cost of embracing CI activity, but rather, the cost of NOT doing so	2, 3 & 4
CI practitioners and the CI function to be placed ideally, at the most senior executive level, or at least, reporting directly to the senior executive level	5
Just as industry specific financial performance ratios are normal measures of efficiency and contribution, CI practitioners should develop methods, relevant to their own working environment, by which both their input and output can be measured and assessed for its commercial value	7

Standard 3: Abstract/Specialised Knowledge	
Action Needed	**Element**
Employers of CI practitioners to require the successful completion of a formal post-secondary qualification for all types of competitive analysis appointment	All
Development of task and person specifications for the CI role	All
Document and actively maintain a publicly accessible CI Body of Knowledge	5 & 7
Mainstream universities to design validate and offer degree level programmes at entry level which would incorporate all aspects of the CI role, with option streams for the public sector, industry specific and not-for-profit sectors.	All
Establishment, funding and promotion of CI Centres of Excellence of Teaching and Research	All
Development of approved training programmes, validated by recognized independent or public authorities	All
CI Centres of Excellence to design, validate and promote post-experience Certificate and Diploma programmes for existing CI practitioners	All
Introduction of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme, required to be completed and maintained to demonstrate continued post-qualification, post-experience competence in the role	All
The development of an agreed code of ethics and standards of behaviour, capable of being applied, implemented and enforced	6
CI practitioners required to affirm to ethical behaviour and employers to be required to take sanctions, up to an including the termination of a contract through a gross misconduct clause should individuals break those standards	6
On appointment to a corporate role, the CI practitioner should spend a period of up to 12 months (dependent on the size and scope of the firm) in as many different functions and locations as possible, in order to gain full appreciation of the organisations activities	8 & 9

Standard 4: General Knowledge of Other, Related Fields	
Action Needed	**Element**
In-house training schemes to be developed by employers to familiarise CI and related decision-support practitioners with specific organisational norms, processes and practices	1, 9, 11
Employers of new entry CI employees to devote the required amount of time and effort to teaching and honing the "soft" skills necessary for the development of a well-rounded communicator, negotiator and team player	2, 5, 10, 12, 17
Employers to teach and develop the management skills necessary for a CI practitioner to work effectively across all functions and levels of the organisation	2, 5, 8, 18, 20
Employers to engender a working atmosphere where critical thinking, critical analysis, creativity of thought is possible and not discouraged	3
Employers to demand that their CI practitioners abide by an agreed standard of ethical behaviour in their CI tasks	6
Employers of CI practitioners to appreciate that industry specific know-how is not absorbed by osmosis and to undertake to train and develop their CI practitioners in those skills in order for them to reach maximum effectiveness at a faster rate	15, 16
Employers to encourage "managed" intelligence exchange and networks and to actively discourage "information silos"	18
CI practitioners and employers to be willing to engage with information technology and solutions used for non-CI related decision assistance and problem solving tools	4, 13, 14 & 19

Standard 5 - Active Participation in a Recognised Membership Society	
Action Needed	*Element*
The crafting and development of an agreed ethical standard of CI practice for all locations, all levels of activity and common roles, and be willing to impose sanctions on those who break the rules	1, 3, 7
Engender co-operation among the growing number of existing CI membership associations, for-profit information, educational providers and academic researchers	2
Promote strong growth in research and scholarship by providing opportunities to conduct further academic research of CI phenomena, sponsoring senior appointments in CI at leading educational institutions and CI Centres of Excellence	3, 5
Provide opportunities for information exchange between practitioners, scholars, vendors and other interested parties, either via national/international conferences, dialogues and/or local events	8
Support academic research programmes through the funding of specific projects	5
Provide student research and writing competitions with tangible benefits to nurture and develop young talent in CI	3
Act as a neutral facilitator for the discussion of "hot issues" such as remuneration, status, access to decision makers and dubious practice	10
Take up work related issues on behalf of members and act as a neutral mediator in the case of work-related conflict	4, 10
Take advantage of all opportunities and all situations to actively lobby relevant pubic authorities for the CI profession, and not just those occasions where the goal is commercial gain	4, 6, 9
Require that all "for credit" educational courses are subject to independent and public scrutiny before being awarded accredited status	5
Actively promote all accredited courses in favour of non accredited courses	5
Provide the opportunity and means for the further development of accredited courses in order to maintain a full and up-to-date portfolio of offerings which meets member requirements	5

THE FUTURE FOR CI PROFESSIONALISM AND CI PROFESSIONALS

In light of the new economic growth, advancing information and communication technologies, increasing globalization, accelerating pace of change, and growing importance of learning and knowledge, the importance of CI to successfully competitive organisations can only grow in the future (Herzog, 2007; Fleisher, 2001; Fleisher and Blenkhorn 2001). It would be most desirable for CI to take steps towards further professionalisation and increasing professionalism among its practitioners. The major question is whether enough desire and strength of will exists to move it forward and whether there are enough CI champions from a variety of sectors including academics, association community leadership, business practitioners, consultants or public-policy bodies who are wiling to combine to take up the challenge.

The above list is indeed a daunting one, but this type of support has been, and is, commonly, experienced by members of other professions such as law, medicine, engineering, finance, manufacturing, architecture, and construction, among others. If CI practitioners wish to receive the revered status of being part of a true profession then these issues will have to be addressed and solutions implemented. Otherwise CI will remain, largely, as it is today as a job which comes along to the few rather than the many, which is part of other jobs but not seen as distinct in its own right, one which does not have any specific qualification, but is "awarded" to an enterprising individual who has managed to draw attention to themselves elsewhere in the organisation. Is this what we really see as the future for CI?

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