



Study of Competitive Intelligence for the LIS Professional

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Abstract

Library and information science and competitive intelligence each have different professional ethics. This article examines the ethical issues of competitive intelligence through the lens of library and information science. Through a review of the literature, three areas in which ethical issues may arise for library and information scientists in the practice of competitive intelligence. The ethical differences between the two fields pose ethical difficulties for library and information scientists: how to collect data, what are acceptable methods for determining what is ethical, and what rules exist to support their own behaviour. This article sheds light on how these ethical issues will complicate competitive intelligence for library and information scientists wishing to work in the field.

Key Words: Competitive Intelligence, Ethics, Library and Information Science, Business Ethics, Library Ethic

Introduction

Library and information science (LIS) professionals sometimes have a hard time remembering that not all information-based fields have the same ethics as LIS. Integrating Intelligence Analysis into LIS Education It is argued that LIS professionals in the field of intelligence analysis often face ethical dilemmas when asked to potentially obtain private data through some form of misrepresentation. This goes against the ethics that LIS taught them.

Competitive intelligence is one of many fields that fall under the umbrella of intelligence analysis. The term competitive intelligence (CI) is defined as “the system and ethical program used to collect, analyze, and manage information that may affect an organization's plans, decisions, and operations” (Miller, 2009, p. 1209). The idea is different from corporate espionage (CE), which conjures up images of men in black suits conducting secret deals in dark hallways. For a brief but thorough introduction to CI concepts, see Gray's 2010 article Competitive Intelligence. In this article, CI may also be referred to as BI – Business Intelligence (BI). This article seeks to explore what ethical issues LIS professionals may encounter when deciding to enter the field of CI. Hopefully this will help LIS professionals prepare for the realities they may face.

Difference between CI and CE

The organization known as Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) articulates that the key difference between CI and CE is that “competitive intelligence is the legal and ethical process of gathering and analyzing information on competitors” (2016). It can thus be said that CE violates these rules. (Miller, 2009) That is, if the relevant information was collected in an illegal or unethical manner, the information collector has taken CE action. The question of when CI becomes CE is further elaborated in an article by Crane (2005) in which he attempts to determine "when legitimate competitor intelligence collection crosses the line into industrial espionage". He argues that, from an ethical standpoint, an act of CI can be considered an act of CE if: the idea of the data accumulated can be considered as private, the strategies utilized go past what is considered satisfactory, or the data was acquired fully intent on being utilized against the public interest. (Crane, 2005) His argument succinctly encapsulates three of the areas in which a LIS professional might encounter ethical difficulties while working in CI. The first topic involves determining how far one should go to collect data and how to do so. The second topic is issues brought on by a lack of clarity regarding what constitutes acceptable behavior.

What are CI Ethics?

Other codes of ethics, such as those developed by SCIP, are less well-known in the field of CI than the ALA Code of Ethics. As a consequence of this, the concept of what constitutes ethics in CI remains somewhat hazy. Erickson (2014) defines the ethics of CI as the "ethical principles of conduct that govern an individual in the workplace," laying out the concept's foundation. According to Thomann & Wells (2013), "the goal of BI ethics are [sic] to facilitate doing the right things for others and for ourselves and to prevent doing harm to others or to ourselves," this hazy concept can be enhanced. Even though this is a step forward, the definition of what constitutes ethics in CI is still confounded by issues of what is "right" and what is "harmful." The fact that the definition of CI ethics still boils down to the following 25 years after Paine's (1991) call for codes of ethics demonstrates the highly relative nature of the subject: act in a good way. Being a good person is harder to say than it is to do, which may be why it is easier to advocate for codes of ethics than to actually create them.

The ALA Code of Ethics makes it abundantly clear in its third and fourth points that the protection of intellectual property rights and privacy must come first. Notwithstanding, one of the aims of CI is to be aware however much about the opposition as could reasonably be expected and that conveys with it the ramifications of overlooking the security and licensed innovation right of the contender. Information should be freely shared within the confines of the creator and copyright, according to LIS professionals. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that a LIS professional might encounter challenges in a CI setting where information is a zero-sum game. When one's job is to ignore both, it's hard to uphold intellectual property rights and privacy. Examples, both real and imagined, CI gathering takes place in a variety of ways. The following articles demonstrate the theory and practice of CI gathering. They demonstrate unethical approaches to information acquisition. Despite the fact that some of the actions described in the texts could be considered unethical, one could argue that the articles serve as cautionary tales.

Chidi (2013), a competitive intelligence officer who has worked for a variety of businesses, wrote *Confessions of a Corporate Spy*. He describes in it how he adapted his methods to specific circumstances and how he gathered the data in particular locations. That is supported by a piece that Kaminer wrote for *The New York Times*. In her column, she asks whether writing something in public gives you the right to keep it a secret, and if so, to what extent. *Spies, Lies and KPMG* by Javers (2007) tells the story of how a man posing as a British intelligence officer infiltrated the CI firm Diligence into the accounting firm KPMG. This raises the question for the LIS professional of how far one is willing to go to violate both intellectual property rights and privacy.

One could make the case that intellectual freedom is demonstrated by divergent ethical perspectives. Additionally, just as opinions vary from person to person, so do perceptions of what constitutes ethical and unethical CI practices vary from place to place and from group to group.

Managers must be aware of the repercussions of their decisions and actions in light of the application of moral principles and codes. Essentially, CI professionals will need to learn to play by their hosts' rules rather than their own. Frequently CI experts choose if something is moral or not by assessing the matter in view of their perspectives. This gives CI practitioners a sense of empowerment, which leads them to pay more attention to ethical issues. Additionally, their participation in moral decision-making increases as a result of this awareness of moral issues. Nevertheless, this abundance of moral thought is not always beneficial. It can result in a wide range of opinions on a given subject, none of which are necessarily correct.

Take, for instance, the issue of deceit. "provides a conceptual starting point for developing a more complete understanding of deception in marketing research, including an ethical analysis from the viewpoint of consequentiality and deontological theories of moral reasoning," according to a Kimmel & Smith paper, is just the tip of the iceberg. The possibility of duplicity is a running subject in the majority of the papers examined in this work. When an omission becomes lying or what exactly constitutes misrepresentation, each author has their own opinion.

Conclusion

In contrast to the LIS profession, which is comparatively more open and honest, the CI profession is one filled with secrecy and suspicion. The LIS professional will have to adapt to a professional disregard for intellectual property and privacy as well as the inability to directly request information in this field. In order to enforce some kind of standardization in the field of CI, it is likely necessary to censor other people's opinions. The field of CI is one in which a representatives' very own convictions and expert obligations are inseparably entwined and the one isn't possible without the other, save by being totally irreverent. Lastly, if LIS professionals decide to act in accordance with the LIS code of ethics, they will also be following their own private interests at the expense of their employer and fellow employees in the field of CI.

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