

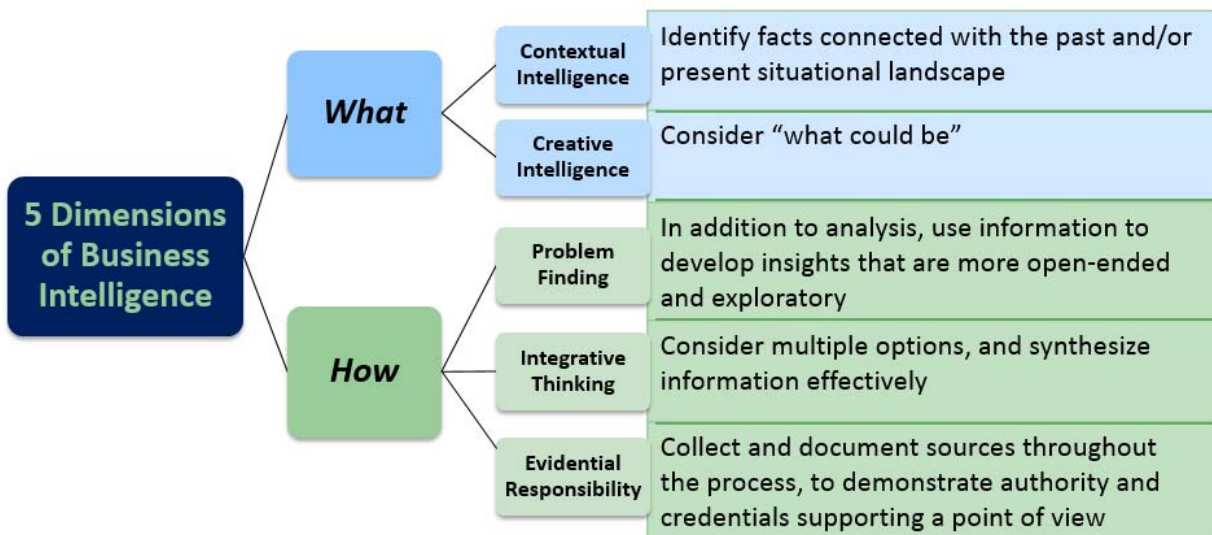
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Business Intelligence BRIEFS(2)

The 5 Dimensions of Business Intelligence

Key Idea: Acquiring business intelligence *with intention* involves applying five different dimensions of thinking.



Conducting research should not be seen as an impulse-shopping expedition, in which we're pulling interesting-looking pieces of information from the shelves, placing them in our cart, and hoping that in the end we can cook up a decent story from the miscellaneous bits of evidence we've collected.

As we progress from novice and informed users toward more proficient and expert users of business information, we will learn to view this process as climbing the steps of a ladder. That is, after our initial collection of information, which we will approach in an intentional way:

1. We examine the information, to see what insight it might be providing;
2. We interrogate it, to see what additional, deeper insights it might be pointing us to;
3. We come up with more thoughtful answers to the questions and issues we've been asked to look into.

In the process of *gathering* this evidence, there are five dimensions of business intelligence skills we need to apply. These dimensions demonstrate a way to think about everything that can potentially be involved in collecting evidence from the perspective of **what** needs to be known, as well as **how** to effectively process what is uncovered.

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What

One of the “what” skills is environmental scanning and sense making, what researchers Mayo and Nohria call **contextual intelligence**. In their study of the characteristics of 1,000 great U.S. business leaders of the 20th century, they found a major source of accomplishments were attributed to their ability to “seize the zeitgeist” by having a complete understanding of the *context* of a business situation.

A different sort of intelligence, one that goes beyond understanding present and past facts, is to consider what currently *doesn't* exist... but *could*. This is known as **creative intelligence**, the ability to see information available at the edges, make connections, and demonstrate a willingness to push boundaries and get out of one's comfort zone.

This concept comes from the research of Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, who surveyed over 3,500 founders of innovative companies or products. They found that these individuals were highly skilled in the discovery characteristics of “associating, questioning, observing, experimenting and networking,” another way of defining creative intelligence. The researchers concluded that this characteristic played a key role in the success of those innovators.

How

Three additional dimensions become apparent when thinking about **how** contextual and creative intelligence are applied to gathering business information.

Problem finding is the ability to develop insights that are more open-ended and exploratory. Kaufmann and Runco define it as “the more proactive dimension of finding new and interesting problems to solve, rather than be[ing] limited to a given input and respond[ing] with some sort of output.” Extensive research supports the benefits of strong capabilities in coming up with new ideas and thinking well.

Integrative thinking is what Roger Martin calls the ability to combine disparate intelligence effectively. In his research, he interviewed over 50 successful business leaders. They all shared the ability to consider multiple options – potentially coming from diverse information sources – and the skill to integrate and synthesize them.

Evidential responsibility refers to collecting and documenting sources, and presenting information to clearly communicate and demonstrate the authority and credentials that support point of view.

Too many case studies deprive students of the opportunity to work on their problem finding skills... They need only apply the right analytical techniques to solve the problem. The best case studies make the students assess a situation, search for patterns, and try to discern the problem for themselves. Those types of cases provide enduring value, because they help build leaders' problem-finding capabilities – something they will desperately need in the 'very messy' real world.

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