

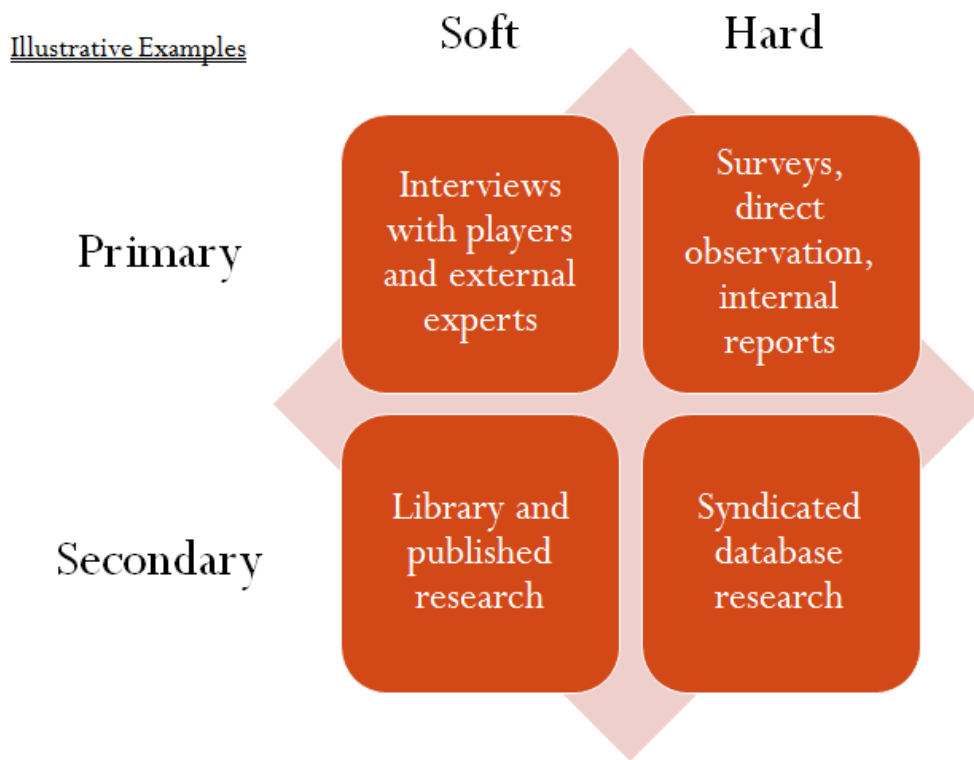
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Creating Bridges to Knowledge

Business Intelligence BRIEFS(3)

Four Avenues for Gathering Evidence

Key Idea: A thorough search for evidence considers the possibilities of all four avenues to gathering information.



We have defined business intelligence as the capability to gather information or evidence to support thorough, well-reasoned business decision making. In MP, we address the four avenues to gathering evidence illustrated in this Quadrant of Sources.

- Primary “hard data,” and the technical skills required to analyze it.
- Primary “soft data,” and the interpersonal skills required to elicit it from people.
- Secondary “hard” and “soft” data, and the skills required to identify the relevant producers and sources, and to evaluate their quality and relevance.

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The definitions of the dimensions are not always distinct, but the differences we are accentuating here are roughly this:

- By “primary” information, we refer to evidence we create directly, or gather directly from an original source. “Secondary” information already exists, and we find, choose and assemble it for our purposes from other sources.
- By “hard” information, we generally refer to measured facts and quantitative data. “Soft” information tends to refer to text or narrative information. (These terms are not intended to be value judgments about the value or reliability of the information!)

These dimensions combine to give us four different types of sources to consider, four “avenues,” and examples of each appear in the quadrant diagram above.

Understanding that evidence can take these four forms will assist us in systematically thinking through the type of information we need to gather, as well as what is already available to us.

There is no fixed path for approaching these various forms of evidence. If we are exploring a completely new area, we may start with already published material on that topic. However if we’re taking over a project from someone else, gathering primary “soft data” by having a thorough and well prepared discussion with that individual would be an important way to get started.

The way we progress through and interact with these various types of sources can vary widely. What is important to remember is that we feel equally skilled in using each of these types of evidence, regardless of the research situation we’re faced with.

Additional References about Gathering Business Information:

Porter, M. (2004). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for analyzing industries and competitors*. Free Press: New York. *Appendix B “How to Conduct Industry Analysis.”*

[This appendix provides guidance on how to approach gathering information from primary and secondary sources to support an industry and competitive analysis.]

Rasiel, E. & Friga, P.N. (2001). *The McKinsey Mind: Understanding and Implementing the Problem-Solving Tools and Management Techniques of the World’s Top Strategic Consulting Firm*. McGraw-Hill: New York. *Chapter 3 “Gathering the Data”*

[Chapter 3 summarizes guidance the McKinsey consulting firm provides its consultants on how to approach gathering primary and secondary information for a project.]