

# Goizueta Business Library

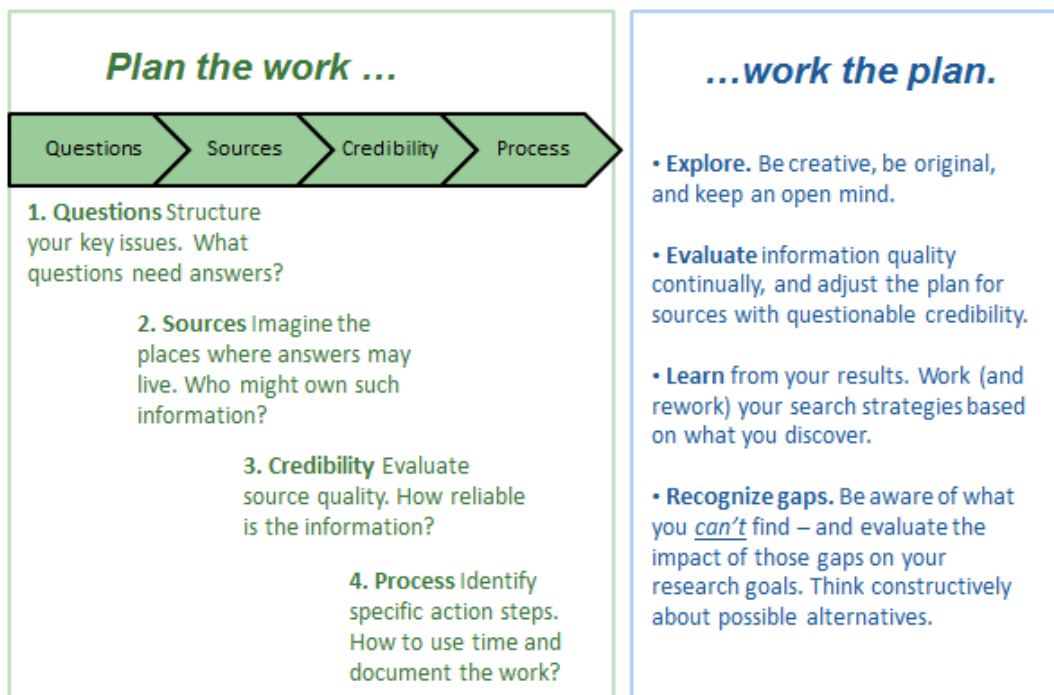
*Creating Bridges to Knowledge*

## ***Business Intelligence BRIEFS(4)***

### **Having an Information Gathering Plan (IGP)**

**Key Idea:** Applying the notion of systematic, intentional problem-solving to the process of business intelligence means creating and following an information-gathering plan.

#### **Develop and use an Information Gathering Plan (IGP).**



When approaching a new research investigation it is important to have a plan.

There is always the temptation to limit and rationalize our interpretation of an issue to fit the knowledge we already have, or the data we haphazardly come across. This can lead to flawed reasoning and unhelpful recommendations for our client. Having a plan makes us intentional about our information gathering strategy. It facilitates a well-rounded, contextual understanding in our process of turning an issue into work.

As with the rest of our structured problem-solving process, first we plan the work, then we work the plan.

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## Plan the Work

There are four steps to getting started and setting up a research work plan:

### 1. **Questions** *Structure our key issues: What questions need answers?*

- Conduct an issues analysis, to determine what questions we want to answer.
- Approach our topic broadly, and frame our topic with a multi-dimensional perspective.
- Keep asking:
  - “What more do we need to know?”
  - “Where do we go from here?”

### 2. **Sources** *Imagine places where answers may live: Who might own such information?*

- Identify likely sources of the information we need.
- Who are the primary “owners” of this information?
  - Who typically uses or needs the type of information we’re interested in?
  - And how is information tailored to them? e.g., suppliers, marketers, lobbyists, regulators, analysts, government agency analysts, etc.
- Identify leads in everything we read.
  - References within the text of articles, reports, etc., e.g. “according to a study by....”
  - Embedded within footnotes and bibliographies.
- Seek out experts immersed in the ecosystem of the information of interest, e.g. industry association staff, trade journal editors, etc.

### 3. **Credibility** *Evaluate source quality: How reliable is the information?*

- Are they reputable, authoritative sources?
- Is the information consistent with other reliable sources?
- What is the bias in the perspective of the information provider?

### 4. **Process** *Identify specific action steps: How to use time and document the work?*

- Establish clear timelines for allocating how much time will be devoted to each part of the information gathering process.
- Prioritize how to proceed with searching for information in the identified sources.
- Define a mechanism for systematically documenting the information collected.

## Work the Plan

It is important to remember that once we have set up our preliminary plan, we should not feel compelled to rigidly stick to it. In the process of our investigation, we will come across information requiring us to adapt this plan accordingly.

### **Explore, be creative, be original, and keep an open mind.**

- Don’t “hit the wall” and let our assumptions get in the way of new discovery.
- Prepare ourselves for surprises – and seize on them rather than being intimidated by them.
- Give ourselves permission to make mistakes. Rather than be deterred by them, consider them as informing our search strategy.

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## ***Evaluate information quality continually.***

- Is it from reputable, authoritative sources?
- Is it clear how it is derived (which sources, what calculations, etc.)?
- Is the data consistent with other reliable sources?
- Has a bias been revealed that weakens its strength as evidence?

## ***Learn from our results. Work (and rework) our search strategies.***

- Understand how to “push” search engines to yield more efficient and effective results.
- Invest time in looking at our search results in order to inform better search strategies.

## ***Recognize gaps. Be aware of what we can't find and consider the impact of those gaps on our research goals. Think constructively about possible alternatives.***

- Can we glean some of the intelligence through articles, etc.? For example if we can't buy a report, a press release might provide a useful summary and some data from it.
- Can we develop our own proxy for the data point using data that does exist?
- Can an alternative perspective or measure offer the information we're seeking?
- Does our inability to find the information offer new insights about the issue we're investigating?

## ***References:***

Many of the concepts addressed in this framework originally came from material created by Susan Klopper of the Goizueta Business Library, to support research-paper assignments in Professor Jeffrey Rosensweig's ***Global Perspectives*** course. In collaboration with Professor Rosensweig, they created a list of guidelines for what to consider when conducting research. This work then was adapted and has served as the foundation for the IGP framework.