Relevance Questions: Applying the Reference Interview Process to the Intelligence Cycle

Jack Dale • The Catholic University of America • Washington, DC
Project Advisor: Dr. Randolph (Ran) Hock

Contact: 22dale@cardinalmail.cua.edu

Research Question

How can the Reference Interview Process improve the Intelligence Cycle?

Specifically, what aspect of the Intelligence Cycle/Process could be improved through the application of the Reference Interview Process?

Definitions

The Intelligence Cycle:

- Also known as the Intelligence Process
- Often conceptualized as a series of sequential steps:
  1. Planning and Direction
  2. Collection
  3. Processing
  4. Analysis and Production
  5. Dissemination

- Instead of being "sequential, orderly, and linear," this cycle/process is "actually a collection of feedback loops" (Clark, 2013: 6)
- Process begins with a "definition of the intelligence problem," usually in the form of "a rather general question" (Clark, 2013: 4)

- Reference Interview Process:
- General steps: (1) "Establishing contact with the user;" (2) "finding out the user's need;" and (3) "confirming that the answer provided is actually what was needed" (Ross, Nilsen and Radford, 2009: 5 in Cassell and Hiremath, 2013: 15)
- Purposes:
  - To figure out "what the user really wants to know" (Ross, Nilsen and Radford, 2009: 3)
  - To draw out from the user "sufficient information about the real [information] need" (Ross, Nilsen and Radford, 2009: 3)
  - Often the "user's initial question... needs to be clarified, narrowed down, made more detailed, and contextualized" (Ross, Nilsen and Radford, 2009: 3)

Discussion

The Intelligence Question:

- Informs us regarding the customer's information need(s)
- Assists in 'driving' the Collection process (later)
- Frames the Analysis and Production processes to follow

The Reference Interview Process can help improve the Intelligence Cycle/Process by assisting customers in asking better questions

How do we assist customers in asking "the real question"? (Bell, 2012: 208)

- Asking closed (Yes/No) questions to request specific information (Bell, 2012)
- Asking open-ended questions "to expand on the topic in a free-form way" (Bell, 2012: 211)
- Building relationships
- Engaging in deep conversation
- Reframing or rephrasing the question(s)

Conclusion

Using their knowledge of and experience with the Reference Interview Process, Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals can enhance the Intelligence Cycle/Process, particularly those steps in the process (such as Planning and Direction) that result in the formulation of intelligence questions. Specifically, LIS professionals can assist their customers by applying those processes and techniques associated with the Reference Interview Process that result in the asking of 'better questions.'

Future Research

- What other steps in the Intelligence Cycle/Process could benefit from the application of the Reference Interview Process in order to generate 'better questions'?
  - Analysis and Production
  - Collection
- Is the Reference Interview Process in a virtual environment as effective in assisting intelligence customers to ask 'better questions'?
- Beyond the asking of 'better questions,' how else can the Reference Interview Process help to enhance the Intelligence Cycle/Process?

References

Cassell, Kay Ann & Hiremath, Uma. 2013. Reference and Information Services. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman