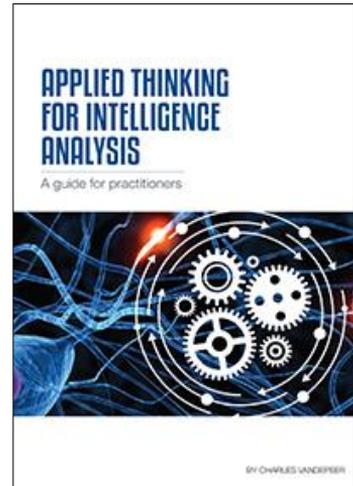


Book Review

Applied Thinking for Intelligence Analysis: A Guide for Practitioners

by Charles Vandeppeer, PhD
Air Power Development Centre, Department of
Defence, Canberra, Australia
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Reviewed by Trista M. Bailey



Intelligence analysis is a process that requires a distinctive set of problem-solving skills accompanied by the ability to be self-critical. As a profession, it demands precise judgement on problems that are often dynamic, people-based and future-orientated. An intelligence analyst is expected by the customer to provide a conclusive product that is tangible, well informed and credible. *Applied Thinking for Intelligence Analysis: A Guide for Practitioners* is designed to empower the junior intelligence analyst with an easy to understand conceptual toolkit. Rather than be intimidated by the challenge of uncertainty and the abundance of information in today’s so-called information age, author Dr Charles Vandeppeer encourages the junior analyst to embrace the unknown and take comfort in what one doesn’t know.

Vandeppeer has drawn on the work of several scholars and academic sources in the fields of social science, psychology and critical thinking; producing what is a very clever and intentionally cultivated framework and foundation for the training of a junior analyst. The length of the guide should not fool one into assuming a lack of content or depth—this book provides not only an introduction to analytical techniques and the problems and limitations an analyst may come to face in the future, but also stimulates a new means of

critical thinking with an attempt to cultivate self-reflection and auto-critique within the methodological process.

The progression of concepts discussed use easy to understand terminology, making this book both a fantastic foundational tool for analysis training and also a useful reference book for senior analysts. Positive and negative aspects of the analytical process are identified, linking both understanding and identification of potential limitations within the analysis process. By situating intelligence analysis within context and by detailing the expectations of intelligence analysis with a working and tangible definition, Vandepier empowers the analyst with an identified fundamental purpose.

Through the use of a tangible definition of intelligence analysis, reasoning behind the identification of problems, limitations and bias are introduced. The concept of the ‘problem’ is defined, providing grounding for justification on potential limitations, including time and research, evidence and the cognitive bias of the human condition. The chapter “Knowledge, Information and Evidence” identifies the difference between deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning, as well as describing the difference between diagnostic, negative and the absence of evidence. Vandepier furthers the concept of self-reflection by explaining concepts such as intuition and other sub-conscious by-products produced by the analysis process that the analyst may face.

Concepts such as language are discussed, including the use of analogies and metaphors within verbal and written product on an audience, including the elements of expertise, prediction and surprise, allowing a junior analyst to question predispositions and presumptions they may have about their own analytical ability. Contrasting concepts are also explained, such as the relationship between prediction (forecasting the future) and retrodiction (making a prediction about the past). For the intelligence analyst, complexity and uncertainty are part of an ongoing process. Vandepier brings attention to the influence of the work and social environment on the analyst through ideas on conformity and teamwork, including expectations of the corporate line and also the tendency of analysts to defend past assessments rather than to be open to the idea of producing a falsifiable product.

Aside from identifying limitations and problems, Vandepier offers solutions through critical thinking techniques such as backcasting, mindmapping, nominal group technique, pre-mortem analysis and indicators of change in an

attempt to avoid unintended consequences and assumptions within the analysis process. In the chapter, “Mindsets, Cognitive Biases and Arguments,” Vandeeper identifies the negative by-products of the analytical process. Even though these are inescapable as they are part human element of the process itself, it is key to be aware of them—rationally and consciously thinking of their identification and how to counter these limitations as they develop, in an effort to avoid or minimise them.

Dr Vandeeper concludes with the concept of unfinished intelligence; although a final product of analysis and assessment is produced in a formal brief or report, intelligence may never be finished. As someone with a rich background of expertise in intelligence throughout a military career, Vandeeper describes the process to be one that is liberating and empowering—the process itself as the challenge of what an analyst can tangibly produce despite many limitations. It is important to be self-confident in the production of assessments; however, it is of more importance to have humility in reconsidering assessments in light of new information. Assessments are always open to be falsifiable in an age where intelligence is likely to change. Awareness and applied thinking are keys to good intelligence.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Trista M. Bailey, BA, MIR, is an officer-in-training in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Melbourne with majors in Political Science and Cultural Studies. She holds a Master of International Relations degree with the completion of a minor thesis in the field of Strategic and Security Studies; *Australia’s Strategic Paradox: Balancing the Autonomy/Dependency Dichotomy with the Prescriptive Doctrine of “Self-Reliance.”* Ms Bailey’s academic interests include foreign affairs, strategic and security issues, defence policy doctrine, and threat analysis.

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