

## Book Review

### *Proactive Intelligence: The Successful Executive's Guide to Intelligence*

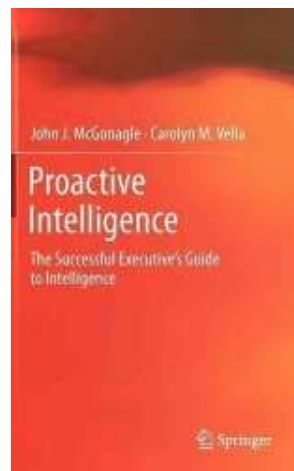
by John J. McGonagle and Carolyn M. Vella

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Reviewed by Dale Fehringer



John McGonagle and Carolyn Vella, who have worked in and written about competitive intelligence (CI) for many years, have turned their experience into a book for executives about conducting CI and proactively using intelligence to help make better decisions. The resulting document is sophisticated enough to satisfy an executive audience, but simple enough to instruct without overusing CI jargon and technical terms.

The authors state their intention up front:

This book marks a new direction—it focuses on competitive intelligence collected by, analysed by, and used by—you alone. This is not going to be a guide on how to work full time as a CI specialist. Instead, we want you to learn enough about CI, and what you can do with it, to enable you to do your job, whatever that is, better. (p. v)

They deliver on that promise. This how-to manual is presented in clearly-written and carefully-organised text that explains the CI process step-by-step. The authors obviously know their stuff, and they offer real-life examples to help clarify their points.

The title, *Proactive Intelligence*, refers to using CI to take action before a competitor acts, not afterwards, and the authors emphasise that point throughout the book. They believe that up-front education, proper planning, and personal

effort can enable decision-makers to obtain the intelligence they need, when they need it, and then use it almost immediately to help make better business decisions.

Writing a CI book for management has been done before, but this one is unique in that it is targeted at executives faced with developing their own CI. It tries to accomplish a lot in a single document, which may be a little optimistic, because CI is a complex subject. It may be asking too much to expect business executives who need CI but do not have access to CI resources to: (a) conduct their own CI research and analysis; and (b) objectively use that analysis to help make proactive business decisions. But readers who want to develop their own CI now have a manual that tells them how.

The discussion of competitive intelligence begins with definitions, a description of the CI cycle, and an explanation of the different types of intelligence. Once that groundwork is done, the authors describe the benefits of CI to business executives, telling the reader: “The beauty and benefit of CI is that it is not a one-time option, such as you get from a consultant or other professional, but it is factual information about your competitors you have developed, and thus can replicate in the future.”

The authors include a few foundational topics, such as the different kinds of CI, and a set of rules for conducting research on the Internet. There is a good discussion of how to prepare for and conduct interviews, and a comprehensive and easy-to-understand list of sources and uses of data. Another section describes how the reader can be a better customer for intelligence, and there are best practice examples of how CI can be used to help make proactive decisions. The section on CI analysis starts by breaking the process into sub-processes (amassing, assimilation, incubation, enlightenment, and corroboration), and provides analysis “tips” and “tools and techniques,” and briefly discusses some of the most common analysis methods. Toward the end of the book there is a thought-provoking discussion on the ways terrorism has affected CI.

The authors encourage the reader to: “look at the world differently to be able to develop your own CI,” after which “you should be able to look more objectively at your own firm.” And they return to their basic premise: “Remember, you are in a world that continually changes. Unless you are willing to be proactive, you will be only reactive.”

This is a welcome addition to the growing subject literature on competitive intelligence. It is carefully planned and written, and it should serve intelligence practitioners well.

#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Dale Fehringer** is the editor of *Competitive Intelligence Ethics: Navigating the Gray Zone* (Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals, 2006). He developed and managed the Competitive Intelligence Unit at Visa International and is a past member of Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals' board of directors.

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