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Communication Patterns between the Briefer and the Policymaker

Intelligence professionals called "briefers" provide intelligence information on a daily basis to senior civilian policymakers. Herein is a description of what actually takes place prior to, during, and after the face-to-face interaction. While a body of work exists on presidential briefings, this assessment is unique because it deals with the process of transferring knowledge to policymakers, and specifically from the briefer's perspective. Individuals from the outside, and even intelligence officers or others who have studied intelligence but have not been "briefers," might find some of this material fascinating, yet possibly hard to believe. But those who have been "briefers" will find that this mostly validates their experience."

Contrary to common belief, acts of transferring knowledge are not context-free, costless, or instantaneous. A complex set of definable communication-related processes is used during the knowledge transfer between the briefer and policymaker. The most vital of these processes are imbued with important cost/benefit trade-offs with potentially highly

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significant impacts on both briefer and policymaker. Three key trade-offs involve the use of the briefer's filtering strategies to reduce information overload establishment and maintenance of the social component of professional relationships, and, most important, the use of storylines to maintain effective transference of knowledge amidst often severe time constraints.

These potential impacts within the face-to-face interaction remain largely invisible to the outsider, even those who are intelligence professionals or who study intelligence. As a result, these impacts and their implications, though not widely understood, are quite relevant in both the briefing interaction, as well as in the analysts' role of creating and sharing of intelligence for their non-intelligence audience.

The detailed nature of the communication interaction is significant, as is its role in shaping knowledge that crosses the transom from intelligence to policymaking. The interaction includes the methods briefers employ to navigate the personality and professional differences and similarities between themselves and policymakers, how they operate in definable communication patterns, and how they manage and attempt to overcome issues that arise within these communication patterns.

METHODOLOGY

From March to June 2011 I interviewed 24 intelligence officers who had either been *President's Daily Brief* (PDB) or Department of Defense Executive Support Office (ESO) briefers. The PDB briefers had briefed the PDB to recent presidents, vice presidents, secretaries of State, Defense, Treasury and other Cabinet officers, while the ESO briefers had briefed their materials to recent secretaries of defense and subordinate deputy, undersecretary, assistant, and deputy assistant secretaries of Defense. Each interview lasted, on average, about 90 minutes. The briefers explained how they conducted their daily tasks, from the time they got up to the time they went to bed. Briefers are assigned to be full-time briefers, typically a rotational assignment lasting between 18–24 months.

The Director of National Intelligence's PDB is conveyed to the policymaker who reads it in the presence of the briefer. The Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) own version of a daily written narrative briefing for policymakers is handled much the same way. Neither PDB nor ESO briefings are oral presentations using Power Point slides; instead, the briefing material is textual, in narrative form, having different amounts of narrative, physically bound in various types of binding according to the amount of narrative, hand-delivered by the briefer to the policymaker. Both briefer and policymaker then sit down in the same room, physically near each other, while the policymaker reads the written material. The briefing material is

referred to as the ''briefing book'' even though the bindings may differ. Shortly after the completion of this study, in early 2012, President Barack Obama began beta-testing the iPad as an electronic replacement for the hardcopy ''briefing book'' and continued using it thereafter.[1]

LITERATURE ABOUT THE ''BRIEFING''

Little, if any, research has studied the mechanisms of knowledge transfer between the intelligence officer and the policymaker. What is known is that intelligence professionals search for truth by maintaining their objectivity, while policymakers search for agenda-supporting or -denying evidence. This fundamental dynamic creates tensions and cautions for the intelligence professional. As such, the advantages and proposed solutions of the relationship between the intelligence analyst and the policymaker have been the subject of much ongoing discussion in the past 65 years, most notably raised by Sherman Kent,[2] with a recent contribution by Dennis Wilder.[3] Some have sought to explain the psychological differences that roles play as the underlying reason for such tension. After World War II Wilmoore Kendall provided early insight into the mind of the policymaker, distinguishing between the operational-planner policymaker and the political appointee or elected official and how the latter have ''pictures in their head.''[4] Thomas Hughes said the analyst community used ''facts in search of some policymakers to influence and of policymakers in search of some facts to support.''[5] Arthur S. Hulnick contends that one source of friction is that policymakers prefer certainty, not the probabilistic language of intelligence analysis, while analysts have difficulty in conveying bad news because policymakers tend to react confrontationally.[6]

Many others have sought to describe the relationship. Robert M. Gates was an early voice in identifying the knowledge gap that often permeates the interaction between analyst and policymaker.[7] Richard K. Betts noted that policymakers have little available time to read, and that as they rise in positional authority, the impact of time constraints becomes more acute.[8] Keith Gardiner pointed to the lack of real data on how analysts and policymakers function, impeding the ability to comprehend why they sometimes work at cross-purposes.[9] David Gries noted that the linkage between analyst and policymaker is largely unexplored, specifically in understanding what kind of information is transferred and how it is transferred.[10]

John McLaughlin provided insight into the daily PDB briefing process when he discussed one of the briefer's roles: ''And for those dozen or so Cabinet officials and others besides the President who receive the daily brief, we also provide supplementary memos and raw intelligence that relate directly to their own agenda for the day.''[11] Richard Kerr and Peter Dixon

Davis provided a little more insight: "The briefer listened to the discussion of their [policymakers'] strengths and weaknesses, complaints and personal exchanges that clearly were not meant for outsiders' ears. We were accepted as part of the scenery."[12] John Helgerson studied the briefing experience of presidential candidates primarily from the candidate's perspective, which provided insightful first-hand knowledge of how the presidential candidates took the briefing.[13] For example, former President George H.W. Bush reflected on the system of daily briefings: "The big difference is that you have to make the decisions—that makes you read a lot more carefully."[14]

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRIEFER AND POLICYMAKER

Being in the presence of a senior policymaker for the purpose of delivering the "briefing" has its implications. Six major differences experienced by the briefers separated them psychologically and socially from the policymakers. But two major similarities between them created very strong bonds. The differences created a disruptive potential in misinterpreting communication while the similarities created an underlying and cohesive shared context. How these differences and similarities played out during the face-to-face interactions defined the communication pattern that the briefers had to navigate.

The differences between the briefer and the policymaker are summarized in Figure 1. Some may seem obvious but others not so much.

The first difference comes in how briefers talked about their self-identity. They saw themselves as providing a service but they characterized themselves very positively as servants performing an honorable profession.

	Briefer	Policymaker (as viewed by briefer)
Self-Identity	Servant (viewed positively)	Elite (perceived positively)
Experience	Civilian, federal, or military service	Elected public office or staff member
The Job	Thoughtfulness, helping others	Leading action, making decisions
Schedule	Entire day preparing for a 10-20 minute event	Entire day in sequence of 10-20 minute events
Knowledge	Probabilities (of the threat)	Worst case (impact to policy)
Goal	To have an impact on the policymaking proess	To have an impact on policymaking outcomes

Figure 1.   Differences between Briefer and Policymaker. (Color figure available online.)

Briefers saw the policymaker as part of an elite, but again, in a very positive sense. A useful analogy here is that of a butler serving in the home of English royalty. The butler, though highly trusted and occupying the same space as the landowner, nevertheless lives in a different social world.

A second difference is found in the professional experiences leading up to each other's assignment. Among the briefers all had spent most of their professional lives as civilian intelligence officers, in military service, or a combination of each. Every briefer had researched the biography of the policymaker he or she briefed. Most policymakers had either been elected to public office or served as a staff member of an elected official. A few had come from academia or had spent time in academia.

A third difference, reflecting the difference in experience, was in how each conceptualized the job. The briefers characterized their purpose as helping others and felt that the primary contribution they brought to the table was a thoughtfulness about the knowledge they were there to convey. The policymaker was seen as a decisionmaker, someone whose purpose was to lead and take action.

A fourth difference was the nature of the job in terms of schedule, and the orientation to time. Briefers spent the entire day (less sleep, getting to/from work) mentally and physically preparing for a single 10–20 minute event, the time that they would be in the presence of the policymaker. This allowed the briefer to exert an exceedingly concentrated amount of effort on the execution of a very short task. Depending on his/her seniority, the policymaker's day, in contrast, typically involved non-stop meetings (less sleep, getting to/from work), divided into increments as short as 5–10 minutes to 30–60 minutes, with a diverse array of people for a diverse set of purposes.

A fifth difference was in how knowledge was inherently framed. The briefers, as intelligence officers, framed their conveyed information in two dimensions: in shades of probabilities, and in relation to a perceived foreign threat. Briefers saw the policymaker as having a different orientation to the information, receiving and processing it from two dimensions: as wanting to know the worst scenario, and what the implications would be to policymakers senior to them.

The last detected difference was in their goals. Briefers' definition of success, ultimately, was to have an impact on the policymaking process, hoping that their contribution, however they defined it, would be meaningful and recognizable. This last aspect was the most difficult for the briefers to discover: for them to know if their contribution actually made an impact. Yet, this was the Holy Grail they sought. In contrast, briefers saw the policymaker's goal as leading the nation, having a different type of impact, one of contributing to actual policymaking outcomes.

Briefers and policymakers did, however, share two unique similarities, at least among the briefer's experience within their institutional setting, and they suspected that policymakers had some similar uniqueness, separate from policymakers' diverse context.[15] The first was that briefers meet with policymakers, quite often one-on-one in the policymaker's office. Policymakers felt that the time they spent reading the PDB/ESO material was pretty much the only time in the day they could devote to absorbing current intelligence. The briefing time also meant that no one was trying to leverage an agenda on them in order to get something from them. For the briefers, the time meant that the policymaker's distraction from his/her normal duties was an opportunity for the briefer to focus on the policymaker's intelligence needs. When they were face-to-face, their normal distractions—for both briefer and policymaker—disappeared, creating thereby an opening for a shared understanding.

The second was a slowing down from the day's otherwise busy pace. A policymaker could take time to focus and think and, depending on his or her interest in the intelligence topic, ask questions. For the briefer, the time spent with a policymaker became one of listening and paying attention, ready to engage in dialogue at the opportune moment, and far different from the activity normally engaged in preparation for the briefing.

The simultaneous dynamic of similarities and differences created a complex interaction of cohesive and disruptive influences, shown in Figure 2. Overlaid amidst this complex dynamic was a consistent daily routine. The combination of the complex interaction and the briefer's routine led to a communication structure, a most important insight.
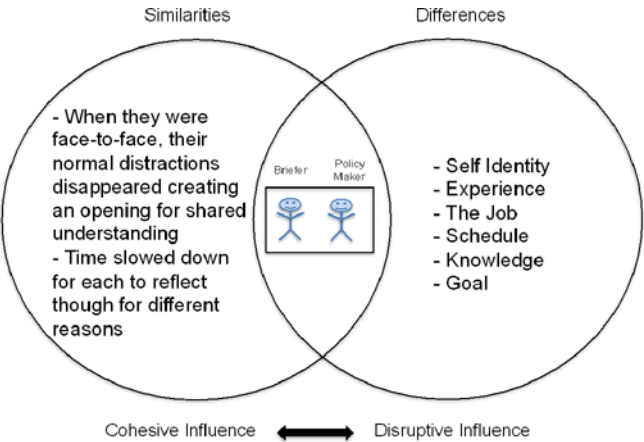

Figure 2.   Complexity of the Briefer Interaction. (Color figure available online.)

THE BRIEFER'S DAILY ROUTINE

A briefer's day could be divided into four major phases: Prepare, Deliver, Adjust, and Feedback, as shown in Figure 3. In the Prepare phase, the briefers studied interacted with many different types of people during the course of their day, but that day started very early in the morning. Some arrived at work by 2:00 a.m. while others arrived by 3:30 a.m. Some began their day earlier and some later but, in general, the briefers spent two-to-three hours after arrival in their workspace processing the information necessary for briefing the policymaker. This first phase was characterized by briefers reading and thinking about the intelligence information made available to them, and how it would be useful for the policymaker. The information came in many forms and formats: softcopy and hardcopy finished intelligence, as well as raw softcopy and hardcopy intelligence. When briefers had questions about the content of the information, they reached out to analysts for assistance, sometimes the morning of the preparation, occasionally at other times when they had a chance to make such contact. The Prepare phase ended at different hours for various briefers depending on each policymaker's schedule but, generally, a notional time for the end of this phase was 6:00 a.m.

The second phase, Deliver, involved the briefer's face-to-face proximity with the policymaker, personally conveying the material during scheduled sessions on the policymaker's daily calendar, typically Monday through Friday, and for a very select few policymakers, on Saturday as well. When these select few traveled, the briefer went along to continue providing
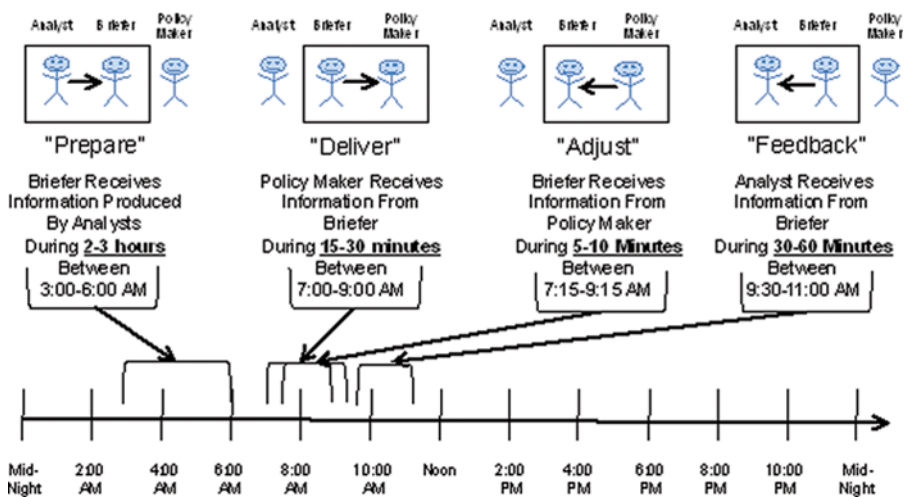

Figure 3. Four-Phase Briefing Routine. (Color figure available online.)

briefings. The length of time of each face-to-face encounter in their policymakers' Washington, D.C. offices varied according to the individual, as modified by his or her schedule, but on average, they lasted 15–30 minutes, depending on circumstances. These encounters generally took place in the early morning work hours, typically between 7:00–9:00 a.m., although some were earlier and some later, but almost always before 10:00 a.m. On occasion, to accommodate changes in a policymaker's schedule, the briefing session was conducted in the afternoon.

During the Deliver phase, the briefer handed the briefing book to the policymaker, sat nearby while "the book" was read, with each having his or her own copy of the briefing book. The briefer augmented the book's contents with short, scene-setting dialogue, usually expressed in a sentence or two, and usually only when the briefer sensed an opportunity to say something relevant.

During the Adjust phase, information flowed from the policymaker to the briefer, in response to the briefer's comments and to the briefing book's content. The briefer, having paid close attention to the policymaker to detect and understand his/her reactions, then took appropriate steps—some during the face-to-face interaction but others later—regarding those actions.

In the last phase, Feedback, information flowed from the briefer back to the authoring analysts and their managers in the form of oral and written comments in a variety of venues. The recipients of this feedback were keenly interested in policymaker reactions to the contents of the briefing book.

THE COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE BETWEEN BRIEFER AND POLICYMAKER

Each of the four phases contained a common communication structure, shown in Figure 4. The individual who received the information during each phase experienced impediments to the information flow.[16] In Figure 4, the direction of the arrowhead between each stakeholder indicates the recipient. The indicated impediments generated tensions that created a cognitive dissonance and became the motivation for the briefer to take action,[17] mainly the employment of a mitigation strategy to reduce the tensions. The information flow impediment is labeled Step A; the tensions created by the impediments are in Step B; and the mitigation strategies employed to reduce the tensions, and therefore, the impediments are noted in Step C.

What follows are details of the three-step processes that occur in each phase of the briefer's daily routine, hence, the remaining section is organized by its four phases. Since the communication pattern is viewed from the perspective of the individual who is receiving the information, the characterizations of the Prepare and Adjust phases are directly attributed to the briefers who were interviewed, while the characterizations of the Deliver and Feedback phases
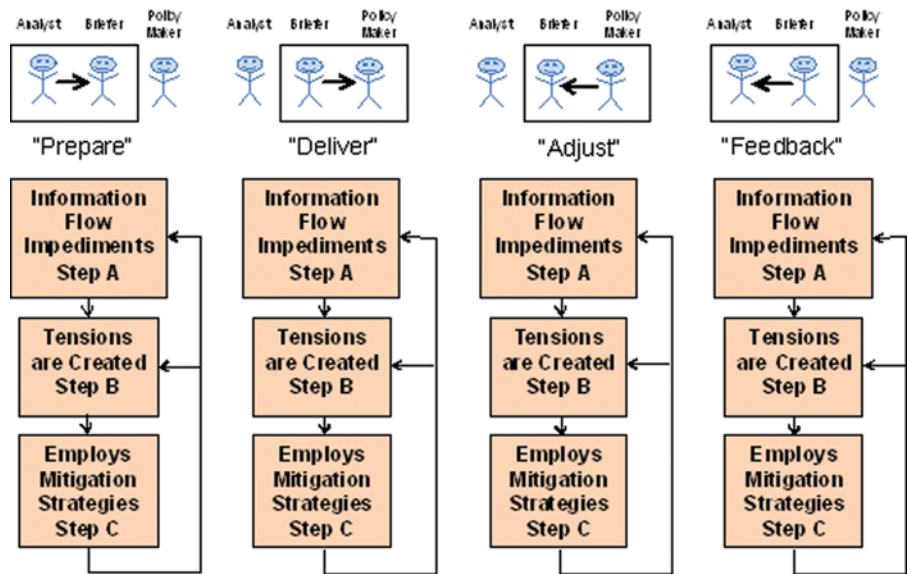
Figure 4. Communication Structure. (Color figure available online.)

are indirectly attributed to the policymaker and authoring analysts, respectively, by the briefer's interview data.

Prepare Phase

The briefers commonly experienced three impediments during the Prepare phase. Each impediment is discussed along with its tension and mitigation.

All the briefers spoke about information overload, the sheer volume of information they had to process early each morning: search, collect, sort, prioritize, organize, and cognitively digest. Information overload became an impediment, causing a tension briefers experienced in the pressure of time before they had to deliver the briefing book. They mitigated the time pressure in two ways. Briefers used a triage strategy and explained why it was their most important preparation step.

The first thing a briefer looked at in a report, whether softcopy or hardcopy, was the title. Selection strategies were based on the title alone. For those items selected, the briefer read the first sentence or first paragraph. If the report was still interesting, the entire document was read. The other type of mitigation strategy used to offset the effect of time pressure was how each improved an intelligence document given the time pressure. Briefers were not themselves the authors of intelligence products used in the briefing books but they carefully read whatever went into the briefing book. Because they were not the original authors, briefers became, in their words, "error detectors."

Briefers could not rewrite the content of material, and to the extent they had time to get the content changed, they focused mainly on the form of the narrative. Were there grammatical errors? Did the sentences make sense? Was the main point of the report up front and obvious or buried towards the end of the report? Briefers had plenty of experience with mistakes in both content and form in products, regardless of prior careful review and editing by the many people who support them. Because briefers did not have enough time to get the system to make every correction, they became the last line of defense—error detectors.

A second impediment in the Prepare phase involved the briefer's analytic experiences. At the time the interviews were conducted, only one briefer interviewed had analytic experience that matched the policymaker's responsibilities. The other briefers had no such specific experience. The policymaker always had a far deeper understanding of the domain. As the briefer's experience increased during the 18–24-month rotation, this difference diminished somewhat. Nonetheless, the knowledge difference generated a tension in the briefer, a fear that he or she would incorrectly answer a question. When possible, briefers mitigated this fear by talking with analysts who were subject-matter experts. The briefers sought to clarify or gain access to domain knowledge that they felt would provide additional value in the eyes of policymakers, specifically knowledge that may not have been included in the written products available to them. This value-added knowledge to the policymaker was sourced by the authoring analyst, with the briefer as the go-between.

The remaining third impediment to their success during the Prepare phase was considered relatively important by the briefers themselves, namely the cleanliness of their desks. A briefer deals with lots of information, in varying proportions of hardcopy and softcopy. But at some point hardcopy becomes easier to manage. Again, the briefing book is a physical object made up of paper products. Every day countless pieces of paper accumulate on the briefer's desk. For the briefer to start each day with a clean desk, no clutter, was imperative. Clutter creates a tension, that of confusion for the briefer. With the pressure of time, ensuring that the right document is being handled and readied for the briefing book becomes critical. The mitigation strategy was quite simply, although time consuming, to remove paper from the desk before going home for the day.

Deliver Phase

Briefers identified two impediments experienced by policymakers upon receiving and processing the briefing book. The first involved the large amount of information each policymaker had to read and process in a relatively short period of time, typically 15–30 minutes. This overload

created a tension in the policymaker that led to difficulty in absorbing all the material in the briefing book. Policymakers mitigated this tension by filtering information, paying attention to some things, ignoring other things.

The second was the policymakers' orientation to policy that framed the way they read the briefing book. This framing made quickly understanding the intelligence information difficult. Briefers believed the policymakers' tension was a result of their operating at a much higher level of abstraction in dealing with much broader issues than merely the threat information of the day. The higher level of abstraction had two effects: Policymakers had difficulty focusing on details which the briefer sometimes felt were important. But more importantly to the briefer, the tension prevented policymakers from using language that would be easily understandable, in context, to the briefer. The policymakers' mitigation strategy to this tension was to ask the briefer to arrange for a ''deep dive,'' a separate, follow-on dedicated time to discuss the intelligence content with the agency's domain experts rather than the briefer, although the briefer often sat in on these deep dive sessions.

Adjust Phase

Briefers identified two impediments stemming from policymakers' reactions to the briefing book. First, briefers described the policymakers as officals having a much broader experience, orientation to mission, and access to and interest in a wide range of knowledge. Briefers were never quite sure they provided the information that the policymakers needed, not knowing if the information was too narrow or too broad. This difference in context created three types of tensions in the briefers: (1) the policymakers sometimes made statements that took the briefers by surprise; (2) briefers desired to be close to the policymakers' inner circle, that group of close friends and associates having unfettered access, complete trust, and unrestricted ability to talk about whatever the inner circle thought should be discussed in a candid way; and (3) briefers knew the value of being close to very senior policymakers but constantly checked to make sure they did not lose their objectivity. The briefers surveyed spoke about the need to self-monitor while being constantly aware of their ambiguous situation.

Briefers mitigated these tensions with a very powerful narrative technique. Almost every briefer used the word ''story'' to describe the narrative presented to the policymaker, saying that this was the mechanism by which knowledge was conveyed. Stories made it easier for the policymakers to follow the main points contained within the intelligence. Briefers often used the word ''storyline'' to describe how the briefing book brought new information to the policymakers' attention. Having a storyline meant that important knowledge contained in the briefing book or conveyed orally by the briefer

was related to previously presented material giving the policymaker a context from which to quickly and easily process the new knowledge. Using storylines also reduced the chances that the policymaker would misinterpret the information, and reduced the time required to justify why new information on a topic was being briefed.

The second impediment experienced by briefers was policymakers' non-verbal communication. While policymakers did talk with briefers, the substance of their conversation was minimal compared with the time reading, and varied with each policymaker. But by far the greater type of policymaker response to briefers came in the form of non-verbal communication, both intentional and unintentional. Reading the briefing book was a solitary task for policymakers, even as it was read in the presence and under the gaze of the briefer. Detecting how policymakers read the briefing book became one of the briefers' most important tasks.

The individual briefer carefully watched the policymaker's gestures, body language, and facial expressions. For example, the briefer paid attention to the pattern the policymaker's finger made as he or she viewed each page of the briefing book. The briefer followed the policymaker's eyes, attempting to detect which sections the policymaker was spending the most amount of time on reading. The non-verbal communication created a tension in the briefer since the policymaker's limited reactions made clearly differentiating between opportunities and constraints difficult.

The briefer diminished the uncertainty caused by non-verbal communication through the use of personal relationships—social and professional—for various stakeholders. The briefers continuously gauged the status of their relationship with the policymakers to measure how well they were doing from the policymaker's point of view as an indirect means of assessing feedback. Almost all the interviewed briefers characterized their relationship with the policymakers in social ways: friendliness, intimacy, trust, and protection. By friendliness the briefers meant that the policymaker was candid, often mentoring and at times praising the briefer. Friendliness was a signal that the policymaker personally respected the briefer. Yet, policymakers also used friendliness to ensure continued access to the intelligence, not necessarily of physical access but rather one of feeling that his or her needs would be understood by the briefer and delivered.

Intimacy meant the establishment of an emotional bond between the briefers and policymakers, much as if they were friends. For the briefers, intimacy indicated that the policymakers trusted, depended upon, and was sincere with them. For the policymakers, intimacy was important in allowing them to be comfortable with the briefer as a person, considering the informality of the face-to-face briefing session.

The third relationship feature, trust, meant the ability of policymakers to share any kind of information with briefers without fear of its becoming

public. Trust encouraged briefers to put more effort into their job. They were consequently willing to take more risks in getting things done. For the policymakers, having a trusting relationship with the briefer resembled a patient–physician relationship although, in this case, the briefer was the physician: the policymaker wanted to stay healthy, keep out of trouble, and depended upon the briefer help to do so.

Protection, was distinct from trust, though a very similar relationship feature. The briefers displayed very deep commitment to prevent the policymakers from being harmed in any way. A briefer was expected to keep the policymaker's raw, unfettered reactions made in his or her presence as private as possible from non-briefers, usually analysts and their managers. For the policymakers, knowing that the briefers would keep negative reactions or statements made in front of them private was important in allowing them to vent their feelings while also being assured that those feelings did not reach the producers of intelligence lest they result in reduced access to future knowledge.

Briefers also used professional relationships to mitigate the ambiguities and uncertainties of non-verbal communication from the policymakers. Thus, the briefer would find it very valuable knowing what important meeting the policymaker would be attending so that the briefing book might include an intelligence product that targeted a question or issue relevant to the agenda for that session. However, the nature of the briefer–policymaker context, as presented in the Similarities and Differences sections, generally prevents a briefer from routinely interrupting a policymaker to ask, "Sir, would you mind telling me what meeting you are attending tomorrow, why you are attending it, what political agenda you are working on relevant to that meeting, and what kind of intelligence would be helpful to you?"

To overcome this limitation briefers establish courteous and effective relationships with people who work around the policymaker, namely civilian or military executive officers, executive secretaries, administrative assistants, and secretaries. These relationships provide bi-directional support. The policymaker's staff members may see the policymaker many times each day but likely for just a few seconds or few minutes at a time, with the interaction likely to be transactional. But the briefer's time with the policymaker is actually somewhat envied by the staff, for although that time may be cumulatively less per day, its nature and length are spent on far more significant matters. The staff may actually find out more information from the briefer about what the policymaker is thinking or needs than they themselves can acquire to meet their responsibilities. On the reciprocal side, the briefer expands the sources and types of information helpful for suggesting and, more importantly, articulating the policymaker's information needs by tapping into the network of professional relationships.

Feedback Phase

Briefers identified two impediments that affected the analysts who authored the products they used. The first was the analyst's difficulty in translating the information from the briefer into his or her own mental framework. Each briefer has a very focused approach to targeting the needs of a particular policymaker, and experiences that policymaker's reaction much more narrowly than the context of the intelligence products written by the analyst. More specifically, policymakers usually did not want negative reactions a to be conveyed by the briefer (intentionally or not) to the analyst because it might be interpreted as criticism. This made it difficult for the briefer to convey meaningful feedback to the analyst, and resulted in the analyst being unsure of the specific value of the intelligence product. As a result, the authoring analysts employed a mitigation strategy of being proactive with briefers, providing them with articles or knowledge that the analysts thought might be helpful.

The second impediment to analysts is somewhat related to the first. A frustrating aspect of a briefer's experience was the absence of specific negative feedback from the policymaker. The briefers interpreted this behavior as a tactic to ensure an unfettered and continued flow of knowledge rather than an indication of satisfaction. Without negative feedback, however, the briefers had no specific comments to make to the analyst, who therefore interpreted the lack of negative commentary as positive feedback. Analysts know that everything they or others write is not going to meet exactly the needs of a policymaker, so this absence of feedback made analysts unsure of their contributions. Some analysts reduced the feeling of uncertainty by establishing a closer relationship with the briefer in the hopes of getting informal feedback, which the briefer might not feel comfortable providing.

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

Each of the four phases of the briefer's daily routine included impediments to the flow of information, many of which resulted in unpredictable outcomes that produced tensions and mitigation strategies to overcome the impediments. These are summarized in the communication structure in Figure 5. Nine impediments were experienced in the analyst-briefer-policymaker interaction on a daily basis, eleven tensions were experienced, and fifteen mitigation strategies were employed.

Effects of Information Properties and Contextual Differences

Not all impediments affected the information receiver in a linear way. At times the communication structure contained within it a nonlinear
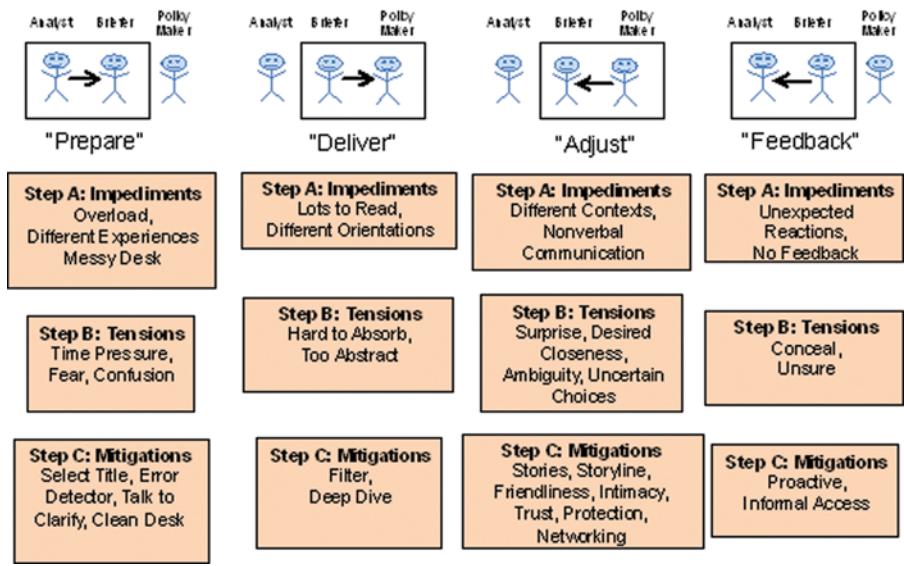
Figure 5. Structure and Findings. (Color figure available online.)

process. Seven of the nine impediments produced only one kind of tension and one mitigation strategy, but in two such cases multiple mitigation strategies were used to offset the one tension. In the case of information overload experienced by the briefer, two mitigation strategies were employed to offset the tension of time pressure: the use of titles as a triage mechanism and the adoption of the role of error detector. In the case of non-verbal communication from policymakers, the briefers employed five types of social or professional relationships to gather information useful for the briefer that were not otherwise provided directly by the policymakers.

The briefers experienced complex reactions and mitigation strategies to the information properties of overload and equivocation or ambiguity: information overload during their preparation for the briefing, the Prepare phase, and information equivocation from the policymakers' non-verbal communication during the briefing, the Adjust phase. These mitigation strategies can be summarized as filtering for the former and relationship building for the latter.

One of the nine impediments produced multiple tensions. The different personal and social contexts between the briefer and the policymaker spawned three tensions: being surprised, wanting to be in the inner circle, and the ambiguity of their relationship. Briefers used a very sophisticated combination of mitigation strategies that employed a story framework implemented through storyline tactics.

Cost/Benefit Trade-Offs

But a cost/benefit ratio is associated with each of these strategies, as shown in Figure 6. In this particular example, a specific cost/benefit calculus is apparent. Filtering provides the briefer with a very effective way of managing information overload when faced with time constraints, but it also opens the possibility of missed opportunities. Relationship building is extremely important to the briefer, but incumbent to any relationship is the possibility of incorrect interpretation, getting the wrong signal.

The cost/benefit associated with storylines is probably the most powerful and potentially impactful feature of the briefer–policymaker interaction. Storylines are used to carry a sequence of events in memory over time, so that when updates need to be briefed, the policymaker can recall a past briefing in which a previous event was mentioned. Maintaining the currency of a storyline became very important to minimize policymaker confusion that might arise in briefing a new event but when time constraints did not allow a retelling of the entire history of related events.

Storyline usage is the same strategy employed in television shows, comic books, or even novels. Each week's televised episode brings something new to the story, but because viewers have a history of following all previous story elements, they can pick up on the telltale nuances of that week's changes and place them in perspective. But, a friend invited to watch the show who had never seen previous episodes would perhaps interrupt frequently for an explanation of what is going on. Doing so would ruin both viewers' experience.

The benefit of using a storyline to achieve effective knowledge transfer—from the briefer's perspective—within a very small time frame and under potentially tense time constraints could also result in a poor briefing.

Mitigation	Potential Advantage	Potential Disadvantage
Filtering	Reduces Information Overload	Misses Important Information
Relationships	Fills in Knowledge Gaps	Misinterprets Signals
Storylines	Reduces Confusion	Lack of Awareness

Figure 6.   Briefer's Key Cost/Benefit Analyses.

A problem for the briefer might occur if the policymaker stops the briefing and requires spending precious minutes being retold the history of events and their significance while struggling to find meaning in the current situation.

The potential downside of storylines is that the effort and cost of maintaining the continuity of different stories, or different threads of intelligence that might be important in the current policy arena, may impede a briefer's introducing and explaining a new story that had never or rarely been brought to the policymaker's attention.

From the briefer's perspective, the issue is not whether a single piece of intelligence is more or less important, or needs to be briefed or not; rather, it arises in the actual conveyance of the intelligence during the face-to-face interaction. The key factor is the knowledge that the briefer must have to stitch together the words and sentences, written or oral, during the interaction with the policymaker.

GUIDELINES FOR BRIEFING SITUATIONS

Briefer Competencies. In the briefer–policymaker relationship, that briefers possess sufficient emotional maturity to withstand the complexity of the interaction and to thrive within it is imperative. Two specific examples are the need to be an acute observer of others' feelings and behaviors, and to ''leave one's ego at the door''; in other words, to be selfless in the face of power.

Organizational Considerations. Organizations that have briefer–policymaker interactions—even if not high-profiled—are faced with two challenges: select an individual to be a briefer, and developing or training an individual to be one. Selection processes must be able to evaluate an individual's ability to psychologically present him/herself in a social setting, and not to select an individual solely on the basis of expertise and quality of being an analyst. Preparation for briefing is really a long-term approach for creating a different way of interacting with consumers of intelligence. Analysts need to mediate the produced intelligence with their personal presence for all the reasons that have been discussed. A one-time ''training class'' will not be sufficient. Periodic assistance will be needed in determining what went right and wrong in each encounter until a briefer masters the required competencies, perhaps by utilizing a counseling-like function by an experienced briefer. Analysts mentoring analysts could be a benefit here.

In a more strategic sense, organizations that transfer knowledge across boundaries have the challenge of determining its utility.[18] Different techniques, such as survey or interview-like questions, can be used. Were there a way to identify how the knowledge factored into a policy decision or significant role, then a measure might become available to indicate how the policymaker used the knowledge. (In the commercial sector, objective

indicators such as changes in revenue or changes in product quality are utilized.) Briefers are positioned to play an extraordinary role in knowledge transfer, and they may occasionally have indirect access to how knowledge was used if the policymaker so reveals.

GUIDELINES FOR OTHER SITUATIONS

The briefer–policymaker relationship is a special element of the Intelligence Community. But every analyst and analytic organization must weigh what and how knowledge should be provided to a consumer of intelligence, whether the decisionmaker is internal or external to the Intelligence Community.

The structure of the communication pattern is likely to remain consistent. Even with the increased use of electronic forms of delivering briefing content to PDB and ESO stakeholders, analysts will continue to play a key communication role, mediating their information needs and the content provided to them. What may change over time are the types of impediments, tension, and mitigation strategies that may emerge. While some may disappear, the communication structure will remain.

Regardless of where briefers fit in the analytic organization they face challenges dealing with the stream of information that flows toward their way. These challenges have an effect that causes them to take or avoid action. The actions taken consume time and effort, potentially at a cost of not focusing similar resources on other activities. Not right or wrong, this dilemma is something analysts should be aware of.

To understand what happens at the point of transfer is important. The gap that exists between the analyst and the consumer can be perilous, especially when the transfer occurs in facing an organizational boundary as extreme as that between the intelligence briefer and the policymaker. What happens within the gap will, in large measure, define the value of the knowledge to the policymaker. Although the role that communication plays in such exchanges is not usually thought about, it should be.

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planners is very different than to policymakers, an audience that "to use Mr. Lippmann's happy phrase, determines the "pictures" they have in their heads of the world . . . ."

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15 One briefer, for example, mentioned that a previous Vice President was asked by a reporter on his last day in office, "What will you miss most about being in office?" He replied: "My briefer."

16 Only the briefer was interviewed in this study, but the briefers, as a whole, were collectively able to portray some common insights they had of the policymakers (and the authoring analysts) within this communication structure. The findings described in this section of the policymakers' communication patterns are

therefore based on the intimate knowledge and experience the briefers have had with them, serving as a close proxy to having first-hand interview data with the policymakers.

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