

IMPROVING INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS HIRING PRACTICES

What can the Boston Red Sox teach the Intelligence Community about better methods of hiring new intelligence analysts? Michael Lewis's 2003 book *Moneyball* is a baseball book. Or is it more? On one level, the book is the story of how the Oakland Athletics, one of the league's smallest and most financially challenged baseball teams, was able to compete and defeat the richest teams in baseball. On a deeper level, the book is really about the ability to use innovative methods to challenge long held human capital beliefs to improve organizational productivity. It turned the "hiring" of baseball players on its head and started a minor revolution within baseball and altered what tools and methods an organization uses to recruit and hire its future "star" performers. *Moneyball* stated that traditional baseball scouting methods were inefficient and by applying new techniques, talent undiscovered by other team could be found.¹

Teams have been recruiting young baseball players for well over a hundred years. Since the early days of baseball the process has remained largely unchanged. Baseball clubs hire scouts who travel worldwide to observe and assess young ballplayers. These scouts are experienced baseball pros who have played, managed, and coached baseball for almost their entire adult lives. They have watched thousands of young players pitch, hit, and run. The scouts have developed their own language and talk about a player's "plus arm" and "looks of a gamer". Their expertise is based on their ability to watch a 17- year old pitcher and make an assessment if he has the potential to one day pitch in the Major Leagues. Their method is almost entirely based on a qualitative approach to assessing talent, by assessing his physical appearance and making an assessment from watching him pitch or hit.

"A lot of what scouts do is based on gut instinct, the history of being in the game...their experience." (Gary Hughes, Chicago Cubs Assistant GM and MLB scout for thirty years)

¹ Hakes, Jain, Sauer, Raymond "An Economic Evaluation of the Moneyball Hypothesis" Journal of Economic Perspectives, Summer 2006, 173.

The central thesis of *Moneyball* is that the scout's traditional reliance on visual analysis of a player and his potential was causing many qualified candidates to be passed up, or drafted for much less money. The key to the Oakland A's success was fully embracing **quantitative analysis**. By analyzing the performance statistics of thousands of baseball players on new ways, future major leaguers could be discovered or undervalued players signed at bargain prices. While baseball has always respected statistics, the prevailing wisdom was that statistics of high school or foreign players were unreliable since they mainly faced "regular" players, not professional talent. The old scouts relied on the look of a player. Many of players the quantitative analysts of the Oakland A's discovered did not "look" like major leagues and did not score high on the old scout's quantitative assessments. The Oakland A's did not care if the player was short, or skinny, or had short arms, what mattered was his pitching statistics. Or an ability to get base hits or draw walks for other players.

The Oakland A's hired a team of young Ivy League MBAs, many with little to no baseball experience. This "scouting" team contrasted widely from the traditional scout with decades of experience and thousands of games under their belt. The young MBAs built mathematical models and created new calculations that allowed the A's to find talent the other teams were missing, since the A's were using a different measurement stick. To the Human Capital specialist this means the Oakland A's developed a different way to measure KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities) that better predicted future success.²

The key for the intelligence community is realizing that *Moneyball* is more than a book about baseball. The lessons can be directly tied to how the community recruits and hires future talent. When read through the lens of human resource management, *Moneyball* becomes about how to adapt traditional recruiting and hiring methods and to fully embrace deeper more quantifiable methods.³ The current Intelligence Community model is heavily qualitative and closely resembles the old baseball scouts who scour the top colleges and high school programs looking for the next star. By absorbing many of the quantitative aspects of the *Moneyball*

² Wolfe, Richard, Wright, Patrick and Smart, Dennis "Radical Human Resource Management Innovation and Competitive Advantage: The Moneyball Story, p111

³ Wolfe, p113.

approach the Intelligence Community may bring in a range of analytic super-stars who may have never been noticed by traditional recruiting and hiring methods.

The current Intelligence Community analysis hiring process relies on the traditional qualitative human capital methods of the resume and the interview. Like the old baseball scout who has signed thousands of major leaguers, the resume review and interview panel has staffed the Intelligence Community with thousands of analysts. *Moneyball* teaches us there may be a better way to find and hire talent. By developing new metrics that more accurately reflect analytic potential the Intelligence Community could hire analysts with better long term potential for advanced analysis.

The current method is like the old baseball scout who travels to the same big baseball high schools and colleges to find the top players. The Intelligence Community does the same thing, by recruiting from the traditional intelligence analyst producing institutions, such as Georgetown, George Washington, and University of Maryland. The large number of graduates from these schools working within the Intelligence Community further adds to the evidence that these schools produce the best analysts.

Members of hiring boards are like the old baseball scouts who often see younger versions of themselves sitting across the interview table and believe they have the best qualifications for a job. This reduces diversity among new analysts coming into the intelligence community at a time where innovative thinking and alternative analysis is needed most.

Old baseball scouts rely heavily on the visual observation of a player to see if he has the potential to be a major leaguer. Intelligence community hiring board looks heavily at previous experience in a regional/function area, or prior-military intelligence billets. Interview panels ask a series of probing questions about analysis and critical thinking, but the results are hard to judge or really quantify. The hiring panel ends up making a recommendation based mainly on a feel for a candidate. While resumes and interview panels are usually scored using some type of a “one to five ranking”, the numbers lack real meaning and end up being no different than low, medium, or high on how well the interview answered the question. The board has no real method for predicting analytic potential except assuming they have the ability due to an

academic degree or previous intelligence analysis experience. What is needed is something better.

In Practice

Is This Really a Revolutionary Concept?

“Identifying and defining needs based on desired qualities... We want an employee who possesses x-type background with a y-type personality or mind-set.” – Anonymous

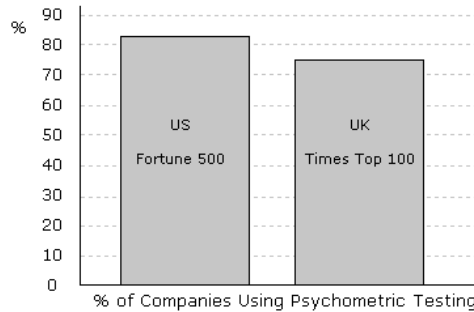
Applying Moneyball Tenets to the Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise

We do not mean to suggest that *Moneyball* is the saving grace fix-all for potential hiring shortfalls across Marine Corps Intelligence, or the Intelligence Community for that matter. But there are certainly tenets that can be extracted and applied that would streamline the process and give hiring authorities a more qualified candidate pool.

There are currently no quantitative indicators in place that would represent a reliable option to compare candidates. Baseball has batting averages and on-base percentages, win/loss ratios and earned run averages, but there is no reliable quantifiable statistic one can use to rate one analyst or employment candidate against another. Work experience and work ethic aren't easily ratable. Equally difficult is rating the quality of a Masters degree from one institution versus another.

Organizations across the globe have widely adopted the use of psychometric testing in their recruiting and hiring activities as a way to fill this gap of quantifiable data. The United States military's use of the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is one example of testing already in use by the U.S. Government. Psychometric tests aim to measure attributes like intelligence, aptitude and personality. They provide a potential employer with an insight into how well one works with other people, how well one handles stress, and whether a potential employee will be able to cope with the intellectual demands of the job. Today, over 80 percent of U.S. Fortune 500 companies use some form of psychometric testing as part of their recruitment and hiring regiment. ⁴

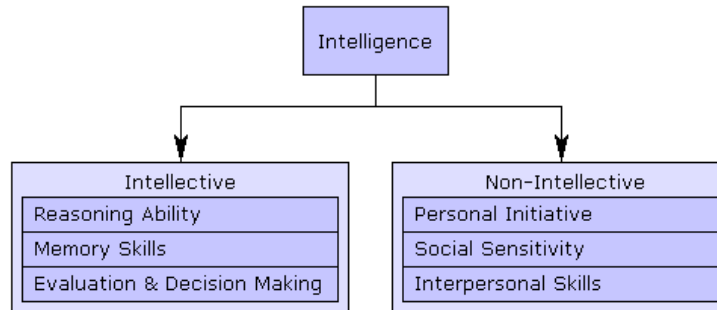
⁴ PsychometricTesting.com, “Introduction to Psychometric Selection Tests”, retrieved 1 May 2010.



There is a plethora of psychometric testing available to hiring authorities and recruiters today that has direct applicability to intelligence functions.

- **Aptitude Testing:** There are over 5,000 aptitude and ability tests on the market today. Some of them contain only one type of question (for example, verbal ability, numeric reasoning ability, etc.) while others are made up of different types of question. The different types of questions can be classified around the following: Verbal Ability, Numeric Ability, Abstract Reasoning, Spatial Ability, Mechanical Reasoning, Fault Diagnosis, and Data Checking –
- **Critical Thinking Tests:** Designed to test one's ability to take a series of facts expressed in words and to understand and manipulate the information to solve a specific problem. Employers use critical reasoning questions to gain an insight into whether you have the key intellectual skills that are the foundation for success in a managerial position. Consequently, these questions are usually restricted to graduate and management level tests.
- **Emotional Intelligence Tests:** Emotional Intelligence is a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action. Psychologists have posited for some time that there are very few skills that determine an individual's accuracy and effectiveness. An IQ test is a basic example of an Emotional Intelligence test. The below diagram illustrates the different measurable aspects of one's intelligence.⁵

⁵ PsychometricTesting.com, "Introduction to Psychometric Selection Tests", retrieved 1 May 2010.



The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is probably the most well-known federal agency that requires applicants to pass a written test during the application process. The FBI's aptitude testing battery consists of two phases of written exams. The written exams are intended to assess a candidate's situational judgment and cognitive ability. Candidates are required to get a passing grade on these exams to advance to the next phase of the process. Even a passing grade does not guarantee advancement. Candidates' scores are judged against others' and only the most competitive are chosen to advance.

Another area where *Moneyball* succeeded was in its use of a more refined/alternate recruiting tool. There are many different organizations who have successfully implemented improved recruiting practices; one organization that has been widely touted as having successfully revolutionized their own recruiting process is Google.

An obvious similarity between Google and the United States Marine Corps that can readily be identified is through the popularity of the brand. Both organizations enjoy tremendous name recognition and both represent examples of institutions that, throughout their history, have made it a point to maintain the values and traditions that made them what they are. While Google and the Marine Corps have very different missions, one can argue the hiring challenges they both face when searching for top-tier talent are comparable.

In the early 2000's, Google experienced a tremendous hiring boom; they sought to double the number of employees from 5,000 to over 10,000 in a relatively short period of time. Early in the process, Google founders made it a priority that, no matter how big or how fast the company grew, maintaining the values and organizational culture was paramount. They didn't want to simply grow; they needed to grow while maintaining the same ethos of hiring only the

best and most qualified applicants in their respective fields that made Google an internationally respected institution.⁶

Google established a dedicated department of specialized recruiting professionals. This ran counter to the norm of hiring an “HR Department” full of generalists who do the ‘hiring’. Each unit of their recruiting team had a deliberately defined skill set for which they were responsible. They recognized that a centralization of recruiting professionals makes it easier to work with the various functional areas within Google and helps them share top applicants between those areas. Because Google believes wholeheartedly in sourcing the best talent that is also sought by its various competitors, every element of the recruiting function is abundantly staffed with highly-trained professionals. They realized that the volume and caliber of talent they desired could not be mined from job and resume banks or general recruitment advertising. In fact, Google does not typically advertise positions in widely-used mass-posting sites such as Monster.com.⁷

That’s not to say Google doesn’t still employ more traditional recruiting tools. Google employees are encouraged to use the referral program and recruiters still participate in college campus visits. But the selection criteria and the selection process are what evolved. Google is renowned for its lengthy hiring process, one that often involves in excess of ten interviews with various levels of Google’s Human Resource and management apparatus.

A Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise Model

As noted, the use of aptitude batteries is no longer an uncommon practice both inside and outside the federal government. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Fortune 500 companies utilize them in some fashion in their respective hiring processes. We are not talking about personality tests; we are advocating a selection from a battery of tests that are able to quantitatively measure an individual’s aptitude for decision-making and cognitive capabilities. There are hundreds of different tests available the Marine Corps could utilize.

The Marine Corps should invest in a study, employing experts in their field, to conduct assessment of available batteries of aptitude tests and identify one which makes the

⁶ Ere.net, “A Case Study of Google Recruiting Part 2”, Dr. John Sullivan.

⁷ Ere.net

identification of skillsets unique to professional intelligence analysts. The identification of the most suitable test is important. The Community needs a tool that identifies the most relevant data. Therefore, this study should also include a portion to discern those capabilities and traits that are found in capable and accomplished analysts.

Finally, the Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise should also consider investment in a team of dedicated recruiters who are familiar with the analytic field and who can go out into the Intelligence Community, job fairs, and college campuses and seek out the next generation of analysts. They should be equipped with all the tools necessary to identify that talent and should be highly trained and educated in their field.