

# **BENCHMARKING OF INFORMATION COLLECTIO TECHNIQUES USED IN HUMINT: FROM THE NAZIST INTERACTIVE TECHNIQUES TO THE NATO "GOLD TANDARD"**

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**Abstract:** *Academic studies in the sphere of intelligence and counterintelligence focused predominantly on aspects of the intelligence cycle area, intelligence typology, collecting information from technical sources, axiological aspects (especially those related to the ethics connected to the process of collecting information, recruiting sources), or the feedback received from the decision-makers / beneficiaries of the finite intelligence product, but they have put less emphasis on collecting information from human sources, process and technique that have occupied and continue to occupy a central and determinant role within the domains of reference.*

*Although the intelligence field has developed and applied scientific methods, the HUMINT approach as a discipline is found in the context of other socio-human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, or communication sciences. The concerns in this regard are largely circumscribed to the applied psychology and US intelligence agencies', practices succeeding the Second World War in an attempt to support operational intelligence by delimiting sets of techniques explicitly addressing intelligence from human sources.[1]*

**Keywords:** *intelligence, intelligence cycle, HUMINT, human intelligence gathering, information elicitation*

## **1. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study revolves the initiative to identify an objective approach, based on scientific evidence and experimentation, to highlight efficiency / lack of efficiency, the opportunity / inopportunity to use dedicated techniques for collecting information from human sources, respectively by HUMINT within the "*information gathering*" phase of the *intelligence cycle*.

We have set up a *benchmarking* in this regard that will be accepted as a *gold standard* in the *HUMINT* field, respectively the "*direct approach*" to which we will cross check three action models (testable, repeatable, evaluable and quantifiable), three techniques for obtaining information based on communication and interrelation which are circumscribed to a meta-method of *elicitation* which has been filtered, refined and perfected in time.

Our initiative is intended to be a starting point, a basis for building a functional structure, a start for future similar researches, circumscribed to both the practical and the theoretical areas of *intelligence*.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

At an early stage of research we realized the need to address the whole approach from a scientific point of view, in which we made a mapping of the methods to be used to contribute with new elements to the accumulated capital of circumscribed knowledge to the field of *intelligence*; in this context, the epistemology of the research and the way in which we considered that we can reach a valid knowledge sign up within the scope of the interpretative approach according to which the center of gravity is focused on understanding the phenomena studied rather than on explaining them. Essentially, the interpretative paradigm allows us to have multi-faceted access on many levels of reality seen through the perspective of one or more individuals, the context, circumstances, causality and effects of the phenomena under study.

Thereby, the ontology of research and the nature of reality in which knowledge exists (or, in other words, the way we perceive reality, objective or subjective) determined us to operate from a subjective perspective, accepting that reality is built up by individual perceptions and how they interrelate, interdepends and determine the building of collective perceptions. Following this logical thread, the methodology of research - the instruments and techniques used - are circumscribed to the case study that allowed us to explore the phenomenon studied in detail, using multiple sources of information collected over time (providing us with answers to the questions why? how? what? addressed to the investigated subject), as well as comparing and interpreting the obtained results. Consequential techniques and ways of collecting information used in research are specific to the multidisciplinary study from the field of *intelligence* and interviews.

Subtracted to this construct, the data analysis techniques used in the research are inductive, enrolling in an attempt to build an understanding of the relationship between the obtained data sets, so that from them we can identify themes, patterns, acting models, in which the interpretative instruments include thematic analysis and *grounded theory* techniques. From an axiological point of view, we accept that research is of an interpretative nature that brings into question delicate subjects, biased by subjective perceptions and assumes the acceptance of a set of pre-existing values (*value laden*). [2]

## 3. CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTIONS

Informally called "*the second oldest profession in the world*", the information gathering activity (so that they can be substantiated later on - whether we relate to the individual, social groups, state-owned organizational entities, etc. - decisions of a military, economic, political, and social nature) probably appeared with the first human conflict.

If initially the gathering of information was probably done with instruments circumscribed to the perceptual-sensorial area, and based on these, decisions were made that addressed the basic needs of food, security, and shelter, the intelligence organizations are currently conducting their work in order to obtain products that are essential assets from the perspective of strategic planning, management and marketing decisions, investment, national security, etc.

In light of the above, although not a per se objective, in the context of this research it is necessary to proceed with a brief clarification of the concepts, meaning that the definitions of the intelligence concept are marked by dynamism, polysemy and fluidity, currently lacking a single structure that is generally accepted by both theoreticians and practitioners.

From our point of view, the most appropriate approach is the three-faceted approach, which belongs to Sherman Kent [3] who said that the *intelligence* term refers to the *process* (sum of planning activities, information collection / gathering, filtering / processing, analysis and production, dissemination), the *product* (the deliverable that will substantiate the beneficiaries' action decisions) and the homonym *organization* (the services, organizations, agencies, entities that produce the final product).

In the same way, with an illustrative role, R.V. Jones [4] compares the *intelligence* cycle with the functioning of a human being who, to be able to accommodate and integrate on a social / contextual plan will use all of his receivers to search, get, check information which, once filtered, processed and analyzed, will allow for adaptive decisions to be made.

The present study does not aim at addressing the entire *intelligence* cycle, but, specifically, to the information gathering stage, namely to achieve this goal through *HUMINT*.

This clarification is necessary as the stage itself aims to obtain, from a variety of sources, through a diversity of techniques, means and methods commonly referred to as sources of information (HUMINT, TECHINT, IMINT, PHOTOINT, SIGINT, COMINT, FISINT, TELINT, RADINT, MASINT, OPTINT, ELECTRO-OPTICAL, IRINT, LASINT, NUCINT, RINT, OSINT, MEDINT, CI – *counterintelligence*) of the raw data to be processed and analyzed for the achievement of the *intelligence* product. [5]

#### 4. HUMINT – CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTIONS

The concept, which in fact is an acronym that reduces the phrase of human intelligence to a condensed form, came to life between 1975-1980 and was inserted into the specialized language as "*a form of collecting political or military intelligence through secret agents*" or "*collecting information in a form covered by agents or other sources*" or as "*human intelligence - military intelligence obtained through human sources who know the target area*".[5][7]

As a practice, the activity of collecting information from human sources is mentioned by historiographical sources such as the Art of War (Sun Tzu), Arthasastra (Chanakya), the Old Testament, etc. And, although it has been bearing various names over the millennia, it has preserved the substance, meaning and importance.

Major mutations occurred in the 21st century amid the technological boom (in the field of data processing, communications, etc.) have made the attention of intelligence organizations prioritize other sources of information gathering: Open Source Intelligence - OSINT, Communication Intelligence - COMINT, Electronic Intelligence ELINT etc.

In contrast, there are voices (both among the theorists and practitioners) that pinpoint the recent failures of *intelligence* organizations which is attributed to the lack of information obtained from human sources; in order to support this hypothesis, we use the arguments used by Arthur Hulnick, which stated that human sources "can bring information that cannot be obtained through technical sensors or developed by diplomats; it would be wrong to give up the possibility to find information from within from a well-placed human source." [6]

In the mentioned argumentative context, we mention that the preoccupations of the theorists working in the *intelligence* area have focused in recent years on elements that predominantly deal with the analysis of intelligence, doctrine, relation with the beneficiaries of the product, on elements of procedural axiology, etc., and, to a lesser extent, on practical issues, which at first sight may seem irrelevant, such as the optimization of information gathering techniques from human sources.

Our desire is to draw attention to these issues and to actively participate in the initiation of a process aimed at rediscovering and optimizing a field of intelligence that seemed to be left unchecked.

The present study continues the pioneering activity in the field initiated by P.A. Granhag, Alison Laurence, S. Oleszkiewicz, H. S. Hodgins, and we want to deepen the following working hypothesis in this regard: *HUMINT's* inefficiency and, as a consequence, failures in *intelligence* are generated predominantly by faulty techniques used in human intelligence.[7],[8],[9]

In this light, we want to make a comparison, a benchmarking, taking as a landmark the *gold standard* in *HUMINT*, a "*direct approach*" and propose an action / complementary approach (taking into account operational models that have proven their effectiveness over time) namely the Scharff technique.

The interest in how information from human sources is gained in the practice of organizations using these sources of information has risen [12], especially after the terrorist attacks on November 9, 2001 in the USA and also the media scandals related to interrogation techniques used in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq. This research initiative also includes the present study, which is intended to be a further step towards the *HUMINT* approach, if not as a scientific field *per se*, at least as a discipline analyzed by means of science.

**Direct Approach** is defined by the conceptual framework provided by the U.S. Army Field Manual FM 2-22.3, *Human Intelligence Collector Operations*, accredited in 2009 by the US Presidency, through Executive Order 13491 and 13493 (in the revocation of the 13440 Executive Order issued by the Bush Presidential Administration in 2007 which limits the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the detention centers in which the Central Intelligence Agency operates) as a standard in conducting inquiries and obtaining information from human sources.[11]

Chapter 8 of the *Field Manual* details 18 approaches that can be used to collect information from human sources, these being detailed in a motivating, direct, emotional approach and other categories.

According to the presented manual, obtaining information from human sources mainly involves adopting a business-like attitude, the use of direct questions and keeping in touch with the human source as long as it responds in an honest manner.

The Field Manual mentions that the *direct approach* is mainly used to obtain information from human sources and uses statistics from operations in the Second World War, according to which the technique quoted yielded results in approx. 90% of cases and in later conflicts (ex. The *Iraqi Freedom Operation*) the efficiency of the *direct approach* was 95%, but there are no clear delimitations to allow this "efficiency" to be tinted.[14]

The *direct approach* is based on the use of a combination of explicit and open questions, avoiding the guiding questions and, according to US researchers, this technique is currently one of the most common techniques, used in 81% in military interrogations and 45% in civilian ones.[15]

The reason we chose the *direct approach* as a comparison element is precisely its official and formal character, in this case being a gold standard in all similar initiatives.

Although recent years have been marked by an increase in the interest in obtaining information from human sources (mostly in the form of attempts to optimize interview and interrogation methods) there is no significant, consistent empirical research to address this area.[16] [17]

Studies by theoreticians from intelligence schools in the USA focused mainly on the use of emotional approaches, both positive and negative, which they compare (in terms of efficiency and viability) with the direct approach.

According to the cited research, the use of emotional approaches leads to an increase in raw data obtained from human sources, the samples used for this purpose summing up both innocent and "guilty" participants.[18]

It is also noteworthy that US researchers have focused primarily on the judicial or criminological approach and less on the specific framework of HUMINT activities from the point of view of intelligence organizations, and the approach of the two domains, albeit etymologically similar, carries adaptive mutations both in the conceptual sphere and in the action domain: if the HUMINT approach from a criminological perspective only addresses the use of questions aimed at accepting guilt or innocence, from the point of view of intelligence organizations it is necessary to obtain raw data and useful information in order to clarify some aspects related to national security. The difference between the techniques and methods used in the HUMINT applied in the military and intelligence area, and in the judicial / forensic area is notable and has been explicitly dealt with by researchers Randy Borum and Jacqueline R. Evans which state that this is mainly due to policies that guide the work of the two areas.[16] [18]

With regard to *HUMINT* related research in the *intelligence* area, the american school has focused on using the *direct approach* and getting a positive emotional valence, to the detriment of a negative one, the purpose of which is to reduce the anxiety and pressure that are the determinants of obtaining false data and information.[21]

Regarding the ways to optimize the direct approach technique both Field manual 2-22.3 / 2006 and self-study by other researchers, they can be optimized by adopting a positive approach based on interrelation and *rapport* creation, but also using *fear down* techniques (which involves alleviating the source's fears, minimizing them and setting up a climate based on calm and cooperation) and *Pride-and-Ego-Up* (aimed at raising - in the case of human sources - self-esteem and respect for one's own). According to the cited sources, the adoption of these techniques determined to achieve better results than the use of techniques involving the increase of the feeling of fear - *fear up* or the lack of hope - *Pride-and-Ego-Down*. [21] [22] [24]

As far as the *direct approach* technique is concerned, our efforts to identify empirical research demonstrating its validity have proved fruitless, except for the study by Jacqueline R. Evans in 2014 which used a sample of 123 interviewees in an attempt to initiate a first step in the empirical approach to strategies presented in the US Army Field Manual. Conclusively, the *direct approach* augmented with positive emotional adoption has achieved similar results to those achieved by inducing negative emotional states, but had the merit of reducing the anxiety felt by the participants and strengthened their perception of building a relationship with the interviewer, which has facilitated the evocation of data and information.

Having the *gold standard* as a model which was assumed through the US Army Field Manual, the present study proposes a variant, represented by the elicitation techniques that have undergone mild mutations, refinements, which have been translated at the adaptive level in the form of optimizations and efficiencies.

The earliest milestones in the use of these techniques have been signaled since antiquity and are represented by *Socratic maieutic*; subsequent techniques have been adapted and used by a successful Nazi interrogator, Hanns Joachim Scharf which, after the Second World War, put them into practice in the US, basing the eviction techniques currently used by the FBI.

### **SCHARFF Tehnique**

Hanns Joachim Scharff has worked in the Luftwaffe - Auswertestelle West Intelligence and Assessment Center during the Second World War as an interrogator, being considered one of the most efficient interviewers according to D.P. Shoemaker and [25], R.F. Toliver [26], using a non-invasive, friendly, non-coercive approach based on establishing an interpersonal connection with the target, in this case American and English captured pilots (according to studies by Par Anders Granhag) to remove the suspicions and self-protective measures developed by it, translated factually through the following lines of action according to Toliver's research and the study by Argosy Magazine:

1. *I will not discard too many issues during the interview / interrogation;*
2. *I will try to find out what the interrogator is doing and I will avoid giving him these details;*
3. *it does not make sense to deny or confirm matters already known by the people who are conducting the interrogation;*

His technique involves understanding, assimilating and adopting the perspective and perception of the reality of the person interviewed / interrogated, which gave him the possibility to predict the person's behavior and reactions.

The tactics used by Scharff concerned the following structure:

1. the friendly approach – a good English speaker and connoisseur of the US and UK habits and trends, Scharff frequently began discussions with war prisoners on issues that did not target belligerents;
2. the relaxed approach, avoiding pushing interlocutors to provide information - Scharff used to tell detainees, with multiple details, the elements he knew about themselves or about a particular situation, giving them the opportunity to complete with small details, to confirm or to deny some aspects;
3. the illusion of knowing it all - Scharff initiates the talks stating that there is little chance for the prisoner to know additional elements;
4. using confirmations and denials - Scharff used to say a suite of details about which he knew they had been verified and that they were true, inserting among them elements in relation to which he did not have authentication validation, this being granted by the interviewees.

The techniques for collecting information used by Scharff, analyzed compared to the *direct approach* method, were tested in a suite of empirical research conducted by the team of researchers Par Anders Granhag, Steven M. Kleinman and Simon Oleszkiewicz; the most representative (from our point of view) is the study "*The Scharff Technique: On How to Effectively Elicit Intelligence from Human Sources*" according to which, following the interview of a sample of 60 participants, the use of the Scharff technique significantly and quantitatively determined the obtaining of more information with a precision and novelty, when using the *direct approach*.

The quoted study is, in fact, part of a suite of 9 researches that have repeatedly altered the conditions of research (eg interviewing less cooperative sources, altering questions and using confirmation / denial techniques, repeated interviewing of the same sources, etc.). The most extensive research in this series, „*Eliciting Human Intelligence - A conceptualization and empirical testing of the Scharff technique*”, was based on three studies:

- Study I - with a sample of 60 people, was made on the phone and countered the five techniques taken from the instrument of Joachim Scharff through which more information has been obtained, and the participants underestimated the volume and value of the provided information, compared to the direct approach technique that resulted in a lower number of information and interviewees overestimated the value of disseminated information;
- Study II - with a sample of 119 people meeting face to face and participants were allowed to provide erroneous information; the results obtained were similar to those of study I, and, in addition to this, people approached by the Scharff technique have been successful in interviewing non-cooperative human sources, the latter having difficulties in identifying the real goals of HUMINT operators;
- Study III - used a sample of 200 interviewees, the difference being the level of cooperation of sources and the ability to provide information, the research results being similar to those of studies I and II. Meritul inițiativelor anterior menționate este acela că: *„au furnizat un cadru conceptual al tehnicii Scharff prin explicarea aspectelor psihologice ce îi determină funcționarea și aplicabilitatea, au introdus o nouă paradigmă în explicarea eficacității tehnicilor HUMINT, au oferit un nou set de măsurători utilizabile în cartografierea culegerii de informații din surse umane și au demonstrat în mod empiric eficiența abordării interogatorului nazist”* în comparație cu utilizarea tehnicii acceptate ca *gold standard* în materie de colectare a datelor din surse umane – *direct approach*.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Circumscribed *HUMINT*, whether we talk about elicitation techniques or "direct approach", regardless of whether they are circumscribed to government / state or private intelligence, the reality will always be the same: the condition "sine qua non" in obtaining and retaining the advantage - from the perspective of competitiveness and security – consists of information, respectively protecting their own secrets while unleashing and exploiting those held by the competition.

The collection and dissemination of information is based on the human need to engage in relationships, to receive feedback about one's own / activity, to be accepted, to understand others and daily realities, etc.

The mechanisms underlying the presented techniques are generally human and are used both offensive and defensive by elicitors, but also by individuals / entities wishing to protect their valuable information.

In this regard, we consider useful the permanent involvement in personal training in order to know the mechanisms underlying the information gathering activity (by adopting prudent conduct that minimizes the chances of unauthorized and unintended dissemination of information) and, at systemic level, adopting measures / policies / strategies to block or minimize the efforts of informational opponents.

As an example, we present the steps taken by the intelligence services in Germany, England, the Netherlands, the USA and not least by Romania which began studies and research related to the field of intelligence, concretely translated into forms of presentation (publications, leaflets) with practical applicability in the area of protection and counter information training.

The motivation of this research is that evolution cannot be seen as a vertical and monotonous initiative, initiated at an Alpha moment and finalized in a vertical visual representation at an Omega moment, but it is marked by hiatuses, jumps, rebounds, breaks of previous patterns and paradigms.

History teaches us that the human race has built up various such theories, research methods, and paradigms over the centuries that have provided a degree of safety and comfort from the point of view of providing an explanation and implicitly an active way of responding to the various unknown cognitive behaviors. But inevitably redistributions, reconfigurations, reconceptions, new research directions are emerging which lead to the resizing of previous paradigms and sometimes to their breaking.

Our intention is not to demonstrate the validity or invalidity of a field-based approach (HUMINT), but rather has a constructive role to add elements that can in turn be a starting point for future research initiatives circumscribed to this workspace.

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