



# The Art and Science of Threat Assessment

### HARD SCIENCE FOR HUMAN SKILLS

The majority of Government agencies and private sector organisations are insufficiently prepared to deal with low probability but high-impact events that can significantly damage them. The impact from these events can include financial loss, endangerment or harm to people and capital or damage to the organisation's reputation.

The repercussions from an executed threat may reach beyond the organisation it is targeted at to the broader community.

Many organisations have increased their investment in risk management resources in efforts to mitigate threat but this strategy is flawed. Focus should not

be on the management of risk but rather on clearly identifying and quantifying the sources of risk. An organisation's ability to do so can enable it to redirect effort and resources expended on knee-jerk responses to low level threats to a focus on the threats with potential for major harm.

The source of threat for many organisations is people, people either internal or external to the organisation. Their threats and the risk they pose may be personal and specific or aimed broadly at the organisation as a whole. Assessing the triggers for these people-based threats is an important, but often overlooked part of the risk

management and response process. Using and applying contemporary research and practice and applying lessons from over 100 real life domestic and international incidents, New Intelligence has developed a pragmatic approach to assessing the likelihood and level of risk contained in verbal or behavioural threats that originate with individuals.

New Intelligence, in partnership with Dr David Matsumoto and his team at Humintell, a US company with a 30 year track record consulting to US security agencies, has designed an intelligence based approach to assessing threats in terms of quantification of risk and harm.

## Why is this capability important?

Decision makers rely on sound assessment of threat and harm. Your ability to assess the likelihood of a threat becoming a risk and being able to quantify the potential impact of that risk, can protect your organisation and the broader community.

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newIntelligence

Changing the way people think

### Case Study

In 2016 the Australian arm of an international corporation received a single typed sheet of paper through their front office postal slot making a threat to harm several non-specific staff at a single location. The paper was passed directly to the Chief Executive of the company who, with his Head of HR, decided that his staff were in danger. They instituted several actions including security guards, reduced shifts, alarm systems and awareness training. The cost was tens of thousands of dollars and went on for over a month. At the end of the month the CEO finally showed the letter to his friend who he discovered was a threat assessment practitioner. Examining the letter only once he told the CEO that he would rate the threat as very low to negligible and went so far as to nominate a current employee as the author. His friend said, "The intent of this author was not to harm anyone but to bring this

security issue (poor carpark lighting) to someone's attention." He then asked, "Did they succeed? Is it well-lit now?" The CEO said that the carpark was well lit now and the cost of lighting it was only \$199.

If you are reading this it is likely that you make decisions about risk or that you support the people who do. Paul Slovic, President of Decision Research and Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon says "Risk does not exist 'out there', independent of our minds and culture, waiting to be measured. Human beings have invented the concept of 'risk' to help them understand and cope with the dangers and uncertainties of life." Essentially Slovic is saying that risk is subjective, and it is this subjectivity that makes effective decision making so difficult. It is the role of threat assessment professionals to help mitigate the effects of this subjectivity by

bringing some objectivity through assessing the nature of the threat itself independently of the other factors contributing to the ultimate decision.

When an individual makes a threat, either via email, face-to-face, by phone or by letter, there is always a motivation and intent in the communication. To make effective threat assessments, practitioners need to identify the motivation. Understanding the motivation for a threat enables better analysis of the probability the threat will be acted upon and the harm that may follow. The ability to break threats into their components through analysis allows for a more objective view of the situation. This is something that is crucial when those involved may be "too close" to the situation.

## BE BETTER

### Individuals – just for you

As a practitioner of threat assessments, you can be placed under an immense amount of pressure to provide the answers that decision makers want. Educated guesses are not enough. This program will provide you with the understanding of important areas of study that will inform your information collections strategies, analytical function, investigative techniques and assessment products to ensure that as far as possible, you maintain the safety of your organisation and their people as well your integrity as a professional

### Organisations – for your team or department

Threat assessment is not a simple process. It requires a variety of capabilities and draws on many disciplines including behavioural economics, psycholinguistics, emotional literacy, psychology and intelligence analysis. Due to the nature of the techniques taught in this program it is not open to everyone and participants will be required to submit an application to attend. There are a number of pre-requisite requirements for the short version of this program and participants will be expected to engage in significant post-course work.