Information vs. Intelligence: What Police Executives Need to Know
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In the year 2005, it is more vital than ever that law enforcement executives have every available tool to maintain public safety in their communities. Intelligence is one of the tools that must be used to achieve public safety goals, and intelligence analysis is instrumental to getting decision-makers what they need. The International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA) has been hard at work for the past 25 years to bring standardization and professionalism to law enforcement analysts. IALEIA has worked very hard behind the scenes trying to ensure that law enforcement had the quality of intelligence needed to make use of the ever-growing sources of information available. Our mission has also been to educate other law enforcement professionals regarding the process and the products of intelligence analysis. In accordance with this mission, IALEIA will be putting on a workshop at the IACP 2005 Conference titled "White Noise: Turning The Flood of Raw Data Into Actionable Intelligence". We are hoping to continue the forward movement regarding intelligence in law enforcement, and hope to see a great turnout to support this effort.

The two most over-utilized terms used in public discourse regarding public safety today are "information-sharing", and "intelligence". These two terms are used interchangeably, which is not only wrong, but has the potential to derail our efforts to prevent another major terrorist incident in this country. Information is raw data; it could be an item obtained from a newspaper report, a statement made by a confidential informant, or simply an observation made by an astute police officer during a traffic stop. In and of itself, it is rare that action can or should be taken on raw, unevaluated information on its own. At some point, context must be provided; corroboration must be supplied; value must be added to this raw information. The major component of the process that turns raw information is analysis; the product is intelligence.

In military and national security circles, the process by which intelligence has been produced was given a name: the Intelligence Cycle. This process is what turns information into intelligence, which is something one can use to make decisions and take action. The steps of the intelligence cycle include planning, collection, evaluation, collation/organization, analysis, production, dissemination and feedback, which should spur more collection, at which point the cycle begins again. Until recently, there were few departments at the state and local levels which were capable of producing intelligence; most often, the analytic component was missing.

The first problem that confusing the terms "information" and "intelligence" caused was that many agencies had "analysts" collecting and disseminating raw data, either unaware of or untrained in analysis. In some agencies, the ability to search databases was considered sufficient for analysts in law enforcement; this was strictly a law enforcement interpretation of the position. It has been pointed out in several public forums that the information to prevent the 9-11 attacks was available, collected by someone and stored somewhere; what was missing was the analysis which would have made all this information useful, and upon which significant decisions could have been made.

In the months following the attacks of September 11, 2001, state and local law enforcement officials voiced their frustrations with the federal government's inability to warn them in advance. I recall reading many articles in the media in which law enforcement executives demanded more "information sharing", particularly focused at the FBI. I also recall thinking that if these executives got what they asked for, they would be buried in uncorroborated, unevaluated, "white noise". At that time, very few state and local police departments had analytic capabilities, so being barraged with information would defeat the purpose of guiding law enforcement decisions. This has, unfortunately, come to pass, with law enforcement agencies erring on the side of caution; they are sharing more piece-meal information than could ever be made useful in case any small detail might possibly be deemed important in retrospect.

On a more encouraging note, I am seeing a real evolution regarding the recognition that intelligence is very different from simple information, and that analysis is necessary to bridge that gap. In a white paper recently published by the Police Executive Research Forum, it is emphasized repeatedly that *intelligence* is what is needed to protect this country from threats to public safety: "It is only with a clear comprehension of the analytic process that one can fully explore the subsequent collection and sharing aspects of the intelligence function."[1] This concept is reinforced in the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan (NCISP), which emphasizes the role and importance of intelligence analysis, stating that it is "vital to the production of usable, timely, and comprehensive intelligence."[2]

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[1] Police Executive Research Forum, "Protecting Your Community from Terrorism: Strategies for Local Law Enforcement Vol. 4, The Production and Sharing of Intelligence", http://policeforum.mn-8.net/default.asp
[2] National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan, Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative
(Global) Intelligence Working Group

IALEIA has served as a voice for intelligence analysts for 25 years, and is now hoping that law enforcement executives will give this profession the support it needs to do the job, which is necessary to accomplish our Homeland Security goals. Please join us in September at the IACP Conference in Miami, and participate in this forum, which we hope will not only provide guidance, but create some productive dialog to help move things forward.