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Fusing Internal and Unclassified Data for Faster, Better Decision-Making

Organizations that successfully integrate validated, contextual external information with internal data can create a more complete understanding of the operational environment and improve the speed and quality of decision-making.

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When fused with the vast amount of information organizations already collect, open-source intelligence can act as a powerful force multiplier for situational awareness and decision advantage across a wide range of mission sets. Yet the value of data fusion depends not on the volume of available information, but on how effectively that information can be integrated, validated, and applied in a manner that provides greater understanding or insight.

Having led the CIA's Open-Source Enterprise, I have seen firsthand that the difference between simple data aggregation and building a high-impact, intelligence fusion capability comes down to a handful of critical factors.

- **Design for integration from the outset.** Fusion cannot be achieved by simply adding external data sources to existing systems. Organizations should adopt data, platform, and delivery models that integrate seamlessly into workflows and decision processes, enabling analysts to work within a unified environment rather than toggling across disconnected tools.
- **Establish a common, structured data model.** Fusion works best when data is validated, structured, machine-readable, and aligned to a shared framework. This ensures that the data is accurate and allows it to be connected and analyzed in context, to uncover critical connections and patterns, and improve the quality of analysis.
- **Build strong governance and trust frameworks.** Effective fusion requires confidence in both the data and the process. Clear guidance around provenance, security, access controls, and data handling are essential, particularly when combining publicly available information with sensitive or classified sources.

Moving Beyond Data Aggregation to Understanding

A successful fusion capability is built on a foundation of validated data. As analysts contend with increasing volumes of data from a growing number of sources, the risk of conflicting, inaccurate, or misleading information continues to grow. The rapid proliferation of AI-generated content has only intensified this challenge. Organizations that ground fusion in verified data will be able to cut through the noise, strengthen the quality of their insights, and make decisions with greater speed and confidence.

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The objective of fusion is not to collect more information, but to establish a ground truth and rapidly uncover the relationships that matter most. The ability to connect people, organizations, locations, capabilities, and events transforms disparate data points into meaningful intelligence. When data is structured, contextualized, and machine-readable, analysts can move beyond simply understanding what happened to understanding why it happened, what it means, and what is likely to happen next. This deeper level of insight enables organizations to anticipate developments, identify emerging risks and opportunities, and make more informed decisions at speed.

Modern technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, can significantly accelerate and scale this process by surfacing patterns, revealing hidden connections, and reducing the time required to generate insight. However, technology alone is not a substitute for sound analysis. Its value depends on the quality of the data it consumes and the rigor of the tradecraft that guides it. The most effective fusion capabilities combine advanced technology with validated data, structured methodologies, and experienced analysts to ensure outputs are accurate, defensible, and decision-grade.

Enabling Faster, More Informed Decisions

The benefits of data fusion are most evident when information is integrated directly into operational workflows.

For example, Janes recently helped a western navy seeking to create a highly secure, isolated data environment aboard its ships that could support access to critical all-source information across multiple classifications. The effort required integrating information on military equipment, operators, orders of battle, capabilities, and related entities to improve mission planning and execution.

By integrating Janes validated, unclassified defense intelligence into the navy's operational environment, personnel were able to access a more comprehensive picture of the mission space. The results were improved situational awareness, stronger planning, and more informed decision-making in an offline, edge environment.

As the volume of information continues to grow, organizations that can successfully integrate validated internal and external data will be better positioned to identify emerging risks, understand complex environments, and make decisions with greater speed and confidence. ■

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