

# Polanyi's tacit knowledge applied in intelligence

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March 27,2019

Sfetcu, Nicolae, "Polanyi's tacit knowledge applied in intelligence", SetThings (March 27, 2019), MultiMedia Publishing (ed.), URL = <https://www.telework.ro/en/polanyis-tacit-knowledge-applied-in-intelligence/>

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This is a partial translation of:

Sfetcu, Nicolae, "Epistemologia serviciilor de informații", SetThings (4 februarie 2019), MultiMedia Publishing (ed.), DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19751.39849, ISBN 978-606-033-160-5, URL = <https://www.telework.ro/ro/e-books/epistemologia-serviciilor-de-informatii/>

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Owen Ormerod has developed a theory that Michael Polanyi's opinion on science can contribute to understanding the process and the "product" of intelligence analysis. (Ormerod 2018) Michael Polanyi's arguments about the activities of scientists are transferable in the field of intelligence analysis, providing a nuanced perspective for perceiving the epistemological challenges and the problems faced by analysts. Polanyi's concepts of "tacit knowledge" and "personal knowledge" contribute to the development of a more efficient epistemological understanding of some aspects of the process and the intelligence analysis product.

There is a multitude of attempts, both in the national security literature and in the law enforcement literature, to align the analysis of intelligence to "scientific" principles and

practices.(Cooper and Intelligence 2012) Ormerod argues that the theory developed by Polanyi is transferable in the field of intelligence. Polanyi's concepts of tacit and personal knowledge have a strong influence on the perception of the intelligence practice.

At present there is a growing interest in looking for a "theory of intelligence." (Hunter and MacDonald 2017)In this context, epistemological issues will be at the forefront of intelligence analysis. (Lillbacka 2013, 304)Intelligence analysis is a knowledge-building activity, and improved analysis requires an understanding of epistemology or the theory of origin and the nature of relevant knowledge. A discursive mode of perception of the field of intelligence can be distinguished in two fundamental ways: (Bang 2017)a) how to obtain information; b) how intelligence can help policy-makers, based on the information gathered and analyzed. (Mudd and Abbey 2015)

The epistemological bases of intelligence studies are largely extracted from the "national security" paradigm. (O'Malley 2016)Patrick Walsh has presented three fundamental characteristics that clearly represent the foundation of the intelligence profession: the "intelligence medium" (collection and analysis), "secrecy" (undercover and collection) and "supervision" (monitoring of the subjects in question). (Walsh 2010, 29)

The objectives of the intelligence analyst can generally include the following categories:

1. The prescriptive modeling required by analysts to represent how systems might work;
2. Descriptive modeling used to understand a given situation and how it works;
3. Predictive or exploratory modeling of how a dynamic system could work in the future under certain circumstances.

(Waltz 2014, 2–3)

There is a strong interest in psychologically looking at the aspects of the analysis. (Heuer 1999)This is particularly true of understanding knowledge in the analysis. (Waltz 2014,

1)Analysts must be sensitive not only to the conclusions they reach, but also to the way they have come to such assertions. As Heuer observed:

"Intelligence analysts should be self-conscious about their reasoning processes. They should think about how they make judgments and reach conclusions, not just about the judgments and conclusions themselves." (Heuer 1999, 31)

In this psychological sense, intelligence analysis is an activity that engages in meta-knowledge or, as Mark Lowenthal notes, "thought thinking".(Moore and College 2010, 8) A central purpose of intelligence analysis is a transition from "knowledge" to "understanding." (Ellis-Smith 2016, 36)

According to Ormerod, Polanyi's concept of "personal knowledge" contributes to a more nuanced epistemological framework for explaining what analysts mean to "know" the intelligence products. (Ormerod 2018)For Polanyi, truth is an objective condition, and finding truth is accomplished through the correspondence of a theory with an objective reality. (Jacobs 2001, 464)Polanyi rejects cognitive relativism or relativity of reality based on our perception. (Polanyi 1962, 315–16)Polanyi was convinced that there was an objective reality; however, to become intelligible, we must try to "establish and make our own" interpretation and understanding.(Polanyi and Sen 2009, 80) According to Polanyi, the discovery process begins at the moment when certain impressions are considered unusual and suggestive, a problem is presented to the mind; continue with collecting clues with one eye at a particular problem-solving line; and culminates in the assumption of a clear solution. (Polanyi 1964, 25)

Polanyi provides a challenging approach to understanding these epistemological issues in the intelligence analysis. For Polanyi, there is the hypothesis behind the observation act. (Polanyi 1998, 19)According to Polanyi, scientific investigations involve a perennial interaction of imagination and observation. While the field of information activity recognizes that it is partially involved in a guessing game, the art of investigation, as Polanyi understands, offers a richer

language (Colapietro 2011, 58) and the epistemological basis for recognizing this aspect in scientific and intelligence analysis.

Polanyi argues that, in order to take account of the problem-solving and discovery process, we need to recognize sufficiently the important role of tacit knowledge and the relationship that this knowledge has with tacit knowledge. Polanyi locates this form of knowledge as an essential element of his science and epistemology.

"Polanyi's concept of personal knowledge articulates epistemologically that within the field of intelligence the work of the analyst is too diversified for there to be a single overarching 'top down' approach to understanding knowledge claims as a product ((Bang 2017), ...). According to Polanyi, since there is no 'scientific method', the scientist must draw on their personal knowledge, which importantly posits that knowledge claims must sufficiently acknowledge the role of the 'knower'. This is the central argument underpinning the idea of a bottom-up understanding of what it means to 'know' something. Knowledge claims are affirmed by the 'personal coefficient' of the analyst's personal knowledge, which according to Polanyi, is a fundamental feature of what it means to 'know' something.(Polanyi 1962, 267) Polanyi's arguments in relation to the authority of science as a valid form of inquiry and way of understanding knowledge claims as an enterprise further highlights the bottom-up way of perceiving knowledge as a product. According to Polanyi, the 'authority of scientific opinion' is 'essentially mutual', being 'established between scientists, not above them'.(Polanyi 1969, 56) The authority of knowledge claims can therefore be characterized as being bottom-up, according to Polanyi's view. This perspective has a bearing on the intelligence analysis discipline by offering an alternative way of considering a broad range of epistemological issues, principally in relation to what it means to 'know' something." (Ormerod 2018)

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