The Journal of Applied Operational Intelligence 2024 Vol 1 No 1 pp 1-4, DOI: 10.5750/jaoi.v1i1.2337

Applied Operational Intelligence: Improving Practice Through Marginal Gains

*Jordan Nunan**
Faculty of Business and Law,
University of Northampton,
United Kingdom

Ian Stanier
Centre for Security and Intelligence
Studies, University of Buckingham,
United Kingdom

Abstract

The *Journal of Applied Operational Intelligence* aims to be a bridge between high-quality peer-reviewed academic research and the intelligence community. The journal's focus will be on evidence-based research, where conclusions and recommendations aim to inform intelligence practices, policies, training, and future research. In this editorial to the very first volume of the journal, Editors-in-Chief discuss the necessity of interdisciplinary research, the vital role of intelligence, and how marginal gains (e.g., research that produces small yet meaningful improvements) are vital to the overall performance of intelligence.

Keywords: Applied operational intelligence, interdisciplinary, marginal gains

Intelligence is the cornerstone of security across public and private sectors (Sage-Passant, 2023). It is a critical tool for preventing and responding to crime, terrorism, and other national security threats (Stanier & Nunan, 2018) and can be used to anticipate competitor moves and deploy finite resources efficiently. Therefore, enhancing applied operational intelligence through academic research is necessary to ensure evidence-based policy and practice.

As a result, the *Journal of Applied Operational Intelligence (JAOI)* has been launched by University of Buckingham Press, aiming to bridge the gap between high-quality peer-reviewed academic research and the practitioner community on contemporary intelligence issues. The journal provides a unique emphasis on applied empirical research that seeks to address how organisations can enhance the day-to-day policies and practices in the intelligence arena. As editors, our vision was to launch an open access journal, one that is accessible and applicable to practitioners, academics, students and policymakers in the field of applied operational intelligence. This open access to knowledge was only made possible by the generous sponsorship from i2 (2024), an intelligence

*Corresponding author: e-mail: Jordan.Nunan@northampton.ac.uk

partner who offer the global industry standard for creating and sharing intelligence.

The *JAOI* integrates knowledge and techniques from a broad range of fields, recognising that applied operational intelligence is inherently interdisciplinary. It draws insights from intelligence studies, psychology, criminology, and international relations, among others, to explore how these diverse areas contribute to more effective intelligence practices. For instance, psychological insights can improve information elicitation (Nunan et al., 2022), while intelligence studies can help us learn from intelligence failures and successes (Wirtz, 2024). Legal and ethical frameworks provide important context for ensuring that intelligence practices remain compliant with human rights (Alison & Alison, 2017) without unnecessary loss in effectiveness. Furthermore, incorporating perspectives from international relations allows us to examine how intelligence plays a critical role in geopolitics and global security. By drawing upon the expertise from these varied disciplines, the *JAOI* offers a holistic view of intelligence that enriches its practical application across the sectors.

A powerful concept is that of *marginal gains*, popularised by Sir Dave Brailsford (Mehta, 2021), former performance director of British cycling. Brailsford's philosophy focused on making small, incremental improvements in every aspect of performance, believing that a series of small gains would lead to significant overall improvements. When applied to operational intelligence, research that produces small yet meaningful improvements in intelligence policy and practice is vital to the overall performance. Each of these improvements may seem minor on their own, but over time, they can lead to breakthroughs in efficiency, accuracy, and insight quality.

The first results of our effort can be seen in issue one whereby a blend of academics and practitioners have produced a range of articles, commentaries, and book review on matters concerning applied operational intelligence. As for the future, becoming an applied operational intelligence researcher requires moving outside of one's comfort zone and exploring new and sometimes hard to reach areas of research. In other words, we need to take time to experiment doing research differently in areas where research has been limited in the context of operational application. In time, we hope to see a stronger partnership between the practitioner and academic community to tackle the challenging areas of applied operational intelligence.

References

Alison, L., & Alison, E. (2017). Revenge versus rapport: Interrogation, terrorism, and torture. *American psychologist*, *72*(3), 266.

i2. (2024). *Intelligence Amplified.* Retrieved from https://i2group.com/

Mehta, K. (2021). *The most mentally tough people apply the 1% 'marginal gains' rule, says performance expert—here's how it works.* Retrieved from https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/23/how-to-be-mentally-tough-use-the-1percent-marginal-gains-rule-says-performance-expert.html

Nunan, J., Stanier, I., Milne, R., Shawyer, A., & Walsh, D. (2020). Eliciting human intelligence: police source handlers' perceptions and experiences of rapport during covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) interactions. *Psychiatry, psychology and law*, *27*(4), 511–537.

Sage-Passant, L. (2023). *The security intelligence services of the private sector* (Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University).

Stanier, I. and Nunan, J. (2018). 'Reframing Intelligence Interviews: The Applicability of Psychological Research to HUMINT Elicitation.' In Griffiths, A. and Milne, R. (eds), *The Psychology of Criminal Investigation: From Theory to Practice.* London: Routledge, pp. 226–248.

Wirtz, J. J. (2024). Are Intelligence Failures Still Inevitable?. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, *37*(1), 307–330.