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# RED TEAM



HOW TO SUCCEED BY  
THINKING LIKE THE ENEMY





**INTO THE WORLD OF RED TEAMING**

**MILITARY AND THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY**

**THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

**MODESTY AND MISIMPRESSIONS**

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# Into the World of Red Teaming



## OUTSIDE AND OBJECTIVE WHILE INSIDE AND AWARE

- Red teaming is a structured process that seeks to better understand the interests, intentions, and capabilities of an institution or potential competitor through simulations, vulnerability probes, and alternative analysis.
- Institutions can get a fresh and alternative perspective on how they do things. It can help them reveal and test unstated assumptions, identify blind spots, and potentially improve their performance.
- A properly administered red team can help ensure that a decision is the right one.
- No matter how open minded people may think they are, studies show that most people exhibit a strong existence bias. They cannot help but assume that the way things are at the moment must be innately correct.
- In the Catholic Church the role of the "Devil's Advocate" emerged as a clearly defined position with a specific responsibility: to challenge the purported virtues and miracles of nominees for sainthood.
- The central theme of the book: you cannot grade your own homework.

## BE WILLING TO HEAR BAD NEWS AND ACT ON IT

- Red teams are used to determine when an institution's standard processes and strategies are resulting in a sub-optimal outcome or, more seriously, leading to a potential catastrophe.
- If the methods an institution uses to process correct information are themselves flawed, they can become the ultimate cause of failure.
- People who are highly incompetent in terms of their skills or knowledge are also terrible judges of their own performance.
- Institutions unwilling to absorb and integrate red team's findings should not bother going through the process.



# Military and the Intelligence Community



## MITIGATING HEIRARCHY AND GROUPTHINK

- Even when one of Seal Team 6's two helicopters crash landed in Osama bin Laden compound, the mission went off without a hitch because they had planned and trained for that exact contingency.
- Escape biases of the existing precedencies and status quos through reason and principles.
- Ultimately, for all their mystique and reverence that they are held, intelligence agencies are simply hierarchal bureaucracies staffed by human beings.
- Most common biases held by intelligence analysts: 1) The tendency to overestimate the likelihood of a high consequence event to reduce backlash should the event occur. 2) Social influence that makes it highly difficult to come to conclusions different then their colleagues. 3) The tyranny of expertise whereby they become anchored in their narrow, though deep knowledge base.
- Truly out of the box analysis should be, by its very nature, vastly different than what commanders and generals believe.

## VULNERABILITY ASSESMENT

- Red teaming is the method for making it more likely that disasters will be foreseen and thereby, prevented.
- The value of competitive intelligence red teaming, is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of, and refine, an authoritative analytical estimate by empowering fresh eyes to re-evaluate assumptions and conclusions.
- Engaging a red team without an ultimate purpose is the worst possible situation. This is the exact scenario for the FAA prior to 9/11 that warned against the high possibilities of a terror attacks.
- Red teaming should not be a one-off event because undetected vulnerabilities will likely go unaddressed and blind spots will inevitably arise.



# Private Sector



## SIMULATING STRATEGIC DECISIONS

- As enticing as the prospect of unruffled consensus in the workplace may be, when leaders dissuade dissent and divergent thinking, they create an environment that may allow disasters to materialize.
- In the business world, the most prominent use of red teaming is to help executives who are facing highly consequential strategic decisions.
- The world is non-linear so the ability to cut through complexity relies on processing a large amount of information quickly and extracting nuggets to make quick decisions.
- Executives become absorbed and captured by completing what is necessary in the immediate future at the expense of carving out time to re-assess and plan for tomorrow.
- “Red teaming provides an additional layer of accountability within the decision making process.” - Marco Rubio

## BUSINESS WAR GAMES

- If red teaming is done too infrequently, the institution becomes high bound and complacent.
- Too often it requires a highly visible or consequential breach of security before investments are made or mandated.
- “The best way to get management excited about a disaster plan is to burn down the building across the street.” - Dan Erwin
- A business war-game is a series of structured and moderated discussions in which small teams of managers or employees assume the role of competitors.
- Business war-games are uncomfortable at first but are ultimately useful as they cultivate solutions to emerging problems that employees simply would not have conceived of on their own.
- “I have never learned anything from any man who agreed with me.” - Dudley Malone

# Private Sector



## THINGS BECOME SHAPED AND NARROWED BY OUR DAILY OCCUPATION

- The problem with an open environment for employees to protest ideas is most workers do not have the skills to identify emerging problems nor are they highly likely to tell their bosses about these problems.
- Experts are least likely to think differently and see discontinuities.
- Most executives and managers think of themselves as intrinsically better than their rivals, they also generally find it difficult to understand or empathize with those rivals.
- Chief executives, above all other traits, value creativity as the most important leadership competency. Yet all research shows most executives are distinctly uncreative, deeply myopic, and over confident in both themselves personally and their company's ability to beat their competitors and not to fail.
- “Those in power have a vested interest to oppose critical thinking. If we don't improve our own understanding of critical thinking and develop it as a kind of second nature, then we are just suckers ready to be taken by the next charlatan that ambles along.” - Carl Sagan

## THE BOSS MUST BUY IN

- Many executives cling to the belief that their business is unlike any other, is uniquely complex, and is therefore holy incomprehensible to outsiders.
- It is hard for businesses to apply liberating structures to themselves for two reasons: senior VP's often suffer from myopia, believing their company is center of the universe and the actions and reactions of other companies do not matter. The second challenge is overconfidence in the strategy that an executive already has in mind. Thereafter, the self-imposed war-game becomes simply a practice confirmatory game.



# Modesty and Misimpressions



## RED TEAM JUST ENOUGH BUT NO MORE

- Leaders should be conscious of the following worst practices when using red teams:
  - Flawed as-hoc approach of using one person (prevents group think).
  - Mistaking the findings of a red team as policy or over subscribing to their findings.
  - Empowering red teams to direct the decision making process.
  - Freelance red teaming that fails to consider the institution's structure, processes, and culture.
  - Shooting the messenger.
  - Distrust of the red team practitioners by leaders who are unable or unwilling to listen to their findings
  - Using red teams to decide rather than to inform.
- One of the most common causes of red team failure is a misunderstanding between employers and employees within an institution on what it is intended to do.
- If a red team and a targeted institution cannot agree on a basic understanding of what will be accomplished before hand, then the engagement should not be initiated.

## FEARLESS SKEPTICS WITH FINESSE

- By nature, red team practitioners are contrarian thinkers and deeply skeptical of any outsider that would impose a rigid classification on what they do.
- For active practitioners of red teams, to adequately convey their points, they need to be able to tell stories. Humans respond more strongly to stories than to a spreadsheet or an excel document.
- “Red teaming is the application of common sense from a different perspective.” - Tom Longland

# The Future of Red Teams



## NEVER LET PEOPLE BELIEVE THEY'VE SOLVED THE PROBLEM

- The overarching "best practice" is to be flexible in the approaches or techniques applied.
- Improving the targeted institution should always be the ultimate objective of all red teams.
- Red teaming can not only change an institution, but also the thinking and acting of the people who work there.
- The same processes that are required to make an institution run smoothly such as, hierarchy formal rules, unit cohesion, and behavioral norms are precisely those that make differentiation and varietal thinking extremely difficult to achieve.
- Embracing a red teamer's mindset can help almost anyone think more critically and divergently about the complications they face in their jobs and everyday lives.

## SUCCEED BY THINKING LIKE THE ENEMY

- Most firms' security teams still build walls based upon how they were taught walls should be built. But you really should build walls based on how people would attack you.
- What men can do easily is what they do habitually. This decides what they can think and know easily. They feel at home in the range of ideas that is familiar through their everyday line of action.
- A habitual line of action constitutes a habitual line of thought and gives the point of view from which facts and events are apprehended and reduced to a body of knowledge.
- You can have a therapists that gives you a bunch of pills and let's you walk around hammered, or you can have someone who will talk to you, educate you, and let make a decision on your own.
- Until you are forced, through readings and lectures on how the mind processes information through lenses and biases, you are not conscious of the blinders that hinder ordinary problem solving.