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RESEARCH

'Intelligence' in function but not in name: analyzing terminology and trends in the job market

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Abstract

Private sector intelligence uses a vast array of terminology that obscures the boundaries, clear definition and demarcation of the field. This paper presents original empirical research to analyze job responsibilities and terminology. It first examines 2245 job postings in the UK through an 'intelligence analyst' query, then engages qualitatively and quantitatively with 425 global postings. The results reveal that private sector intelligence positions appear under a myriad of titles and descriptions that lack standardization, reflecting a wide array of roles and responsibilities which contribute to a murky recruitment environment. This variability contributes to a 'grey zone' of intelligence roles and reflects the need for greater understanding of private sector intelligence functions, to delineate what truly constitutes intelligence in the private sector.

Keywords Intelligence · Private sector intelligence · Intelligence recruitment · Intelligence employment · Intelligence analyst · Professionalization

Introduction

As the private sector intelligence field continues to evolve and professionalize, it is critical to understand the job landscape. While the nascent scholarship on private sector intelligence has examined the field's evolution and professionalization (Sage-Passant 2023; Robson Morrow 2022; Dahl 2018) and, separately, analytical skills

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(Duvenage 2021; Lewis 2018; Campbell Prestwood 2018), none has yet holistically examined how hiring practices shape the field. Driven by the need for intelligence job seekers to better understand intelligence opportunities, and for private sector intelligence roles and responsibilities to be better captured within intelligence studies and intelligence programs, this research presents and examines two original datasets collected under separate research questions with a common mission: to capture the characteristics of the private sector intelligence job market.

This paper argues that intelligence positions in the private sector appear under a myriad of titles and descriptions that are non-standardized and reflect a diverse array of roles and responsibilities. This has contributed to the conflation of 'intelligence analyst' roles with other 'analyst' roles such as business intelligence, cyber, or data analyst roles, which could hamper the growth and professionalization of intelligence in the private sector. These hypotheses reflect both practical and doctrinal concerns, which also mirror Wilhelm Agrell's (2002) assertion that 'when everything is intelligence - nothing is intelligence'. Two decades after Agrell made this argument, concerns over the meaning and boundaries of intelligence as a profession continue to prevail both in practical and academic terms, amid transformational forces in the field, such as the proliferation of open-source intelligence and artificial intelligence tools in the workplace.

This study treats intelligence as a product, practice, and function, where information is processed to provide actionable insights to decisionmakers based on specific requirements. Emphasis is placed on the 'intelligence analyst,' who helps convert that information into actionable intelligence in the public or private sector. We distinguish between risk intelligence and other types of intelligence, such as market, competitive and business intelligence, which are considered outside the scope and boundaries of the security and geopolitical risk-focused intelligence job function.

Contemporary intelligence encompasses a broad array of risk-focused and security-focused functions in corporations and other organizations outside of government, which are the subject of a nascent and growing literature (Dahl 2018). The challenge in this environment is that many jobs termed 'intelligence' turn out to be outside the scope of risk intelligence, while others represent classic intelligence analysis or collection roles without ever using the term 'intelligence.' These positions appear on job platforms such as LinkedIn and Indeed under a variety of job titles and descriptions that often obscure their true meaning and can confound aspirants to such roles. These platforms employ algorithms that often seem to incorrectly bucket intelligence roles with other unrelated positions—for example, combining 'intelligence analyst' roles with 'analyst' roles from domains such as consumer pricing. Meanwhile, many true risk intelligence roles appear under a myriad of titles that do not use the term. Understanding the state of the private sector intelligence job market is important for practitioners and scholars alike; practitioners need to understand the places where the jobs market may be operating sub-optimally, and academics seeking to understand private sector professionalization need to understand the job market.

This obfuscation is explored by developing two separate datasets which were analyzed independently and the findings were combined to draw this paper's overall conclusions. For the first, job postings were manually collected on a large N scale stemming from the search query 'intelligence analyst' in the UK between December



2023 to February 2024 on LinkedIn and Indeed. 2245 job postings were collected and then qualitatively coded into themes relating to different areas of work, such as intelligence analysis or data analysis, based solely on their job titles. This phase of the project asked: when the term 'intelligence analyst' is queried in jobs databases, what types of jobs are returned and to what extent do the jobs actually map onto intelligence as recognized from the literature?

In parallel, 425 job postings from around the world were manually collected for the second phase. The underlying research question was: what terminology is used in private sector intelligence job postings and what qualifications are being sought? These job postings constituted risk intelligence roles even if the title did not have the word 'intelligence' included in the title or job description. Here, intelligence jobs are defined as those jobs that apply intelligence techniques to external operating environments to facilitate strategic decision-making and mitigate geopolitical and security risks (see Robson Morrow 2022). These postings came from intelligence job boards, website postings, and email distribution lists. The dataset was coded for traits and characteristics requested in the job postings, educational requirements, work experience requirements, and job titles to provide insight on the requirements and qualifications within intelligence job postings, and to explore the potential mismatch in intelligence job titles and job descriptions.

This paper first briefly contextualizes this job market confusion by engaging with literature on online job seeking and recruitment, and how the online job market influences the private sector intelligence field. Subsequently, the paper delves into the current state of intelligence as more than a government function, the problems arising with the expansion of intelligence capabilities in the labor market, and thus the professionalization of intelligence – engaging in important definitional, ontological, and professional concerns related to intelligence and the role of the intelligence analyst. Then, the authors set out the methodological parameters of each phase for collecting and analyzing online job postings, clarifying the steps undertaken for each separate phase of research. Next, the authors discuss the broader implications of the results for the intelligence market, identifying a distortion of the online intelligence job market due to ads outside the scope of intelligence analysis, and diverse intelligence terminology and job characteristics that obfuscate the boundaries and requirements of private sector intelligence. This research concludes that there is a 'grey zone' of intelligence roles: a job falls in the grey zone if it encompasses responsibilities related to intelligence but also additional requirements that fall outside of the traditional scope of intelligence, which will be explored in detail in this research. The paper wraps up with recommendations for further empirical and theoretical research.

Private sector intelligence as a professionalizing function: E-recruitment and job market representations of intelligence roles

The popularity of digital recruitment has soared both from the recruiter and applicant side. As the needs and the demands of both the job market and the global population changed with the introduction of Web 1.0 and 2.0, new recruitment platforms emerged, gathering greater pools of candidates and tackling their screening even



faster. Electronic recruitment (e-recruitment) first developed in corporate websites and digital boards and then moved to job aggregators and professional social media, providing more opportunities for organizations to distribute available positions and ways to accurately target them (Black and van Esch 2020).

The key-word search and filtering capabilities of e-recruitment may be more appealing to larger masses of applicants compared to 'traditional' job search methods such as newspaper advertisements, flyers, or in-person, 'impromptu' calls and requests for work. Online job postings have also shown to better match candidates to roles than newspaper job listings (Mang 2012). Yet, it is also still dubious whether one can easily find the right candidate through digital recruiting methods. E-recruitment has rendered applications for positions time and cost-effective, but it has also created irrelevant applications per position (Melanthiou et al. 2015; Nasreem et al. 2016; Zahedi Nejad et al. 2024).

E-recruitment is also supported by Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as machine learning, natural language processing, deep learning, and neural networks (Eubanks 2018). Here, scholars have warned of human bias in machine learning algorithms, algorithm bias or other forms of bias as significant challenges to objective recruitment practices and to understanding job ads data (Ore and Sposato 2022; Köchling et al. 2023). Nevertheless, the exploitation of online job postings' data for research purposes has been boosted. Though they cannot represent the entirety of the job market, online job ads allow researchers to analyze bulk data to ascertain job market dynamics, identify skills, and to gather newer insights about the labor market (Khaouja et al. 2021). They can also help infer and compare more traits, requirements, needs, education and other characteristics for jobs (Beręsewicz et al. 2024).

Previous studies have also explored external factors affecting the labor market in the UK or which sectors in recruitment have been affected by COVID-19. The pandemic ushered in new trends: higher salaries, lower recruitment, and more non-permanent and part-time positions across the board. This wave of changes also impacted intelligence practice, sparking further interest in intelligence scholarship. Around the time of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, scholars urged the US government to consider reshaping how intelligence analysts work by providing more opportunities for teleworking, which allows the increased benefit of exploitation of open sources (Gioe et al. 2020).

With consideration to the above, research on employment trends and recruitment practices in intelligence studies is still limited. This could be partly attributed to the fact that jobs in intelligence are not considered as 'mainstream' as other jobs. Non-specialized online professional networks have granted greater accessibility to relevant intelligence roles, but recruitment efforts are still less structured in intelligence than other professions, let alone private sector intelligence (Marrin and Clemente 2006; Smith 2022). Moreover, it is worth noting that the sustained prevalence of intelligence jobs listed in traditional job search locations, especially more senior roles, can be still word-of-mouth or spread across professional networks.

The limited and noteworthy efforts in intelligence studies include studies in the last decade by Corkill et al. (2015), Smith (2022), and more recently Larsson (2025). The former and latter studies share similar methodological and analytical features



amongst themselves as well as this paper. However, none of these studies have examined the private sector. Larsson's study focuses on the recruitment of the Swedish signals intelligence professionals by examining a large collection of job advertisements. Corkill et al. focus on identifying the attributes of intelligence analysts by examining job descriptions across different agencies and departments within the Australian context. Their findings show several weaknesses captured in the job descriptions which could potentially dissuade graduate and entry level applications. These include a limited requirement for tertiary education, which clashed with the complex cognitive and intellectual skills expected for intelligence analysts to possess, and the use of generic, public service skills that create the illusion that intelligence analyst roles are mostly clerical administrative work. Smith focuses on the selection and assessment aspects of the recruitment of intelligence analysts, calling for organizational and resourcing restructuring to make sure that the right applicants are made part of organizations.

Nonetheless, one of the trends the private sector intelligence field has followed in recruiting and screening applicants is the use of social media networks to find jobs. In this case, does AI hinder or benefit recruitment in intelligence analysis roles from the applicant's perspective? The question that arises is: what does the query generate for 'intelligence analyst'? The algorithm, for example, might identify 'intelligence' and 'analyst' (intelligence + analyst) separately. Jobs posts therefore are potentially misadvertised on online social media platforms as 'intelligence analyst' roles, perhaps not corresponding to what an 'intelligence analyst' role would entail. Intelligence roles today exist in both the public and private sectors, and intelligence capabilities often cross over into other fields. The increasing demand for intelligence in the labor market across various economic sectors, such as finance or aviation, has coincided with opportunities becoming more visible and accessible via online job advertisements. With these trends comes the potential for widespread perpetuation of misconceptions over what intelligence is really about.

In recent years, the previously state-centric approach to intelligence studies has evolved to include scholarship on private sector intelligence and calls for newer approaches in intelligence studies that move beyond the scope of the public sector (Robson Morrow 2022; Ben Jaffel and Larsson 2022; de Werd et al. 2024). Studies of intelligence no longer consider it purely as a secret government activity, with many now conceptualizing it as a corporate activity, or – better – an activity to support decision making and provide decision advantage (Warner 2002; Breakspear, 2012; Sims 2022). While academic scholarship has always been based on explaining and understanding practice, here the diversification of intelligence is a trend noted recently by both scholars and practitioners alike. The typical narrative about intelligence has been that it is, at its core, a government function. A key omission to this narrative, both as a function and as definition, and the evolution of the definition, is that intelligence has been a private endeavor for a very long time (Sage-Passant 2024).

Intelligence is professionalizing in both the public and private sectors, and it is at an early stage of the journey on the private sector side. As argued by Robson-Morrow (2022), building on work by Stephen Marrin, Jonathan Clemente, and George Allen, professionalization requires a sense of shared identity, standards, a body of knowledge, education and training, and certification or licensing (Marrin 2012; Marrin and

Clemente 2006; Allen 2009). Private sector intelligence is developing as a body of knowledge and there are a growing number of trainings and academic courses teaching this subject, but the ability to identify standards is marred by the murky landscape when it comes to terminology.

In a 2022 study, Robson-Morrow analyzed a dataset of 774 private sector security intelligence roles that had 304 unique job titles, building on a 2019 survey in which 126 practitioners had 72 different titles. As argued in the 2022 study, '[t]his variation reflects the lack of standardization and coalescence around common requirements. It also intensifies barriers to entry: graduate students seeking a career in private sector intelligence are often at a loss as to what to query.' The private sector intelligence field is characterized by a shared professional identity, as explored by Duvenage; however, to external parties, including prospective entrants into the field and human resource professionals, the variation in terminology poses a critical challenge in setting salaries and defining roles (Duvenage 2021; Robson Morrow 2022).

To reflect a direction for intelligence that moves away from Michael Warner's 'secret, state activity' to something more inclusive and representative of the 'state of the art' (2002), Alan Breakspear (2012) opines that 'intelligence is not only an activity which might be practiced without secrecy, it can also be undertaken by organizations in a wide range of sectors; at all levels of government, in business, and in non-profit activities of all kinds.' Breakspear's definition broadly encapsulates the expansive nature of intelligence as a function beyond the boundaries of the governmental, national security apparatus.

There is insufficient attention paid to the unifying aspects of both public and private sector intelligence, notwithstanding differences in priorities and policy objectives. Poorly defining intelligence amid the diversification of intelligence roles can perpetuate a mismatch in terms of practitioners', academics', and the public's knowledge and understanding. There is an ontological relationship between the definition and the work that necessitates clearer definitions and standards. Amidst this effort to fully acknowledge the non-government side of intelligence and intelligence analysis, this paper calls for clearer definitions of intelligence to create boundaries to avoid the belief that 'everything is intelligence'. Despite the breadth of capabilities and roles sprouting outside of government, not everyone can do intelligence or is an intelligence practitioner.

Wilhelm Agrell's (2002) paper titled 'When everything is intelligence - nothing is intelligence' remains provocative and relevant, applicable to different debates within intelligence studies. Agrell problematizes the public misunderstanding of intelligence as any analytical activity that can describe other roles of any analytical capacity. It is easy to lump intelligence with other analyst roles when it is understood as 'information processing.' In this case, Agrell prioritizes uncertainty, management, and exploitation as key characteristics of other information and analytical based roles. Agrell notes: 'information processing, information screening, and informatics are sometimes described as intelligence analysis, which they are not.' Agrell also offers a personal story that exemplifies the misconception of any analytic activity as 'intelligence analysis':



…I was contacted by a consultant offering university-based courses to external customers. He asked me if I could give a course in intelligence analysis to some of the staff at the regional federal police department. I replied that I already a few years ago had given a course for their intelligence analysts. Yes, he knew that, but this time it was not the intelligence people but the central administration. They wanted a course to improve their ability in describing threats, trends, and future tasks in a convincing way in their budget proposal. This was of course quite a legitimate need, but far more in the domain of public administration than intelligence analysis. I tried to explain the difference when the consultant objected: 'But isn't that more or less the same thing?'

The answer is no. Not because of any intellectual territoriality or desire to preserve an aura of hidden knowledge. It is simply not the same thing. Analytic skills are important in most fields, and so is ability to handle and use information in the electronic age. ***But information is not intelligence and only a fragment of all kinds of analysis is intelligence analysis*** (emphasis added).

Mere information is not intelligence. In fact, intelligence practitioners and academics have had to encourage this understanding in the public due to the false belief that sharing information online on social media platforms is intelligence–a perception furthered by online activities surrounding the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Intelligence postings still reflect a need for a specialized skill set, belying the belief that anyone can do intelligence, but the exact definition and scope of that skillset is wide-ranging, and the roles can cover a myriad of responsibilities, doing no favors to those seeking to more clearly define the field.

Methodology: collecting and analyzing job postings

This paper analyzes intelligence job postings from two different standpoints. The first includes the collection of a vast dataset of jobs in the United Kingdom built from the query 'intelligence analyst.' In the second, the authors examine job postings that describe intelligence activities, even if they do not include the word 'intelligence' in the title or description. The latter builds on work by Corkill et al. (2015) in which they collected job advertisements to understand the core attributes of intelligence analysts from job descriptions. Each of the approaches used in this paper are described below. We note that the data collection was not jointly pursued and that the collection timeframes were different; while a few postings may have been collected in both, this is minimal and does not affect the overall analysis because the datasets were never combined in the analysis and are not directly compared to each other. The UK research works as a prelude to the second dataset, which provides more qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of the contents of job postings, delving in-depth beyond the job titles.



Examining UK job postings via the query 'intelligence analyst'

The first research approach analyzed jobs from online job ads in the UK gathered from two non-specialized professional social media platforms, LinkedIn and Indeed, using the query 'intelligence analyst.' The objective of this data collection is to present the state of the online job market within the field of intelligence, examining the field distribution of job ads' data responding to the 'intelligence analyst' query.

Data collection was performed via a social media archiving method of job advertisements from December 2023 to February 2024. This was a purposive sampling process across two platforms, LinkedIn and Indeed. LinkedIn and Indeed were chosen due to their popularity in the UK, with LinkedIn having a more globalized outreach and Indeed a more national outreach in the UK. The unit of analysis was individual job advertisements that were manually screen captured. There were two parameters in their collection: first, data needed to be the result of the search query 'intelligence analyst,' and second, the location was set as the United Kingdom only.

Next, entries were sorted into Excel spreadsheets by logging the specific Identification Number of the job advert as set in the repository and the relevant job title as seen in the job advert. No information or identifiers from companies associated with the job ads analyzed were exploited for this portion of the research. Job ads were classified in Excel based on their job titles and coded under different thematic fields of work. Results were intended to show the opportunities on professional social media platforms when one is navigating the online job market looking for an 'intelligence analyst' role.

Research limitations for the dataset include duplications, job/organization authentication challenges, jobs being taken down, jobs being updated or altered, and the possibility of jobs within the scope of the research that were not identified by the 'intelligence analyst' query. Using two platforms helped address some of these limitations and reduce potential and reduced bias that might stem from using only one platform.

Jobs in the UK-focused dataset were strictly coded into a single category of best fit based on their job title. Due to the volume of the dataset (2245 observations), cross-coding would have been prohibitively time intensive and substantially complicated the study; thus, this research employs the category that most closely reflects the position's terminology. While beyond the scope of this study, a valuable future research stream would consider the complexity of jobs that potentially straddle multiple categories, recognizing that intelligence professionals often have additional responsibilities in their portfolio.

Examining job postings that describe an intelligence position

In parallel, we developed a second dataset to catalogue job postings that describe intelligence jobs regardless of whether they include intelligence in the title or description.



This dataset focuses on risk intelligence and, building on Robson-Morrow's (2022) previous work, the authors define intelligence jobs as those that apply intelligence techniques to external operating environments to facilitate strategic decision-making and mitigate geopolitical and security risks.

Job postings were collected via open-source research, including the LinkedIn 'Pay it Forward Jobs Board' for intelligence jobs, google searches, and intelligence email distribution lists. These jobs postings were manually collected between June 2015 and May 2024, resulting in a total of 425 job postings. Once a week, researchers checked the LinkedIn jobs board and conducted searches using the following terms 'private sector intelligence jobs'; 'intelligence jobs'; and 'non-government intelligence jobs'. Additionally, emails were periodically received from a community distribution list. The authors caution that this is not an entirely comprehensive list of all intelligence jobs available; rather, this dataset captures a cross-section of potential intelligence jobs.

To be included in the dataset, a majority of the role must be intelligence-related work relating to security or geopolitical risk. To meet this standard, a job posting had to meet the following three inclusion/exclusion criteria:

(1) Non-public organizations: The company posting the job had to be a private sector organization – such as a business, financial institution, humanitarian organization, or a technology company. This ensures the dataset does not include any government roles, which are not the focus of this research.
(2) Intelligence gathering, analysis, and management: The job duties and responsibilities listed included intelligence gathering or roughly 50% or more of the working time was related to intelligence gathering, intelligence analysis, or intelligence managerial duties.
(3) Security and geopolitical work: The focus of this intelligence work had to be on security or geopolitical topics. Market and competitive intelligence roles are deemed part of a distinct business profession and therefore not within the scope of this study.[1]

For each job posting in the dataset, the text of the job posting was copied into an Excel spreadsheet, including the required qualifications, preferred qualifications, job description, educational requirements, experience requirements, language requirements, and security clearance requirements. Once the entry was inputted, the authors conducted text analysis by manually coding each post for skills, backgrounds, and

[1] The authors exclude market and competitive intelligence because it is a distinct subfield of intelligence different from risk intelligence (which is the focus of this paper). This aligns with the emergence of two separate professional organizations for the different types of intelligence: the Strategic Consortium of Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) for market/competitive intelligence and the Association of International Risk Intelligence Professionals (AIRIP) for risk intelligence. For academic research on the different subfields of private sector intelligence, please see: Robson Morrow (2022); Dahl (2018); Robson (2018); Torres-Baches (2018).

languages. For each posting, the characteristics listed in the 'job requirements' section of the posting (such as requiring analysis skills, a degree in political science, or Spanish language proficiency) were recorded and tracked. Across the 425 postings, the authors identified 22 skillsets, 44 educational and experiential backgrounds, and 18 languages requested in the job postings. Using simple binary coding – 1 if the characteristic was mentioned, 0 if it was not – every post was coded for further analysis.

Inter-coder reliability

Because both of these datasets are heavily dependent on coding, each dataset was assessed for inter-coder reliability to reduce potential bias. For each dataset, which was originally coded in entirety by one individual author, five entries were randomly selected using a computer-generated number randomizer. Then, the five entries were shared with the other two authors and coded without knowledge of the original coding choices. Once each post was re-coded, the coding choices were compared to the original coding of the posting. The inter-coder reliability checks confirmed the internal consistency of the datasets.

Data analysis results

UK jobs ads categorization: titles and themes

Data collection was driven by the hypothesis that the query 'intelligence analyst' produces a mismatch of job titles and job descriptions, populated by job ads that have nothing to do with intelligence, whether titled intelligence analyst or not. A total of 2245 advertisements were collected, providing a robust dataset for analysis. All jobs were classified and coded into the following categories: Intelligence Analysis, Business Analysis/Business Intelligence, Market Analysis/Market Intelligence, Insight

Table 1 UK study job ads distributions (Indeed, LinkedIn, total $n = 2245$)

Job Category	Indeed (n=1183)		LinkedIn (n=1062)		Total (n=2245)	
Business Analysis/Business Intelligence	273	23.80%	226	21.28%	499	22.22%
Consultancy	13	1.01%	25	2.35%	38	1.69%
Cyber	65	5.49%	8	0.75%	73	3.25%
Data Analysis	202	17.08%	460	43.31%	662	29.48%
Information Analysis	29	2.45%	23	0.02%	52	2.32%
Insights Analysis	58	4.09%	84	7.91%	142	6.33%
Intelligence Analysis	**65**	**5.49%**	**63**	**5.93%**	**128**	**5.70%**
Market Analysis/Market Intelligence	60	5.07%	0	0	60	2.67%
Other General	231	19.52%	102	9.60%	333	14.83%
Other Intelligence	113	9.55%	51	4.80%	164	7.31%
Research	62	5.24%	20	1.88%	82	3.65%



Analysis, Consultancy, Data Analysis, Cyber, Research, Information Analysis, and the broader categories of Other General (meaning Jobs), and Other Intelligence (meaning related to Intelligence, Jobs).

The themes created are based on the frequency with which relevant roles appeared. The job categories are shown in Table 1. Jobs were classified using the Indeed Career Guide's definitions, as follows: (Indeed Career Guide 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2026a; 2026b; 2026c; 2026d).

- Intelligence Analysis: 'An intelligence analyst is a security professional who collects and evaluates information related to security and criminal activities'.
- Business Intelligence: 'A business intelligence analyst's primary responsibility is to analyse data to identify opportunities for business improvement'.
- Consultancy: 'Consultants offer expert advice on their specializations, dynamics, best practices, and regulations to individuals and organizations who require their services.'
- Cyber: 'A cyber security analyst is an information technology professional whose primary function is to protect organizations from cyber attacks and respond swiftly to restore protection if compromised.'
- Data Analysis: 'Data analysts organize and interpret large amounts of data for others to easily understand.'
- Insights Analyst: 'An insights analyst supports decision making by analysing customer data and identifying patterns to develop effective strategies and improve business operations.'
- Market Analysis: 'Market research analysts help brands and businesses understand which products and services are in demand, which demographics compromise their target audience and how much their target audience is willing to pay for their products or services.'
- Research: 'A researcher is an information professional who uses research methodologies to gather data, analyze the data and present their findings.'

This research also incorporates two additional categories beyond the Indeed Career Guide to ensure the analysis was as comprehensive as possible:

- Information Analysis: Information collection and analysis in various business contexts outside of intelligence. The author(s) have notes as a limitation the lack of sufficient public definitions of 'information analysis', and discuss how jobs titles as such it could potentially entail 'intelligence analyst' duties.
- Other Intelligence: Intelligence supporting roles that do not constitute intelligence analysis, such as Security Operations Center Analysts.



The categorization of the job postings for the UK-based research stems from an organic thematic organization of jobs based on job title frequency. For 8 of the 11 categorizations, public definitions are used by the same platform(s) where the jobs ads were collected are used, to keep consistent with the understanding of these platforms. 'Other General' includes job postings unrelated to intelligence.

On Indeed, 1183 job ads were collected. Out of this total, 65 roles were coded as 'Intelligence Analysis'. 'Other Intelligence' refers to roles related to intelligence and intelligence analysis, but their titles are not 'intelligence analyst'; there were 113 job ads for 'other intelligence'. Half of the dataset here can be distributed among roles in Business Analysis and Business Intelligence, Data Analysis and Other General roles that include ill-described vague analyst titles, roles in education, technology and science, or other roles that cannot be further classified. On LinkedIn, 1062 job ads were collected. Out of this total, 63 roles were coded as 'Intelligence Analysis'. 'Other Intelligence' generated 51 job ads. In this dataset, Data Analysis, Business Analysis and Business Intelligence prevail.

Overall, results from the total dataset, displayed in Fig. 1, show a low frequency of Intelligence Analysis themed roles (meaning, titled Intelligence Analyst jobs) appearing from the query, as well as a low frequency of other intelligence roles. The presence of other roles in market analysis and market intelligence, research, and consultancy creates a larger scene in which lines are blurred and under which intelligence analyst roles get buried.

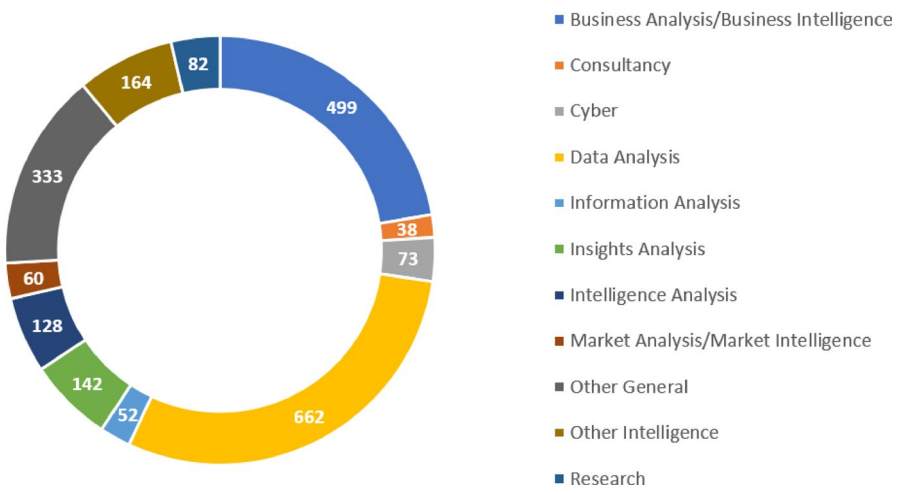


Fig. 1 Job ad distribution (indeed and linkedIn, $N=2245$)

Identifying intelligence jobs via stated job responsibilities

These blurred lines become even more apparent when examining known intelligence roles. The second dataset, comprised of 425 jobs with job descriptions that match our understanding of intelligence, produced several results. First, the word 'intelligence' often does not appear in the job title, underscoring the confusion from the previous dataset. Second, the wide breadth of requested backgrounds makes it impossible to describe a single archetype for an intelligence job. Third, only a small portion of the job postings requested a security clearance, challenging a common public perception that intelligence jobs necessitate classifications and clearances.

Of the 425 job postings in the dataset, over half did not include the word intelligence in the job title. 56.7% of the jobs did not include the words intelligence, intel, open-source intelligence (OSINT), or human intelligence (HUMINT) in the job title. While the most common job title was 'intelligence analyst', only 19 of the 425 entries carried this title. More commonly, a job title might include adjectives to describe the type of intelligence, such as 'intel threat analyst', 'intelligence analyst – executive protection', 'all source intelligence analyst', 'OSINT analyst', or 'intelligence and investigations analyst'. Broadening the analysis to include these variations of the intelligence analyst title, roughly 174 of the positions (41%) would be considered intelligence analysis or intelligence manager positions. The most common broad categories of jobs in the dataset include intelligence analyst (41%), safety, security, and GSOC positions (38%), other (non-intelligence) analyst positions (21%), and researcher positions (3%).[2] Although there were common topics or themes in the job titles, analyzing along these thematic lines is difficult due to the variations in the titles. For example, on the subject of threat analysis, jobs included 'threat analyst', 'threat assessment manager', 'threat intel researcher', 'threat intelligence analyst,' 'threat monitoring analyst,' 'threat monitoring specialist', and 'threat research & intelligence technical analyst'. While the titles for these jobs appear similar, the job responsibilities for these roles vary widely, ranging from strictly research responsibilities to writing intelligence reports to offering recommendations to senior management.

Yet, all of the jobs in the dataset described intelligence work, with some explicitly referencing intelligence responsibilities without referring to the job as an intelligence role. For example, a posting entitled 'global security operations analyst' included the following job responsibilities, among others: identify and mitigate risks for evolving business environment; leverage data gained through process evaluations and data research to influence investigative direction, management; facilitate daily operations of the GSOC, encompassing diverse responsibilities such as risk intelligence, incident/crisis management, response to building intrusions, emergency communication, ensuring supply chain resilience, travel security, and implementing physical security measures; and keep track of global geopolitical events that could potentially impact executive travel, company events, or operations, and provide timely, periodic reports.

[2] Due to overlap in the job titles, the titles sum to over 100%. For example, a 'security analyst' would be included in both the security category and the other analyst category.



Table 2 Skills and languages requested in intelligence job postings

Skill	Percentage (%)	Language	Percentage (%)
Communication skills	61.6	Spanish	5.18
Written skills	60.2	Arabic	3.06
Verbal communication skills	53.7	French	3.06
Teamwork skills	41.4	Russian	2.35
Analysis experience	40.5	Portuguese	2.12
Computer skills	25.6	German	1.88
Work independently	24.7	Chinese	0.94
Multi-task	21.7	Turkish	0.94
Thrive in fast paced	19.5	Dutch	0.24
Detail oriented	17.9	Urdu	0.24
Sound judgement	16.2	Persian	0.24
Problem-solving skills	15.8	Italian	0.24
Management experience	15.8	Farsi	0.24
Adaptable/flexible	15.3	Bahasa	0.24
Research skills	15.1	Yoruba	0.24
Organized	13.4	Wolof	0.24
Leadership	9.88	Hebrew	0.24
Critical thinking	9.41	Swahili	0.24
Integrity	8.94		
Willingness to learn	8.24		
Time management	5.41		
High energy	1.41		

Turning to the job requirements themselves, the job postings suggested a wide array of backgrounds and skills appropriate for the intelligence jobs, suggesting that a single archetypical intelligence worker is difficult to define. In the 425 postings, 22 different sets of skills were mentioned, 44 different educational and experiential backgrounds were mentioned, and 18 different languages were mentioned by name. The complete list of skills, backgrounds, and languages is included in Tables 2 and 3 below. The backgrounds that were requested most included security (58.4% of job postings), intelligence (47.1%), and business (34.8%), as well as academic disciplines like international relations (22.4%), political science (18.1%), law enforcement (16%), cyber (12%), finance (8.7%), criminal justice (7.8%), journalism (7.3%), information technology (7.1%), and media (6.1%). Unsurprisingly, communication and analysis skills were in high demand, with over 61% and 40% of jobs mentioning those respective skills. Other skills essential to intelligence roles were requested as well, including detail-oriented (17.9%), sound judgement (16.2%), adaptability (15.3%), and integrity (8.9% of postings).

As illustrated in Table 2, many of the skills traditionally associated with intelligence analysis are highly sought after in the job postings. The academic literature on intelligence analysis has often focused on communication skills, particularly in relation to communicating uncertainty, (Dhami and Mandel 2021; Dhami et al. 2015; Sinclair 2010; Dorn 2019); technical proficiency (Odom 2008); and analysis skills



Table 3 Backgrounds requested in intelligence job postings

Background	Percentage (%)	Background	Percentage (%)
Security	58.4	Africa	1.65
Intelligence	47.1	Humanitarian	1.65
Business	34.8	Psychology	1.41
International relations	22.4	History	1.41
Politics	18.1	Sociology	1.18
Law enforcement	16.0	Statistics	1.18
Military	12.0	Asia	1.18
Cyber	12.0	Math	0.94
Geopolitical risks	11.8	Aviation	0.71
Finance	8.71	Communications	0.71
Criminal justice	7.76	Public health	0.71
Journalism	7.29	Environmental	0.47
IT	7.10	Geospatial science	0.47
Computer science	6.59	Philosophy	0.47
Media/social media	6.12	Diplomatic	0.47
Economics	3.53	Transportation	0.24
Engineering	3.53	Energy	0.24
Data analytics	3.29	Graphic design	0.24
Law	3.1	Geography	0.24
Americas	2.12	Maritime	0.24
Middle east	1.88	Public policy	0.24
Europe	1.65	Consulting	0.24

(Lowenthal 2020);[3] which is supported by the data in Table 2. However, Table 2 also reveals some surprising findings that appear to challenge the literature. Critical thinking skills have often been cited as a trait foundational to intelligence analysis (Pherson and Pherson 2020; Moore 2007; Hendrickson 2008), but only 9.4% of the job postings explicitly asked for critical thinking skills. Job postings omitting critical thinking skills does not necessarily mean that critical thinking is not key to the job; it may be that people writing the job postings feel that critical thinking skills are bundled with other skills that were listed in the ad, such as analysis or writing skills. Nonetheless, this discrepancy between the literature and the data offers an important point of future study.

Another area where the data diverges with potential expectations is security clearance requirements. Only 3.76% of the jobs required security clearance, and another 1.41% listed security clearance as a preferred qualification. The remaining 94.82% of the private sector intelligence jobs in the dataset did not mention any type of security clearance for the job. In the private sector, individuals may hold security clearance if they engage in government contracting and are sponsored by an agency. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), in 2019 there were roughly 1.3 million contractors or other non-governmental employees that

[3] Mark Lowenthal estimates that analysts require roughly 5 years of experience before they become 'seasoned' analysts. See Lowenthal (2020).

held security clearance (Congressional Research Service, 2023). This information, in combination with the interest in hiring candidates with a security, intelligence, law enforcement, or military background shown in Table 3, many of whom would have previously held security clearance, often produces a potential perception that security clearances are necessary or highly beneficial for private sector intelligence; however, the absence of references to clearances in the vast majority of postings challenges that perception.

Discussion of key findings

In analyzing the data, three key findings emerge. First, the UK data reveals a distortion of the online intelligence jobs market due to ads outside the scope of intelligence analysis, suggesting that applicants may struggle to locate authentic intelligence jobs amidst jobs that algorithms mistake for intelligence roles, such as data analysis or business intelligence roles. Second, both datasets raise questions about a misalignment in intelligence terminology, which in turn obfuscates the boundaries of private sector intelligence and hampers attempts to codify and professionalize the field. Third, this misalignment, along with a diverse set of job requirements and candidate qualifications, contributes to a 'grey zone' of intelligence.

The UK dataset ($n = 2245$) provides insight into the evolving shape of the intelligence job market and captures its recent state. The results shed light on important limitations for potential applicants seeking intelligence analyst roles using mainstream online job platforms due to the intrusion of job ads featuring sectors outside the scope of intelligence analysis (i.e. data analysis, business intelligence, and market intelligence). Therefore, identifying 'intelligence analyst' roles in non-specialized online job market platforms can be more difficult due to algorithmic variations in understanding 'intelligence'. Moreover, applicants may be confronted with issues in authenticating job posts and the organizations behind them, their relevance to intelligence, and whether the roles fit into the scope of intelligence analysis in practice. Overall, this creates a time-consuming and disorienting experience for the applicant. Therefore, one direction for future consideration is to further explore whether mainstream online job platforms are and should be preferred. Currently, there are a few efforts to remedy this issue, including private community groups that serve as venues for sharing job postings but are limited to current professionals, and various efforts that seek to publicly address the market gap, including an 'OSINT jobs' website which better connects intelligence practitioners with recruiters, particularly to roles specializing in open-source intelligence (OSINT Jobs, 2024), and an intelligence vendor that maintains a jobs board with positions across the industry (Factal 2026).

Given the confusion surrounding job titles and corresponding responsibilities, the private sector intelligence jobs landscape may be understood as a 'constellation' of simultaneously overlapping and distinct jobs, shown in Fig. 2. The constellation framework in Fig. 2 proposes a categorical, visual understanding of the online job ads sphere; it proposes an understanding of the intelligence analyst as part of intelligence related roles, and a grey zone of roles in and outside of intelligence, in the sense they can assume responsibilities and capabilities related to intelligence and intelligence



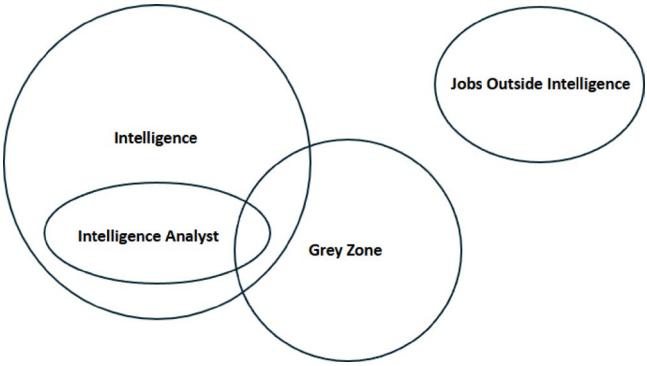


Fig. 2 Visualization of online job market postings

analysis, but they might not be 'pure' intelligence analyst roles. There is also a sphere of 'non-intelligence roles' that could be closer out more away from the intelligence sphere.

The most important feature of this constellation is the emergence of a 'grey zone' of roles that stand in an 'awkward' position both in and outside intelligence and intelligence analysis. In the UK dataset, despite querying 'intelligence analyst' jobs, the results recorded a low occurrence of actual intelligence analysis themed job postings. At the same time, in the category 'Other Intelligence', which captures all the job titles that seem to be close to risk intelligence yet are not titled 'intelligence analyst', a significant part of jobs ads titles coded are considered to assume elements of intelligence analysis practice. This creates a 'grey zone' between intelligence and intelligence analysis and non-intelligence roles.

The grey zone concept illustrates that job titles alone are insufficient for job seekers or members of the public to understand whether a role falls within the intelligence domain. For example, the grey zone could include roles in security operations centers (SOCs). Someone working in a SOC may have analysis duties that would be considered intelligence, but also physical security duties such as patrolling the perimeter or developing emergency operation plans for the company, while other SOC analysts may only collate incidents and not engage in any work that would be considered intelligence analysis.

Although the grey zone concept was developed from the UK dataset, it also helps contextualize the second dataset, which complements the first by examining job descriptions to understand the characteristics of intelligence analysis roles in the private sector job market. As discussed previously, the US dataset ($n=425$) reveals a lack of consistent terminology to describe intelligence roles, including positions that never use the term intelligence but are quintessentially intelligence positions. Meanwhile, roles with similar titles may describe radically different job responsibilities and expectations. For example, consider the following three jobs in that dataset, all of which are variations of the 'intelligence analyst' job.

Job 1, titled 'intelligence analyst', describes a role that is tactical and strategic. The job responsibilities portion of the posting states that the employee will: effectively identify and analyze relevant risks and vulnerabilities, and produce actionable

products in a timely manner to inform enterprise-wide security operations; research open-source intelligence, social media platforms, and deep/dark web for known and potential threats capable of impacting our client; monitor geopolitical events of concern that might impact international travel, corporate events, and/or operations, and provide periodic and timely reporting; provide ad-hoc intelligence analysis support to Executive Protection personnel and other key Global Security stakeholders; author, or assist with, the production of both tactical and strategic level reports; and uncover information gaps that can help identify potential threats in the short and long term.

Job 2, also called 'intel analyst', offers a more strategically focused version of the job. Job 2 states that the employee will serve as a subject matter expert for countries within the Americas region; monitor sources in local languages for events, concerns, or indicators of concerns that may have personal safety or business continuity ramifications; draft concise, accurate, error-free intelligence; interact professionally with clients in written and verbal communication; performs back-up duties related to other regions; and other duties and responsibilities as assigned by manager.

Job 3, called a 'security intelligence analyst', swings the pendulum in the other direction by prioritizing tactical intelligence efforts. Job 3 says candidates will be required to partner with key stakeholders across the company to identify risks to sensitive IP and collaborate with cross functional partners to mitigate those risks; support sensitive, complex, and confidential investigations into incidents of data loss and intellectual property theft, technology misuse, and conflict of interest; collaborate with technical forensic and human investigations to mitigate risks and/or vectors of IP loss identified during investigations; partner with Legal and Human Resources and other investigative/analysis functions across the company to optimize IP risk reduction and investigations; review alerting from a variety of sources, assess potential impact to the business, and support investigation as required; solve complex problems with data from multiple sources and make recommendations to leadership on the appropriate strategy; and effectively communicate at all levels of the company, including at executive level.

All three of these jobs are variations of the 'intelligence analyst' role, yet have some similar and some entirely different responsibilities. All of the jobs have a common core revolving around understanding, analyzing, and mitigating risk to the company, which makes them all 'risk intelligence' roles. At the same time, each job carries different responsibilities and takes a different approach to the same underlying task of mitigating risk. Job 1 explicitly covers both tactical and strategic operations, and focuses on strong analytical and research capabilities across a broad range of topics including geopolitics, executive protection, and enterprise-wide risk. Job 2 takes a narrower approach, asking for a subject matter expert on the Americas and a high-level understanding of risk within that region. Conversely, job 3 is framed as more of an investigative role, asking the candidate to support investigations into data loss and IP threats by partnering with technical forensics, other investigative teams, the legal department, and the human resources department.

Such a differing use of the term 'intelligence analyst' has several potential implications for the field of private sector intelligence. First, the lack of common terminol-



ogy may create barriers for job candidates to successfully find a job that fits their skill set. The nuanced differences in roles with the same title requires careful evaluation of the job responsibilities to determine the skills necessary for the role. While a job candidate may feel generally qualified for a role as an intelligence analyst, some intelligence analyst roles may be a better fit than others, without that being readily apparent based on the job title alone. This may produce a mismatch in skills between employers and the candidates they hire, which harms both the employer and job candidate. This lack of common terminology and job responsibilities stems from current limitations in the professionalization of private sector intelligence, as reflected in the literature on intelligence professionalization (Robson Morrow 2022).

Conversely, the differing use of terms may point to a broader phenomenon of private sector intelligence jobs evolving to meet organizational needs. An intelligence role that also includes non-intelligence job duties, such as developing an emergency plan, may be a function of intelligence jobs further integrating with the larger company and becoming a force multiplier. In the example of developing an emergency plan for the company, although this action does not require intelligence analysis, it does involve complex thinking about risk and risk mitigation, which intelligence analysts excel at. In this case, intelligence analysts may provide valuable insights into non-intelligence problems, which is a sign of collaboration and integration with the larger company enterprise. Under these circumstances, the lack of common terminology and responsibilities may lead to more flexible and valuable usage of intelligence roles, which may accelerate the professionalization of private sector intelligence. Without further research, it is impossible to evaluate whether this lack of standardization harms or helps professionalization of the field.

Given these uncertainties, job seekers, employers, and academics alike may be interested to understand what employers are looking for when hiring intelligence analysts. Yet, looking at the second dataset of 425 intelligence jobs, the vastly diverse set of job qualifications and responsibilities requested by employers poses a challenge to providing a definitive typology of an intelligence analyst and demystifying the grey zone. The job postings data, as previously shown in Tables 2 and 3, reveals a desire for traditional intelligence analysis skills, like a background in intelligence, analysis skills, writing skills, computer skills, and language skills. But it also shows a desire for skills that might sit in the grey zone, such as security experience, which could mean geopolitical security or physical security, depending on the context, or a variety of acceptable backgrounds ranging from math to psychology to finance.

This identification of the grey zone and the underlying data in this paper illustrate why, as Agrell lamented, the term 'intelligence' is so commonly misunderstood and misused. The grey zone and the lack of boundaries for the field hinder not only public understanding, but also may harm the professionalization of the private sector intelligence field. These findings underscore that demarcating the intelligence analyst profession is important, yet a complicated endeavor that involves finding ways to unify rather than seclude roles in the grey zone of the intelligence market.



Conclusions and future research

Using two original datasets, this paper has shown that intelligence positions in the private sector appear under a myriad of titles and descriptions that are non-standardized and reflect a diverse array of roles and responsibilities. Scraping online job platforms for intelligence roles also revealed a variety of positions that do not fall within the scope of security, risk, or geopolitical intelligence work, and yet are encompassed within the same terminology. Existing algorithms on platforms such as LinkedIn and Indeed lump 'intelligence analysis' roles, with other 'analyst' roles, far from intelligence. Meanwhile, job titles without the word 'intelligence' may conceal what effectively are quintessential intelligence collection and analysis roles.

This research's findings indicate a complex digital recruiting environment, where intelligence roles become blurred amongst other roles advertised in business analysis and business intelligence, market analysis and market intelligence, data analysis, information analysis, tactical cybersecurity, and many other domains. E-recruitment, especially from social networks, is a normalized by-product of the dissemination of the internet, but new complications arise in sorting the available job ads data and trying to find a job that matches that applicant's skills. This paper has shed light on the complexity of the online job market for intelligence roles amidst certain algorithmic bias observed in generating relevant to intelligence results.

There are several important directions for future research. First, the authors plan to conduct interviews to determine how closely actual hiring practices resemble job postings, with the hypothesis that the official descriptions developed by intelligence or security teams in conjunction with HR might not be reflective of the candidate that ultimately gets hired. Further, it would be useful to explore how job descriptions for intelligence analyst roles should be communicated, and to understand who is behind the drafting of these job descriptions. If, for example, human resource professionals are responsible for advertising intelligence positions without any familiarity with the field, the resulting job postings may not clearly convey the position's requirements and they may inadvertently mislead job seekers or might be more prone to creating inaccurate or misleading job advertisements about the intelligence analyst role.

Second, job titles and descriptions are also ripe for further study, particularly those clustered in the 'grey zone' of intelligence. As argued in the professionalization literature, baselines and standards are needed to clearly define and articulate intelligence roles and responsibilities in the job market. Previous job description analysis by Corkill et al. (2015) has shown 'a prevailing perception of intelligence analysis as a clerical, administrative role.' However, intelligence is a global, cross-sectoral community, far broader than an administrative function and distinct from other professions. Nonetheless, currently querying job databases, as demonstrated in this paper, can perpetuate the misconception that intelligence is cyber related, business and market focused, or data science related. The landscape is complex, with some cyber jobs falling into the intelligence category, while many do not, and the data science angle is particularly challenging because intelligence practitioners frequently exploit information and data science competencies for daily tasks, including to filter signals from noise, while still performing a function that is distinct from traditional data science roles. This picture underscores the concept of the grey zone and highlights the need



for further study, perhaps in conjunction with HR, of job descriptions and duties in intelligence roles.

Lastly, as mentioned previously in the discussion section, scholars should study whether the myriad of titles and job descriptions is reflective of the private sector intelligence field evolving. The risk-focused view of private sector intelligence presented in this paper is not the only way to define private sector intelligence; private sector intelligence may be evolving to better align and integrate with companies and the business enterprise. Studying this theory would provide insights into the evolution and professionalization of the field.

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Data availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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