

## **INFORMATION SEEKING (INF)**

**Information seeking** is driven by a desire to know more about things, people or issues. It implies going beyond the questions that are routine or required in the job. It may include “digging” or pressing for exact information; resolution of discrepancies by asking a series of questions; or less-focused environmental “scanning” for potential opportunities or miscellaneous information that may be of future use.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asking questions to be sure you understand exactly what a client or colleague wants and why</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doing what you were asked to do without understanding the client's or your colleague's needs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personally investigating problems to understand what has gone wrong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accepting second-hand information about an incident involving your customers or peers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being uncomfortable with discrepancies in data and digging to resolve them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• going ahead with work based on information that you <i>think is probably correct</i> without asking further questions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using all available resources in the department and pressing for more exact information to develop a complete understanding of the situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being satisfied with vague or potentially ambiguous information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regularly researching information by contacting available resources or people who are not normally involved if need be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counting on the people immediately at hand (your manager, staff or the training department) to keep you informed on relevant technologies or business information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading manuals, internal documents, technical journals and other information sources to find out as much as possible about relevant technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning just enough about the system you are working with to deal with immediate problems</li> </ul>

**Developmental  
Activities**

## **Level 1-2 Activities**

Recall situations where you feel you exhibited effective and ineffective Information Seeking.

- List the specific actions you took that made your collection of information particularly effective.
- List the specific actions you took which led to ineffective or inefficient collection of information.
- Resolve to practice the effective Information Seeking activities in your daily routines and reduce or eliminate those actions which are ineffective.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Track your ideas to find out which practices are most effective.

Think about a situation where you found out something too late, or were otherwise caught unaware.

- Consider how you might have found out the information in advance.
- Write down what you intend to do differently in the future when it comes to information gathering.
- Put your ideas into practice.

Identify a problem where you will need to collect information to solve it. Follow these steps:

- List all information you will need to solve the problem (leave out any information that is not important to resolving the issue).
- Ensure you incorporate the viewpoints of others, e.g., other staff, business partners.
- Use past experience to avoid unnecessary information collection (e.g., has this type of problem occurred before? If yes, how was it handled?)
- Seek input from your manager or team members who have expertise in resolving the problem.
- Prioritize the information items on your list. Identify those items that provide the most value *and* are the easiest to obtain. Ensure that you gather data that is directly relevant to the problem you are trying to solve.

- Determine how and when you will collect the relevant information (e.g., sources can include printed material, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, direct observation).

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Think about the “big picture” with this particular client/stakeholder. Is there any broader scope information that you should be gathering that would assist in future interactions?
- \* Try asking the same question in a different manner or format to broaden your understanding.
- \* Keep a list of the sources you've used. Ask peers what additional sources they use.

**Ask your manager to identify someone who does an excellent job of Information Seeking. Ask to spend time with them on a project.**

- Note how they approach finding out the information they need.
- Compare the questions they ask to the questions you would have asked.
- See if they “dig deeper” by asking further questions about an issue when you thought you already had enough information.
- Try to incorporate their methods into yours for future information seeking responsibilities.

**Identify several general problem areas for which you need additional information, e.g., a new product or service; a current project.**

- Meet with your manager and other colleagues to identify:
  - ⇒ Additional information resources they feel would be helpful.
  - ⇒ Where you can obtain the resources.
  - ⇒ Which items in the resources identified are likely to be of most value.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Speak with your peers to find out about their information gathering process.
- \* Discuss your readings with people inside and outside the organization.
- \* Run your approach by your manager. Incorporate his/her feedback.

**Pick a managerial skill (e.g., team building, coaching, leadership) you want to know more about.**

- Make a point of reading books and articles on the subject.

- Research options for applying the skill in a particular situation you are facing and develop an approach you think will work.

**Think about what information you're trying to gather before you actually go out to gather it.**

- Before you initiate a meeting, make a list of the information you need to collect. For example you might want information on:
  - ⇒ A client's/stakeholder's satisfaction with their current systems/processes.
  - ⇒ Additional services that a client/stakeholder would like.
  - ⇒ Any specific problems they have had that you should know about.
  - ⇒ Any particularly good experiences they have had.
- After the meeting, review what you have learned. Ask yourself if there are any gaps. Initiate another contact, if necessary, to ask for additional information.

### **Level 3-4 Activities**

**Read up on the current issues facing the government or specific divisions within it.**

- This can be local or national newspapers, news magazines, industry journals, business magazines, books on economic trends, etc.
- Ask your manager or team for information related to your work or the work in the region. For example, manuals, brochures, newsletters, results of client or employee surveys.
- Read the information on an ongoing basis.
- Find a few people who have a broad perspective on your job, department, or on the public sector.
- Maintain regular contact with them with the specific intention of learning more about issues you face.

**Seek out a role as an information gatherer.**

- These roles can be either short term, such as offering to find the root of a problem, or long term such as offering to be responsible for keeping some information (e.g., list of client services, individual files, etc.) up-to-date.
- Taking on this responsibility should motivate you to develop the needed skills to finding the information.

## *Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

---

- For your topic, list information sources. Include everything you think might be a source even if you are uncertain (a book, a person, a record, etc.)
- Determine how to access each source. For example, answer “How will I get that book?”, “meet with that person”, “find the address or telephone number”, “make the time to”, etc..
- Keep records if this becomes complex.
- Learn to summarize the key points from your research. Write an outline to organize the information.
- Identify gaps in the information. Plan how you can get the missing information.
- Present your findings.
- Continue talking to your manager/team about the topic, your search strategies, and your findings. Listen for added information or tips on new information resources.

### **Reflection Tip:**

- \* Develop a system for gathering your information.

### **Gather more information than is required and recap what others have said.**

- Try out the following tips:
  - ⇒ When you reach the point in a conversation when you would normally stop asking questions, try to think of one more thing to ask.
  - ⇒ Use open-ended questions (e.g., questions that begin with “Tell me about...,” “What do you think about...,” or “Please explain...,”) rather than questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”.
  - ⇒ Try to include the questions of “Why?” or “Why not?” in your conversations to ensure that you understand the real reasons underlying certain issues.
  - ⇒ Recap information you receive verbally to the person in question to ensure the information is both correct and complete. This is useful when gathering information for an assignment, that requires a lot of detail.

### **Include questions of “Why?” and “Why not?” in your conversations.**

- Use these questions and additional probes to ensure that you understand the real reasons which underlie issues and circumstances.

**Before you initiate a meeting with the clients/stakeholders you are providing services to, make a list of the information you need to collect from them. For example you might want information on:**

- Their satisfaction with their current systems/processes.
- Additional services they would like.
- Any specific problems they have had.
- Any particularly good experiences they have had.
- After the meeting, review what you have learned. Ask yourself if there are any gaps. Don't be shy about initiating another contact to ask for additional information.

**Identify a problem where you will need to acquire a significant amount of information from others, e.g., ongoing difficulty in achieving good turnaround times on client applications.**

- List those individuals with whom you will conduct an interview (your clients, staff, and people familiar with the department's objectives).
- Develop an agenda for your interview -- identify the topics/information you will need from the interviewee and the questions to elicit that information.
- Prepare open-ended questions, e.g., questions that begin with "Tell me about..." or "What do you think about..." "Please explain..." instead of questions that will result in a simple yes or no.
- Explain the purpose of your interview and the information you need to acquire.
- Be sure to take adequate notes during the interview.
- Summarize your notes once you have completed your interviews.
- Identify common themes and draw preliminary conclusions.
- Share your findings with your manager and ask for his or her feedback.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Be sure to ask the interviewee about alternate sources of information.

**Reflect on whether your investigative techniques could be improved.**

- Judge your current techniques based on the time they take to execute and the amount and quality of the information they yield (relative to the amount and quality needed).
- This should capture the costs and benefits of your methodology.

## *Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

---

- Use the net result of your cost-benefit analysis (i.e., the remainder of the total benefits less the total costs) to compare your current methodology with existing alternatives.

### **Reflection Tips:**

- \* Are you using your current techniques to their fullest? E.g., probing deep enough, asking the right questions, or getting to the correct sources.
- \* Compare your results with your peers. Do they have more efficient methodologies? What part of their methodologies might work for you.

### **Identify several general problem areas for which you need additional information.**

- Meet with your manager and other colleagues to identify:
  - ⇒ Additional information resources they feel would be helpful.
  - ⇒ Where you can obtain the resources.
  - ⇒ Which items in the resources identified are likely to be of most value.
- Be willing to ask for help or leads when you run into obstacles or dead ends during information searches. Think about alternate sources of information.

### **Reflection Tip:**

- \* Try to be as efficient as possible with your requests – only ask for help from people who you can reasonably expect to provide reliable, useful responses.

### **When you uncover a problem, or an employee or co-worker comes to you with a problem, make a personal effort to solve the situation.**

- Ask questions to determine the true nature of the problem, its effect on the people involved, their ideas about possible solutions and how they would like you to ensure a solution to the issue. If possible or appropriate, make the effort to personally collect all the data required to solve the problem.
- Make a list of all the issues affecting success. For each issue, identify all the sources of information (people, documents, etc.) that you have consulted so far in order to solve the problem.
- Make a list of at least five additional people and documentation sources you have not yet considered.

## *Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

---

- Prepare a list of questions for each source to answer, and collect the missing information. When consulting with people, make sure that you ask them who else they would suggest you speak to about the issue.
- Make brief notes after each meeting of what you have learned. After you have collected information from a variety of sources, spend some time alone trying to tie it all together. What conclusions can you reach? What suggestions or recommendations can you offer at this time?
- Try bouncing your ideas off people whose opinions you value.
- Refine your ideas based on their input.

### **Reflection Tips:**

- \* Consult others to make sure you are asking the right questions.

### **Arrange to lead a fact-finding session to gather information about a new service or initiative.**

- Identify an area where the branch's expertise is lacking.
- Make note of the information you think is important to focus on.
- Contact your internal and external contacts in order to identify resources they feel would be helpful, places you can obtain the resources, and items within the resources which are likely to be of most value.
- Read each section of the print resource and ask yourself the following questions:
  - ⇒ What is the key point of this information?
  - ⇒ How does this information relate to what I already know (or the information I already have)?
  - ⇒ Of what relevance is this information to the problem I currently face?
- Summarize the key points of each resource and how it is relevant to your current needs.
- Get feedback from your peers on your findings. Get him/her to question you thoroughly on the initiative you've researched. Make note of the information you still need to research.

### **Reflection Tips:**

- \* Ensure that you fully understand the information. Do peers have additional information?



## **Level 5 Activities**

**Use co-workers, managers, and contacts from other branches as information resources.**

- Talk to them about their jobs. Ask what they are working on currently, what problems they see, what improvements they expect, and, most importantly, how they are carrying out the work (methods, procedures, behaviours, etc.).
- Identify the techniques and behaviours you would like to incorporate in your work or work style.
- Return to the person or persons who used the techniques or behaviours that are of interest to you and ask them for further detail. Probe them to obtain the information you might need to carry out the technique or behaviour yourself.
- Ask them for advice. They might have some ideas about how you can implement the technique or behaviour in your unique situation. They might also be able to direct you to other information resources.
- Get on-going feedback from your manager/team.
- Ask your manager/team to provide you with regular feedback on how well you gather information to get at underlying needs or issues.
- Avoid being defensive; treat this as a learning exercise.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Practice your probing questions here, doing a little research about that person's area before speaking to them will make it easier to ask the in-depth questions.
- \* Strive to find out at least one useful fact from each contact.

**Make it a habit to read up on the current issues facing the organization or specific areas within the industry.**

- This can be local or national newspapers, news magazines, industry journals, business magazines, books on economic trends, etc.
- Ask your manager or team for information related to your work or the work in the industry. For example, manuals, brochures, newsletters, results of client or employee surveys.
- Read the information on an ongoing basis.
- Keep track of where you have found the most useful and relevant information.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Use the information gathered to help guide and inform your personal development.
- \* Don't let this list limit future searches.

**Develop a network of information sources and regularly use that network.**

- The network should include people inside and outside the organization.
- Ensure you contact these people at regular intervals to maintain an information sharing relationship.
- Strive to find out at least one useful fact from each contact. For example, their experience with new products or systems, ongoing problems, changes in personnel.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Use this information to help guide your personal development.

**Seek out information as part of a special new initiative you want to spearhead.**

- Volunteer for special projects beyond your current mandate. For example, you launch a task force or organize a special strategic planning session for the division.
- Use this opportunity to demonstrate your skill at Information Seeking. For example, if you were organizing an offsite meeting, call five places instead of just one or two. Instead of just asking if they have space ask if there is anything special they can do for the session. Instead of relying only on your experience ask other people, inside and outside of the division, what kinds of retreats they have been to in the past.
- Apply the same basic probing skills as above to draw the needed resources around your initiative.
- In all cases, be very thorough in digging up information.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Taking on this responsibility should motivate you to develop the needed skills to finding the information.

**Get on-going feedback from your manager/team.**

- Ask your manager/team to provide you with regular feedback on how well you gather information to get at underlying needs or issues.
- Avoid being defensive; treat this as a learning exercise.