



Behavioral Science and Insider Threat

Introduction

Malicious insiders can and have done tremendous damage to national security. In many of these cases, much of the damage could have been avoided if one concerned, observant colleague spoke up. By saving one coworker from making a bad decision, you might be protecting our national security as well. While human nature cannot be predicted with 100% certainty, studying it may provide insight that can be leveraged for insider threat programs and risk mitigation.

What is Behavioral Science?

Behavioral Science is a branch of science (such as psychology, sociology, or anthropology) that is focused on



understanding and dealing with human behavior. Behavioral science has shown us it is more productive to attempt to understand why and how someone has chosen the path they did. With this insight, we may better anticipate their movement down the path they chose and intervene if necessary.

Policy

DoD Directive 5205.16, the DoD Insider Threat Program, mandates the establishment or maintenance of a multi-disciplinary threat management capability to conduct and integrate the monitoring, analysis, reporting, and response to insider threat. It further states that this capability will include the ability to share a variety of information, to include mental health information with commanders (or civilian equivalents) DoD Component-wide. Additionally, the National Insider Threat Task Force published the Insider Threat Program Maturity Framework, which addresses the importance of behavior science.

Role of Behavioral Scientists

Behavioral Scientists can assist insider threat program personnel by providing training, consultation, and research. Some of the specific ways they can assist are:

- Help identify, explain, and contextualize concerning behaviors.
- Provide expert consultation, training, and customizable analytical tools.
- Operationalize current research to enhance an organization's prevention, detection, and mitigation efforts.
- As part of their research, conduct interviews, review case studies, and analyze data.

Behavioral Science Resources

While mandated to be part of a multi-disciplinary insider threat management capability, not every organization has inherent resources; however, a number of them do, and the Defense Insider Threat Management and Analysis Center (DITMAC), for example, provides a centralized capability for DoD.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is the set of underlying beliefs, assumptions, values, and norms that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization. This is important because the organization's culture functions as a "lens" that can influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in employees.



Critical Pathway

Critical-path analysis has been an approach that has been used in business and medical fields to identify the relationships of processes and their most critical and vulnerable points. The critical path framework provides useful categories for assessing if a given person of concern might be on a destructive path. The four elements of the critical path are:

- Personal Predisposition
- Stressors
- Concerning Behaviors
- Problematic Organizational Responses

Personal Predispositions

Normal and well-adjusted individuals rarely commit hostile insider acts. Some of the personal characteristics that could predispose individuals toward becoming insider threat risks include the following (keep in mind, an individual with these issues is not necessarily an insider threat):

- Medical/psychiatric conditions
- Social network risks
- Previous rule violations
- Personality or social skills risks
- Decision-making deficits

Stressors



Stressors can be negative or positive events that result in changes in personal, social, or professional responsibilities that

require individuals to spend effort and energy to adjust. While everyone experiences stress in life, research indicates that stressors especially place pressure on those who possess vulnerable predispositions and can lead them down the next step of the critical path (not everyone with these issues is an insider threat):

- Personal
- Financial
- Professional

Concerning Behaviors

Studies of insider threat offenders have shown that most were known to have committed some form of concerning or problematic behavior before acting directly against their organization (not everyone with these issues is an insider threat):

- Interpersonal
- Technical
- Financial
- Personal
- Mental Health
- Social Network
- Travel
- Suspicious Travel



Problematic Organizational Responses

The last element in the critical path model is problematic organizational behavior in response to at-risk employees. How an organization responds to troubling behavior can be a major factor in a person's movement down the critical path. These factors include:

- Inattention
- No risk assessment process
- Summary dismissal or other actions that escalate risk

Resources

You can find more information on this topic at:

- [NITTF, ODNI Mental Wellness Module](#)
- [CDSE Webinar with Dr. Robert Gallagher of the DITMAC](#)
- [CDSE Webinar with Dr Eric Lang and Dr. Rene Dickerhoof of PERSEREC](#)
- [PERSEREC Technical Report 18-16](#)
- [PERSEREC White Paper](#)
- [Application of the Critical-Path Method to Evaluate Insider Risks](#)