Chapter VIII

The Source Map: A Means to Support Collection Activities

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ABSTRACT

In the collection stage of the intelligence cycle, one has to determine relevant sources, access them and retrieve data from them. For each data class, many possible sources are available and determining the right ones is often difficult. Moreover, accessing sources and retrieving data may require a lot of effort. In this chapter, we present a tool for supporting the effective and efficient use of sources—the “source map.” In essence, a source map links data classes to sources and contains meta data about these links. These meta data indicate the adequacy of sources in terms of ease of access, ease of retrieval, and usefulness of the retrieved data. A source map can support the selection of appropriate sources (given a required data class), and it can support the assessment of the overall adequacy of available sources.
INTRODUCTION

Searching and retrieving data about the environment is an important activity in the intelligence process. This activity—as part of the intelligence cycle—is usually called the “collection stage” (cf., Herring, 1992; Kahaner, 1997; Bernhardt, 1994; Sammon, 1994; Gilad & Gilad, 1988). The collection stage is considered to be the most time-consuming stage (e.g., Chen et al., 2002) and if it is not performed carefully, many difficulties may arise (e.g., too much time spent on search; collection stage leads to irrelevant data; information overload) (cf., for example, Cook & Cook, 2000; Chen et al., 2002; Vriens & Philips, 1999). For successfully carrying out collection activities, knowledge about which sources contain what kind of data, and knowledge about how to approach sources (meta-knowledge regarding the collection of data) would be very helpful. This chapter presents a tool to structure and deal with this metadata: the source map.

An essential question in the collection phase is where to find the requested data both effectively and efficiently. To answer this question, one has to:
1. identify possible sources;
2. judge the value of the source (in terms of different criteria, e.g., does it contain relevant data? What are the costs of employing this source? Is it reliable?, etc.);
3. use the value-judgments to select the appropriate sources.

Many authors discuss Step 1 by pointing to a variety of available sources (cf., Fuld, 1995; Kahaner, 1997; Sammon, 1984). Typical sources include the Internet, online databases, sales representatives, internal or external experts, CEOs, journals, tradeshows, conferences, embassies, etc.

The literature treats the valuation step more implicitly. Most of the time, it discusses distinctions regarding sources, such as open vs. closed sources, internal vs. external sources, or primary vs. secondary sources (see Kahaner, 1997, for a review). These distinctions implicitly refer to different criteria used in the valuation of sources. The distinction open vs. closed sources implicitly refers, for instance, to criteria such as “ease in collection” or “relevance.” The distinction primary vs. secondary sources implicitly refers to the criterion “reliability of the data.” In our view, it is possible to value sources more precisely when the valuation criteria are stated explicitly and not implicitly in the form of these distinctions.

The selection step is even more elusive in literature (and practice). This step integrates the value-judgments to select a list of appropriate sources for
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