RESEARCH NOTE

Abstract

Risk management requires strong, collaborative, and trusting relationships across many organizational functions, especially between Insider Threat (InT) and Human Resources (HR) professionals. "Engaging with HR Professionals" is a workshop designed to build this relationship through scenario-based learning. Together, InT Program personnel and HR professionals work through complicated inquiries that highlight the importance of collaboration for individual and organizational well-being.

the **ThreatLab**
Integrating Research Into Practice

About The Threat Lab

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) founded The Threat Lab in 2018 to realize the Department of Defense (DoD) InT Program Director's vision to incorporate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space. Our team is headquartered in Seaside, California, and includes psychologists, sociologists, policy analysts, computer scientists, and other subject matter experts committed to workforce protection.

Engaging with Human Resources Professionals – A Workshop to Increase Collaboration

OPA Report No. 2021-051 • PERSEREC-RN-21-09 • APRIL 2022

Jennifer VanBerschot, Marianne Hughes, Christina Weywadt, Emma Mix, Nathan Hunt, Tiffany Bostrom, Nicole St. Hilaire, Stephanie L. Jaros, Jennifer Garcia, Sara Barr, Heidi Sergel, Victoria Dobbin, Jennifer Kuzmicki, & Vicky Froderman

Introduction

Insider Threat (InT) programs are postured to deter, detect, and mitigate insider threats before they reach a critical point and potentially harm the organization. Human Resources (HR) professionals represent the first line of defense for an organization's InT program. HR professionals screen prospective employees, support employee retention and release, and maintain information associated with employee well-being across the employment lifecycle. Employees also often turn to HR when they witness concerning behavior or experience personal and professional stressors. Within government organizations, HR is frequently a required coordination element before any disciplinary action is taken. As a result, HR professionals play a critical role in an organization's efforts to protect its information, facilities, networks, people, and resources from insider threats.

Although early detection increases the likelihood of successful threat mitigation,[1] information sharing between HR and InT personnel may be limited for a number of reasons.[2] For instance, concerns related to collective bargaining agreements, complicated agency or company policies, and fear of inappropriately disclosing personally protected information or violating federal privacy laws

---

[1] Intelligence and National Security Alliance, "Explanation of INSA-Developed insider threat Definition," September 2020a. At https://www.insaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/INSA_InT_Sept252020.pdf

[2] Intelligence and National Security Alliance, "Legal Hurdles to Insider Threat Information Sharing" January 2020b. At https://www.insaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/INSA_WP_Legal-Hurdles_FIN.pdf

are commonly cited barriers to open communication. These and other concerns can discourage members of the HR community from collaborating with InT personnel, especially if the InT Program lacks sufficient transparency. Encouraging a two-way relationship between HR and InT personnel provides one method to overcome this resistance and keep the workforce safe.

The National Insider Threat Task Force (NITTF) and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence & Security (OUSD[I&S]) asked The Threat Lab, a program within the Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC), to develop a product to improve collaboration and information sharing between HR and InT communities. In response, we created a product titled: "Engaging with HR Professionals Workshop." This workshop uses scenario-based learning exercises to encourage collaboration through shared problem solving and intergroup activities. This downloadable suite of materials includes everything an InT Program Manager or Hub Chief needs to host a learning-centered workshop with InT and HR staff members in their organization. This Research Note summarizes the design of and deployment recommendations for this workshop built to increase effectiveness and decrease potential threat to the workforce.

Building a Workshop to Engage HR Professionals

Promoting intergroup cooperation using scenario-based learning begins with learning objectives that emphasize collaboration. The Terminal Learning Objective (TLO) provides structure to the overall workshop, while Enabling Learning Objectives (ELOs) structure specific learning and activities. Based on the sponsor's needs assessment and subsequent foundational literature reviews, the TLO for this project is as follows: HR professionals will recognize the mutual benefit of and increase awareness of InT roles and procedures in an effort to enhance communication and collaboration with InT personnel across the employment lifecycle. The ELOs include:

- Recognize why certain information typically held by HR is important and permissible (regarding legality and policy) to share with InT personnel.

- Describe the consequences of not sharing HR information with InT personnel.

- Describe how the relationship between HR and InT is mutually beneficial in serving organizations and larger Agencies.

- Review a collaborative response from HR to a request for employee information from an InT professional.

- Recognize ways to address barriers to data exchange between HR and InT personnel.

- Examine a collaborative data exchange between HR and InT professionals.

- Identify steps to enhance collaboration between HR and InT professionals.

Workshop Materials

Once the TLO and supporting ELOs were created, a two-hour interactive virtual workshop comprised of the following materials was designed: 1) a Facilitator Guide; 2) PowerPoint Slides; 3) Supplemental

Materials; and 4) an Evaluation Survey. All of the workshop materials are accessible and 508 compliant, and are described in the following sections.

Facilitator Guide

We recommend the InT Program Manager or Hub Chief facilitate the event and use the facilitator guide as an all-inclusive manual for executing the workshop. It contains an overview of the workshop, contents associated with Scenario 1 (Disgruntled Employee) and Scenario 2 (Domestic Abuse), and a wrap-up reflection exercise.

The overview establishes the purpose of the workshop, including workshop goals and the ground rules for the exercises (e.g., there are no *right* answers). Following the overview is an explanation of how to present the slides to the participants, a description of icebreaker exercises to orient participants to the workshop tools and technical platform, and an introduction to the purpose of the workshop.

The workshop includes two scenarios designed to provide real-world practice in building trust and encouraging appropriate information sharing between InT and HR. Each scenario includes several pieces of evidence for the participants to consider and discussion questions delivered at key points to prompt the participants to consider how and why they might respond.

Scenario 1: Disgruntled Employee

The first scenario is based on a fictional employee, Tom Harris. Tom is a difficult employee who is tolerated because of his technical expertise as an aircraft maintainer. This scenario begins when Tom's supervisor contacts his security officer, who subsequently contacts the InT Hub to submit a report. Due to limitations on what the Hub can access via electronic systems, the Hub emails HR to request Tom's entire employee file. Workshop participants review data housed in HR systems (e.g., demographics, documented incidents, HR case file notes, reprimands, employee logs, and additional reports), as well as data collected as part of the InT Hub's inquiry (e.g., security database information, public social media posts, and notes from an interview with Tom's current supervisor).

The discussion questions for this scenario focus on how HR might respond to the requests from the InT Hub and what information they might share. The discussions also prompt participants to review organizational policy to justify their decision. Finally, the scenario concludes with a review of the outcome and a discussion about the value of overcoming organizational silos in an effort to protect the workforce.

Scenario 2: Domestic Abuse

The second scenario focuses on a fictional employee, Sharon Jones. Sharon is a critical care nurse who is married to a potentially abusive partner, Jody Smith. The scenario begins when a coworker, Jill Robbins, witnesses an incident of abuse between Sharon and Jody at work. Workshop participants review HR data on the case (e.g., an initial incident report, an email that Jill sent to her supervisor reporting the incident, Jody's employee file [which includes a medical discharge, letters of counseling, and documents related to medical leave], and a restraining order filed by Sharon against Jody). Participants also review additional public and private data on Sharon and Jody (e.g., concerning text messages between Sharon and Jill documenting Jody's history of substance abuse and Jody's public social media posts).

The discussion questions for this scenario focus on when HR should consider reaching out to the InT Hub for assistance. The discussions also prompt participants to review organizational and privacy policies to assess their obligation to report the situation to InT Hub, which data they can provide from Jody and Sharon's files, and the logistics of reaching out (e.g., what channel to use to communicate risk, who to contact within the Hub, how to respond to follow-up inquiries made by the Hub). Finally, the scenario concludes with a review of the outcome and the importance of reporting potential risks to the InT Hub.

Wrap-Up and Reflection

The workshop ends with a final reflection and discussion about the learning objectives. The facilitator asks participants how they plan to move forward as a team after the workshop, and then asks participants to consider how they might increase awareness, enhance communication, and better collaborate in the future. The wrap-up activity encourages participants to brainstorm how to apply their knowledge to their daily roles and identify ways they might overcome barriers to information exchange.

PowerPoint Slides

The workshop materials also include PowerPoint slides that the facilitator should display during the course of the workshop. The slides provide information the participants need in order to engage in the workshop and follow along with the scenarios. When combined with an online meeting tool that allows for annotations and in-group chats (e.g., Zoom), the slides provide a visual template that shows where and how the users can provide their answers (e.g., select 'yes' or 'no' in response to a question).
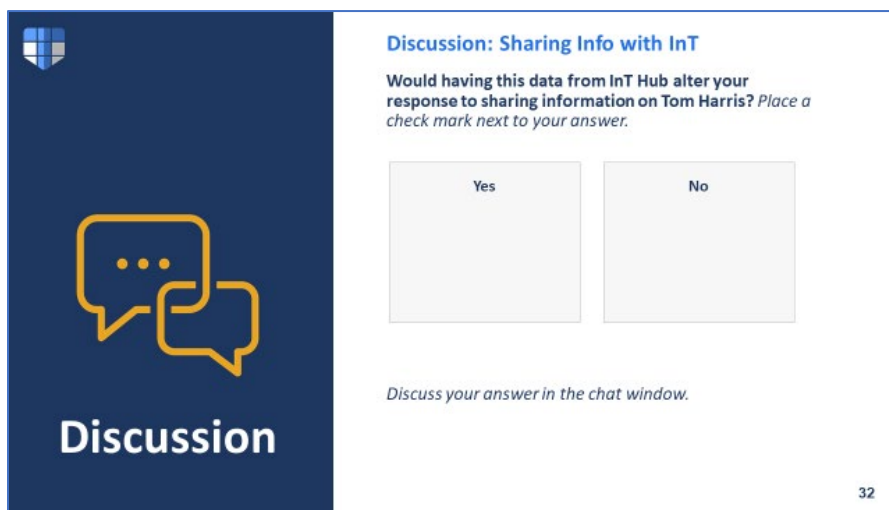
Supplemental Materials

In addition to the Facilitator Guide we also designed a packet of supplemental materials for both the facilitator and the participants. The facilitator's supplemental materials include best practices for virtual (as opposed to in-person) facilitation, sample invitation emails to use as templates, and helpful resources for participants if they are faced with situations similar to the scenarios addressed in the workshop (e.g., a list of domestic abuse warning signs and guidelines for conducting difficult meetings). In addition, facilitators will have a downloadable packet containing the evidence presented in the scenarios. The supplemental materials for participants include helpful resources for situations

similar to the scenarios addressed in the workshop (e.g., a list of domestic abuse warning signs and guidelines for conducting difficult meetings) and a downloadable packet containing the evidence presented in the scenarios.

An Evaluation Survey

Finally, we included a survey link in the workshop materials to help The Threat Lab gather evaluation feedback from the participants to improve this workshop and future products and services. The survey link is incorporated into the actual workshop agenda to help improve response rates and encourage participants to reflect on their workshop experience in the moment.

Next Steps

Building collaboration between HR and InT professionals is ongoing and iterative. This workshop is just the first step in this process. Building on our research and recommendations from SMEs we encourage organizations to consider a number of additional steps:

- Evolve the learning experience. For example, InT personnel could conduct additional workshops with their HR colleagues to review actual inquiries, especially those that were particularly complex (e.g. where collaboration made a difference and/or wasn't sufficient). Or, participants could create other artifacts such as collaborative games that provide an alternative format for learning.

- Commit to after-action and outreach efforts, and encourage participants to report long-term changes they are championing to promote employee well-being and reduce the risk of insider threats (e.g., adoption of best-in-class HR programs that reduce security incidents).

- Develop a community of security-smart HR professionals. This could include formal professionalization through certification or a less formal community of practice.