



Why Some Regulators See Change Coming—and Others Don't

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The Information Problem

Regulators operate in environments characterized by constant change. Government priorities evolve, technologies emerge, professional practice shifts, and public expectations continue to grow. Most significant developments do not arrive without warning. Signals often appear months or even years before they become major organizational issues. Yet regulators vary considerably in their ability to recognize those signals, understand their implications for public protection and regulatory effectiveness, and respond appropriately.

The difference is rarely access to information. Most regulators have access to more information than ever before. Board reports, environmental scans, stakeholder feedback, performance data, and sector updates are widely available. The challenge is not information scarcity; it is determining which developments may affect public-interest outcomes, what they mean for the organization, and whether they require regulatory attention. In many organizations, the issue is not a lack of information but a gap between information, insight, and organizational response.

For regulators, the objective of intelligence is not simply awareness. It is helping organizations recognize developments that may influence their ability to fulfill their public-interest mandate. The earlier significant developments are identified and understood, the greater the opportunity to respond proactively rather than reactively.

Three Types of Intelligence Challenges

Organizations experiencing intelligence-related challenges do not always face the same problem.

In some cases, the issue is relatively specific and well understood. A regulator may need to assess a policy change, understand the implications of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, monitor workforce trends, or examine a developing regulatory issue. In these situations, organizations often need focused analysis or advisory support to help determine an appropriate response. When the question is clear, targeted intelligence support can often help organizations move more quickly from uncertainty to informed action.



In other situations, the problem is less clear. Leaders may notice recurring symptoms without fully understanding the underlying causes. Important developments repeatedly arrive as surprises. Environmental scanning occurs but rarely influences decisions. Information is collected from multiple sources, yet decision-makers receive conflicting signals. In these cases, organizations may benefit from stepping back to examine the broader factors, assumptions, processes, and organizational dynamics contributing to the problem before pursuing additional solutions.

Some organizations discover that the issue extends beyond a specific question or recurring problem. Intelligence activities may be fragmented across departments, rely heavily on individual effort, or lack clear governance and accountability. Intelligence may be generated, but mechanisms for translating insight into organizational adaptation, planning, program development, or future preparedness remain underdeveloped. In these situations, the challenge is no longer a discrete problem but a broader organizational capability issue. Organizations facing these challenges may benefit from examining how intelligence supports public-interest decision-making, regulatory effectiveness, and organizational preparedness.

Intelligence as an Organizational Capability

One of the most common misconceptions is that intelligence is simply about gathering information. In practice, higher-maturity intelligence systems function as a proactive and organizing capability. Rather than waiting for information to arrive, organizations intentionally define intelligence priorities, identify what developments require attention, and direct monitoring activities toward issues most likely to influence organizational objectives, regulatory responsibilities, public-interest outcomes, and future operating conditions. Intelligence helps determine not only what an organization knows, but also what it pays attention to.

Higher-maturity organizations actively participate in the ecosystems within which they operate, building relationships, exchanging intelligence, and learning from regulators, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders. They also recognize that not all information is equally valuable, placing increasing emphasis on validation, credibility, and significance so that reliable signals can be distinguished from noise. Effective intelligence systems help organizations assess which developments may affect public protection, regulatory effectiveness, stakeholder confidence, or organizational capacity. Information that appears insignificant in isolation may become highly relevant when considered in relation to public-protection responsibilities, organizational priorities, and regulatory risks.

Mature intelligence systems recognize that intelligence is not the responsibility of a single individual or department. Policy teams monitor legislative and practice developments, communications professionals identify emerging stakeholder concerns, risk and performance functions detect changing trends, and operational teams often observe emerging issues before



they become organization-wide concerns. Higher-maturity organizations intentionally connect these perspectives to support decision-making and public-interest outcomes.

What Higher-Maturity Organizations Do Differently

Higher-maturity organizations create feedback loops connecting intelligence, decisions, actions, and outcomes. This continuous cycle of monitoring, interpretation, action, learning, and adaptation helps ensure intelligence remains relevant and contributes to organizational improvement over time.

They spend more time thinking about the future. Rather than focusing exclusively on current issues, they explore how emerging developments may evolve, what alternative futures might look like, and how organizational strategies, policies, programs, and capabilities may need to adapt. They recognize that foresight is not about predicting the future with certainty; it is about improving preparedness.

These practices do not eliminate uncertainty. They do, however, improve awareness, preparedness, decision quality, regulatory effectiveness, and the organization's ability to fulfill its public-interest mandate.

A Question for Leaders

For leaders, the most useful question may not be whether the organization has enough information. A more valuable question is whether the organization is effectively transforming information into awareness, awareness into insight, and insight into action.

As regulatory environments continue to evolve, organizations may benefit from considering whether the challenge they face is a specific intelligence question, a recurring intelligence-related problem, or a broader intelligence capability issue. Each may require a different response, but all relate to the same objective: ensuring important developments are recognized, understood, and acted upon early enough to support effective decision-making and organizational adaptation.

Whether your organization is seeking insight into a specific emerging issue, attempting to understand a recurring intelligence-related challenge, or looking to strengthen intelligence and foresight capabilities more broadly, additional information is available at www.upstreammanagesolutions.com or by contacting jordan@upstreammanagesolutions.com.

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