Red Teaming has been defined as “the independent application of a range of structured, creative and critical thinking techniques to assist the end user make a better informed decision or produce a more robust product” (Ministry of Defence, 2013). By subjecting plans and ideas to rigorous challenge and analysis, they can be thoroughly assessed, and vulnerabilities and flaws can be identified. Thus, by using the red teaming technique, there is a more robust baseline for decision-making.

Sunstein (2015) argues that red teams are formed to test proposals, plans and missions both at the level of concept and practice, by systematically and deliberately identifying potential vulnerabilities and weak-points.

HOW IS RED TEAMING DONE?

The US Defence Science Board (2003) identifies several different styles of red teaming. These include: “playing” adversaries/competitors; serving as devil’s advocates; offering alternative interpretations; and generally challenging established thinking within an enterprise. The evidence is that red teaming is difficult to perform effectively. The MoD (2013) make recommendations on how best to go about this:

- The ‘end user’ should: identify the specific task they want to undertake; identify an appropriate team (a combination of subject matter experts, creative and critical thinkers, analysts, cultural advisors and role players); and task and empower the team leader so that he/she can run the team effectively. The end user should be receptive to criticism, provide good information and guidelines, and have a good working relationship with the red team leader.

- The ‘red team leader’ is identified as the most important role in successful red teaming, and should: build a constructive relationship with the end user; build an appropriate team; ensure that the team receive all useful information; choose the tools and techniques to be used; organise, manage and help the team in generating and producing quality findings to feed back to the end user.

- The red team should: be tailored appropriately for the project; be formed of a range of individuals; and be of appropriate size. It should be noted here that the optimum team size is considered to be between five and nine people. The team should possess: analytical, creative and communication skills; the ability to ask questions of, and challenge traditional thinking, as well as self-awareness.
WHO USES IT?

Red teaming has been used in many different contexts. Large technology companies such as Apple and Microsoft use red teaming to hack their own software and identify areas needing improvement. Law firms also use a red team equivalent to ‘pre-try’ cases and test arguments by employing different firms to present a case against them (Sunstein, 2015).

Red teaming is most often associated with military/government action. A red team was used in the planning process of the raid on the compound thought to contain Osama Bin Laden, assessing the likelihood that he was actually inside the compound (The Telegraph, 2011). There is no set way of designing red teams, however the range of organisations and governments using them demonstrates the value they have for improving decision-making processes.

FURTHER READING


THE CHALLENGES OF RED TEAMING

Although successful red teaming is entirely possible, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges and when it does not necessarily work:

- Red teams cannot always predict all possible means of attack (Meehan, 2007). Meehan argues that red teams tend to work off available knowledge and past experiences/events, and so are unable to predict surprises. Further to this, the US Defence Science Board (2003) point out some potential causes of difficulty, including issues like a failure to take the assignment seriously, marginalisation from the decision-process, and a loss of independence if “captured” by the end user (2003).

- Longbine’s (2008) discussion of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM details failures to anticipate and prevent the conflicts and terrorism that arose out of the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime because those in charge of operations continued to be preoccupied with, and mistakenly maintained their pre-war analysis and plan for the situation in Iraq, despite noticeable changes and criticisms from soldiers on the ground. Longbine attributes this failure to poor “self red-teaming”, which should have been done by an independent red team, again stressing the importance of method when using the technique.