
How to Fix Your Organization's Competitive Readiness Problem:

Hint: Your Competitive Intelligence Function May Not Be the Culprit

INTRODUCTION

Your CI team has spent three months building a comprehensive landscape. It runs 80 slides. It covers every competitor, every trial, every regulatory milestone, every conference presentation that touched your therapeutic area in the last 18 months. It is thorough. It is accurate.

It is also sitting in your email. Unopened. Just like the last quarterly report.

This problem, which is pervasive, is not just a functional failure of the CI team. It is also an organizational failure. Conflating the two is one of the most persistent and damaging misconceptions that constantly calls into question the value of the CI function, while simultaneously leading to organizations being on the back foot in competitive markets.

Competitive intelligence is a function. Competitive readiness is a culture. CI produces information and insights. Readiness produces action and response. A CI team that has done everything right — identified the signal, interpreted the implication, delivered the insight — has still done nothing if the organization on the receiving end has no mechanism for converting that insight into a coordinated, cross-functional response.

This white paper argues for a deliberate understanding of these two capabilities and for the intentional design of the latter. It describes what competitive readiness requires, how it differs from what CI teams are typically asked to do, and what organizations that have built an effective readiness infrastructure do differently from those that haven't.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTELLIGENCE AND READINESS

The confusion between CI and competitive readiness is understandable. They are related. They share inputs. They often share personnel. But they are solving fundamentally different problems.

Competitive intelligence answers: What is happening?

A well-designed CI function monitors the competitive environment systematically and continuously. It identifies signals — in patents, clinical registries, regulatory filings, conference presentations, hiring patterns, earnings calls — that indicate competitor intent, capability, or direction. It interprets those signals. It delivers insights that are timely, accurate, and actionable.

CI is primarily an insights function. Its outputs — landscapes, trackers, catalyst reports, scenario briefs — are inputs to decision-making. The CI team can have dedicated functional expertise and leadership. There is a head of CI. There are analysts. There is a process. The accountability is clear.

Competitive readiness answers: What will we do about it?

Readiness is a fundamentally different organizational challenge. It asks not what is happening but what we will do — in advance of it happening, if possible, and at speed once it does. And here is the critical structural distinction: there is no head of competitive readiness. There cannot be, not in any meaningful sense. That's because competitive readiness, done correctly, belongs to the entire organization.

A competitive response to a major market event touches commercial strategy, medical affairs, market access, investor relations, regulatory affairs, clinical development, business development, and communications — simultaneously, and in a coordinated way. No single function can own that response. No single leader can direct it unilaterally. What is required is not a person in charge but a system in place.

WHY CI TEAMS BECOME NEWS REPORTING FUNCTIONS

Before describing what effective competitive readiness looks like, it's worth being direct about how most CI functions actually evolve — because the trajectory is depressingly consistent.

A CI function is established. It begins with energy and ambition. Broad source coverage. Cross-functional stakeholder engagement. Forward-looking scenario development. The team is seen as a strategic asset. Then, gradually, it isn't. The 80-slide landscape decks start to feel like obligations rather than tools. Stakeholders stop reading them and the summary becomes the deliverable.

The solution is not to make CI teams better at CI. It is to give CI a structural counterpart — the readiness infrastructure — that creates demand for exactly the kind of forward-looking, predictive, scenario-based work that CI teams should be doing.

WHAT COMPETITIVE READINESS ACTUALLY REQUIRES

Competitive readiness is the organizational capability to convert competitive intelligence into coordinated action — proactively when possible, and at speed when required. It has four defining characteristics:

1. Cross-Functional Representation

A competitive readiness team is not a committee of CI professionals. It is a standing cross-functional group that includes designated and empowered representation from every function that would be required to respond to a material competitive event. At minimum, this typically includes:

- Commercial strategy and marketing
- Medical affairs
- Market access and reimbursement
- Regulatory affairs
- Clinical development
- Investor relations and communications
- Business development (where relevant)
- Competitive intelligence (driving intelligence input and scenario framing)

Each representative has two responsibilities. The first is to contribute their functional perspective to shared scenario planning — ensuring that the full organizational impact of potential competitive events is properly assessed. The second is to carry accountability back into their function: to develop function-specific action plans, to communicate those plans to their teams, and to lead execution when a scenario activates.

2. Governance That Drives Action

Competitive readiness requires governance — not bureaucracy, but a defined operating rhythm that forces the organization to engage with competitive scenarios before they become crises.

In practice, this means: a standing meeting cadence with a defined agenda structure; a clear owner for each scenario or competitive threat; explicit decision rights — who can approve a response, who needs to be informed, who can pull the trigger on communications; and a mechanism for escalating urgency when the environment changes.

Governance also means someone is accountable for the readiness function itself. Not for competitive responses — those belong to the cross-functional team — but for ensuring the system is maintained, that scenarios are updated, that the meeting happens, and that action items are tracked. This role is often co-led by CI leadership and a senior commercial or medical affairs colleague. It requires credibility across functions and the organizational standing to compel participation.

3. Scenario Planning Based on Imperfect Information

The most important thing a competitive readiness team does is not respond to competitive events. It is to plan for them before they happen.

This is where CI and readiness connect most directly. The CI team's forward-looking hypotheses — about when a competitor's Phase III data will read out, what their label might look like, how they're likely to position commercially, when they might file — become the inputs to readiness scenario planning. The readiness team takes those hypotheses and asks: if this happens, what do we do?

The discipline required here is tolerance for imperfect information. Competitive scenarios are not certainties. A CI team working on a hypothesis that a competitor will file for approval in Q3 may be right, may be six months off, may be wrong entirely. The readiness team cannot wait for certainty before planning. The scenarios are planned against probabilities, and the plans are refined as the picture sharpens.

The question every readiness team should be able to answer — at any point, for any major competitive scenario — is: 'What will we do if X happens?' And when X does happen, there is coordinated communication and a seamless plan of action put into place.

4. A Single Point of Accountability

One of the defining features of organizations without readiness infrastructure is the experience of a competitive event triggering a flurry of activity with no clear coordination point. Everyone is working. Nothing is coordinated. Communications go out of sequence. Sales teams get different messages than medical affairs. IR says something inconsistent with what marketing is saying. Leadership is frustrated.

A mature readiness function establishes a clear single point of accountability for competitive responses — not for all decisions, but for coordination. Someone who can say 'here is what we're doing, here is the sequence, here is who is doing what.' It is a coordination role. And it requires that the groundwork has been laid in advance.

THE CI TEAM'S ROLE IN COMPETITIVE READINESS

The competitive intelligence function is not the competitive readiness team. But it is the indispensable engine that makes a readiness team functional.

CI's specific contributions to readiness are:

- Identifying and framing the scenarios that the readiness team should be planning against — not based on what has already happened, but on forward-looking hypotheses grounded in systematic intelligence.
- Keeping scenario assumptions current as the intelligence picture evolves — ensuring that what the team planned for six months ago still reflects the actual competitive environment.
- Triggering escalation — recognizing when a signal indicates that a scenario is moving from hypothetical to imminent, and alerting the readiness governance structure.
- Providing analytical depth during readiness discussions — answering functional questions about competitor mechanisms, trial designs, regulatory pathways, and commercial positioning that inform the response.

The CI function's value is maximized when it is deeply embedded in the readiness structure — not as a reporter of news, but as the primary source of forward-looking intelligence that gives the readiness team something to plan against. CI should be co-leading the readiness process, not attending it as a guest.

This also creates a virtuous cycle for CI. When CI is embedded in a readiness structure, its forward-looking, predictive work has a direct outcome: it shapes the scenarios that the organization is preparing for. That visibility into impact is what sustains CI's organizational credibility over time — and what prevents it from devolving into a news aggregation function.

BUILDING IT: A PRACTICAL STARTING POINT

Organizations that want to build a genuine competitive readiness capability do not need to redesign their entire competitive strategy process. They need to make three commitments:

Commit to the Cross-Functional Structure

Establish a standing competitive readiness team with named representatives from each relevant function. Make clear that this is not an advisory committee. Members have accountability — for functional perspective in shared planning, and for function-specific plans in their own teams. Identify a co-leadership structure (CI plus a senior commercial or medical affairs partner often works well) with explicit responsibility for maintaining the system.

Establish a Governance Cadence

The readiness team needs a regular operating rhythm. A monthly or quarterly standing meeting may be a reasonable starting point for organizations with more distant competitive threats. Weekly meetings could be appropriate for highly dynamic and evolving markets during periods of heightened competitive activity. The agenda should be structured around the active scenario portfolio: which scenarios have changed, what new intelligence has shifted assumptions, what action items are open, what decisions need to be made, what new scenarios may we need to plan for. After a competitive event, teams should do a post-hoc analysis to refine processes, outputs, and ways of working.

Invest in Forward-Looking CI

The readiness team is only as good as the intelligence it runs on. If the CI function is primarily reactive — summarizing press releases, covering conferences, answering ad-hoc questions — the readiness team will have nothing to plan against. The CI team needs dedicated capacity for the kind of systematic, proactive monitoring that surfaces and interprets early signals that can drive forward-looking hypotheses.

CONCLUSION

The ideal competitive intelligence function is not a news aggregator. It is a strategic intelligence capability that generates early signals, builds forward-looking hypotheses, and drives scenario planning to give organizations a genuine head start on their competitive environment.

But that function reaches its full potential only when the organization it serves has built the readiness infrastructure to act on what it learns. Intelligence without readiness is information management. Intelligence with readiness is competitive advantage.

The organizations that navigate competitive disruption most effectively — that are never truly blindsided, that respond faster than their competitors expect (or proactively put competitors on their heels), that seem to always have a message ready, a plan in place, a narrative prepared — are not usually smarter or luckier than their peers. They have built a system that connects the information function to the action function.

That system is available to any organization willing to design it deliberately.

To learn how Pelorus Intelligence can support your competitive intelligence and readiness capabilities, visit www.pelorusintelligence.com or contact us at info@pelorusintel.com