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Good practice? Invest in a Framework!

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Many reports on major national initiatives like the Crime Reduction Programme acknowledge 'implementation failure'. Common explanations are 'poor project-management skills', or 'short-term funding regimes'. Important as these are, Heraclitus' excellent Soapbox article ('Good Practice - What's it all about?' *Network News*, Winter 2005) also blamed 'dumbing down.'

Higher echelons in crime prevention often believe 'The only information you can hope to get into practitioners' heads is a slogan or two, if lucky.' I totally disagree. Crime prevention's basic idea is simple (cutting the cause cuts the risk), but its practice is complex. Reliable, valid data must be collected; patterns analysed; evidence of what works assessed, selected and adapted (cookbook copying won't work); ideas implemented; people mobilised; and evaluation, adjustment and learning done and shared. The complexity is numerical, too. One excellent project on underage drinking had 13 different interventions. Until we winkled it out of the team in a 3-hour interview they didn't appreciate their own achievement... nor did anyone else.

Here's my main point: Given this complexity, it's futile dumbing down community safety knowledge into slogans and rapid-read case studies to aid communication, if these can't inspire actions that are sophisticated enough to do good and avoid harm. Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety is spot on - our mental frameworks must reflect the complexity of the problems they are intended to tackle.

> S – Scanning
> A – Analysis
> R – Response
> A – Assessment

SARA and the crime triangle are instant introductions to the problem-oriented approach to prevention. But once practitioners have grasped the basics they rapidly find little depth to guide action further; nor do they inspire the creativity vital to take community safety to new contexts and keep up with social change and adaptive criminals. SARAs 'Response' confuses several distinct activities. The crime triangle is incomplete and under-represents the offender side. Fragmentary part-models of causes abound. Each individual model (e.g. Routine Activities Theory, RAT) is simple – but they are all jumbled together leaving each practitioner to figure out how to combine them and cope with gaps, overlaps and competing explanations (e.g. how does RAT relate to Rational Offender? Where does self-control fit? The TV programme Scrapheap Challenge comes to mind). Plans to improve performance by acquiring and consolidating crime prevention and community safety knowledge through the 'IPAK' process (www.crimereduction.gov.uk/ipak01.htm), or setting national standards for partnership working are fine, but won't succeed without a decent framework and language to describe causes and interventions. This is basic good practice in knowledge management.

Why the drive to oversimplify?

Misunderstanding of practice and disdain for detail – senior policy makers prefer high-level abstractions such as Systematic Reviews, delivering messages like 'Street lighting is cost-effective at reducing crime and fear'. Fine for policy, but shift perspective to the street to be lit (how, when, where, involving whom?), and it's not remotely informative enough. Rapid job turnover among policymakers also discourages understanding of complexity.

Top-down stops too soon – top-down initiatives for improving community safety performance are important, but their designers somehow always leave their grand edifice miraculously suspended without a ground floor, let alone foundations. To fill the gap they rely on imperfect toolkits and minimalist peer-to-peer sharing of good practice, namely practitioners simply visiting successful projects; but the originators may have left, lack the time to talk, or have difficulty explaining what was done in clear, transferable terms that explicate the principles and tradeoffs.

Patronising attitude to practitioners – an assumption at the top that poor intellectually-challenged practitioners won't understand; that they are technicians with limited diagnostic skills and limited response repertoire. Unsurprisingly, working with practitioners confirms that complexity seen as relevant is handled well.

Reluctance to grasp the nettle of improving the frameworks for practice knowledge. Fear prevails that practitioners can't be prised from their comfort zones of crime triangle and SARA to accept something more functional, if initially more challenging. (Would you want your doctor's training to exclude relevant theory and knowledge of diagnosis and treatment to rely on four shallow, generalised steps?) The problem is compounded by the 'pick 'n' mix' approach to learning (e.g. on websites), and the reinvention of (often imprecise) terminology and structure in every new practice guidance document or toolkit. The slogans and superficial definitions often used by major initiatives give no clear and systematic grounding to practitioners' work.

What to do?

Adopt a strategy of 'high investment in professional training and support systems, for a high yield in performance'. Give practitioners a professional career start by equipping them with an adequate framework for understanding and intervening in crime and community safety - far better front-loaded than trying to pack lots of complex knowledge into aching heads while they struggle to do their jobs, by sole reliance on instant

learning from inadequate knowledge-bases and imperfectly-designed toolkits. An appropriate mental framework enables practitioners to efficiently take in more information, select what they need, assimilate it to what they already know, progressively grow in expertise and generate new high-quality ideas and actions. It also organises the knowledge-base.

But changing what practitioners bring to their work won't improve performance if their working situations don't evolve in step. So, treat and manage practitioners less like box-tickers and more like consultants with principles, evidence and methods at their fingertips ready to combine into innovative
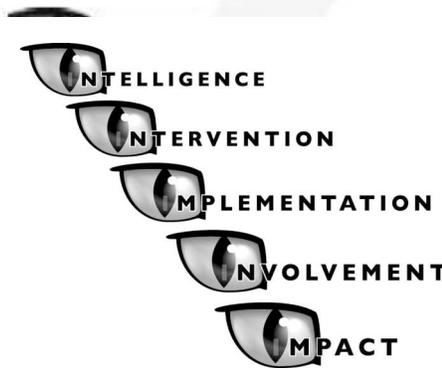
and plausible solutions in each new context. Development of appropriate career structures and a receptive organisational environment for sophisticated problem-oriented action could be helped by proposals in the review of the C&D Act 1998 for strategy-tactics distinction, and the embedding of problem-solving in the National Intelligence Model (NIM).

What sort of framework do practitioners need?

I've developed 'precision tools' to handle appropriate complexity in the knowledge and practice of crime prevention and community safety. The Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity (CCO) (*Fig 1*) is a one-stop shop for causes of crime and principles of intervention, incorporating the crime triangle, RAT, offender-oriented approaches and more. The 5Is framework (*Fig 2*) captures, consolidates and transfers knowledge of the process of prevention, revising and extending SARA's headings (into Intelligence, Intervention, Implementation, Involvement and Impact). Both zoom from top-level overviews into organised detail allowing a wide choice of intervention methods, configuration of solutions to context, and innovation. Both fit the problem-solving

strategy/tactics of NIM and are being applied (e.g. the Youth Justice Board advocates 5Is to capture good practice from YOTs; the Swedish National Crime Prevention Council requires local funding bids to use 5Is to describe their proposals). See both frameworks on www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/lz_learning.htm#theory and a project description on www.crimereduction.gov.uk/gpps05.htm. A powerful definition of community safety developed by a range of stakeholders is on www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/community_safety_strategy.pdf p7 - but sadly not in the recent National Community Safety Plan!

I'm now collaborating with graphic and web designers to make CCO and 5Is as user-friendly as they are functional, and to couple them closer. Let's work together to un-dumb community safety theory, knowledge and training. Look at further material on the frameworks, guidelines and examples at www.designagainstcrime.com/web/crimeframeworks, and send criticisms and suggestions, especially examples of use. The more it's a collective effort, the better the results and hopefully the better our gains in performance.

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INTELLIGENCE
INTERVENTION
IMPLEMENTATION
INVOLVEMENT
IMPACT

Problem Space: a Map of Symptoms and of Crime Prevention Objectives

Place · Time · Crime type · Victim · Modus operandi · Offender · Crime target

Crime or disorder event

Diagnosis space: the Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity

remote causes of crime or disorder event

Offender presence in situation · Anticipation of risk, effort and reward · Target person or property · Resources for crime · Target enclosure · Readiness to offend (motives/ emotion) · Wider environment · Lack of skills to avoid crime · Absence of crime preventers · Criminality (predisposition) · Crime promoters

Immediate precursors of crime or disorder event

SITUATION

Crime or disorder event

OFFENDER

Intervention in cause

Disruption of Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity

Decreased risk of crime events

OFFENDER

Crime prevention method · CRIME PREVENTION PACKAGE · Crime prevention method 3 · Crime prevention method 2

SITUATION