Let's face it – crime prevention is complex

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Paul Ekblom

p.ekblom@csm.arts.ac.uk
www.designagainstcrime.com click crimeframeworks

Overview

- Policymakers, delivery managers, practitioners and researchers in crime prevention all prefer simplicity in theory, method and description

- Simplification has gone too far – crime prevention is complex

- Oversimplification has had damaging and constraining effects:
  - On policy, delivery and practice
  - On theory

- We should reconcile simplicity and complexity

- This necessitates a *design*-type approach to how we collect, manage and communicate knowledge of crime prevention practice, with implications for:
  - Theory
  - Process models
  - Replication
  - Tacit knowledge
  - Practitioner education
  - Conduct and utilisation of evaluations

- A suite of frameworks exist aiming to realise these requirements

Simpler overview

David Birley, delivery expert attached to Home Office, 1987, on hearing that a conference had concluded that 'crime prevention was a lot more complicated than people had thought'

'Damn!'

The gift to be simple?

- Criminological researchers and evaluators, and program delivery managers, share a long-standing concern to avoid *over-complicating things* for politicians, policymakers, public & practitioners

- Simplicity has clear benefits…

Simplicity – some benefits

- Helps to communicate understanding and know-how to practitioners and their management

- Ensures action is basic and robust enough to be implemented by practitioners with limited training

- Helps preventive action to appear self-evident and frugal enough, to appeal to funders

- Enables messages and understandings to compete and survive in the world of popular opinion, politics and sound-bite media

- Makes for easier policy choices and delivery strategies

- Supports scientific parsimony

Simplicity is a valid principle but…

- Single-minded pursuit of simplicity not always consistent with good public understanding, policy, delivery, practice or research

- All of the benefits have downsides

Simplicity in politics and public understanding

- Narrow performance management agenda and search for easy universal solutions, limit scope for adapting interventions to context, and innovation

- Theory & applied research shackled to political 'common sense'

- Citizen involvement in prevention means everyday understandings cannot be ignored by academics or professional crime preventers

- 'Progress' towards better practice constrained as crime prevention adjusts to slogans and ephemeral political fixes

Simplicity in policy choice

- **Systematic Reviews** of crime prevention interventions tend to give 1-dimensional answers to guide policy choice – 'does it work, is it cost-effective?' when there is a whole raft of 'Choice magazine'-type questions that should be asked, answered and acted upon

Simplicity in delivery of practice

- In general

  - Good practice guidance is brief and superficial

  - 'Cookbook copying' supplants intelligent replication

- With **Situational Prevention & POP**

  - Practitioner material sloganised, simple diagrams, homely metaphors and elemental theories

  - Theories not joined up

- On the **offender-oriented** side

  - Practitioner charisma and tacit knowledge

  - Obscuration

  - Simple risk/protective factor menus, rigid procedural recipes

Extreme simplicity – adaptive or maladaptive?

- Simplicity seems an *adaptation* to crime prevention context

- But is 'pure simplification' *maladaptive*?

- Can simplicity *alone* deliver?

- Should we strive to accommodate to greater complexity and perhaps challenge the environment to which we currently just seek to adapt?

The dismal leg-iron of Implementation Failure

Implementation failure

- Many evaluations of crime prevention have shown performance to be limited
  - Mainstreaming of 'success story' academic-led demonstration projects often disappoints
  - A pervasive problem across English-speaking world (and probably everywhere)
  - From Problem-Oriented Policing to Communities That Care, and much of UK government Crime Reduction Programme

Implementation Failure – the case of Problem-Oriented Policing

- No pervasive **adoption** of POP despite long effort

- Where POP *is* officially adopted, **embedding** it within police organisation and culture remains limited

- Where POP activity is undertaken, often done **poorly**

- Bullock et al. (2006) – UK entries to Tilley Award for POP projects showed **no trend of improvement** in quality of entries 1999-2005 despite intensive effort

What's causing implementation failure?

- Explanations include
  - Deficient project management skills
  - Limited analytic capacity of practitioners
  - Short-term funding
  - Over-centralised management
  - Unsupportive organisational context
  - Mission drift
- These are valid but they neglect
  - *Inadequate knowledge of practice*
  - *Inadequate knowledge of delivery*

Implementation Failure – contribution of limitations in knowledge and understanding

- Inadequate supply of people with skills to develop & implement sound projects

- Limits to practitioners' understanding of the causes of crime, in general and regarding specific crime problems

- Training limited in quality and quantity

- Career development traditions of generalism and 'moving on' among police and local government

- Limitations in information evaluations collect and synthesise

Confessions of complexity

- Link between crime prevention knowledge, complexity and implementation failure is circumstantial

- But researchers increasingly acknowledge complexity as an issue – even the 'arch-simplifiers' in the world of Situational Prevention and POP

Confessions of complexity in SCP-POP

- Knutsson & Clarke 2006 *Putting theory to work. Implementing Situational Prevention and Problem-Oriented Policing*
- Every chapter mentions or implies complexity as an issue:
  - **Intro** – even <u>seemingly straightforward interventions can be difficult to implement</u> for a variety of technical, managerial & social reasons
  - **Laycock** – <u>complex picture</u> of rights, responsibilities, vulnerabilities of institutions/individuals able to beneficially influence causes of crime
  - **Scott** – <u>complexity of implementation</u> as one explanation of why problem-oriented initiatives succeed or fail
  - **Brown** – evaluation of UK government's Reducing Burglary Initiative showed interventions appearing simple on paper could be <u>deceptively complex</u> and time consuming when it comes to implementation stage
  - **Knutsson** – success of Norwegian project on controlling illegal taxi services partly due to <u>unusual absence of technical complexity</u>
  - **Hough** – systematic <u>misjudgement about complexity</u> of the preventive enterprise – complexities in achieving institutional legitimacy and communicating social meaning within social control agencies – 'modernisation project' of government is ill-equipped to handle it
  - **Homel** – overarching cause of implementation failure in the UK Crime Reduction Programme was <u>failure to treat the programme and all its levels as a *system*</u>
  - **Bowers & Johnson** – <u>complexity of the implementation process</u> necessitates a risk management framework to help practitioners avoid implementation failure
  - **Pease** – <u>complex entities</u> that individuals, firms or government departments must understand in implementing plans – other individuals, firms and government departments – lead to enormous uncertainties between intent and outcome
  - **Tilley** – knowledge to be conveyed for POP to succeed is <u>much more complicated than first assumed</u>. Requirement to supply <u>relatively complex guidance</u> to 'reflexive practitioners'

What is this demon, complexity?

Complexity of crime prevention illustrated

- Quantitative complexity

  - Classifying crime problems generates thousands of cells

  - Causes of crime are many, and act at different ecological levels such as individual, family, community or society

  - Sheer exuberant variety of intervention methods

  - Practical realisation of methods – diverse ecological levels of action, institutional settings, geographical scales, long implementation chains

- Qualitative complexity

  - Interaction between causes – context dependence of replication

  - Emergence – networks, markets and opportunity structures

  - Complex adaptive systems – dynamic interpersonal interactions even within micro-situation – plus criminal counter-moves, arms races etc

  - Implementers as well as criminals make own adaptations to intervention

Accepting complexity (1)

- We should accept complexity, and not just adapt to a simplistic world-view of crime and crime prevention – but:

  - **Scale** of knowledge requires ways of **organising and managing** it

  - **Combinatorial complexity** means **gaps in knowledge** of what works and how to implement it can't be filled by cumulative research effort

  - **Innovation** important

    - Practitioners must **improvise** to make up knowledge deficit

    - Co-evolving crime & crime prevention, and wider social & technological change, makes what works now, a **wasting asset** needing replenishment

Accepting complexity (2)

- How should practice-oriented academics respond?

  - Seek proper tension between simplicity & complexity in all aspects of prevention

  - Remember that parsimony is actually about being as simple as possible *but no simpler* (Einstein)

  - So where reality demands more complexity and/or emergence, it should be incorporated; but start from simplest position where every complicating factor must fight empirically & logically to justify its inclusion

Sorted? 'Appropriate complexity'

- Ashby's *Law of Requisite Variety*

  - In designing a **control** system to influence some **real-world** system, it takes complexity to control complexity

  - Real world is crime; control system is prevention

  - Our **concepts** of crime and crime prevention must be of *appropriate complexity* to handle real complexity out there

  - Our **communications of knowledge** to practitioners must be of *appropriate complexity* to get knowledge across – futile dumbing down

  - Equally futile if practitioners not endowed with expertise to understand, critique and assimilate that knowledge
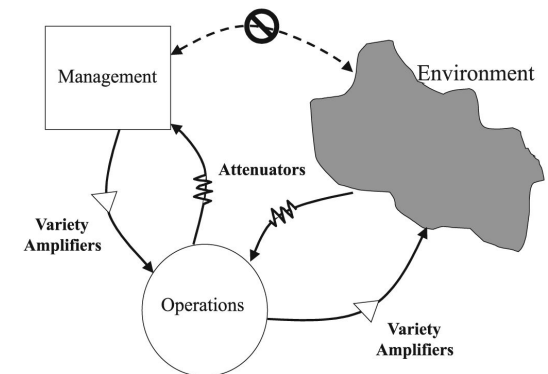
Source: Adapted from Beer (1985)

- Adaptation requires intelligent design
    - In case you were wondering… not this **>**
    …but this **v**
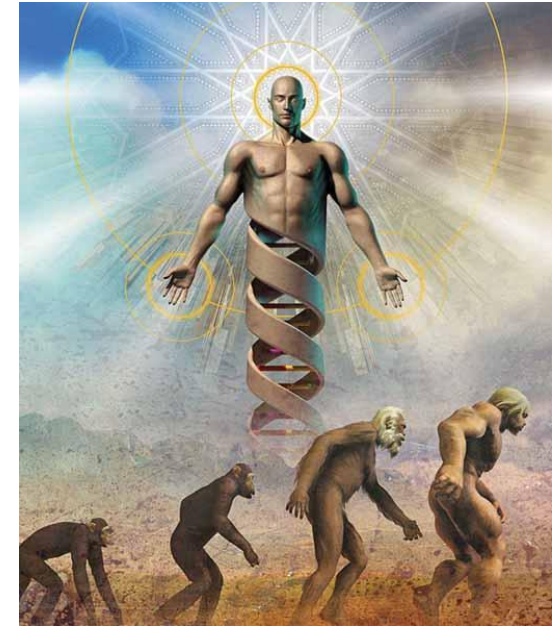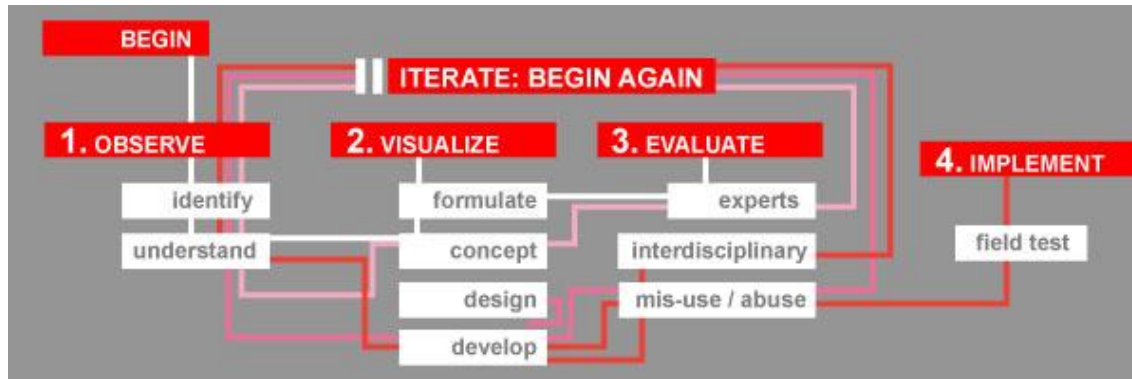
- Design works best when 'requirements capture' identifies **contradictions** – e.g. **simplicity v complexity** – and maximises on **both** by creativity & ingenuity not compromise

- Strategy is to apply Ashby's Law and use a *small* injection of *well-designed* complexity into our *frameworks* to tame the *greater and more chaotic* complexity *out there*

Adapting prevention to appropriate complexity –strategic requirements

- Being Generative

- Helping theory to engage with complexity

- More complex process models for doing prevention

- A learning engine

- Articulating complexity

- The process of knowledge capture

- Educating practitioners to cope with complexity

- Ensuring their organisations invest in practitioner education and support sophisticated working

- Enriching and organising information that evaluations capture

Being generative

- To close Malthusian gap between our knowledge and complex reality, our theory and process models must help practitioners *improvise, adapt and innovate* to new contexts & new problems

- This can only be done if they are *generative*

- Just as grammar and vocab enable an enormous number of comprehensible sentences to be uttered…

- Our theory and process models, plus our evidence of what works, must enable practitioners to
  – Generate plausible, 'grammatical' proposals for action
 – Refine & adjust them through trial & feedback

Helping theory to engage with complexity

- Focus on generative **causal mechanisms** underlying theory

- Describe preventive interventions in twin discourses:

  - Real world **method**

  - Analytic **principles**

- Actively consider **interactions** between theoretical processes, and **emergence** of new, higher-level causes

- **Integrate** theories within and between fields

- Whilst awaiting the perfect integrating theory, consider broad integrating-frameworks like **Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity**

More complex process models: educating SARA?

- Process models need to help practitioners

  - **Select** action from knowledge base

  - **Replicate** in own context and/or

  - **Innovate**

- This requires much more detail, and progressive structure to manage it, than models like SARA offer – especially the Response stage

- Generative, combinatorial innovation enabled by

  - Breaking action into 'interchangeable elements'

  - Method : principle dualism
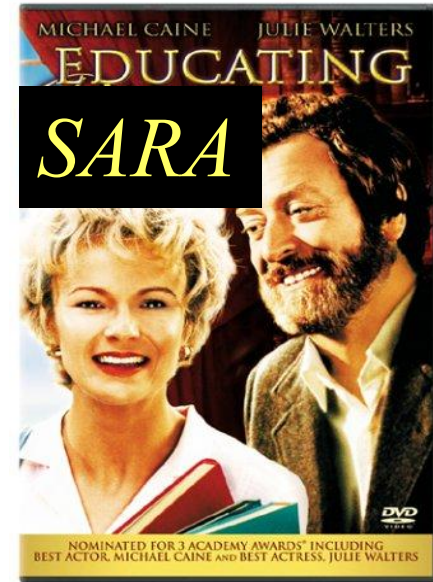
A learning engine

- Theories and process models are already learning engines – they cumulate – but need to be made more explicitly so

- Principles of Adaptive Learning – Piaget

  - **Assimilation** (new knowledge fitted into old frame)

  - **Accommodation** (existing frame adapted to cover new knowledge)

  - Example – *target softening* and Clarke's 25 Techniques of Situational Prevention – do we:

    - Jam it under target hardening? (assimilation)

    - Make a new category or revise what we call the existing category? (accommodation)

Product Ref: 82/90

Articulating complexity

- Articulation needs strategies like:

  - Extracting **tacit knowledge** by improving our **terminology and definitions** and developing **systematic headings** for capturing knowledge and retrieving it

  - **Flexible, generative language**, not rigid sequence of preventive actions

  - Explicit attention to **discourse** – technical, functional, legal etc

  - Communicating complexity by **graphic & interactive design**
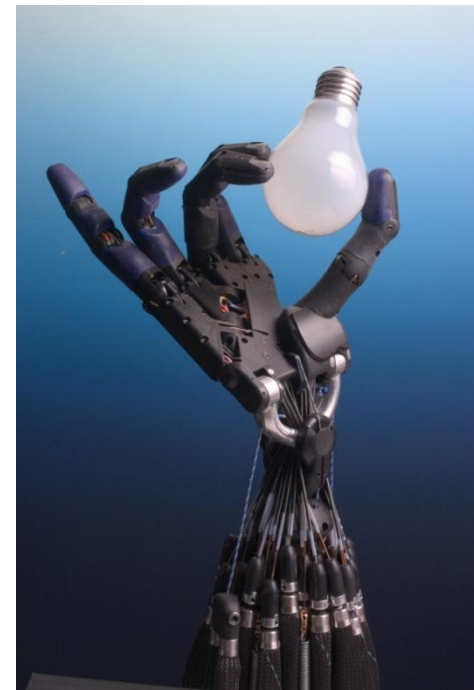
The process of knowledge capture – the practice of learning about practice

- Acquisition

  - Structured interviews, not Management Info forms, or 'contact email'

  - Important not just to capture **choices** made at each stage of planning and implementation, but **tradeoffs, issues and conflicting considerations** behind those choices

- Evaluation of Process

  - Description of process must lead to evaluation of the various individual replicable elements of action, and of whole sequences and packages

  - Process evaluation, if systematic, can lead to benchmarking

- Consolidation – the job of 'middle-range' theory… theories of intervention, of mobilisation, of practicalities of implementation

- While **designing our frameworks** to handle real complexity of prevention, we must simultaneously raise the complexity that **practitioners** can cope with

- Some believe practitioners can only handle simple slogans - **true**?

- Provided the frameworks reflect *natural* complexity of the job that practitioners tackle, they can cope

- Practitioners – less like **technicians,** more like **consultants**

- Education & training must therefore be at appropriate level

- Our **theoretical models** of crime causation and preventive intervention, **process models**, and capacity for generating & describing action through **appropriate language** must become an integrated mental *schema*

- This schema must get into practitioners' heads early in their career, so it becomes the way

  – They view the world

  – Generate innovative action

  – Efficiently ingest and assimilate new experiences

Ensuring organisations invest in practitioner education and support sophisticated working

- Pointless educating practitioners as consultants if they can't use professional discretion, or if that discretion becomes too detached from organisational goals and strategic/ tactical decisionmaking

- So organisational development has to proceed in step
  - Intelligence-Led Policing may help here

What works – multiple dimensions needed

- A rigorous and systematic evidence base is vital
- But Systematic Reviews of what works are currently not sufficient to inform policy, delivery or practice
- 'What Works' knowledge is often compressed into just a few numbers – **% fall in crime, effect size, cost effectiveness**
- These are crucial but …
  - A **richer, multi-dimensional input** is needed for nurturing intelligent decision-making, planning and implementation
  - A *Choice Report* approach
    - **What's overall good value**
    - **What's best for you**
  - Scope and methods of **process & impact evaluations** must support this

Additional Dimensions of Choice when selecting interventions (1)

Overall good value – beyond cost-effectiveness, are actions:

- *Responsive?*
  - Can they be efficiently *targeted* on *causes* of crime?
  - Can they be efficiently *prioritised* on basis of the harmful *consequences* of crime, *needs* of victim and wider society?
- *Legitimate* and *acceptable to community*?
- *Sustainable* in effectiveness, financial, Human Resource terms?
- *Adaptable* – proofed against social/ technological change and adaptive offenders?
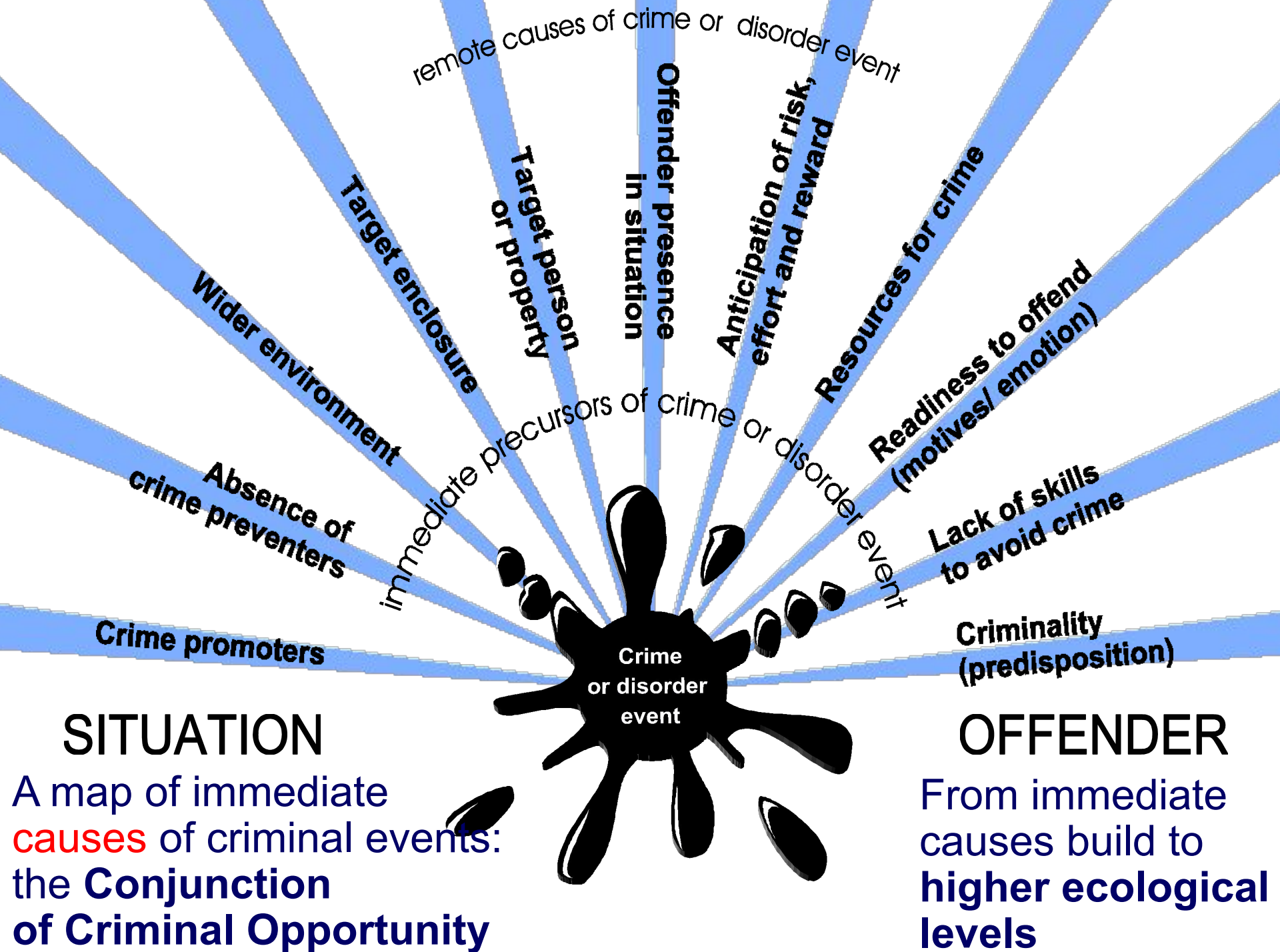- *Deliverable* with an acceptable level of risk, given the context and the resources available?

Choices to fit the crime problem and context
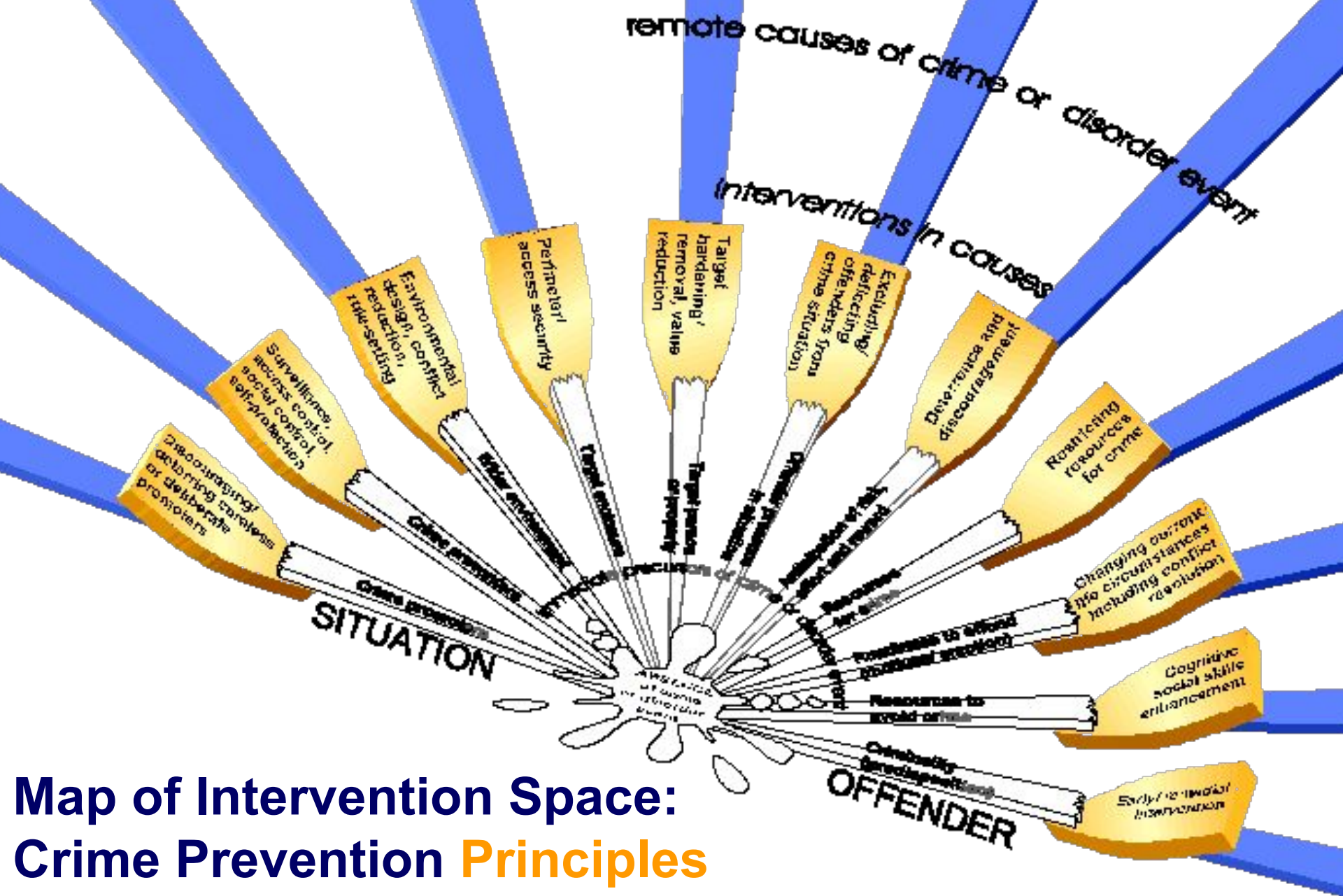
- Over what *timescale* and *geographical scale* is the action designed to operate?

- What are the *conflicts, tradeoffs and synergies* with other policy values (privacy, energy consumption, justice, regeneration…)

- What is the *scope* of the action – does it tackle a narrow range of crime types or a broad range? Does it go beyond crime?

- *Coverage* on the ground – *how much* of the crime problem tackled? (eg is it cost-effective in only some types of area, or all areas?)

# Frameworks supporting a more complex approach and aiming to meet design criteria

- **Definitions** including

  – Crime Prevention
  – Community safety
  – Partnership

- **Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity**

  – Integrating framework which maps immediate causal mechanisms of criminal events and preventive interventions in those causes, on offender and situational sides

- **5Is – Process model**

  – A language and a map for describing all the stages of the preventive process, thereby capturing and sharing good practice know-how and identifying requirements to support delivery
    - Intelligence
    - Intervention
    - Implementation
    - Involvement
    - Impact

# Additional slides not presented at conference

remote causes of crime or disorder event

immediate precursors of crime or disorder event

Wider environment

Target enclosure

Target person or property

Offender presence in situation

Anticipation of risk, effort and reward

Resources for crime

Readiness to offend (motives/ emotion)

Absence of crime preventers

Lack of skills to avoid crime

Crime promoters

Criminality (predisposition)

Crime or disorder event

SITUATION

A map of immediate causes of criminal events: the **Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity**

OFFENDER

From immediate causes build to **higher ecological levels**

Map of Intervention Space:
Crime Prevention Principles
and the Conjunction of
Criminal Opportunity
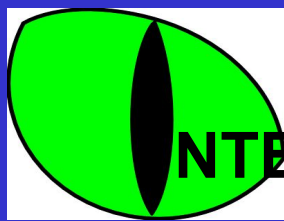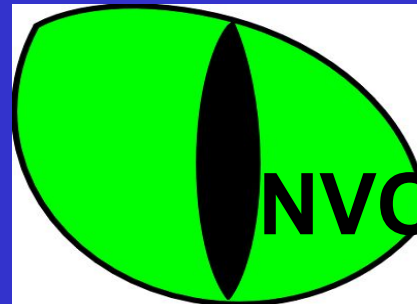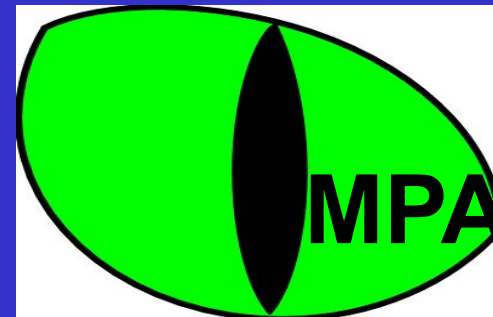
INTELLIGENCE
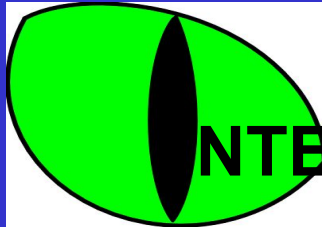
INTERVENTION
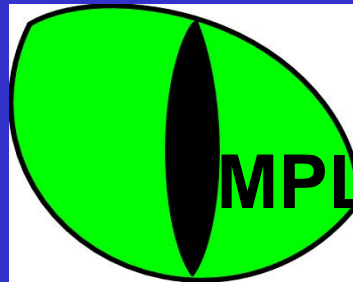
IMPLEMENTATION

INVOLVEMENT

IMPACT

The Five Is

**The tasks of the Preventive Process**

5Is - features

- Can be used both to record, retrieve and 'playback' preventive action
- Designed to facilitate intelligent replication and innovation
- Respects the dual discourses of analytic principle and practical method
- Defines a whole raft of action terms
- Is more a language for describing complex action than a rigid sequence of steps
- Builds on SARA but spans offender-oriented prevention as well as SCP-POP
- Is structured so it can handle and organise progressive detail – by Zooming in

The Zoom Structure (1)

Message: Intelligence:

Map: Causes, risk/ protective factors:

Methodology: Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity
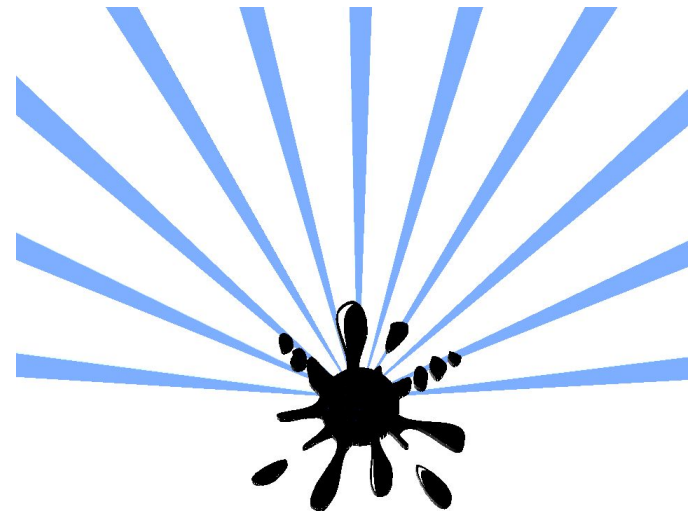
The Zoom Structure (2)

Message: **Involvement:**

Map: **Partnership, Mobilisation, Climate-setting:**

Methodology: **Mobilisation** – CLAIMED

- **C**larify crime prevention roles/ tasks to achieve

- **L**ocate appropriate preventive agents

- **A**lert and **I**nform them

- **M**otivate them

- **E**mpower them - increase capacity

- **D**irect them - objectives, standards

Conclusion – a reassuring message?

- Crime and its prevention are undoubtedly complex

- But the complexity **can be tamed** provided we develop suitable frameworks and languages to handle it within research and practice, and provided we adapt our institutions to support this

- This requires a high level of **investment** in

    - Concepts

    - Capture of knowledge through evaluations

    - Sharing of knowledge & skills through training, guidance etc

to deliver a high **yield** in terms of successful

performance in crime prevention