

Improving

^ The language of situations: risk looms and opportunity knocks



Risk and Opportunity

- The concepts of **risk** and **opportunity** have been in heavy use from early days of SCP
- But are they still **fit for purpose**?
- Do they need an **upgrade, deepening and extension**? For example -
 - Is risk **subordinate** to opportunity (as in opportunity = risk, effort, reward)?
 - Or should it be on **same level**, e.g. as an **opposite**?
 - How do they relate to usage of the same terms in fields **beyond SCP**?

Coming up....

- **Language of situations – holding SCP back?**
- **Developing a convention**
 - **Basics of risk and opportunity**
 - **Humans as caused agents, with goals**
 - **Defining risk and opportunity symmetrically**
 - **How do risk and opportunity relate to each other?**
 - **Estimating and characterising risk**
 - **Estimating and characterising opportunity**
- **Causation**
- **Variations in kinds of risk and opportunity**
- **Where next?**

Language of situations – some issues

- ‘Language of situations’ is deficient
 - SCP emphasises ‘view **from** offender’ over ‘view **of** offender’
 - But the ‘**fundamental attribution bias**’ when we observe other people’s behaviour leads vernacular language to develop more terms for **dispositions** than **situations**
- This implies we may lack the best **tools for thinking and communication** even within typical SCP
- And **extending our reach** makes additional demands
 - Beyond individual situations, interest in more **strategic** approaches e.g. niches, enterprises and opportunity structures
 - New action domains e.g. **Design Against Crime, Security and CT**
 - New **source concepts and methods** e.g. in design, hard science, economics, ecology/ foraging, co-evolutionary arms races, military, health and safety, disaster and resilience, business/enterprise, all with own languages and concepts

Risk and opportunity

Limitations in the concepts of risk and opportunity

- **Risk**



- Alternative definitions and terms – how does it relate to threat, danger, vulnerability, hazard?
- Used in SCP rather loosely - most security and economics literature separates **probability** from **harm**, we don't do this clearly enough
- Exclusive focus on **offender's** risk, conceptually detached from 'risk of crime'

- **Opportunity**



- How related to niche,, honest opportunity, opportunity structure, enterprise?
- Any useful links to classical opportunity theories?
- Opportunity is ecological, not purely situational – co-determined by offender resources
- Opportunity not the whole story – **precipitation**

If this is this holding SCP back, what do we do about it?

- We can't devise a **perfect** suite of definitions that cover all our needs and link with all our widening range of cross/inter-disciplinary connections
- But we can try to develop a **convention** for our own use, that is clearly- and deeply-enough defined
 - To support **internal exchanges** within SCP
 - To render thinking more agile when **flipping between offender/preventer perspectives** – Red team, Blue team
 - To make for a clear **interface with other disciplines**
 - They know exactly what our terms mean and we know theirs
 - We can accurately translate rather than stumble over 'faux amis' where term is same but concept different

Developing a candidate convention

- Aiming to cover basic definitions of **risk and opportunity** plus suite of related concepts needed to provide a complete and consistent framework
- Starting in a way that is **generic** and not specific to crime, so as to support agility of perspective and to forge widest links with other disciplines
- Only an introduction here, much more at <http://riskopp.wordpress.com>

Risk and opportunity basics

- Risk and opportunity are both **ecological** concepts
- They relate to how **agents** actively **cope** with, and **forage** in, their **environment** in the face of uncertain outcomes
 - The risk may never materialise
 - The opportunity may not come about or be realised
- Need a detour on **agents...**

Humans as *caused agents* (ECCA 2007)

- Twin discourses used for explaining behaviour of people in all roles – offenders, crime preventers, crime promoters:
 - Perception, emotion, motivation are **caused**
 - Simultaneously, we are rational-ish, goal-o **causing**
- Links to
 - Wortley's 2-stage **precipitation & opportunity** model
 - **Risk/effort/reward + provocation** in 25 techniques of SCP
 - Wikström's **agency** model
 - Ekblom **Rich Offender** idea



Risk and opportunity basics

- The **goals** agents pursue can be
 - **Positive** (events or states to **seek** or to cause)
 - **Negative** (events or states to **avoid** or prevent).
- Foraging generally involves **both** simultaneously
 - E.g. seeking a good time at a club whilst avoiding getting mugged on the way home
- The goals range from top-level (survival, procreation etc) to subsidiary, **instrumental** means to ends (get coat to survive winter, get hat to impress)
- The goals may be organised in strategic **plans** and/or tactical **scripts**

Definitions – risk and opportunity

- A **risk** is a **possible event** or set of similar events of a certain probability whose occurrence would **jeopardise** one or more of the goals of an agent
- An **opportunity** is a **possible event** or set of similar events of a certain probability whose occurrence would **meet** one or more of the existing goals of an agent
- The goals in question could be **ultimate** ends or **intermediate** means to those ends

Definitions – risk and opportunity

- Examples of positive or negative goals:
 - A **risk** of being attacked – negative, avoiding-goal in jeopardy
 - A **risk** of missing a bargain – a positive, seeking-goal in jeopardy – surely an opportunity about to be missed
 - An **opportunity** for acquiring a bargain – a positive, seeking-goal can be met
 - An **opportunity** to elude attack – a negative, avoiding-goal can be met
- This shows the two concepts entangled and at the same level

How do risk and opportunity relate?

- However, risk may be more **inclusive** than opportunity
 - Many more ways things can **go wrong** for an agent than can go right
 - Risks are **present** and may have to be coped with even when the agent is not out foraging but asleep in a cave
- A risk is something an agent **avoids or tolerates**; an opportunity something to be **grasped** not just blundered into – takers and makers
- Though one could seize an opportunity to eliminate a risk, tolerate a risk to exploit an opportunity, or tolerate a risk that the opportunity will be lost

How do risk and opportunity relate?

- Whether something is classed as a risk or an opportunity is partly determined by **how the goal is phrased**: avoidance of crime = seeking security
- But the positive goal often represents something at a higher level.
 - Consumption of food (as a **consummatory act**) is a far broader positive experience than merely satisfying hunger
 - **Community safety** is broader than **security**

Estimating risk

- *A **risk** to a given agent can be represented as the **probability** of occurrence of a **possible event** (or set of similar events) multiplied by the **harm** from that event*
 - *Where **harm** relates to the **positive and negative goals** whose achievement that event **jeopardises**, whether at an **ultimate** or an **intermediate** step*

Characterising risk

Hazard:
something
with
potential to
cause harm

Risk
has 3
aspects

Possibility – nature of event

Who does what to whom/what?

Probability of event

How likely is it to happen?

Harm from event

What is the harm?

To whom and/or to what?

When does it happen – immediate
or knock-on?

Intermediate or ultimate goal?
Positive or negative?



What does this imply for Rational Choice Theory?

- The 'risk' of 'risk, effort and reward' may be too **loosely defined**
- Can have risk that
 - **Harm** will befall offender
 - **Effort** will be too great in relation to **reward**
 - **Reward** could fail to materialise at all
- Is '**danger**' a better term?
- And recall that risk/danger, effort and reward are **interchangeable currencies**
 - To reduce danger I may tolerate less reward or boost effort
 - To boost possible reward I may tolerate more danger or risk of failure

Estimating opportunity

- An **opportunity** to a given agent can be represented as the **probability** of occurrence of a possible event (or set of similar events) multiplied by the **benefit** from that event
- Where **benefit** relates to the **positive and negative goals** whose achievement that event meets, whether as an ultimate or intermediate step

Characterising opportunity?

Boon:
something
with potential
to cause
benefit

Opportunity
has 3 aspects

Possibility – nature of event

Who does what to whom/what?

Probability of event

How likely is it to happen?

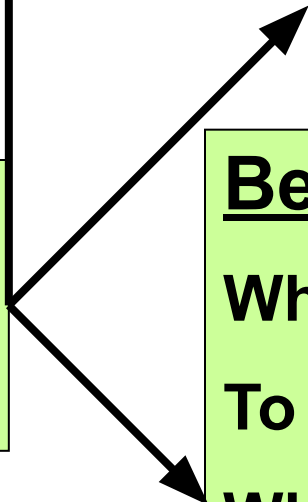
Benefit from event

What is the benefit?

To whom and/or to what?

When does it happen – immediate
or knock-on?

Intermediate or ultimate goal?
Positive or negative?



Risks and opportunities can be described in 3 ways

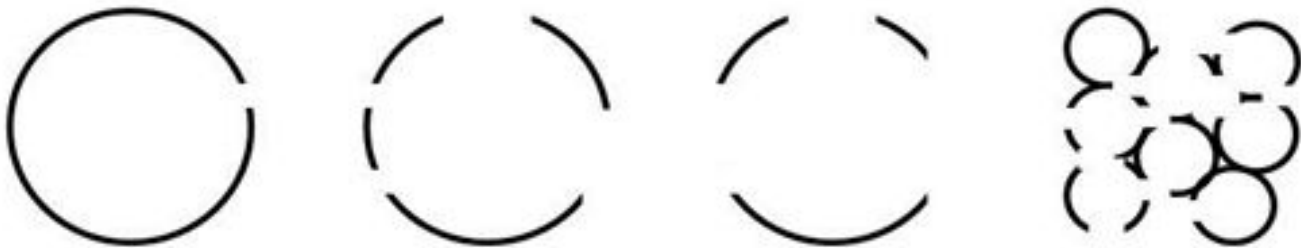
- As **empirical risk and protective factors** and their opportunity equivalent
 - CRAVED, EVIL DONE conventionally seen as risk factors but from offender perspective are opportunity factors
- **Goal**
 - **Threat** = hazard with intention behind it
 - **Promise** = boon with intention behind it
- **Cause**
 - Conventional views – Crime Triangle, CCO
 - Hazards, facilitating conditions, **vulnerabilities** giving rise to heightened probability of undesired event, **susceptibilities** to harm – and opportunity counterparts?

Causes of risk and opportunity

- Hazards and boons are **causes** – causal preconditions of undesired or desired event
- They are usually **necessary but not sufficient** for the event to occur
- This is where **conjunctions** like the **Crime Triangle** or the **CCO** come in
- And where the agent can make an **active difference** in spotting and shaping those conjunctions

Risks and opportunities vary in terms of obviousness and effort

- From **high risk and a doddle of an opportunity** with most hazards and boons in place and visible
- To **vague risk and remote opportunity** that really have to be worked at imaginatively, creatively and persistently to discern them and make them happen or not happen



I should probably stop about now...

- Where does this take us?
 - Main purpose is to jolt us out of complacent understanding we have had on risk and opportunity
 - Do we need to modify terms, approaches in SCP?
 - There's a lot more to consider in terms of opportunity structure, risk structure, net opportunity structure, risk landscape, environment, niche, etc – in draft at <http://riskopp.wordpress.com> – **please comment!**
- But pure **instrumentalism** is only part of the story
 - We have an emotional, motivational cognitive accompaniment – the **caused** agent and crime **precipitators** have to be intimately woven in

Wait for it...



Control *principles* – how control tasks work via influencing perpetrator

- **Defeat** – physically block access and movement or block/obscure information perpetrator wants to collect
- **Disable/deny** – equipment helpful to perpetrators, such as bugs or cameras
- **Direct/deflect** – perpetrators towards/away from place or behaviour
- **Deter-known** – perpetrator knows what risk of exposure is, and judges it unacceptable so abandons/aborts HR attempt
- **Deter-unknown** – perpetrator uncertain what control methods he's up against, so again judges risk of exposure unacceptable
- **Discourage** – perpetrator perceives effort too great, reward too little, relative to risk, so abandons/aborts attempt
- **Demotivate** – awakening, within perpetrator, motives/emotions contrary to mission, e.g. empathy with potential victims, removing excuses, coward image
- **Deceive** – perpetrator acts on wrong information on risk, effort, reward, where to go etc, and is exposed to immediate arrest or protracted intelligence collection, frustrated, or falsely decides not to select this site as target
- **Disconcert** – causing perpetrator to make involuntary movement or otherwise become startled
- **Detect** – passive, and active exposure to make perpetrator self-expose by instrumental, expressive or involuntary action; by making legitimate presence/behaviour distinctive; and by improving capacity to detect, of people exercising security role
- **Detain** – once perpetrators detected, they must be caught and held (or at least, credible identifying details must be obtained so they can be traced)

Questions and responses

- Is there a risk of overloading practitioners with, say, so many Ds?
 - Practice knowledge in our field has grown over the last 30 years (if it had not, what were we *doing* all that time?), so we have to face up to the need to communicate more of it. This needs organisation of the knowledge in one way or another.
 - Alliterated lists or acronyms (CRAVED etc) are equally problematic, but the way forward is probably through interactive graphical toolkits which in my experience succeed in conveying more detailed and/or more complex material to practitioners
 - In any case, getting virtually all principal intervention principles of the SCP field onto a single slide of single sentence descriptions is highly efficient consolidation of knowledge
- Practitioners tend to use terms like risk, threat, hazard etc completely carelessly and interchangeably and seem to get on ok, so why bother trying to improve/standardise them? Does it matter?
 - It matters because practitioners armed with sharper tools for thinking, communication and collaboration are likely to perform better (though this should ideally be tested empirically). Security personnel on whom the Ds were tried, for example, strongly appreciated the understanding conferred by these principles
 - It matters for purposes of building crime *science* – all sciences and science based practice disciplines (e.g. medicine) have found it necessary and beneficial to develop a controlled vocabulary; for example, Intelligence-Led Policing book spends half a chapter defining and distinguishing between data, information and intelligence.