

Let's face it – crime prevention is complex

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**DESIGN
AGAINST
CRIME**



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?

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 seemingly straightforward interventions can be difficult to implement for a variety of technical, managerial & social reasons
 - **Laycock** – complex picture of rights, responsibilities, vulnerabilities of institutions/individuals able to beneficially influence causes of crime
 - **Scott** – complexity of implementation 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 deceptively complex and time consuming when it comes to implementation stage
 - **Knutsson** – success of Norwegian project on controlling illegal taxi services partly due to unusual absence of technical complexity
 - **Hough** – systematic misjudgement about complexity 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 failure to treat the programme and all its levels as a system
 - **Bowers & Johnson** – complexity of the implementation process necessitates a risk management framework to help practitioners avoid implementation failure
 - **Pease** – complex entities 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 much more complicated than first assumed. Requirement to supply relatively complex guidance to 'reflexive practitioners'

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

Adapting prevention to appropriate complexity

- Adaptation requires intelligent design
- 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)

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

Educating practitioners to cope with complexity (1)

- 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

Educating practitioners to cope with complexity (2)

- 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?

Additional Dimensions of Choice when selecting interventions (2)

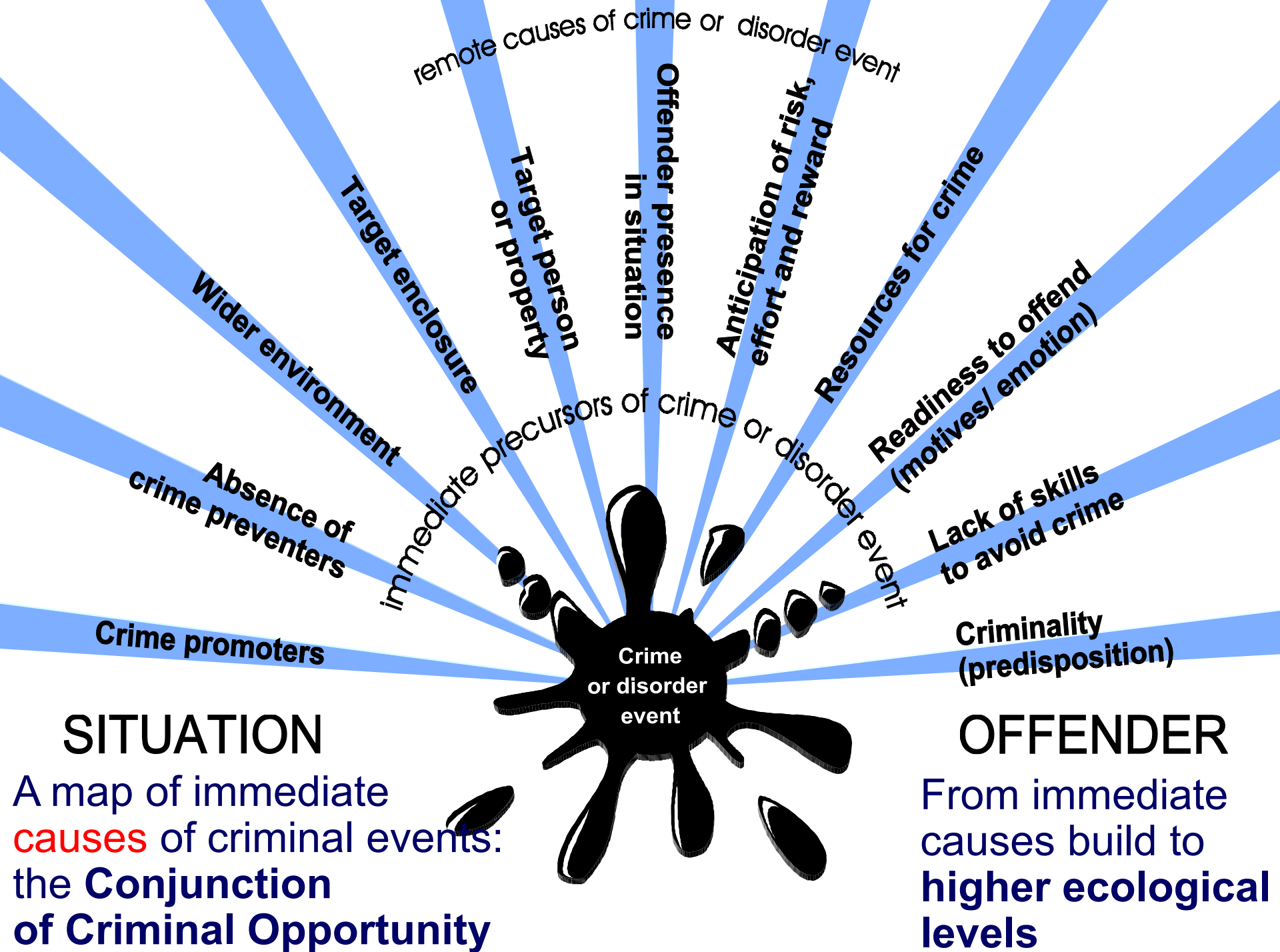
Choices to fit the crime problem and context

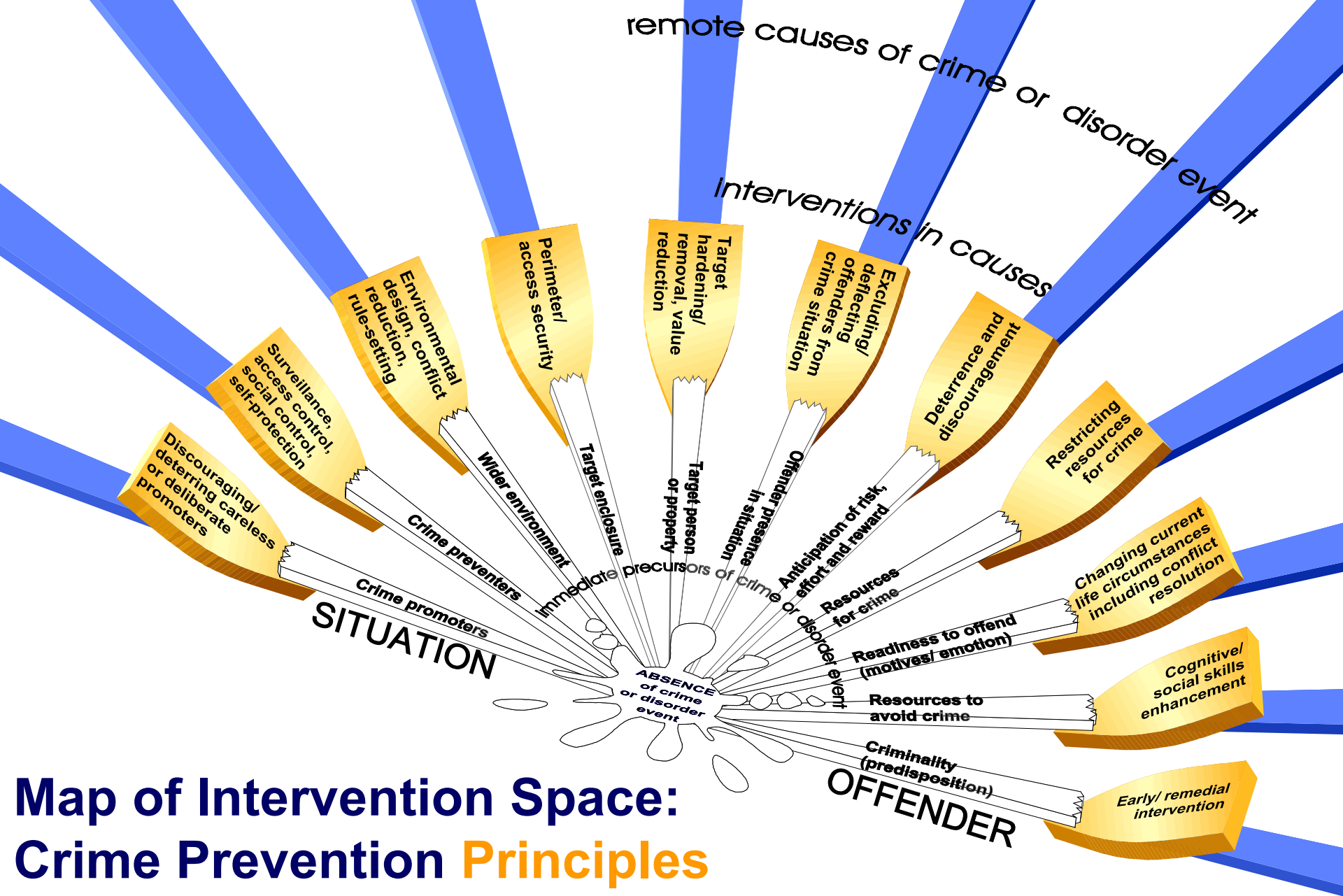
- Over what ***timescale*** and ***geographical scale*** is the action designed to operate?
- What are the ***conflicts, tradeoffs and synergies*** with other policy values (privacy, energy consumption, justice, regeneration...)
- What is the ***scope*** of the action – does it tackle a narrow range 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

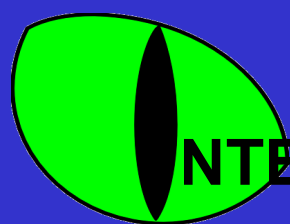
- **Definitions** including
 - Crime Prevention
 - Community safety
 - Partnership
- **Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity**
 - Integrating framework which maps immediate causal mechanisms of criminal events and preventive interventions in those causes, on offender and situational sides
- **5Is – Process 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

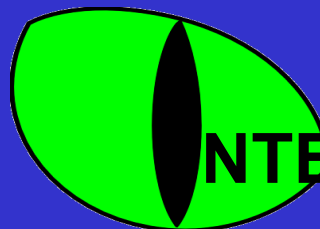




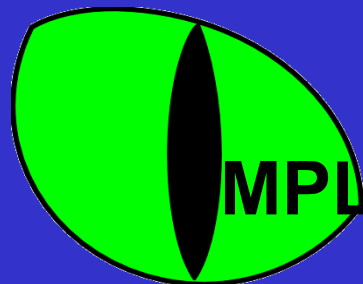
Map of Intervention Space:
Crime Prevention Principles
and the Conjunction of
Criminal Opportunity



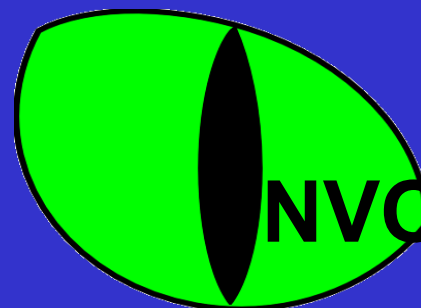
INTELLIGENCE



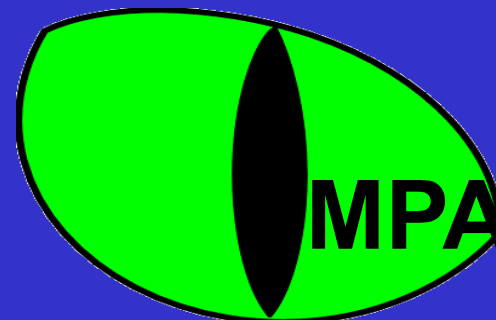
INTERVENTION



IMPLEMENTATION



INVOLVEMENT



IMPACT

The Five Is
**The tasks of the
Preventive Process**

5Is - features

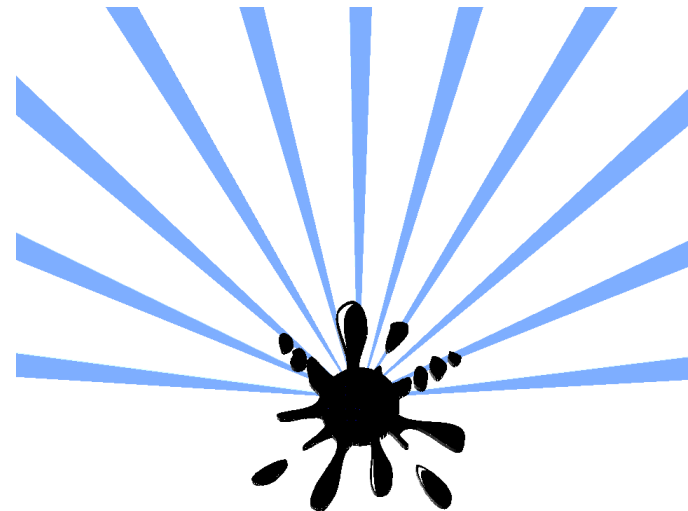
- Can be used both to record, retrieve and 'playback' preventive action
- Designed to facilitate intelligent replication and innovation
- Respects the dual discourses of analytic principle and practical method
- Defines a whole raft of action terms
- Is more a language for describing complex action than 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 etcto deliver a high **yield** in terms of successful **performance** in crime prevention