Police Strategies and Tactics

What Every Analyst Should Know[1]

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We are all generally familiar with the venerable "crime analysis process": data collection and management; data scanning and querying; data analysis; information dissemination; response; evaluation and feedback. The historical view is that at the dissemination stage, the crime analyst passes the ball to the operational divisions, takes a break, and comes back in the game for the final "evaluation" stage. In reality, of course, we know that no matter how good the pass (e.g., the analytical product), the operational divisions often fumble the ball, or don't notice it's being passed, or aren't on the field in the first place. While better agency processes could mitigate these problems, while we're waiting for our agencies to develop them, could we perhaps carry the ball a bit further?

Responding to a crime pattern or series is not, of course, up to the crime analyst. But this loss of full control does not give the analyst license to ignore what happens once his or her bulletin goes out the door, nor does it excuse the analyst for failing to participate in the development of effective tactics and strategies. As Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady notes in his foreword to the forthcoming second edition of *Exploring Crime Analysis* (IACA, 2008):

> If crime analysts have one collective shortcoming, it is that they do not participate sufficiently in turning their analyses into action. It is not enough to deliver the report. Crime analysts should be expert consultants not only on *what*, but also on *what to do about it*. As the field evolves, crime analysts will need to hone these skills.

Chief Casady's challenge therefore requires analysts to:

1. Understand the arsenal of tactics and strategies that police have at their disposal
2. Know how to apply these tactics and strategies to an active crime pattern or problem
3. Know how to make effective recommendations for tactical or strategic action, and in the proper forum

The first step is to understand the difference between *tactical* intervention in patterns and series and *strategic* intervention in long-term problems.

Tactics to Intervene in Series

Routine activities theory posits that crimes—both individual and serial—occur when a 1) motivated offender encounters 2) a suitable target in a time and place where there is 3) an absence of capable guardianship.

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[1] This article is an amalgam of material previously published in the IACA's Professional Training Series workbook for "Tactical Crime Analysis," a September 2008 *Police Chief* article, and the IACA's *Exploring Crime Analysis*, second edition.

Time and Place
With Absence of
Capable Guardianship

Motivated Offender

CRIME!

Suitable Target

This essentially gives police three avenues for tactical development:

1. Remove the motivated offender through **apprehension tactics**
2. Remove the suitable target through **target hardening tactics**
3. Supply the capable guardianship through **suppression tactics**

In the 1980s, analysts at the San Diego (CA) Police Department created a diagram for such tactics, now colloquially known as the "San Diego Wheel" (right). This article does not include some of these tactics (because we no longer know what they mean) and does include some additional ones.
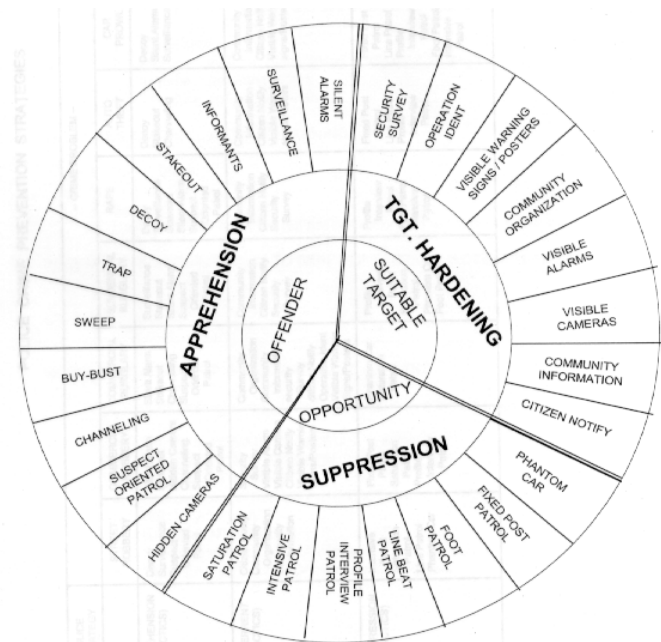
Apprehension Tactics

Apprehension tactics work best when there is a reasonable chance of identifying and capturing the offender (particularly when the police have a suspect description or some physical evidence), or when the temporal or geographic characteristics of the pattern are narrow enough that officers have a good chance of interrupting the crime in progress. Needless to say, apprehension tactics are best suited to series (based on a single offender or group of offenders) rather than general patterns (where arresting one offender would still leave the underlying opportunity).

Some examples of apprehension tactics include:

- **Evidence**: physical evidence, such as DNA, fingerprints, shoe prints, voice recordings, or video recordings can be matched to offenders through standard investigative techniques. *Example: fingerprints recovered from the window at a house burglary are matched to a past arrestee.*

- **Rapid response:** knowing the existence of a pattern, the police agency can prioritize response to calls for service that may involve it (including "suspicious activity" incidents that might indicate a crime about to occur), hoping to catch the offender on the scene. *Example: when a nighttime department store burglary series targets a jurisdiction, dispatchers are instructed to immediately dispatch, and officers are instructed to rapidly respond to, any nighttime alarm calls at department stores.*

- **Planned response:** police can use known information about an offender's sequence of events to catch him after the offense has occurred. *Example: in a purse snatching series in which the offender usually uses the victim's credit cards at the nearest Home Depot, officers can be dispatched to area Home Depots to look for the offender as soon as the next incident is reported.*

- **Silent alarms:** provided to likely targets in a series, silent alarms can bring police to the scene while the offender is still there. *Example: bank hold-up alarms*.

- **Stakeouts:** when the analyst is able to make a forecast of the next likely offense location and time, stakeouts can catch the offender when he arrives. *Example: detectives watch a parking lot in which numerous auto thefts have been occurring.*

- **Surveillance:** "stakeouts" watch a fixed location; "surveillance" follows a particular suspect. Surveillance works well when the police have a very likely suspect and need to catch him in the act of committing a crime. *Example: the analyst uses his database to identify three suspects that match the description of an active serial rapist. Detectives follow them around until they catch one assaulting a female.*

- **Informants:** informants, usually working with detectives, can provide intelligence on who's active. *Example: an influx of prescription narcotics comes to town. The School Resource Officer hears from various students that a recently-expelled high-schooler is behind most of it.*

- **Decoys:** if the location is generally known, and the offender prefers a particular type of target, officers acting as decoys can help draw him out. *Example: to end a series of muggings of elderly women at a local park, a female officer dresses in a makeup and wig and, under surveillance from other officers, hobbles through the park at night.*

- **Controlled buys:** controlled buys, usually involving undercover officers, catch offenders selling narcotics, other contraband, and stolen goods. *Example: to end a GPS theft series, an undercover officer, posing as a taxi driver, puts the word out that he wants to buy some GPS devices. The offender contacts him and arranges a buy in a local parking lot.*

- **Suspect-oriented patrol:** this tactic involves simply patrolling for a suspect who matches the description of an offender in a series. It works best when the description is very specific, or the police have a photograph or video. *Example: in a recent street molestation series, the suspect is described as a white male with a red Mohawk haircut and earrings in both ears. Patrol officers scan the streets for such an offender and, when they identify one, obtain his identification for later evidence comparison.*

- **Hidden cameras**: like stakeouts, hidden cameras work when the offender's likely next strike can be limited to a few locations. *Example: to combat a school vandalism series, police erect hidden cameras at the three most targeted schools, hoping to capture license plate numbers of cars entering the parking lots.*

Suppression Tactics

Suppression tactics seek to scare the offenders away without necessarily catching them. Although in some ways less satisfying than apprehension, suppression works well in patterns not based on a particular offender, when the offense is fairly minor, when nothing is known about the offender, or when the offender's next strike cannot be accurately forecast.

Suppression tactics include:

- **Security guards or dogs:** some kind of personal, visible security is often the best way to deter a potential offender. Even signs that indicate such presence (whether truthful or not) sometimes work. *Example: to stop a spike in thefts of car parts from several auto dealerships on the same street, the dealerships collectively hire a security company to provide constant patrol of the parking lots.*

- **Saturation patrol:** in this tactic, police triple or quadruple the normal patrol presence in an area. *Example: a housebreak series strikes the Oak Park neighborhood. The patrol commander instructs all units to drive through Oak Park when they're not on other calls.*

- **Directed patrols:** directed patrols involve instructing officers to visit certain locations at certain times. They can be done in a vehicle or on foot ("park and walks"). It is often the "default tactic" for any crime pattern, no matter how suitable (or unsuitable) it is. *Example: with convenience store robberies on the rise between 21:00 and 23:00, officers are instructed to visit convenience stores in their beats between those hours.*

- **Profile interview patrols:** this tactic involves making aggressive and frequent threshold inquiries of anyone who matches the description of the offender in a pattern. It should be used with care, so as not to harass citizens or trespass on their constitutional rights. *Example: a strongarm robbery series in a local downtown area involves a group of juveniles. Officers stop and question any group of juveniles they see in the area, making it known that they're aware of the pattern.*

- **Phantom car/Scarecrow car:** police usually have more patrol vehicles at any given time than officers to use them. In this tactic, police park those unused cars at a high-crime location, hoping to fool offenders into believing an officer is present. *Example: a local Shop & Savealot supermarket is getting hit*

badly with baby formula thefts. Officers park an unused patrol car in the fire lane all day to scare the offenders away.

- **Checkpoints:** although also subject to a few constitutional and legal considerations, checkpoints work when police can identify the likely route through which a serial offender must pass. *Example: juveniles keep playing "mailbox baseball" in a local residential area. Officers put patrol cars at the only two streets that allow access to the area, stopping and questioning drivers entering at night.*

- **Closures:** with this fairly drastic tactic, police use legal authority and other city agencies to close businesses, streets, and public areas affected by a crime series. *Example: feuding groups of soccer players keep getting into fistfights at a local field. Police convince the Parks & Recreation Department to close the field until things cool down.*

- **Killing Markets:** this tactic, borrowed from problem-oriented policing but applicable to crime patterns, instructs police to identify outlets for sale for stolen goods and then close them or otherwise render them unsuitable. *Example: video game thefts skyrocket when a new store opens in town, offering to pay cash for used games. Police visit the store's manager and convince him to offer only store credit instead.*

- **Visible cameras:** cameras can not only help apprehend offenders, they can help suppress them if placed in a visible location. *Example: police mount cameras on tall poles in a parking lot in which thefts from cars have increased.*

Target Hardening Tactics

Target hardening is a viable option for patterns in which the type of victim or target plays a larger role than the offender or location. It works best when potential targets can be easily identified and contacted. Such tactics include:

- **Security survey:** police visit locations likely to be affected by the pattern and recommend prevention options. *Example: faced with a drug store robbery series, officers visit all the drug stores in the jurisdiction and make recommendations as to street visibility, product placement, camera setup, and nighttime staffing.*

- **Property identification:** potential victims are encouraged to engrave or record the serial numbers on their property. *Example: when laptop computer thefts increase around an office building, police instruct the employees to note the serial numbers of all laptops and to engrave the company's name on the bottoms.*

- **Warning signs:** to reach a large but individually unidentifiable group of potential targets, police post visible signs. *Example: when purse snatchings increase around a local mall, officers post signs on the entrances and exits, warning shoppers to keep a tight hold on their purses and watch for suspicious activity.*

- **Community organization:** police use the resources of "neighborhood watches" and similar community groups to spread the word, identify potential suspects, and otherwise watch out for

each other. *Example: in the midst of a daytime residential burglary series, officers present at local community meetings, encouraging residents to lock their doors, watch their neighbors' houses, and report suspicious activity.*

- **Alarms:** silent alarms help catch offenders; general alarms can reduce the desirability of a target. *Example: officers pass out alarm stickers for residents of an auto theft-plagued neighborhood to post on their cars' windows.*

- **General community and media information:** if police can notify potential targets that a certain pattern is occurring, that a certain type of property or victim is being targeted, or a certain type of behavior is risky, citizens will take their own crime prevention steps. *Example: due to the rise in thefts of GPS devices from cars, officers create a flyer for businesses that sell GPS devices to hand to their customers, warning buyers not to leave the devices visible on their dashboards when they park. The local media also carries the story.*

Strategies to Intervene in Crime and Disorder Problems

Some of the tactics suited for patterns and series, such as killing markets, visible cameras, and warning signs, are also suitable for long-term problems. But patterns and problems share one key difference: for problems, apprehension tactics almost never work. Most problems—college date rapes, school bullying, drunk driving, disorder at budget motels, and traffic accidents, to take a few examples—are based on an underlying opportunity that attracts multiple offenders.

The best model for problem intervention is Ronald Clarke's "25 Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention," which are organized into five categories:

Increase the Effort
Harden targets
Control access to facilities
Screen exits
Deflect offenders
Control tools and weapons

Increase the Risks
Extend guardianship
Assist natural surveillance
Reduce anonymity
Utilize place managers
Strengthen formal surveillance

Reduce the Rewards
Conceal targets
Remove targets

Identify property
Disrupt markets
Deny benefits

Reduce Provocations
Reduce frustration and stress
Avoid disputes
Reduce emotional arousal
Neutralize peer pressure
Discourage imitation

Remove Excuses
Set rules
Post instructions
Alert conscience
Assist compliance
Control drugs and alcohol

The Center for Problem Oriented Policing has examples and case studies for the 25 techniques at http://www.popcenter.org/25techniques.

Developing Tactics and Strategies

Simply knowing the arsenal of tactics and strategies available to police is not, of course, enough. Police agencies must apply these interventions to emerging patterns and chronic problems. There are both informal and formal methods for doing so.

Informal Methods

Informal methods of response will exist in every agency—even those with formal processes. Never underestimate the ability of a motivated officer, supervisor, or community member to bring a swift end to a crime pattern or problem. Crime analysts should develop rapport with these groups.

Officer initiative. In the simplest method of tactical planning, individual officers assimilate and internalize the analyst's information and recommendations. While on patrol, they implement what tactics they can to address the pattern. These might include suspect-oriented patrol, profile interview patrol, directed patrol, talking to informants, and warning members of the community.

Supervisor initiative. Similar to officer initiative, this method relies on operations and investigations supervisors to grasp the information and to act on their own accords. As supervisors, they have more power to pursue more resource-intensive tactics, such as decoys, saturation patrol, and planned response.

Community initiative. If analysts disseminate pattern information to members of the residential or business community, they may trust community members to develop their own pro-active crime prevention steps.

Formal methods

Ideally, agencies support line-level initiative while still maintaining a formal tactical planning process that ensures *something* is done about emerging crime series.

Crime analysis-directed protocols. A few agencies allow the crime analysis unit to explicitly recommend assignments and tactics, which officers are expected to follow unless a supervisor countermands them. Such protocols put a lot of power into the hands of analysts but can generate resentment within the agency if not handled carefully.

Problem-solving teams. Some agencies establish groups of officers specifically to intervene in patterns and problems. These officers are detached from regular patrol so as not to be distracted from their missions with routine calls. Names for these teams include "Impact Teams" and "ProAct Teams." Some agencies that implement them use the term "split-force model," meaning they have divided their operations divisions into regular operational units (that respond to calls for service) and tactical action or problem-solving units. Generally only large agencies can afford such special models.

CADE

Crime Analysis Unit   **February 9, 2005**

District One

• Sections 106, 107, 108, and 109 (**Johnson Drive to SM Pkwy, Quivira to Switzer**) has been inundated with license plate thefts, auto thefts and recovered stolen autos. Thursdays and Saturdays, especially between 0400-0500 and again between 1700-1900 hrs are most likely. **FORECAST: Thurs, 2/10 between 0400 – 0500 hrs.**

District Two

• Auto Burglaries, especially at **Fox Run Apartments,** are accelerating with this district accounting for more than 80% of the auto burglaries this year. The MO is to break a window and target stereo equipment. Thursdays and Saturdays, 0100 – 0400 and 1500-1900 are most frequent times. Suspects have also hit at **Westbrooke Glen** and **Haverford West Apartments**. **FORECAST: Thursday, 2/10, 1500-1900 hrs, Westbrooke Glen Apartments parking lot.**

District Three

• Added presence in the **5100 blk of Monrovia** is recommended. Two cars were stolen in the past four weeks from that block (which is a cul-de-sac). Both cars were taken from the driveway, both between 0600 – 0700 hrs.
• License Plates are being taken from the **Shawnee Station Apartments and the adjacent shopping center, including Walmart.** Tags are taken on weekdays, 1700-2215 hrs. There was also an attempted auto theft at **Walmart.**

District Four

• Focused patrol on **Westglen Theaters** and the **shopping plaza is** recommended. Recommendation: weeknights, 1700-2230 hours and Weekends between 1100 – 2300 hrs as duty permits. Vehicle vandalisms (slashed tires) on multiple vehicles reported.

District Five

• Appliance thefts from homes under construction in the **4900 blk of Theden**, evening hours on weekdays and all hours on weekends.

District Six

• **Mill Creek Plaza, 17200 blk Midland Dr.,** is under construction. Overnight 1/26 to 1/27, a uni-loader was stolen from the property. Extra Patrol as duty permits.

District Seven

• Added patrol in the construction area around **23600 blk of 52nd St.** Appliances are being ripped out of the walls and stolen at night. FICs of anyone in the area after hours are recommended.

Area Crimes & ATLs

ATL: W/M and **W/F** in an **older white SUV with one blk door, OK/089ZNE** involved in theft from **Bed, Bath and Beyond** in Shawnee.

ATL: H/M, 20s, driving a **maroon Grand Am with a trunk luggage carrier** for a purse snatch that occurred at 75th & Nieman on 2/2 at 2150 hrs. The purse has been recovered.

ATL: B/M & B/F driving an **older brown Olds, MO/564XEX** for theft from **K&G Mens Store, 7353 Quivira.** Vehicle has also eluded Lenexa PD officers twice, but was described as a **blue Dodge 4d**.

ATL: b/m, 18-23, stocking cap, wears a single glove, cast on right arm, armed with a handgun (left hand), driving (possibly) a **blk Volkswagen Jetta or Beattle.**

REMINDER

CADE is held the 1st Wednesday of the month at 1500 hrs. **SUPERCADE** is held the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 1500 hrs. All employees are invited and welcome to attend and/or present information. **One hour of OT is authorized for those not already on duty during the meeting.**

Tactical Crime Bulletin - What's Hot NOW!

Shawnee, Kansas has a program called "Crime Analysis Directed Enforcement" (CADE).

POP Partnerships. You may note that many of the techniques of Situational Crime Prevention can be encouraged, but not directly implemented, by the police. Most good problem-oriented policing projects therefore require partnerships between the police and members of the community who can effect such strategies (handlers, place managers, and guardians in POP parlance).

COMPSTAT. COMPSTAT is, of course, the mother of all formal tactical and strategy development methods. Established by the New York City Police Department in the 1990s, it involves getting all of the decision makers in the department into a room on a regular basis, reviewing current criminal activity, deciding what they're going to do about it, and reviewing success or failure at subsequent meetings.

The Philadelphia Police Department reviews data in its regular COMPSTAT meeting

COMPSTAT-style systems go under so many alternate names and acronyms that Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady has suggested the OOVOC ("Our Own Version of COMPSTAT") as an umbrella term. These various OOVOC systems are characterized by how they balance *accountability* with *problem-solving*. The New York style of COMPSTAT features a sometimes-harsh view of "accountability" with precinct commanders expected—under the threat of demotion or transfer—to know the details of crime volume, as well as individual crimes, in their areas. The precinct commanders themselves present the current crime figures and pattern information and are questioned in detail by the commissioner and chiefs.

Other models care less about who presents the data, and more about facilitating a collaborative process to intercede in emerging patterns and to solve long-term problems.

A properly-designed COMPSTAT-style system can make excellent use of crime analysis. Ideally, the department discusses information that the crime analysts have prepared, and decides how to respond. The best systems ensure no pattern or problem goes unaddressed, encourage creative thinking, and reward effective (rather than traditional) strategies and tactics. The Fort Worth Police Department's CIDAT process, for instance, requires a written action plan to follow any discussion of a pattern or series.

Action Plan

Issue/Problem: Burglary of motor vehicle (BMV) in Fort Worth remains the most commonly committed Part I crime. More than 10,000 BMVs have occurred in each of the past three years contributing to about 25% of our Part I crime rate.

FORT WORTH
Burglary of a Motor Vehicle (BMV)
Percent of Part I Crimes which are BMV in Fort Worth (1995 - 2006)
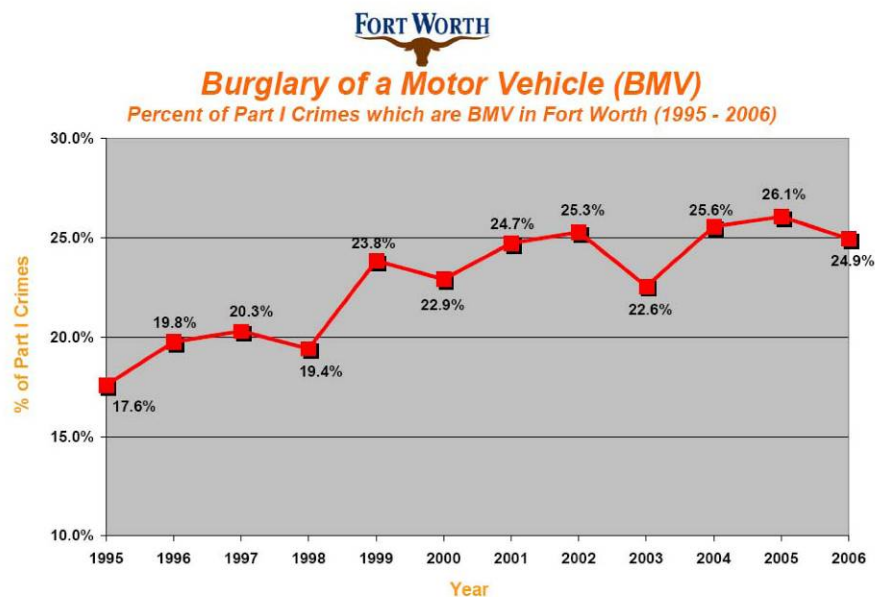
Area of Issue/Problem: Citywide

Responsible Commander: Bradley Ford

Assigned Date: April 23, 2008

Follow up Date: May 7, 2008

Measure of Success or Failure

The first measure of success will be the full implementation of the action plan. Upon full implementation of the plan, the department will begin monitoring BMV levels in relation to historical data to determine if the number of BMVs is declining.

Confidential

The beginning of a three-page action plan for reducing motor vehicle break-ins in the City of Fort Worth

Conclusions

From within and without, crime analysts are increasingly being encouraged to take a more active role in response. In their landmark book *Crime Analysis for Problem Solvers in 60 Small Steps* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006), Ron Clarke and John Eck challenge analysts to "be the local crime expert," to "know what is effective (and not) in policing," to "embrace your key role at response," and, in the first step, "*rethink your job*." In the introduction to Clarke and Eck's British version of the publication, Nick Ross, the chairman of the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, speaks directly to the analyst:

> Who are the professionals who will do the analysis of data and identify patterns at the local level? Who will construct hypotheses on how to intervene and put those ideas to the test? Who will create strategies that the police and other crime reduction partners can act on? Who can gently but firmly lead society away from being so reactive to the new smart way of detecting baddies quickly and heading off trouble before it starts? Need I say it? You.

Answering this call requires the crime analysis profession to think beyond the data analysis, geographic information systems, and publications that have largely dominated our time and attention for the past fifteen years. Crime analysts cannot simply be mappers, graphers, and bulletin-makers; we must also be criminologists, problem-solvers, tacticians, strategists, and investigative reporters. And, occasionally, we must lead the horse to water—and make it drink.