

Identification and application of Best Practice in Crime Prevention - some fundamental questions and some attempted answers

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**DESIGN
AGAINST
CRIME**



What is the purpose of collecting Best Practice information?

- To improve *performance*, and widen the scope of crime prevention to cover new problems and solutions
 - By sharing the *technical knowledge* of how to do it well
 - By helping other practitioners avoid past *mistakes*
 - By *rewarding and encouraging practitioners* who succeed in improving performance and extending scope
 - By developing a wider culture and climate of *quality* of preventive action among practitioners, policymakers and others

Who should be interested in Best Practice?

People/organisations concerned with

- Practice (obviously)
 - Action directly focused on tackling specific crime/safety problems – at local, regional national or international levels

But also people/organisations responsible for action at higher levels:

- Delivery
- Policy
- Public understanding and debate
- Governance

All these should be interested in Best Practice, from different angles

Who should be interested in Best Practice?

People/organisations concerned with

- Delivery

- Establishment & operation of *systems to support & control action on the ground* to achieve policy goals – including training, recruitment, leadership, supply of information, performance monitoring
- Establishment of a *conducive working environment* for preventive practice – including improving social cohesion and police-public relations

Who should be interested in Best Practice?

People/organisations concerned with

- Policy - local, regional, national, international
 - *Strategic choice* of priorities and performance targets, and of broad types of action to meet these goals (eg should government fund street lighting?)
 - Not only 'does the action work?' But 'can it reliably be delivered in mainstream programmes?'

Who should be interested in Best Practice?

People/organisations concerned with

- Public understanding and debate
 - Public *accountability* for money spent, choices made
 - Establishing wider climate of public understanding and acceptance for crime prevention goals, and for the actions to deliver them

Who should be interested in Best Practice?

People/organisations concerned with

- Governance of crime prevention
 - How 'civil' crime prevention relates to justice and repression
 - Who has access to information – eg CCTV
 - How decisions are made on crime prevention policy – and by whom (eg public partnerships, public-private partnerships)
- For all levels, Practice examples can illustrate principles, challenge assumptions, extend frontiers of thinking

What kinds of action should be considered for a Best Practice knowledge base?

- **Operational** – practice of individual crime prevention actions focused on specific crime problem in specific context (local-international)
- **Delivery?** – action aimed at developing and building capacity, establishing/maintaining partnerships, improving police-public relations, social cohesion, supplying information, funds and other resources to support operational action
- **Laws, regulations, legal practices??** Those comprising part of a wider package of civil and justice-based actions? Those which extend the role of courts in crime prevention?

Imagine...

**you are the user of a Best
Practice knowledge base –
what information do you want it
to contain?**

How is Best Practice knowledge to be used for guiding practice?

- *Clarification* of crime problem
- *Selection* of action for preventing a specific crime problem
- *Replication* of action, adapting to new context
- *Innovation*

Clarification of crime problem

What information is helpful for clarifying the crime problem?

- What *exactly* is the problem about?
- Does the problem that the *public* complain about, remain a valid concern after it has been examined and measured more closely?
- What are the *causes* and *consequences* of the problem?
- Who are *involved* as offender, victim, other party?

Selection of preventive action

from a Best Practice Knowledge Base –

Do Best Practice descriptions contain the

right information to help you choose?

What level and type of action does the Best Practice case-study description cover?

- Is the project about *Operational prevention*? (eg action to prevent specific burglary problem in area of Milan)
- Or is it actually about *Delivery*? Creating the *conditions and capacities* for operational prevention to work (eg developing training courses for architects)?
- If operational, does it distinguish clearly between the *Intervention* (eg people locking their windows) and *Involvement* (eg *mobilising* people to buy, fit and use locks through a publicity campaign)?

Dimensions of Choice when selecting Best Practice actions (1)

Choices with clear preference – from evaluation

- Are actions *effective or cost-effective*? Do anticipated *benefits* significantly outweigh *costs/ risks*? Are there any serious *undesirable side-effects*?

This is where most evaluations **stop** –
but there is much more to know.....

Dimensions of Choice

when selecting Best Practice actions (2)

Choices with clear preference – from evaluation

- Are actions *responsive*?
 - Can they be efficiently *targeted* on *causes* of crime problem?
 - Can they be efficiently *prioritised* on basis of the *consequences* of crime, *needs* of victim and wider society?
- Are actions *legitimate* and *acceptable to community*?
- Are actions *sustainable* in effectiveness, financial, and Human Resource terms?
- Are actions *adaptable* – proofed against social/ technological change and adaptive offenders?
- Are actions *implementable* with acceptable level of risk given the context and the resources available?

Dimensions of Choice when selecting Best Practice actions (3)

Choices to make which fit the crime problem and context (there is no absolute 'correct answer')

- Over what *timescale* and what *geographical scale* is the action designed to operate?
- At what '*ecological level*' does the action operate? Individual, family, peer group, community, market, society...?
- What are the *tradeoffs* with other policy values (privacy, energy consumption, bureaucracy, justice...)
- What is the *scope* of the action – does it tackle a narrow range of crime types or a broad range?
- *Coverage* on the ground – *how much* of crime problem tackled? (eg is it cost-effective in only some types of area, or all areas?)

Replication of preventive action

from a Best Practice Knowledge Base –

Do Best Practice descriptions contain the

right information to help you replicate?

Replication is not simple

- There are few research studies of replication in crime prevention – new ideas are more interesting...
- But evidence that exists, shows that replications of ‘success story’ projects often do not perform well
- There is a wider history of implementation failure in large crime prevention programmes aiming to replicate pilot projects en masse

Replication is not simple – why?

- Reasons for replication failure include:
 - *Context* is important in determining whether prevention works – many conditions have to be established for the preventive ‘mechanisms’ to be successfully triggered
 - Copying an example of Best Practice *too precisely* (‘cookbook’ style) won’t adapt it to context or to the specific local crime problem
 - People often fail to strike the right balance between copying the successful *end product* and copying the *intelligent process* that successfully generated the end product

Does the Best Practice description contain the right information in the right detail to help you replicate it intelligently in different contexts?

- **Quick-read summaries are necessary (eg for ECPA) but to transfer Best Practice, more needed:**
 - Descriptions of *practical methods* are brief and information on ‘quality indicators’ missing
 - Information on *generic principles*, which *do* transfer between contexts, is often not made clear
 - *‘Process’* information is absent or limited
 - It is difficult to *‘reconstruct’* the unfolding stages of action
 - There is no information about the *choices and tradeoffs* that had to be faced at different stages – in different contexts practitioners may want to make different choices

Innovation of preventive action

from a Best Practice Knowledge Base –

Do Best Practice descriptions contain the

right information to help you innovate?

Innovation

- **Why innovate?**

- Replication is more like innovation than we think
- There are many more crime problems and contexts than we will ever be able to cover by good evaluations of Best Practice
- Crime problems and contexts change – what we know now, will become out of date with social and technological change, and adaptive offenders

Does the Best Practice description contain the right information to help you innovate?

- **How innovate?**

- Draw on *generic principles/theory* – ‘generative grammar’ of crime prevention – Does BP description highlight these principles?
- *Recombine elements* of action – cut Best Practices into sub-units (eg how to mobilise people in a project targeted on burglary) and put them together in new combinations (eg use same method in a car crime project) – Does BP description enable this?

Dimensions of Choice – *Delivery level*

Ensuring actions are *deliverable* in rollout of programs:

- Does the action depend on *scarce and/or risky resources* such as charismatic project leaders?
- Is the right *infrastructure* present/ can it be supplied? (eg training, access to information on crime etc)
- Are right *partnership* arrangements in place to support the action/ can they be created?
- Can we ensure that the action implemented will be of the right *quality*?

**A Best Practice knowledge base
designed to be fit for purpose –
specifying the right format**

A knowledge base designed to be fit for purpose?

- Info in Best Practice knowledge base must be:
 - Retrievable/ searchable – precise, clear, consistent – *can you find what you want?*
 - Communicable – nationally and internationally – *can you understand it?*
 - Of good quality – accurate and reliable – *can you trust it?*
 - Organised to guide planning and action – reflects process of doing crime prevention – *can you act on it?*
 - Organised to support training – *can you learn from it?*
 - Clear about what type of action it describes – eg practice or delivery – *can you be sure of the level you are working at?*
 - Of appropriate complexity and detail – you cannot describe essentially complex actions with over-simple terms – *does it match your reality on the ground?*

Not fit for
purpose?



Being fit for purpose requires

- Standards – *criteria of quality and completeness* for description and evaluation of action – Beccaria, multiple dimensions of choice
- *Standardisation of language* for description of action and evaluation
- Ability to describe and reflect the *structure and process of action*
- Both *case studies* and *toolkits* that systematically set out choices and guide practitioners through them

Quality standard - How reliable is the Best Practice information in the Knowledge Base?

- The right kinds of information may be present in the Best Practice description, but:
 - How *technically good* was the evaluation method?
 - How *comprehensive* was the evaluation method? (eg was the process evaluation as well-conducted as the impact evaluation?)
 - How *independent* was the evaluation from the practitioners who implemented it, and from other interested parties (eg people trying to sell security equipment)?

Judge the cost of an evaluation against the cost and risk of acting on the wrong answer

Why a standardised framework?

- **Terminology**
 - Efficiency and accuracy for communication, collaboration and training
- **Evaluation**
 - Decisions using known levels of reliability
- **Precision tools**
 - Clear definitions, unambiguous, don't overlap, capable of translation, memorable
- **Professional discipline**
 - Quality assurance

Clarifying the structure of action

- Crime prevention action has a rich structure:
 - Programme
 - Project
 - Intervention – practical methods, underlying principles
 - Causal mechanisms – how each intervention method works in detail, in context
- And two perspectives:
 - Narrow – *prevention* – intervention in causes of criminal events to reduce risk & potential seriousness
 - Broad – *community safety* – emphasis on quality of life, perceived risk, consequences of crime, harm reduction

Clarifying the language of action (1)

– Process of prevention

Candidates:

SARA

- Scanning
- Analysis
- Response
- Assessment

5Is

- Intelligence
- Intervention
- Implementation
- Involvement
- Impact

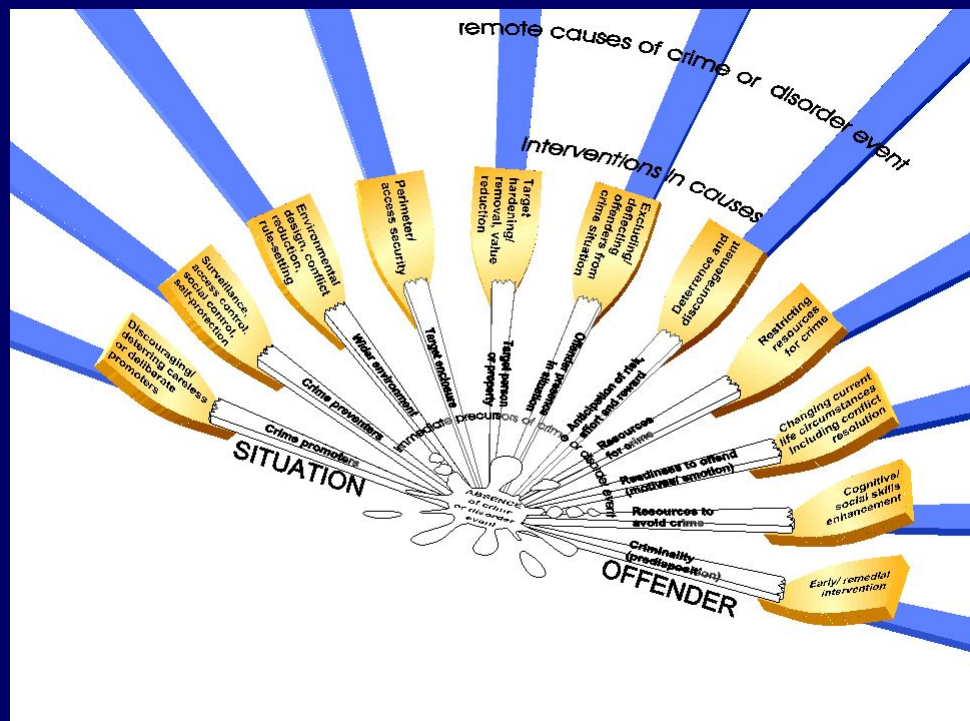
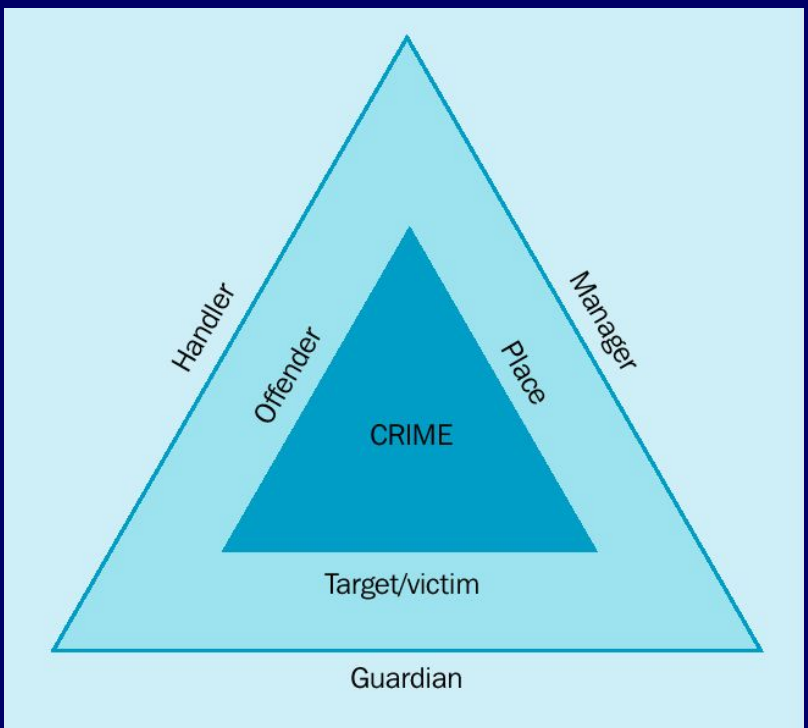
Clarifying the language of action (2)

– Causes and Interventions

Candidates:

Crime Triangle

Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity



Pros and Cons of frameworks

- **SARA** is very simple and easy to learn relative to 5Is, but:
 - Has insufficient detail to organise knowledge and guide thinking, especially Response stage
 - Does not distinguish principles & methods
- **Crime Triangle** also easy to learn relative to CCO, but:
 - Again has insufficient detail/ depth to take practitioners beyond 'kindergarten' stage
 - Insufficient coverage of offender/social side
- Any more extensions or new frameworks to consider?

Clarifying the language of evaluation (1)

- In the ECPA entries a wide range of terms was used to describe types and aspects of evaluation – this is inconsistent and confusing
- Suggested standard definitions:
 - *Input* – money and human resources
 - *Process* – organised sequence of activities from defining crime problem through to intervention and impact evaluation
 - *Output* – actions implemented in the real world (eg numbers/quality of houses receiving security equipment, young people attending youth club...)

Continued>

Clarifying the language of evaluation (2)

- Suggested standard definitions (continued):
 - *Ultimate outcome* – the desired objective in crime prevention or similar terms (eg reduction in frequency or seriousness of violent behaviour)
 - *Intermediate outcome* – first step in chain of cause-effect from action to Ultimate outcome, that can be argued to reduce risk of criminal events (eg improvement of strength of locks, change in young people's attitudes to violence that may ultimately lead to reduction in their violent behaviour; or change in 'risk and protective factors' correlated with later criminality)

Clarifying the language of evaluation (3)

- Suggested standard definitions (continued):
 - *Monitoring* – internal project-management function that may examine any or all of the aspects above, to guide the course of the project and to ensure quality control
 - *Performance assessment* – external delivery-management function that focuses on ultimate outcomes often with setting of targets

So what is Best Practice?

- **Successful outcome**
 - Based on reliable evidence
 - Evaluated on several dimensions
- **Good process** (indicating the likelihood of *consistent success*, not just a lucky win this time)
- **Good description**
 - To enable intelligent selection, replication in-context, innovation in Practice
 - To inform Delivery and higher levels of action

Where to find information

5Is and CCO

<https://5isframework.wordpress.com>

*Please send comments, suggest improvements
or participate in development! p.ekblom@ucl.ac.uk*

SARA and Crime Triangle

<https://popcenter.asu.edu/>

Beccaria

www.beccaria.de