

Focused Asset Protection

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What is the most important thing we have learned in the last 20 years of study and practice of security?

Research and development of deterrence and other criminological theories has shown distal or abstract actions either do not reduce crime, or are at best not very effective. Proximate measures that create shame or fear are more effective. Also, crime events are caused by individual or groups of individuals, and cost-effective security measures should be designed, refined and evaluated to deter would-be offenders as individuals.

What are the most important trends or innovations that are influencing, have influenced or will influence the future of the study and practice of security?

More robust and useful theory tools have emerged and continue to be developed, including situational crime prevention, routine activities, the theft triangle; contemporary and classical deterrence, desistance, journey to crime and environmental criminology. These theories along with self-control and social learning theories have helped advance practical, higher impact asset protection practices. Likewise the literature on hot “stuff” such as hot spots, high-impact offenders and hot products as well as place-based, lifecourse and tipping point perspectives are proving useful to policy makers. Other positive developments include the use of multi-method research, user-friendly statistical software, rapid keyword literature search and retrieval sources, the expanding cooperation of law enforcement, private security and academic decision-makers and researchers.

If you were setting the research agenda for the next 10 years, what would be your priority and why?

It is clear the asset protection discipline has a lot of opportunity to become much more effective in reducing the probability and impact of crime and loss. Theory-informed, multi-method R&D that helps academics and practitioners develop more effective protective measures is indicated. Expanding the amount of field experiments, offender interviewing, behavioural observation via CCTV review, surveys and data modelling will provide scholars and executives with the understanding and measurements they need to make better security strategies and investments.

A particular research need, in my opinion, is in situational or conditional deterrence. Offenders and situational circumstances vary so widely, that as in medicine, security theory

and research need to approach the “molecular” level. It is got to start somewhere. And when it comes to preventing crime and loss, I think it starts with the bad guy. Offenders are creating our crime and loss problems. And offenders are the key to crime prevention. After all, it is them we are trying to deter. Asset protection and loss prevention are not just terms; they are what security practitioners are supposed to be doing – supporting organizations by preventing incidents and reducing negative impact. And to reduce crime events, we need to reduce crime attempts. That means creating deterrence. Deterrence of course means convincing the bad guys not to offend on a given property.

But there is a critical bridge between applying situational protective measures, and reducing crime attempts. Similar to modern medicine that is rapidly moving to a micro-level to provide greater prevention and treatment, there is a deeper crime prevention concept, and that is – crime control impact is often *highly conditional*. Offender background, experience and mood, as well as the design and ongoing execution of current crime control measures affect actual crime event outcomes (Figure 1). For example, a basic tenet of offender deterrence holds those to be deterred should: (1) see or otherwise know about the protective cue(s) we deploy (i.e. CCTV domes in the ceiling), (2) also understand how this cue directly affects or threatens them (CCTV domes mean their crime attempt will be detected through monitoring of video images for example), also (3) feel threatened or believe they will be detected and detained as advertised (the cue must be credible and proximal to them),

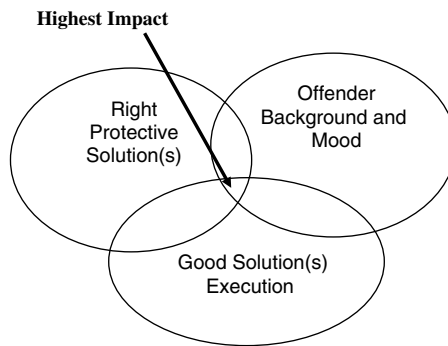


Figure 1. Crime Prevention is Highly Situational.

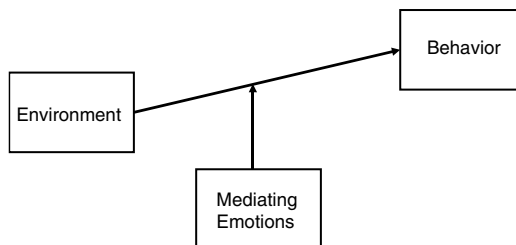


Figure 2. The Influence/Deterrence Model.

and, of course (4) would-be offenders must be concerned enough about possible consequences to alter their plans or behaviour. To capitalize on this premise, researchers and practitioners need more data on protective methods to boost awareness and an understanding of deployed asset protection cues, as well as how to improve their credibility.

Summary

Organizations have found there is a big difference between a security measure that looks like it is probably working, to a particular security measure that is definitely working, and finally, a security measure that is working well enough to provide a positive return on investment. CEOs and CFOs increasingly expect most asset protection investments to provide a financial gain – the exception being certain life safety efforts. A starting model for studying deterrence methods is seen in Figure 2.

In my opinion conditional deterrence is a critical research need. Loss prevention decision makers report to our team that despite their extensively deploying asset protection staff, processes and technologies, they still catch a lot of thieves and experience tremendous losses. We can do better. And security research can help lead the way.