

Developments in Security

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

The study of security has transformed over the last 20 years, and many important things have been learnt about the practice of security. The most important set of findings – I would suggest – relate to the poor level of professionalism/standards of security personnel at operational and managerial levels. A host of official reports and academic studies have exposed the low standards of many security personnel.

The first report I would point to is the House of Commons Defence Committee Report of 1990 on the Physical Security of Military installations. This, among many disturbing findings, illustrated examples of security officers scared of the dark, going on drunken rampages and incapable of performing their duties effectively. This was followed by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report of 1995, drawing upon a range of evidence to illustrate criminal infiltration in the industry, low levels of training and abuse of power. Academics have been relatively slow to investigate such issues; however, a dedicated few have. Hearnden (1993) has exposed poor levels of training and education among security managers, South (1988), Wakefield (2003) and Button (2006) have shown many issues of concern relating to the pay, motivation and standards of security officers. These problems are not restricted to the U.K., which has been my focus so far. Similar problems have been regularly exposed in the U.S.A. (from Kakalik and Wildhorn (1971) to more recently Parfomak, 2004); as well as in Canada (Shearing and Stenning, 1981), Australia (Sarre and Prenzler, 2005), South East Europe (International Alert, 2005) and Japan (Yoshida, 1999) to name some. The problems illustrated in these studies have highlighted the need for greater commitment to training and education as one of the central means to raise performance, and this has sparked one of the main debates in security industries across the globe: whether the government intervention is required to set standards to raise performance.

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?

Security is ultimately influenced – too much in my view – in response to developments usually beyond the practitioners' control. Thus, the scope and range of risks the organization faces are a major influence. For most, the shape of crime risks such as theft, robbery,

burglary, fraud, etc. influence the role of the practitioner and ultimately, what they wish to learn about. Some of these risks – such as terrorism post 9/11 – have influenced security too much, given the actual risk of such attacks to most organizations. Nevertheless, no matter what the reality of the risk from terrorism, it will continue to grow in influence on the study and practice of security.

The next major influence on the study and practice of security are standards and regulations from official government bodies as well as voluntary organizations. In some sectors, the reach of regulation on the practice of security has made the discretion available to innovate security strategies virtually non-existent, such as in the aviation sector. The recent U.K. government response to the plot to allegedly blow-up airlines in-flight using home-made bombs assembled onboard was to lead to the introduction of extensive restrictive regulations on the practice of security. Regulation will continue to play an important part in the practice and study of security.

Technology is the other great influence. The last 20 years have witnessed the huge expansion in the use of CCTV, the introduction of more sophisticated intruder alarm and access control systems, and the widespread use of electronic article surveillance equipment to name some. The future of security seems bound to be more technologically driven, and future security operatives and managers will need to be technologically aware.

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

Going back to the main findings of the last 20 years being poor standards of professionalism, the agenda we need is more regular and sophisticated analysis of the effectiveness of security. Only if we do this, can we decide if strategies are working, and whether they need to be adapted. In the U.K., the British Retail Consortium (BRC) regularly publishes its Retail Crime Costs Survey. This covers detailed analysis of crime trends, losses as well as investment in security. This enables retailers to know if their investment in security is working.

We need more of this kind of research at a national, industrial and organizational level. As examples, I would suggest how about a regular survey of the security of airports and ports, schools and hospitals. Research should also consider the performance of specific occupations, particularly in the age of regulation. In 1996, the British Audit Commission published an analysis of public views of the degree of reassurance given by a range of policing/security persons and products from –100 to +100. This found a uniformed police officer on patrol was the highest (+80), but among others that a neighbourhood watch sticker (–5) gave more reassurance than a security guard (–15). Annual surveys, such as this with a wider range of data sought, would give a good indication of whether the performance of security guards was improving enabling policy makers to make better decisions.

If we use the medical profession as an analogy, there are extensive studies regularly published illustrating the effectiveness of different drugs, treatments, lifestyles, etc. In medicine, practitioners at all levels of decision-making generally have a good idea that what they are prescribing works. This is not the case in security. For many products and practices, there is no evidence and too often, security practitioners are simply doing what they think

works. The development of a research agenda on effectiveness (or what works) will not be enough to transform the industry. There also needs to be a change in mentality and pursuit of what I would call “security science”. I was recently at a meeting of a leading security organization with several dozen security managers talking about professionalism, and I asked how many read “*Security Journal*”, to which only two put their hands up. I would hope the next 10 years brings not only a research agenda that gives security managers the tools to do their job, but that they also embrace that agenda by reading one of the best sources of “what works” in security!

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