

SUBMISSION FOR GOLDSTEIN AWARD

SUMMARY

This project looks at a Problem Oriented approach to an Organised Crime Group (OCG) in the North East of England. Using a threat matrix the OCG was initially ranked in terms of the risk they posed. Then, using 'rational choice' theory as a template, a multi-agency approach instigated a hostile environment for the OCG to operate within. The evaluation established the OCG diminished in risk, with police, partner agencies and community being supportive of the approach.

SCANNING

Organised Crime is a significant problem in the UK and the rest of the world. A report published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC 2006: 5) highlighted that 'typically less than 6 per cent of over 1500 organised crime groups (OCG) at Force and regional level [within the UK] were being targeted'. Although organised crime is prevalent the resources required to investigate and bring a successful prosecution can be substantial, often resulting in the majority going unchecked.

During 2009 the Durham Constabulary engaged in a project to identify the OCG operating within their jurisdiction. Once identified the agency analysed each of these groups to establish the threat they posed. To do this they used a nationally accredited threat matrix to understand their actual and potential impact across six categories: a) injury to victims or others involved; b) harm to the community; c) reputation/political effects in relation to the police or government; d) criminal capability or capacity; e) the boundaries or ability to cross borders (local, regional, national, or transnational); and f) the economic impact on society. Each of these categories was scored in relation to the level of impact and the probability of it occurring. The OCG were then ranked and prioritized for action. Although it could be argued the assessment was subjective this is mitigated due to the fact the same group of people within an individual jurisdiction assess each OCG. This makes the application of the threat matrix score a more reliable approach *within* police forces (albeit discrepancies may still occur *between* forces).

This evidence based threat assessment conducted by Durham Constabulary during April 2009, initially positioned one OCG as its highest priority. Although the assessment highlighted there was a wide network of individuals involved within the OCG, thirteen individuals were classified as core members. It was believed the OCG diversified into a variety of crime which involved fraud, illegal dumping of waste substances, extortion, and theft. They had even named two streets after themselves which was a constant reminder to everyone in particular residents of their power and influence.

The 13 members of the group had a total number of 90 previous convictions between them and all but 2 of the group were male. Table 1 below shows the range,

mean, and standard deviation for their: age, number of offences prosecuted for, number of convictions, and the number of impending prosecutions.

Table 1
Mean responses and standard deviation for the variables: age, number of offences, number of convictions and number of impending prosecutions

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age (years)	23 – 56	39.08	10.81
Number of offences (per person)	0 – 35	6.92	9.11
Number of convictions (per person)	0 – 15	4.31	4.05
Number of impending prosecutions (per person)	0 – 4	1.62	1.71

The group were housed in close proximity of each other in a rural village on the outskirts of a North East English city. None of the group had any visible income, did not pay taxes and claimed some form of benefits e.g. housing etc. However the financial wealth of individual members was clear to see as they had built large houses close to one another. Other residents within the village were intimidated by them.

The dilemma for the Durham Constabulary was that if they used their resources, against this group, in the traditional way - which meant proactively gathering intelligence to prosecute significant members of the gang, two things would occur. First other members of the group or associates would fill the vacuum and organized crime would continue. Secondly the level of resources required would be significant, reducing the level of the impact that could be achieved against other crime groups. A different approach to combat organized crime was therefore considered – an approach that would use a Problem Oriented philosophy. The objectives for this project were to, reduce the financial profit of the OCG; dismantle the OCG; prevent the OCG from being able to reinvent themselves or another group to fill the void following a successful police intervention; and to ensure that the community becomes a safer place, allowing public confidence to increase.

ANALYSIS

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Analysis was commissioned to establish accurate profiles of the group, and the type of offences they were involved in. In this way it was hoped there would be a fuller understanding of the opportunities the OCG were exploiting in order that these could be blocked, thereby preventing the crimes.

Hobbs (1998) has previously stated "traditional forms of organised crime are reliant upon [...] traditional family structures". Although it is accepted many OCG are assembled around loose networks this was not the case for this particular group. 85% of the core group was related to each other, whilst the remaining 15% were close associates. The core group also had connections with an extended network of approximately the same size who they would engage with in a mutually beneficial criminal enterprise. There were others within the group that had taken on the surname furthering the status of the OCG and intimidating the public.

A diagram was produced to represent the hierarchical status and position of each group member. It was noted by police officers that the most influential family members were "reluctant to get their hands dirty". As such a more detailed assessment was conducted of the number and types of convictions for each of the core members. As the pareto principle (80/20 rule) predicts these 90 prior convictions were not randomly assigned in terms of offenders or types of offences. In fact one offender accounted for the most offences (39%) across the group and the three most involved offenders accounted for approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total crimes committed. One offender had no convictions or impending prosecutions. When the type of convictions were analyzed they were found to fall into three legislative categories. In frequency order these were offences under the Theft Act (theft, handling stolen goods; aggravated vehicle taking; theft of/from a vehicle; taking conveyance without authority; burglary; and going equipped for theft). The second most common type of offending was against the Road Traffic Act (driving without a licence; driving whilst uninsured; and dangerous driving). Finally a smaller number of the prior convictions contravened the Public Order Act (using threatening, abusive, insulting words or behaviour against others).

This analysis pointed out two critical points. First it showed a small number of individuals were used predominantly as 'enforcers'. These individuals were the ones expected to 'get their hands dirty' and the presence of capable and willing people to provide such a service provided the opportunity for the group to operate. Secondly, although the members of the group were involved in organized crime this was diverse. They appeared to seize whatever opportunity was available in terms of making money. In order to do this they would involve themselves in lesser precursor or post event offences i.e. issuing threats, committing driving offences, thereby making themselves vulnerable to police intervention.

As further criminal intelligence was gathered this picture was enhanced. The group was concentrated in a small geographic area and this increased their solidarity and reputation. As the years had progressed they had become over-confident and arrogant. They manipulated civil laws such as planning permission, and minor road traffic laws such as speeding. When challenged by residents, Council representatives

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or police officers they would respond aggressively resulting in them living relatively unchecked.

Due to this analysis it was assumed the OCG would exploit any opportunity and efforts were made to speak with other public and commercial agencies within the area. Unsurprisingly all of these agencies articulated similar problems with these individuals. They were able to share suspicions relating to illegal behaviour and ultimately a much fuller picture was established.

RESPONSE

Cornish and Clarke (1986) developing 'rational choice theory' argued that an offender could be diverted from committing a particular crime by:

Increasing the effort to commit the crime,
Increasing the risk of being caught,
Reducing the rewards from the crime,
and **removing the excuses they would use in justifying the crime** (a further category relating to reducing the provocation was also highlighted, albeit this category will not be used here).

The police officers involved in this project therefore considered all the interventions that could be deployed to make organized crime an *irrational choice* for these offenders. The matrix was used to plan the interventions to be used against the core members of the OCG. The main difference to other traditional methods was that it used a team approach, mobilizing other agencies (both commercial and public) to share information and pool resources to deliver the most effective response. This partnership was formed under a Gold, Silver and Bronze Command structure. The main thrust surrounding the interventions was to generate a hostile environment, reducing the opportunities for this OCG to commit crime. A good example was working with the environment agency. The group was suspected of illegal dumping of waste substances. Although a serious offence the environment agency had insufficient capability to prove the group's connection with this crime. However by allowing the environment agency to use the police surveillance team evidence for this offence was established within the day (the surveillance team commenting it was the easiest task they had ever undertaken).

Table 2 (below) shows examples of the range of interventions deployed by the police and other partners including: The Building planning department, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Council Anti Social Behaviour Officers, The Crown Prosecution Service, The Rights of Way Department, The Fire and Rescue service, Land Registry, The Environment Agency, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Asset Management (Proceeds of Crime Act), Department of Works and Pensions, Community Safety Officers, Environmental Services, Vehicle and Operator Services Agency and members of the community.

Table 2

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Increase effort	Increase risk	Reduce rewards	Remove Excuses
<p>Traffic calming measures to reduce speeding along the main street.</p> <p>High police presence to challenge low level criminal behaviour</p>	<p>Use of ANPR on all OCG vehicles (and info circulated to all staff)</p> <p>Monitor OCG, TV licence, mortgages, bank accounts, mobile phones, travel documents etc. to identify offending.</p> <p>Implementation of CCTV throughout the village</p> <p>Targeting vehicles belonging to the OCG for traffic offences.</p> <p>Gathering intelligence surrounding members of OCG to establish the parameters of offending</p> <p>Police support and attendance at Parish Council meeting's</p> <p>Plain clothed officers patrolling</p> <p>Supply photos of OCG , and other information to partner agencies to assist them in their actions</p>	<p>Use of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Part 7. S.327 and S.344 - Money Laundering) to seize and confiscate money obtained from crime.</p> <p>Preventing the development of houses by instigating planning notices.</p> <p>Enforcing planning notices. No response by offenders results in demolition.</p> <p>Renaming of two streets</p> <p>Prevent purchase of Community centre land</p>	<p>Traffic calming measures</p> <p>Notices issued by County Council to all resident of the village surrounding ASB (noise nuisance). These establish what is and what is not appropriate.</p> <p>Notice to all residents of Partner's intentions</p>

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This data is produced from interventions carried out in 2010 and the beginning of 2011. The most frequent offences that are impending prosecution are categorised under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (c.43) and the Fraud Act 2006 (c.35). The most common offence within the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (c.43) is the depositing of controlled, non special waste in or on land without a licence (100%). The Fraud Act 2006 (c.35), which constituted the making of false representation to make gain for self or another, or cause loss to another, was the most common offence committed under the legislation. This revolved around organized insurance fraud.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment was conducted by Lancaster University (UK). The assessment covered a number of areas. First it looked at the impact upon the OCG members in relation to ongoing intelligence and convictions. Second it looked at the perception of both the community and the police as a result of the project.

The impact of the OCG was re-assessed using the threat matrix mentioned in the scanning section. When this was completed it showed that the threat of the OCG had reduced significantly and it was no longer ranked first in the group's operating within that jurisdiction.

There was also a clear change in the offending pattern of the group. When looking at impending prosecutions the majority of offenders (n=8; or 62%) had decreased their involvement in criminal activity, whilst the remainder had maintained or slightly increased their criminal involvement. It is expected during the next twelve months this would decrease. The most significant change has been in the type of offences. The OCG members were typically convicted of crimes such as theft, burglary, assault, failing to surrender to bail, and public order. These crimes have all been overt in their nature. The crimes currently awaiting prosecution differ significantly in their character, and are considerably more covert in nature. As observed these crimes tend to include environmental tipping, and fraud. The changes in types of crime by the OCG suggest two noteworthy findings. First, that the police are now establishing the methods the OCG are using to make money, which had previously gone unnoticed, it could also be argued that the OCG are developing a more covert nature and engage in crime that doesn't involve a direct victim.

The next part of the evaluation was to conduct semi-structured interviews with seven serving police officers (Group 1), three members of external organisations (Group 2), and five members of the community (Group 3). Although the questions varied slightly across the groups they explored individual perceptions relating to impact of the OCG on the community; b) impact of the police interventions on the OCG; c) effectiveness of the police operation (including interventions and tactics); d) the ultimate aim of the police.

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All 3 group's showed consensus in how the OCG impacted on the community in a negative manner through fear and intimidation. It was also noted that the small scale of the village had been drastically affected by the large scale of the OCG that was corrosive and had effectively destroyed a previously close knit community. Secondly, there was agreement in relation to the perceived impact of more recent police interventions. It is evident in the responses that policing was originally ineffective and displayed little impact against the OCG. As a result of this, policing adapted and the responses signify an increase in police presence and awareness of the OCG, which contributed to the perception of enhanced policing.

The interviews conducted with 3 members of external organizations highlighted some particular issues. The majority of participants stated that the police were effective in regards to communication however, in the beginning; there were some barriers between certain agencies. This was gradually overcome and led to a better understanding of the capabilities of each organisation. One participant expressed how police interventions have become more successful over time through the implementation of a variety of strategies including: seizures, and enhanced community liaison.

The final interviews were conducted on 5 members of the community who had each lived there for various durations ranging from eight years to 75 years, and had, therefore, experienced different levels of criminality in terms of the OCG. Firstly, the majority of participants within this group expressed that their knowledge of the OCG and their criminal activity derived from personally observing them engage in criminality. These included offences such as: motoring offences (speeding); burning wire to gain copper; and illegal tipping. In addition to this, the participants reported that the communication with the police had increased in recent years and, therefore, some knowledge of the crime being committed was generated through direct information, as well as word of mouth. One participant who had been resident in the village for 75 years explained that the level of affluence exhibited by the group could not have been achieved through legitimate means.

It is clear that this team approach had galvanized community spirit, which led to a rise in public confidence. In addition, the members of the community expressed how effectiveness of the police has developed over time. The majority of participants argued that previously, the police were ineffective at reducing crime and disorder because of their reluctance to act; the lack of communication with the community; and their reliance on crime statistics (when most of the OCG crimes went unreported). The community representatives explained how the police have, in recent years, become more effective in their overall police management, adoption of multi agency approaches, and their desire to make a conscious effort to support the people of the village. The majority of participants stated that the police operation has been a success in terms of reducing the criminality of the OCG and the fear among the community.

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Finally it was also interesting to note that many of the interventions had some symbolic meaning. For example the OCG had named two roads after them in the area they had built their houses. This served as a constant reminder that they were above the law. Renaming those streets and removing the sign's was a significant undertaking which the OCG fought; however when successfully achieved it was a further action that reduced the confidence of the OCG and increased the confidence of the community. Indeed as police actions increased members of the community also started taking a more prominent role, even engaging in civil law to reduce the noise caused by some of the OCG members.

A recent survey to assess the impact the policing had, revealed that the community felt the members of the OCG had 'quietened down' and stopped affecting the community as a direct consequence of police activity. That the partners were working closer and more effectively together. They further stated that the police need to 'stick with it' and 'finish the job' There is no doubt that this activity not only has gone a long way to address criminality in the village but has sent ripples out across the area. There is no doubt that this activity in and around the village has restored confidence in a beleaguered community, eroded the confidence of a well established crime family who acted with impunity and has taught the police and other partner's what's important and what works.

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