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# INTRODUCTION

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Problem-oriented policing (POP) is a police management philosophy that above all has come to be associated with Herman Goldstein. An important and influential article from the late 1970s introduced the concept and the principles behind it (Goldstein, 1979). In 1990, Goldstein published *Problem-Oriented Policing*, in which he described the approach in more detail. The main idea is to persuade police to move away from incident-driven policing by identifying the problems that lead citizens to call for assistance, and then to intervene in the mechanisms that cause the problems. Problems in this context are defined as: (1) a cluster of similar, related, or recurring incidents rather than a single incident, and (2) substantive community concerns. Goldstein made clear that problem-oriented policing is primarily a preventive approach, and that solutions are preferred that to a lesser extent, or preferably not at all, rely upon use of the criminal justice system.

In another important publication, Eck and Spelman (1987) reported a number of case studies using the approach, and introduced the acronym SARA to describe the four essential stages of a problem-oriented project: Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (Eck and Spelman, 1987). Scanning means to identify, specify and describe specific problems. Analysis is the phase in which the causes of the problems are explored. Response refers to the search for tailor-made solutions to remove the causes of the problems and then the implementation of the selected responses. Assessment is the process in which the solutions are followed up to evaluate their implementation and effectiveness.

It can be misleading to perceive the process from problem identification to evaluation of effectiveness as following a predetermined sequence where analysis only takes place in the second phase. In fact, the process is iterative, with analysis going back and forth between the stages. For example, new information gained at the response

stage may require fresh analysis of determining conditions to be undertaken (see chapter by Clarke and Goldstein in this volume). In the United Kingdom an alternative to SARA is sometimes used — PROCTOR — that in a somewhat more modulated way describes the different stages and also underlines that analysis takes place throughout the whole process. PROCTOR signifies "... PROblem, Cause, Tactic or Treatment, Output and Result" (Read and Tilley, 2000:11). To carry out a complete analysis of causes is an extremely demanding task that, however, is unnecessary in this context. It is sufficient to find factors that can be changed or manipulated — the so-called pinch-points.

Choice of response (Tactic or Treatment) also requires an analytical, creative approach. In addition, it is essential at this stage to have access to knowledge about methods that have been used successfully elsewhere when similar problems have been encountered. During the Output stage, the degree to which measures are implemented as planned, and the reception that they are given, are both explored. In the Result stage, an evaluation is conducted to discover if the expected effects have been achieved and if side effects have occurred. Evaluation is a demanding task that entails both data collection and rigorous analysis.

At a higher level of abstraction, problem-oriented policing may therefore be characterized as a much more analytic way of conducting police business than practiced hitherto. The goal is to get away from a reactive incident-driven mode in favour of a proactive and preventive way of conducting police business.

## **RECEPTION GIVEN TO PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING**

The concept immediately aroused interest, and police forces in the United States, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia have adopted problem-oriented policing. Many projects, with varying degree of support from management, have been carried out by enthusiastic officers at the beat level. Some forces have also tried to implement a more complete realization of the idea. Central authorities (for example, the Home Office in the U.K., the National Police Board in Sweden and the National Police Directorate in Norway) and other organisations (for example, the Police Executive Research Forum in the United States) have also tried to stimulate police interest in problem-oriented policing.

In many places, more or less extensive courses for police officers on the principles and practice of problem-oriented policing have been given. For example, during basic training at the police academies in both Norway and Sweden, future officers are taught problem-oriented

policing. The power of the good example has also been used to advocate and spread the approach. In the United States, the Police Executive Research Forum has arranged an annual conference on problem-oriented policing in San Diego every year since 1990. One of the main events consists of a competition — the Herman Goldstein Award — for the best problem-oriented policing projects. The award now attracts about 90 submissions each year. In United Kingdom a yearly conference — Brit PoP — has also been established, where the Tilley award is given to the best project. In Sweden, there has also been a national conference with a competition for the best problem-oriented policing project.

It was hoped that these competitions would encourage forces to duplicate the successes of others and that the concept would gradually diffuse, resulting eventually in a breakthrough in policing strategy. The original vision was, thus, that problem-oriented policing would permeate the police organization and that a radical shift in the policing paradigm would occur.

## **Extent of Implementation**

Despite the welcome accorded to the concept by the police, hard questions soon began to be asked about the extent to which they were actually implementing it. Hardly any police force has adopted problem-oriented policing as its dominant strategy. The few exceptions could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The San Diego Police Department under Chief Jerry Sanders in the United States and the Lancashire Constabulary under Chief Constable Pauline Clare in the United Kingdom are such examples where genuine efforts to implement problem-oriented policing in the organization has taken place.

Other warning signs concerned the quality of the projects submitted for awards in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Many of these projects fall well below the depth and quality of work needed for successful problem-oriented policing interventions (Clarke, 1998; Scott and Clarke, 2000; Read and Tilley, 2000; Scott, 2000). Even Goldstein himself has sometimes shown signs of disappointment and frustration. The expected breakthrough has not occurred except in police rhetoric (see Goldstein's chapter in this book).

However, none of the early advocates of problem-oriented policing has questioned the basic idea. The disappointing implementation of problem-oriented policing is not thought to be evidence of "theory failure"; on the contrary, belief in the concept is still strong. Rather, it is a question of shortcomings in the implementation of problem-oriented policing.

## Origins of this Book

If the concept is sound, the failures of implementation must be understood and corrected before the problem-oriented approach can assume its proper role in policing. Are the causes to be found in academia where the concept was originally developed, in lack of support from government or in the police service itself?

These questions were the starting-point for this book. The contributors, all of whom have considerable understanding of the problem-oriented approach and are among the foremost experts in the field, were asked to reflect on progress made to date and to think about ways of improving the implementation of the concept from whichever perspective they chose. In the event, their contributions range quite widely over a variety of topics concerned with ways of improving the number and quality of problem-oriented policing projects. These topics include:

- the receptivity of police managers and line officers (Goldstein, Townsley et al.);
- the willingness and capacity of police organizations to make necessary changes (Scott, Townsley et al.);
- the role of awards and importance of good case studies (Bullock and Tilley, Clarke and Goldstein, Sampson);
- the in-house expertise of police in crime analysis (Bullock and Tilley, Clarke and Goldstein, Goldstein, Lamm Weisel);
- the needed input and support from the research community in building a body of knowledge to support good practice (Eck, Goldstein, Scott);
- the need for police to become informed about relevant concepts from situational crime prevention and environmental criminology (Eck, Sampson, Scott);
- the experience of seeking to implement other evidence-based strategies such as repeat victimization (Laycock and Farrell);
- the level of support needed from governments (Goldstein, Laycock and Farrell); and
- the expectations of the wider community about the police role and function (Goldstein, Laycock and Farrell, Scott).

## **Complexity of the Enterprise**

These topics were the focus of the meeting held in Norway to discuss the individual contributions. Perhaps the main conclusion that emerged was that the complexity of the problem-oriented approach has been greatly underestimated. Problem-oriented policing may be common sense, but it takes considerable experience, skill and technical knowledge to practice it. Reiss (1992) argues that only police organizations with considerable research capacity can be expected to implement problem-oriented policing in any thoroughgoing manner. It is a research- and evidence-based activity. It is not reasonable to expect all police to develop such a capacity or to develop it quickly. Nor is it reasonable to expect that police would move quickly to embrace such a radical shift in their traditional method of operating. Indeed, expectations concerning the time needed for the concept to be in everyday use have been wildly optimistic. Five, ten or even twenty years — depending on the country in question — is really a short time for a paradigm shift of this magnitude to occur.

Even if the police wished to move quickly to employ personnel with the necessary technical skills to implement the approach, the supply of such people with relevant training and experience is scarce. Education for this purpose hardly exists at universities or other institutions of higher education. Nor is it purely a question of technical skills, but also of attitudes. Researchers suited to this task must be willing to serve policy and practice, but an important part of criminological training at university institutions is to inculcate an independent and critical attitude toward government and the police. The pejorative term "administrative criminology" is sometimes used to characterize the type of criminology that is engaged in producing policy-relevant knowledge for government. It is assumed that this knowledge is "tainted" by the need to suit the interests of the establishment and is not pursued for the benefit of ordinary citizens (Young, 1988). To the contrary, police researchers should indeed have a critical, independent attitude. In fact, if they are properly to serve the police such an attitude, combined with unquestioned personal integrity, is of the utmost importance.

Nor is it well understood in university departments of criminology that knowledge about the "root" causes of criminality is of very limited relevance to everyday policing. The line of thought with most relevance to problem-oriented policing is found in the situational approach (see, e.g., Clarke, 1997). This criminological approach seeks to supplement the system of justice, not to provide a complete alternative. It also has a clear practical orientation by providing guidance about manipulating different situational factors to affect potential

offenders' perceptions of criminal acts as more risky, more difficult and less rewarding. In this respect, situational crime prevention shares assumptions with the theoretical basis of policing — deterrence theory. Both share the assumption of humans as rational actors, even if there are nuances in this image (Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Clarke and Cornish, 2000; Sullivan, 2000).

However, many academic criminologists have objected to situational prevention on theoretical grounds. A common but faulty objection is that since (assumed) "root" causes are unaffected by situational measures, displacement of crime will of necessity occur. Many studies have shown this not to be true (Hesseling, 1994). An important tenet of the situational approach is that the opportunity structure for crime is a cause of criminality per se, and that by affecting the opportunity structure, crimes will be prevented in a true sense; thus explaining why displacement is not a necessary consequence of situational prevention.

Leaving aside the shortage of people with the relevant theoretical background, there is also a serious lack of people with the required analytic skills. Undertaking scanning and analysis at the level required for successful problem-oriented policing is a difficult and challenging task. It requires familiarity with different types of crime data and with a wide variety of statistical and mapping tools. During the last few years, crime mapping has developed very rapidly both in terms of theoretical knowledge and in software to assist analysis (see, e.g., Weisburd and McEwen, 1997), but training in crime mapping has lagged far behind in criminology departments. Finally, the ability to undertake rigorous impact studies is of the greatest importance, but this is also in short supply. Such studies make high demands on both methodological skills and research imagination, yet few researchers are being trained in evaluation methodology.

It is unclear if the technical capacity needed to support problem-oriented policing can build upon the crime analyst function that nowadays is increasingly found in many police departments. This function is gradually becoming more sophisticated as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) become more readily available. The uncertainty is created by the fact that crime analysts generally lack basic training in problem-oriented policing and primarily serve other tasks, like providing management with data for resource allocation or for media purposes. These day-to-day demands might make it impossible for crime analysts to provide the continuous analytic support needed for problem-oriented policing projects, and it might be necessary to create a specialized analytic capacity with personnel having specific competence in problem-oriented policing.

Given the difficult and demanding task that problem-oriented policing represents, it is also of vital importance to improve training of police officers. Normally courses are short, and it is not possible to get a sufficiently deep understanding after just a couple of days training. Considerable experimentation may be needed before a satisfactory curriculum and format is developed for longer courses of perhaps several weeks in duration. It is also imperative that management get more thorough training, since they have the ultimate responsibility for the activity. They must be well informed enough to know the level of commitment and the specific skills required to undertake a satisfactory problem-oriented project.

### *Problem Solving versus Problem-oriented Policing*

A second conclusion reached at the meeting in Norway was that it is important to differentiate between problem-oriented policing in its proper sense and activities at beat level that are more accurately characterized as problem solving (Clarke, 1998). Problem solving signifies that officers have solved a persistent problem, perhaps in a creative and new way, but without undertaking a deep analysis (often because the problem was clear and evident), without undertaking a thorough analysis of its causes (one creative solution was perhaps enough), without requiring extensive and expensive measures (even if no one had come up with the idea before, it was simple to carry through), and without undertaking any formal assessment of the result (the problem was so evident and simple that its presence or absence was easy to observe).

It is of course important to encourage this kind of problem solving. It has always existed and has been carried out by officers who have sometimes been regarded as "oddballs," not engaged in "real" police work, by their colleagues. But problem solving, without the elements of SARA or PROCTOR, cannot be regarded as problem-oriented policing. Problem-oriented policing and problem solving go well together; they should both be encouraged, but should not be confused with each other.

### *The Capacity to Engage in Problem-oriented Policing*

Finally the Norway meeting concluded that advocates had sometimes made the mistake of assuming that the primary and ultimate goal of the enterprise should be to make problem-oriented policing the dominant strategy for policing. Experience shows this to be unrealistic. Not only is the task too difficult, but also the police reject this goal. The more realistic alternative is for the police to develop the ca-

capacity, at least in the larger forces, to properly implement a small number — say three or four — problem-oriented projects each year. With a sufficient number of forces working in this way, knowledge about how to handle substantive problems that materially impact police resources would rapidly accumulate, though deliberate efforts to share the results of each department's work with the wider field would have to be made. If this were done, forces would learn from each other, thereby increasing progress for policing.

### **Cause for Optimism**

In view of the disappointing progress to date in implementing problem-oriented policing, it may be a little surprising that the contributors to this book remain optimistic about the future of the concept. Apart from their belief in the inherent soundness of the concept, this optimism is grounded in the developments that have taken place in the past twenty years. Of particular importance is the growth in the body of knowledge on policing and crime prevention. Notwithstanding the urgent need for more case studies of problem-oriented policing, understanding about the effects of preventive measures and police tactics has grown considerably both in depth and breadth. During the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many evaluations of crime preventive measures in general and, more specifically, of police tactics and interventions have been carried out. In this connection, compilations of research results are extremely important and helpful given that problem-oriented policing is an evidence-based activity. Examples of this are the anthologies of experiences of situational prevention in Scandinavia (Knutsson, 1998) and worldwide (Clarke, 1997). For police tactics, compilations by Sherman et al. (1997) and Bennett (1998) are available.

Despite the criticisms made above of the universities, there is now also available a supply of basic textbooks that are policy-relevant, some with a practical crime preventive orientation (e.g., Felson, 2002). At a more advanced level, books are available on evaluation research and methodology that focus on crime prevention (e.g., Pawson and Tilley, 1997). In these regards, conditions are far more favourable than just a few years ago.

An increasing number of tools and concepts have also been developed to help police undertake the complex functions entailed in problem-oriented policing. Concepts like SARA and PROCTOR have already been mentioned. The crime triangle (see Eck in this volume), developed from the routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979) is of great value in guiding problem-oriented policing projects. On a practical instructive level, the Office of Community Oriented Police



Services (COPS) in the United States Department of Justice has recently published a series of 20 guides for police officers on how to handle different types of problems. Just to give two examples, Guide number 1 is about assaults in and around bars (Scott, 2001) and number 4 is on drug dealing in privately-owned apartment complexes (Sampson, 2001). These guides are condensed literature reviews and summarize knowledge on how to decrease harm caused by the specific problems. In an extension of this effort, two other series of guides are planned: One will summarize knowledge on responses (for example, what is known about crackdowns or closed-circuit television), and the other will summarize knowledge about the use of various analytic tools (for example, how to do offender interviews or conduct a school crime-prevention-through-environmental-design survey). All these guides, and other relevant information, will be disseminated much more readily as a result of the development of the Internet.

Finally, changes that will likely assist problem-oriented policing have also occurred in government. In pace with more sophisticated management and audit styles, more emphasis is being placed on the need for evidence-led practice. Both nationally and at the local level, much more attention is being paid to performance indicators and evaluation. The training and education of police officers has also become more extensive and professional in the past few decades. In both Norway and Sweden, for example, basic training takes more than two years. Many large forces in the United States now require a college degree for newly employed officers. This means that there will be a growing number of well-educated officers with higher professional standards and expectations. Many of them will also be acquainted with the principles of problem-oriented policing. These developments in policing, in combination with more realistic expectations and a stronger theoretical foundation, make us believe that problem-oriented policing will become an integral part of doing police business in the future.



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