

Closing the Gap between Analysis and Response

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Effective crime analysis relies on standard processes that transform good data into effective law enforcement actions. All of the process models of crime analysis, whether the traditional “crime analysis process” (collect, query, identify, analyze, disseminate, respond, and evaluate); the SARA model (scan, analyze, respond, assess); or the “intelligence cycle” (collect, process, analyze, disseminate, respond) suggest a smooth progression through each of the steps in the process. But not all of the transitions require equal effort, and the most difficult in any of the processes is the transition between analysis and response. It is here that the analyst loses direct control over the process and must pass the baton to the operational units. The operational units, for their part, end up having to work with whatever the analyst passes them, regardless of its quality or operational relevance. There are, then, two major potential breakdowns in the process:

- **No actionable information:** Either the agency’s crime analysis unit does not provide the type of information decision makers need or the information is incorrect or insufficient.
- **Inadequate follow-up:** The analysis unit provides actionable information, but the agency has no processes in place to take it and use it for its intended purpose.

This article provides suggestions for creating a smoother transition between analysis and response at each stage of the process.

Knowing What Analysts Can Do

Agencies whose analysts are producing mostly administrative products (statistics, data, charts, maps, and other outputs for administrative or management purposes) are not getting the full value of their crime analysis programs. Similarly, if analysts’ “crime bulletins” are just summaries of individual crimes, they are missing a lot of what crime analysis can do.

A crime analysis unit should regularly issue both tactical products (analysis of emerging series, patterns, and hot spots) and strategic products (analysis of long-term or chronic trends and problems). These products serve as an information arsenal to arrest serial offenders, quash hot spots, suppress opportunities for crime, harden targets, and, in general, reduce crime. Agencies should make sure to direct their analysts to concentrate on tactical and strategic issues (see figure 1).

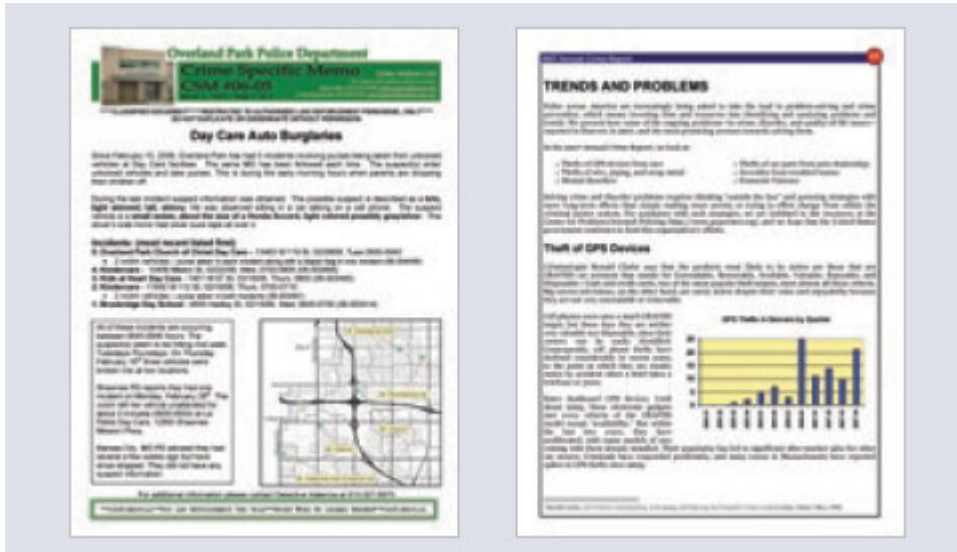


Figure 1. (Left) Tactical publication from the Overland Park, Kansas, Police Department and (right) strategic publication from the Danvers, Massachusetts, Police Department

Adequate Training and Resources

Analysts cannot provide actionable information if they do not have the time, training, or tools to implement the latest methods in data querying, spatial analysis, temporal analysis, forecasting, publications, and a host of other crime analysis skills. To remain at peak performance, a crime analysis unit needs the following:

- **Adequate staffing:** The International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA) defines adequate staffing as one analyst per 1,500 Uniform Crime Report Part I crimes (agencies with fewer than 1,500 Part I crimes should have at least part-time analysts). Agencies with fewer analysts run the risk that they will miss some patterns or will be unable to fully analyze crime and disorder issues.
- **Time:** The 1:1,500 ratio assumes each analyst will have 40 hours a week to devote to crime analysis. Appointing analysts and loading them up with nonanalytic duties will destine a program to inadequacy.
- **Initial and ongoing training:** An initial round of basic training for new analysts should be supplemented with annual classes and professional conference attendance.
- **Proper equipment:** Necessary equipment includes modern computers; software for data analysis, statistics, and publications; and a geographic information system (GIS).

Getting Analysts out of the Office

The first step in closing the analysis/operations gap involves orienting the crime analysis unit toward an operational focus. No good analysis comes out of an ivory tower or a cloistered fifth-floor office. Analysts must

- have a visceral understanding of the nature of crime, criminals, and the social dynamics of the jurisdiction;
- know what types of information operational units find valuable;
- understand what tactics and strategies have a realistic chance of success;
- plug themselves into the informal intelligence exchange that happens on the ground level of any agency, discovering relevant facts that do not always make it into police reports; and
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Officer-analysts come to the job with much of this knowledge. Good civilian analysts will take steps to develop these resources, but new ones, or introverted ones, may need the support and encouragement of agency leaders to get out of the office now and then. Agencies should encourage site visits; ride-alongs; participation in offender interviews; and a regular, open exchange of information, intelligence, and ideas between analysts and officers.

Broad Array of Tactics and Strategies

In agency after agency, the default response to any crime pattern, series, hot spot, trend, or problem is the directed patrol. Unfortunately, in some agencies it is often the only response. Directed patrols can be valuable for certain issues and can lead to both suppression and apprehension. But there is a much larger list of potential responses at an agency's disposal.

Tactical products: Tactical products require tactical responses—fast, effective responses that stop a crime pattern or series in its tracks, through one of three means:

- Apprehending offenders
- Hardening potential targets
- Suppressing underlying opportunities for crime

The correct approach depends on the characteristics of the pattern, as determined by the analysis. There is likely no existing published model for analysis-based tactical action, but table 1 suggests several tactics based on the focus of the pattern and the tactical avenue an agency wishes to pursue.¹ (For this list, the authors are partly indebted to an unpublished diagram created in the San Diego Police Department in 1979 known as the “San Diego Wheel.”)

Focus	Tactical Avenue		
	Apprehension	Target Hardening	Suppression
Location: Limited locations for next offense; small target area	Rapid response Silent alarms Stakeouts Hidden cameras Channeling	Security surveys Alarms	Security guards or dogs Directed patrols Phantom cars Checkpoints Closures Visible cameras
Offender: Strong offender description or name; or good physical evidence	Traditional evidence-based investigation Surveillance Suspect-oriented patrol General community and media information	General community and media information	Profile interview patrols
Target: Limited number of potential targets; targets easy to identify and reach	Decoys Controlled buys	Property identification Bulletins to potential victims	Market disruption
None: Broad geography; no suspect; large number of available targets	Planned response Informants	Warning signs Community organization General community and media information	Saturation patrols

Table 1. Tactical avenues available to agencies, by focus type

Strategic products: Strategic products demand long-term problem-solving responses, for which the best template is the “25 Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention,” designed by Ronald Clarke and readily available at the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.² These techniques do not focus on offender apprehension but rather on eliminating the underlying opportunity for crime, often suggesting solutions outside the purview of the law enforcement community. The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing Web site also has several other valuable resources for dealing with specific problems—anything from school bullying to prostitution to gun violence.

Encouraging Initiative

For agencies with no formal response structure in place, the initiative of individual officers, investigators, and supervisors becomes the primary mechanism of using crime analysis information. But even with a formal response structure, agencies should not discount the role that individual initiative plays. After all, agency leadership will still want officers to take analyses and run with them between CompStat meetings.

Policies, procedures, and leadership should encourage initiative at the following levels of their organizations:

- **Patrols:** Patrols should review crime analysis information and implement what tactics and strategies they can to address a particular issue. These might include suspect-oriented patrols, profile interview patrols, directed patrols, talking to informants, and warning members of the community.
- **Investigators:** Investigators can group related crimes, prioritizing those that are part of a pattern or series, and implement such effective tactics as surveillance, stakeouts, and controlled buys.
- **Supervisors:** Supervisors should plan and direct more resource-intensive tactics, such as decoys, saturation patrols, and planned response.

individual crimes, in their areas. The precinct commanders themselves present the current crime figures and pattern information and are questioned in detail by the commissioner and chiefs. Other models care less about who presents the data and more about facilitating a collaborative process to intercede in emerging patterns and to solve long-term problems. In these models, accountability and confrontation are less important than effective results.



A properly designed CompStat-style system can make excellent use of crime analysis. Ideally, the department discusses information that the crime analysts have prepared and decides how to respond. The best systems ensure that no pattern or problem goes unaddressed, encourage creative thinking, and reward effective (rather than traditional) strategies and tactics. The Fort Worth, Texas, Police Department's CIDAT process, for instance, requires a written action plan to follow any discussion of a pattern or series (figure 3).

Figure 3. The beginning of a three-page action plan for reducing motor vehicle break-ins in Fort Worth

Involving the Crime Analysts in Response

Crime analysts should have a seat at the CompStat table—and not just as the people running the PowerPoint presentations. Analysts who have studied patterns or problems and discussed them with other members of their agencies know more about the big picture than anyone else. Analysts who take the time to learn about effective police tactics and strategies will probably have a good idea on what to do about various patterns or problems. Wise leaders will know to tap this resource.

More importantly, involving crime analysts in the response planning process makes them vested in the success of the strategies. They learn to see a stronger connection between the work that they do and the ultimate prevention of crime. This will make them better, more engaged analysts.

Expanding the Definition of Success

Not all responses must end in arrests to be successful. For some patterns—and for the majority of long-term problems—arrest is a decidedly ineffective response. But while most police agencies recognize and reward officers who make significant arrests for individual crimes, it is somewhat rarer to find an agency that rewards officers for suppressing opportunities or hardening targets, even though by doing so they might have prevented dozens of future crimes.

Crime analysts should not be allowed to neglect the “evaluation” stage of the crime analysis process. They should monitor patterns and problems after implementing tactics and strategies. Agency leaders can ask them what worked and what did not and reward the successful initiative of

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Providing Feedback to Analysts

Agency leaders should make sure analysts know which of their products work and which do not. Analysts should be informed about what information is useful, what is extraneous, and what is simply absent. The entire agency should be encouraged to do the same. Analysts should neither waste time on useless products nor overlook data sources, questions, and techniques that could have a real effect on crime and disorder.

Some agencies develop formal feedback mechanisms such as surveys and focus groups. These can be valuable, but when any officer or detective feels comfortable and willing to say to an analyst, “Hey, that bulletin you sent out yesterday was great!” (or “a waste of my time,” as the case may be), agencies know they have a good feedback process in place.

Conclusions

Agencies should expect a lot from their crime analysis units. With adequate training and resources, analysts can keep on top of each new crime pattern as it emerges and provide their agencies with useful analysis for many of the chronic problems their jurisdictions face.

For all law enforcement leaders, sending the message that crime analysis really matters must be an organizational imperative. In smaller agencies, law enforcement executives can underscore this message through direct and frequent contact with their analysts. In larger agencies, the chief or sheriff should make deliberate decisions about where crime analysts are placed within the agency, both physically and on the organizational chart. When properly implemented, the crime analysis function can be a vital component of an agency’s crime reduction mission. To be successful, however, law enforcement leaders must ensure that adequate attention is paid to the selection, training, and support of crime analysts. As the profession moves toward the adoption of such new paradigms as data-driven or intelligence-led policing, the need for good crime analysts will matter even more in the future.

Analysts can do great work for an agency; it should not be allowed to go to waste. Many crime analysts are heard to complain, “I issue bulletin after bulletin and no one *does* anything with them.” Sometimes this is the analyst’s fault (for failing to provide actionable information), and sometimes it is the agency’s (for failing to establish processes for using the analysis). Either way, it is the community that loses out. The suggestions in this article can help to diagnose the problem. ■

Notes:

¹Definitions of these tactics and further notes can be found in Christopher Bruce, “Tactics to Intervene in Patterns and Series,” International Association of Crime Analysts Web site, <http://www.iaca.net/articles/tactics.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²These techniques are listed in “Twenty Five Techniques of Situational Prevention,” Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, <http://www.popcenter.org/25techniques/> (accessed August 6, 2008).

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