

Script Analysis for Crime Controllers: Extending the Reach of Situational Crime Prevention

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To a genuinely warm and generous man

Salute Ernesto!

Introduction

Crime script analysis has been introduced in the field of environmental criminology in 1994 by Derek Cornish. The main purpose of this contribution was to provide the field with a framework that could be used to detail the crime-commission process for purposes of situational prevention. Since Cornish and Clarke's (2002) piece on the potential of script analysis to examine organized forms of crime, very few have looked at the preventative benefits of this approach to tackle such crimes regardless of their degree of 'organization' (see for instance, Chiu et al. 2011; Hancock and Laycock 2010; Savona 2010; Savona et al. 2013). The work completed recently by Savona et al. in Italy is one exception. Savona achieved the difficult task of mapping situational prevention strategies onto scripts related to the infiltration of the public construction industry by the Italian mafia and scripts of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Italy. As pointed out by Savona et al. (2013) (see also Moreto and Clarke 2013), organized crime is quite a challenge to investigate from a script approach because it involves a complex network, which is often international in nature, and implicates individuals of the legal economy and criminal organizations.

In this chapter, it is argued that examining scripts from the perspective of crime controllers could be beneficial for preventing complex forms of crime such as organized crime. Consistent with Savona et al.'s (2013) footsteps, the objective is to extend the boundaries of script analysis, which could assist in tackling organized crime. This chapter, however, is not a study on organized crime per se but a contribution in environmental criminology that could be useful for preventing organized crime and beyond. Indeed, it is believed that scripting the intervention process of crime controllers is relevant for preventing any forms of crime.

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Routine Activity Approach and the Problem Analysis Triangle

According to the routine activity approach, the occurrence of crime is dependent on the convergence in time and space of three elements: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable victim or target, and (3) the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen and Felson 1979). The concept of 'capable guardian' is central to this approach and refers specifically to the presence of any individual who has the capacity to interrupt crime commission either directly or indirectly. Felson (1995) also indicates that a person can prevent crime simply by being visible and/or in close proximity to the offender, that is, without intervening. Conversely crime is more likely in the absence of a guardian. The power of this approach lies in its simplicity and applicability to crime problems for purposes of crime prevention.

The formulation of the routine activity approach led to the development of the first version of the problem analysis triangle (Clarke and Eck 2005). Originally, the problem analysis triangle was a theoretical figure composed of three sides (i.e., the offender, the victim and the place). A second version of the problem triangle emerged from the works of Marcus Felson and John Eck. This second formulation also includes an outer triangle characterized by what are called crime controllers, that is, a handler, a capable guardian and a place manager (Clarke and Eck 2005). Each crime controller is responsible for exerting control on one element of the original triangle, that is, on the offender, the victim or the place. Originating from Felson's work (1986), an intimate handler is someone who because of a close relationship with the offender can handle, control or contain the offender's propensity to offend (e.g., parents, relatives). As underlined in the routine activity approach, capable guardians are responsible for protecting themselves and their belongings as well as potential victims or targets. Brought to light by Eck, place managers are in charge of supervising places by controlling access to these places (e.g., bar owners, hotel maid) (see for instance Eck and Weisburd 1995). In summary, crime is less likely when handlers directly supervise offenders, guardians directly supervise potential victims or targets and place managers directly supervise places (Felson 1995).

Scripts and Crime Scripts

Schank and Abelson (1977) illustrated the concept of scripts well with the restaurant script, that is, the sequence of actions that must be taken by the customer of a restaurant. The customer must: enter the restaurant; wait to be seated; get the menu; order; eat; get the check; pay; and exit. A script is a special type of schema known as an event schema (Fisk and Taylor 1991). An event schema is a knowledge structure that organizes the sequence of actions to adopt in a particular context. Like any schemas, an event schema contains assumptions and expectations about the social world that guide a person in interpreting future experiences. In other words, a person has accumulated knowledge about what sequence of actions to adopt in order to achieve desired goals. This knowledge, in turn, assists and guides the person in

Table 1 Example of a crime script

Script scenes	Script actions
Preparation	Get a weapon, select co-offenders
Entry	Enter neighborhood
Precondition	Look for convenience stores, clerk work alone, absence of other customers
Instrumental precondition	Identify and select a suitable convenience store
Instrumental initiation	Approach and verbally intimidate the clerk working at the convenience store
Instrumental actualization	Show weapon, assault
Doing	Take money
Postcondition	Threaten the clerk to not report victimization
Exit	Walk away

everyday life. According to Schank and Abelson (1977), a person has a repertoire of behavioral sequences stored in memory ready to be activated unconsciously in the presence of familiar cues.

Crime commission also requires the adoption of a particular sequence of actions for completion (Cornish 1994). Cornish (1994) borrowed the script concept from cognitive psychology in order to: (1) provide a framework to systematically investigate all of the stages of the crime-commission process of a specific crime, decisions and actions that must be taken at each stage and the resources required for successful completion of the crime, and (2) assist researchers in identifying additional intervention points for situational prevention. A crime script simply represents the complete sequence of actions adopted prior to, during, and following the commission of a particular crime. Scripts have now been applied to understand property, interpersonal and organized crimes. However, only recently do scholars have started to complete script analysis for its main purpose, that is, to think about and design situational prevention measures (Brayley et al. 2011; Chiu et al. 2011; Clarke and Newman 2006; Hiropoulos et al. 2013; Leclerc et al. 2011; Savona 2010; Savona et al. 2013; Smith and Cornish 2006).

The typical sequence of script scenes used to break down the crime-commission process of offenders is detailed in Table 1. As an illustration, a hypothetical example of an armed robbery script in a convenient store is shown. The armed robber has to go through a series of steps from getting a weapon, selecting a suitable convenience store, and intimidating the clerk to assaulting the clerk, taking the money, threatening the clerk to not report the victimization, and walking away.

Scripts for Crime Controllers

Thinking about scripts from the offender perspective is immediately appealing for situational prevention. However, scripts can be completed from the perspective of actors who can interfere with crime as well (Leclerc 2013; Leclerc and Reynald

Table 2 The application of script analysis to crime controllers

<i>Routine activity dimensions</i>	Offender	Victim	Place
<i>Crime controllers</i>	Handler	Guardian	Place manager
<i>Focus of script analysis</i>	Intervention process as opposed to crime-commission process		
<i>Objective of situational prevention measures</i>	Facilitate script as opposed to disrupt script		

Table 3 A hypothetical handler script

Script scenes	Script actions
Preparation	Carry mobile phone
Entry	Enter the convenience store where youth is
Precondition	Look for youth in convenience store
Instrumental precondition	Identify and locate youth in convenience store
Instrumental initiation	Approach youth
Instrumental actualization	Remind the youth that stealing is wrong
Doing	Stop the youth from stealing
Postcondition	Explain situation to clerk
Exit	Leave convenience store

submitted). As argued by Leclerc (2013), script analysis does not make any distinction between the offender, the victim or any person who might be involved or intervene during crime events. Script analysis is designed to map out and understand the behavioral sequences of any forms of human behavior leading to an outcome in a particular situation (Schank and Abelson 1977). These sequences include those of crime controllers.

The goal of offenders is to commit crime without getting apprehended. Therefore, the ultimate objective of scripting crime-commission processes is to obtain a fuller range of intervention-points in order to disrupt the script before completion. As shown in Table 2, the goal of crime controllers (handler, capable guardian and place manager) is rather to prevent crime through direct supervision, and intervention. Accordingly, the ultimate objective in this case is not to disrupt the script but rather to facilitate its execution.

To illustrate scripts from the perspective of crime controllers, a hypothetical example of a script for each crime controller is presented below. Table 3 shows a hypothetical and simplified example of a handler script. Specifically, in this example, an adult is aware that the youth living next door, who s/he knows personally, is thinking about stealing from the convenience store nearby. As with offender scripts, the adult (or the handler in this case) has to go through a number of stages in order 'to grasp the handle' (Felson 1986, p. 122) and prevent the youth from committing crime. During the preparation phase, the handler may carry a mobile phone to call the parents of the youth if judged necessary. Then the handler may enter the convenience store where the youth went. The subsequent steps may involve looking for, identifying and locating the youth in the store. The handler may then approach and

Table 4 A hypothetical capable guardian script

Script scenes	Script actions
Preparation	Carry mobile phone
Entry	Already in setting
Precondition	Capacity to intervene
Instrumental precondition	Locate youth setting up a small-scale drug laboratory
Instrumental initiation	Alert other potential guardians, approach youth
Instrumental actualization	Discourage youth to offend
Doing	Report to police
Postcondition	Inform neighbors

Table 5 A hypothetical place manager script

Script scenes	Script actions
Preparation	Use radio transmitter, capstun canister
Entry	Already in setting
Precondition	Training of employees, active supervision of place
Instrumental precondition	Identify and report suspicious activities
Instrumental initiation	Approach potential offenders
Instrumental actualization	Discourage potential offenders
Doing	Neutralize potential offenders and/or their activities
Postcondition	Report the incident to police

remind the youth of the serious consequences of stealing and that stealing is wrong. Finally, the handler may grab the youth by the arm or ‘force’ the youth to leave the store, explain the situation to the clerk at the counter and then leave the convenience store.

Table 4 shows a hypothetical and simplified example of a capable guardian intervention script enacted during the set up of a small-scale drug laboratory in a bush nearby (for a detailed script model of the intervention process of capable guardians, see Leclerc and Reynald [submitted](#)). During the preparation phase, the capable guardian may carry a mobile phone for ease of communication if needed. Then in order to intervene, the capable guardian may have to locate the youth offender setting up the laboratory, approach the youth and/or alert other capable guardians. Following this stage, the capable guardian may try to discourage the youth from proceeding with the laboratory by threatening to report the offense to the police. The next stage may involve reporting the incident to the police. A post condition may be to ensure the long term success of the intervention by informing the neighbors of this criminal event.

Table 5 shows a hypothetical and simplified example of a place manager script. In this case, the place manager is a bar owner who wishes to prevent drug dealing in his/her establishment. During the preparation phase, the place manager may benefit from a radio transmitter and tools for protection if needed (e.g., capstun canister).

A precondition for a successful intervention in this script may be to ensure that all employees are sufficiently trained to supervise, report and manage suspicious customers and their activities. Then in order to intervene, the place manager may have to identify and report suspicious activities to other employees including doormen. Following this stage, the place manager (and/or the doormen) may have to approach, try to discourage, and if necessary, neutralize potential offenders and/or their activities, which might involve banishing them from the bar. The place manager may also report the incident to the police.

After identifying the script of a crime controller, the classification table of 25 situational measures designed by Cornish and Clarke (2003) may be used to map measures onto each stage of the script in order to facilitate its completion and therefore, favor a successful intervention and prevention of crime (see Leclerc and Reynald [submitted](#)). It is important to note that because the objective of script analysis in this context is to facilitate the intervention of crime controllers, the goal of measures such as increasing risks, increasing efforts, decreasing rewards and removing excuses has to be reversed in order to be applicable. This exercise means that the purpose of situational prevention will be to decrease the efforts, decrease the risks, increase the rewards, and remove excuses to not intervene.

Conclusion

Drawing on the problem analysis triangle, the objective of this chapter was to use the script approach in criminology to extend the reach of situational prevention, which could be helpful to combat complex forms of crime such as organized crimes. Specifically, it was shown that the sequence of actions of handlers, capable guardians and place managers can be scripted for purposes of situational prevention. In this context, the script approach represents an opportunity to facilitate the supervision and intervention process of crime controllers. This development in scripts is significant because it takes into account third parties who may be present during crime events—third parties who may make a difference in whether or not crime is ultimately committed. The reality is that certain crimes such as organized forms of crime are quite complex to prevent for a variety of reasons (e.g., the number and diversity of actors involved, the hierarchical nature of some organizations, the international nature of networks, the capacity of some organizations to adapt and evolve rapidly in response to law enforcement strategies, etc.) (see Savona et al. 2013). In this case it appears sensible to think about scripting the actions of crime controllers because they have the potential to exert pressure or control over criminal organizations and the actors involved in those organizations.

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