TACTICAL CRIME ANALYSIS

Research and Investigation

Derek J. Paulsen | Sean Bair | Dan Helms

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Section I

Introduction of Crime Analysis

1

Introduction

Crime analysis is an emerging discipline within the field of public safety. In its current state of near infancy, the functions, techniques, products, and even the nomenclature critical to this new profession are still being defined. When one becomes a police officer, one enters a standardized and accredited training program. Every department knows the specifics of each officer training each officer and knows that each officer demonstrated competency in core skills upon completion of the program. When an agency looks to hire an officer, it knows that the officer has the skills necessary to protect and serve the public. This is not the case for a crime analyst. The skills of crime analysts in the United States vary drastically from place to place, even within a single law enforcement agency. In one department, an analyst may only have the skills and functions necessary for data entry and yet hold the title of crime analyst. In another, the analyst may provide valid and useful spatial, statistical, and temporal analysis to the department, which in turn uses the analyst's results to make more informed and effective decisions. As in any emerging profession, efforts are being made to standardize the skills and training of crime analysts. Within the next decade or so, the skills and training of crime analysts and crime analysis units will be as commonplace and standardized as those of police officers.

Crime analysis is a collection of police functions that provide analytical and decision support to law enforcement and public safety agencies. Although the analysis of crime is implicit in the title, crime analysts also study police activity and may range farther afield in support of their mission. The crime analyst is a support unit, not a primary police unit. This is no trivial role, however. The crime analyst is no less vital to the sworn police officer than his patrol car or radio. When properly utilized, the analyst can provide direction and guidance that act as a force multiplier. A typical crime analyst can be expected to improve the efficiency of the investigators and patrol force; thereby effectively increasing the agency's ability to serve the community to a greater degree than a single new officer or detective.

The crime analyst's role is to support decision making by police officers and administrators through effective analysis and presentation of information. Although the analyst is seldom a decision maker, no part of police

operations should be aloof from scrutiny by the crime analyst. The ability to effectively retrieve, analyze, and disseminate information means that the analyst acts as a decision supporter. It is the place of the analyst to recommend and advocate effective actions and strategy based on her or his professional expertise. While the analyst should not be giving orders to sworn personnel, decisions made without benefit of analytical support are unlikely to be the best decisions.

Crime analysts must not only be proficient at statistical techniques and mathematics, but specialists in technology as well. The typical crime analyst must have a comprehensive understanding of data and databases, the software used to retrieve those data and analyze them, but also the personality and credibility to present his or her finding to a group who does not understand either. An analyst must use technology and delve into disciplines that others make their careers from in order to provide the department with information that is timely, accurate, and operationally useful.

Most crime analysts now recognize four main divisions of the profession: tactical, strategic, operational, and administrative. Although many departments are beginning to see the importance of specialization, most analysts still must manage their day to provide service across all four areas. In doing so, analysts may be relegated to the role of jack-of-all-trades, but masters of none. In this introductory chapter, we will briefly explore various definitions that have been advanced for the four types of crime analysis. We will begin with the authors' own simple, albeit broad, definitions of these categories:

- Administrative analysis is the study of police efficiency and effectiveness.
- Strategic analysis is the study of crime trends and statistics.
- Tactical analysis is the identification, analysis, and resolution of crime incidents, patterns, series, and sprees.
- Operational analysis is the study and support of specific police activities.

Tactical crime analysis is the comprehensive identification, evaluation, analysis, and resolution of specific criminal activity problems. These problems are typically categorized as being incidents, patterns, series, or sprees. Tactical problems are characterized as being distinct from mainstream criminal activity due to the presence of recognizable identifiers which distinguish them as belonging to an identifiable category. Incidents are unique crime events unrelated to other events, but distinguishable from mainstream criminal activity because of their significantly unique properties. Incidents demand directed attention (i.e., a schoolroom spree-killing). Patterns are criminal activities that are related by a number of characteristics such as location, *modus operandi (MO)*, time, or day. However, critical incidents do

not have sufficient suspect information to either confirm or refute the causality behind the related incidents. Series are sets of criminal activity that are believed to share the same causality. By causality, we mean that the same offender, group of offenders, criminal organization, gang, or enterprise is responsible for planning or perpetrating the involved crimes. The aim of the tactical crime analyst is to resolve each individual problem as quickly and decisively as possible for the immediate benefit of the public safety.

Strategic crime analysis is the comprehensive identification, evaluation, analysis, and resolution of non-specific criminal activity problems. These problems are descriptive of mainstream criminal activity; the strategic crime analyst, therefore, deals with those problems making up the vast majority of threats to the public safety. The aim of the strategic crime analyst is to increase public safety by reducing the level of crime throughout his or her jurisdiction.

Operational crime analysis is the comprehensive identification, evaluation, analysis, and resolution of specific police activity problems. These problems are characterized as being distinct from mainstream police activity because of the unusual and atypical nature of each problem. Police activity problems involve activities initiated and performed by police, law enforcement, and public safety authorities (e.g., patrol operations, traffic stops, surveillances, warrant services, etc.), as opposed to criminal activity, which are crimes perpetrated by offenders. The goal of the operational crime analyst is to resolve each individual problem as quickly and decisively as possible for the improvement of the public safety through the successful police operation.

Administrative crime analysis is the comprehensive identification, evaluation, analysis, and resolution of both non-specific police activity problems. These problems are characterized as being descriptive of mainstream police activity problems; the administrative crime analyst therefore deals with those problems making up the vast majority of problems relating to police activity. The aim of the administrative crime analyst is to increase public safety by increasing the efficiency of police activity.

In recent years, tactical and operational analysis have somewhat gained in ascendancy over the previously dominant strategic and administrative analytical paradigms. The prevalent acceptance of concepts such as problem oriented policing (POP), community oriented policing (COP), crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), the recurrence of high-profile criminal incidents such as spree-killings and terrorist attacks, and the public and police fascination with serial offenders have all conspired to increase the focus on tactical and operational problems. This has resulted in a corresponding de-emphasis on strategic and administrative functions as resources are prioritized.

In the United States, tactical crime analysis has become a type of analysis where analysts are beginning to specialize. Many departments are hiring a tactical crime analyst because the functions require so much of an analyst's

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