

# Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity – Classic

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The CCO framework is equivalent to the **Crime Triangle** (Target/victim, Offender, Place) but wider-ranging and more detailed. It supplies a map of 11 immediate causal pathways which come together to make criminal events happen, and 11 counterpart principles of intervention which seek to block, deflect or weaken those causes.

One major purpose of the framework was originally to integrate theories of crime causation by covering both offender and crime situation in a single schema which avoided confusing and superficial distinctions such as 'situational versus social'; and to do likewise for crime prevention approaches oriented towards these same two poles. (Even today, a deep cultural divide exists between researchers and practitioners who on the one side focus on situational causes and interventions, and on the other, offender-oriented ones.)

Another purpose was to provide a way of considering crime prevention across all institutional settings, both 'civil' and justice-based (refuting false but frequently-encountered dichotomies such as 'it's not prevention but deterrence... or law enforcement... or punishment'). The overall vision remains one of supplying a rigorous and comprehensive schema and language to help practitioners, policymakers, researchers and theorists alike.

CCO is an 'ecological' framework because it combines individuals (offenders, preventers, promoters) and their environment. It integrates a range of theories including Routine Activities, aspects of Environmental Criminology, Rational Choice, and various other psychological perspectives on offending. It does not directly incorporate higher-level sociological or cultural causes of crime (although there is an interest in studying complex, emergent processes as these build up from elemental causes), but adopts the perspective

that each of these higher causes has to act through one or more of the components of the CCO before it can 'make a criminal event happen'.

CCO can be used alone or in tandem with other frameworks in this suite (eg [5Is](#), [M&S](#)).

CCO offers the following:

- Covers volume crime, violence, antisocial behavior, drugs, organised crime, terrorism, cybercrime
- Maps immediate causes of crime, integrates theories, revealing gaps, overlaps and conflicts between these
- Maps entire range of possible preventive intervention principles and (in the context of the wider 5Is process model) describes individual methods in ways that are conducive to intelligent replication
- From a 'Scientific Realist' or 'Realistic Evaluation' perspective, supplies a basic map of the immediate contextual factors which are necessary preconditions for crime prevention mechanisms to be triggered
- Provides a means of articulating 'squishy' concepts/terms eg those such as 'territoriality' in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
- Guides offender interviews with a schedule covering both 'view from the offender' questions about the crime situation as they see it, and 'view of the offender' self-reporting of motives, resources, criminogenic life circumstances etc
- Organises and defines perpetrator techniques/ Modus Operandi in terms of how offenders cope with or exploit the situational elements of CCO, guiding collection of 'preventive intelligence'
- Guides investigation of crime (extending the familiar 'means, motive and opportunity' to commit an offence)

- Supports futures work – crime proofing, crime risk assessment, crime impact assessment etc [see [Crime risk assessment/ crime impact assessment web page](#); also [M&S page](#)]

## Background

In the early 1990s a fairly masochistic exercise was undertaken to classify several thousand local crime prevention schemes that were being implemented in the context of the UK Government's Safer Cities Programme (the sadism came when others were required to read the resultant documentation). One purpose was to try to put 'like with like' when evaluating scheme impact. The diversity of those schemes was challenging: they covered a range of institutional settings and preventive mechanisms, and no available framework was able to handle the complexity or the breadth. Likewise, attempting to determine exactly what the individual schemes were endeavouring to do, even with detailed entries in a management information system, proved difficult – there was not a universal, rigorous and consistent schema or language by which the preventive interventions could be articulated. This not only inhibited intelligent replication of any success stories, it also constrained the realisation and monitoring of the original scheme as it unfolded. Therefore, it was decided to develop a new framework purpose-designed for the job.

At about this time, Nick Tilley began introducing 'Scientific Realist' perspectives to the crime prevention domain and to Safer Cities in particular (eg Tilley 1993). The SR paradigm of the desired preventive outcome only being achieved if causal mechanisms were triggered in necessary contextual conditions (like a

match only lighting a fire if dry wood was present and wind absent) shaped the orientation of the emerging framework. This therefore is centred on analytic causal and contextual factors rather than simply being a superficial 'natural history' of preventive methods. The framework evolved iteratively as it was applied to a succession of Safer Cities schemes (acting in fact like a 'learning engine' which steadily improved its fine-detailed tracking of reality as it assimilated itself to a larger sample of preventive action). The result was more complex than alternative frameworks, but this was considered worthwhile in view of the greater rigour and scope it offered.

The framework was originally published in 1994 in Crime Prevention Studies under the title Proximal Circumstances (reflecting its coverage of the immediate causes of criminal events and including those acting through both offender and crime situation). Crime prevention and community safety continued to grow in the UK, particularly with the preparation for what became the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 which established statutory local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. Work on guidance, education and training for practitioners was discussed in national fora and working groups, and then published.

At this time Proximal Circumstances was rebranded as the Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity to reflect its extension from purely academic to practitioner-friendly orientation (the exact moment was when walking towards Oslo Harbour in discussion with Ron Clarke in July 1997) and the 'ray and shield' graphics developed (see Ekblom 2000). In 2001 the Home Office commissioned the development of a range of toolkits for crime prevention practitioners and these were accompanied by the website material

introducing CCO at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100413151441/http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/cco.htm> (and see Ekblom 2001). Worked examples describing theft from cars and assaults in CCO terms are at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100413151441/crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/cco01.htm> and [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/cco02.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/cco02.htm).

Since that time, CCO has pushed its frontier into organised crime, drugs, terrorism, restorative justice and most recently Design Against Crime. An interest in emergence is motivating the extension of CCO from the bottom up (immediate causes of individual criminal events) to connect with more complex phenomena and processes involving networks, markets etc at a range of ecological levels. The original CCO materials contained much information about the 'preventive process' which has since been hived off into the 5Is framework. Indeed, in that process model, CCO now comes under Intelligence (causes) and Interventions.

## References

Ekblom, P. (2011) *Crime Prevention, Security and Community Safety Using the 5Is Framework*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=296569](http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=296569)

Ekblom, P. (2010) 'The Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity Theory'. *Sage Encyclopedia of Victimology and Crime Prevention*.

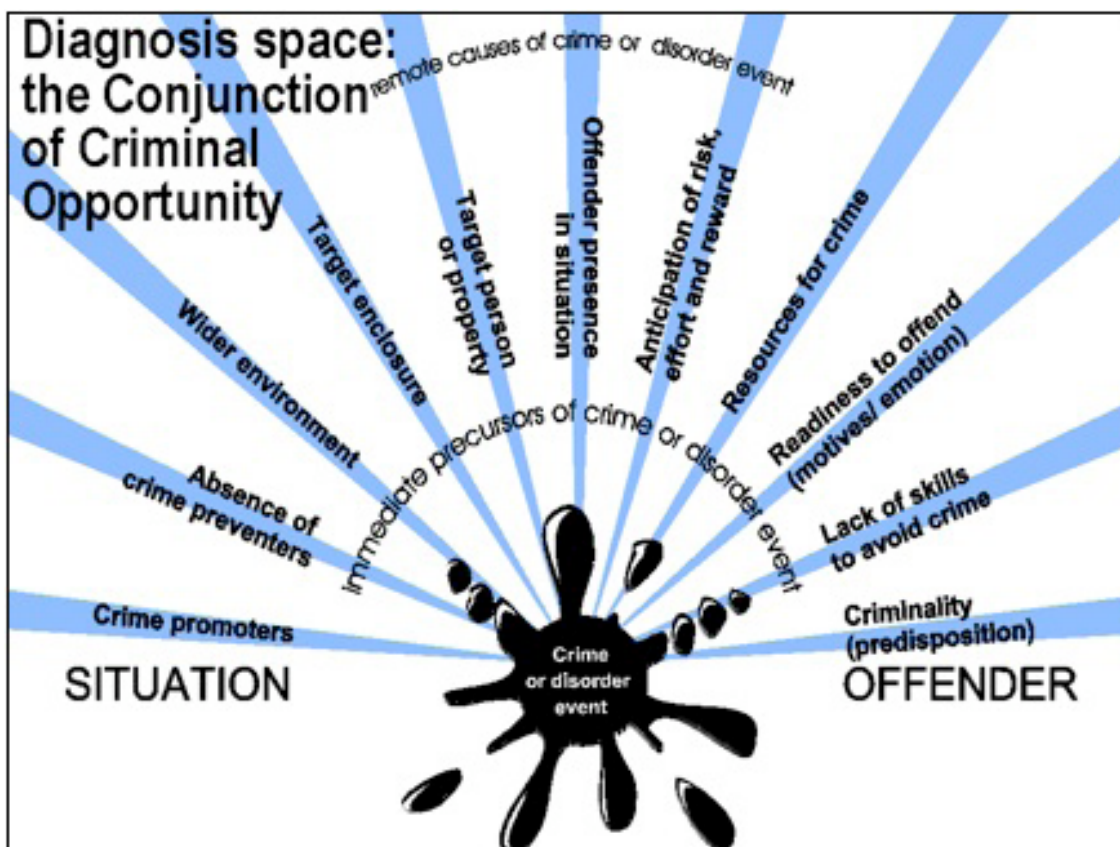
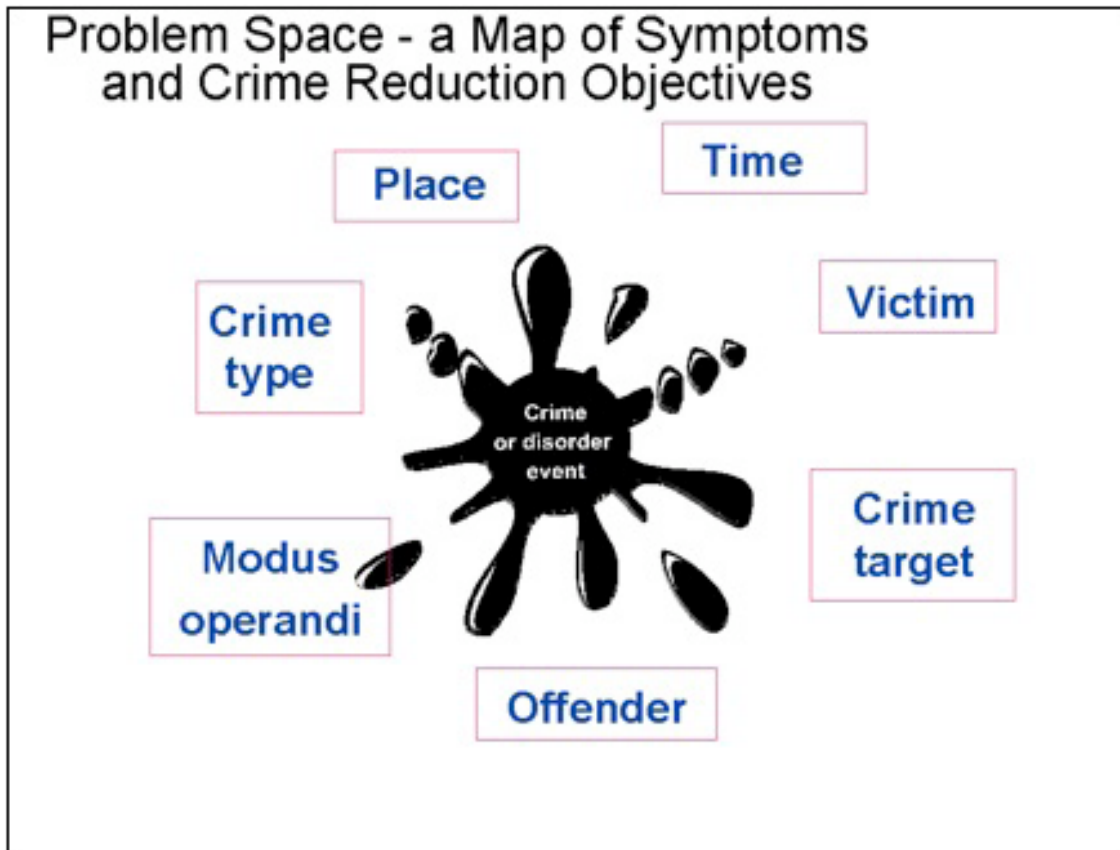
Ekblom, P. (2000). 'The Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity - a Tool for Clear, 'Joined-up' Thinking about Community Safety and Crime Reduction' in Ballintyne, S, Pease, K and McLaren, V (eds.), *Secure foundations: Key issues in crime prevention, crime reduction and community safety*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

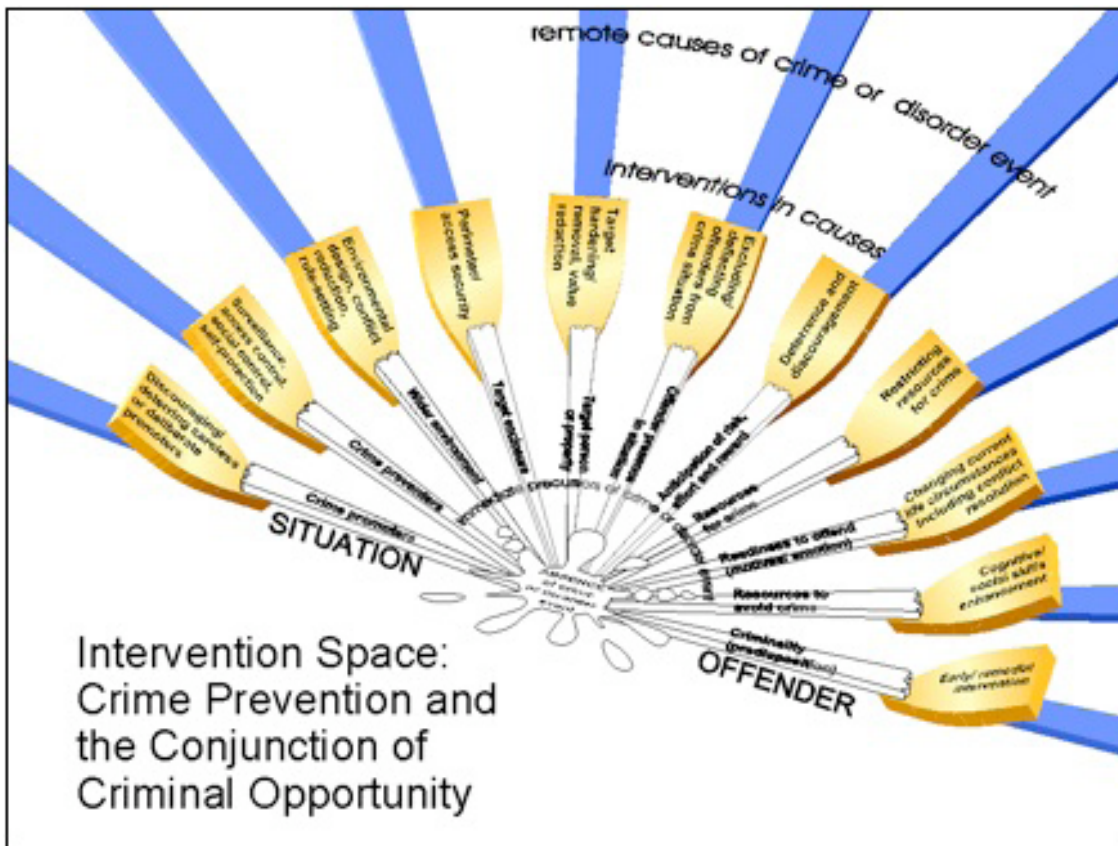
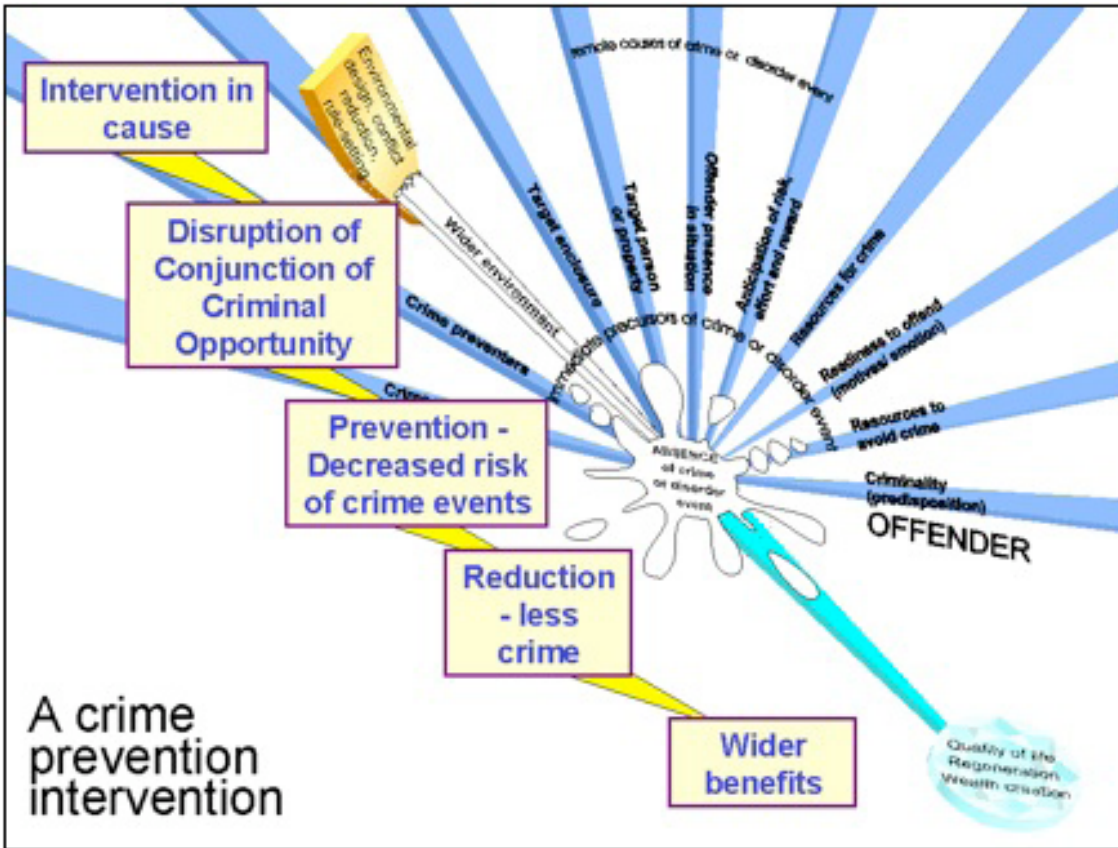
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Tilley, N (1993). *After Kirkholt: Theory, Methods and Results of Replication Evaluations*. (Crime Prevention Unit Paper 47.) London, UK: Home Office. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/fcpu47.pdf>.

The main documents relating to CCO are on a separate page on this website [[CCO Classic](#) – Detailed Documentation]

The Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity - CCO in diagram form







## CCO in table form

**Table 1 Basic causes and intervention principles**

Immediate causes of criminal event	Possible interventions in cause
<p><b>1. Criminality (predisposition to offend)</b> Longer-term psychological features of offender including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Antisocial attitudes</li> <li>• Criminal self-image or reputation</li> <li>• Habits or standing decisions</li> <li>• Drug addiction</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reducing criminality through:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early /developmental intervention - tackling risk and protective factors</li> <li>• Remedial intervention (convicted/ cautioned/ at risk young people)</li> </ul> <p>At various <b>ecological levels</b> especially</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Treatment in prisons, probation and medicine relating to prevention of recidivism</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Lack of resources to avoid crime</b> Social and intellectual skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid conflicts</li> <li>• Exercise self-control</li> <li>• De-escalate fights</li> <li>• Earn a legitimate living and achieve esteem and social inclusion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supplying skills to avoid crime:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training offenders in social skills</li> <li>• Training in practical/ work skills</li> <li>• Contacts with preventers - mentors, minders and models</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Readiness to offend</b> Short-term influences on people's mood or motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current life circumstances including unemployment or homelessness</li> <li>• Needing risk, excitement, esteem</li> <li>• Recent events such as a domestic argument</li> <li>• Being in a particular emotional state such as anger</li> <li>• Being disinhibited through alcohol or drugs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reducing readiness to offend:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of disinhibitors eg alcohol</li> <li>• Control of stressors/ motivators</li> <li>• Tackling debt, unemployment, housing problems etc</li> <li>• Resolving prior conflicts</li> <li>• Satisfaction of psychological and social needs legitimately</li> <li>• Esteem</li> <li>• Inclusion</li> </ul>

Immediate causes of criminal event	Possible interventions in cause
<p><b>4. Resources for committing crime:</b>                      These help offenders reduce risk and effort, increase reward, control conscience, by exploiting vulnerability of target, enclosure and environment, avoiding/overcoming preventers, exploiting promoters, and networking with co-offenders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Inside knowledge</li> <li>• Repertoire of Modus Operandi</li> <li>• Tools</li> <li>• Weapons</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Ability to overcome moral inhibitions</li> <li>• Physical strength and social skills for intimidation/deceit</li> <li>• Access to trusted network of collaborators (crime promoters)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Restricting resources:</b>                      Control of/ screening for/ design of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weapons</li> <li>• Tools</li> <li>• Information on target’s attractiveness and vulnerability</li> <li>• Know-how/ MOs</li> </ul> <p>Control of criminal organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Decision to commit offence</b>                      Offender’s immediate anticipation of / response to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk</li> <li>• Effort</li> <li>• Reward</li> <li>• Conscience</li> <li>• Provocation</li> </ul> <p>And more strategic decisions on whether this kind of crime, or the criminal career, are worthwhile</p>	<p><b>Deterrence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase perceived risk of getting caught</li> <li>• Increase perceived costs of getting caught</li> <li>• Formal – arrest and punishment</li> <li>• Informal – shame</li> <li>• Personal – guilt</li> <li>• Discouragement</li> <li>• Increase perceived effort</li> <li>• Reduce perceived reward</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Offender presence in situation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine activities of offender</li> <li>• Crime attractors – motivated to look for crime there (see environment, enclosure)</li> <li>• Free to enter or circulate in crime situation</li> <li>• No detectable traces left</li> </ul>	<p><b>Excluding offenders from crime situation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segregating conflicting groups</li> <li>• Closing roads and paths</li> <li>• Attracting offenders elsewhere</li> <li>• Exclusion of specific offenders</li> <li>• Enhancing traceability</li> </ul>

Immediate causes of criminal event	Possible interventions in cause
<p><b>7a. Target property</b>  ‘Hot product’ (Clarke 1999) Object, service, system or information that is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concealable</li> <li>• Removable</li> <li>• Accessible</li> <li>• Valuable</li> <li>• Enjoyable</li> <li>• Disposable</li> </ul> <p>(Mobile phone = typical example)</p>	<p><b>Reducing target vulnerability/ attraction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target hardening</li> <li>• Concealment</li> <li>• Target removal</li> <li>• Value reduction</li> <li>• Reducing provocativeness</li> <li>• Property identification</li> </ul>
<p><b>7b. Target person</b>  (Passive aspects of person who is the target in him/ herself, as with revenge or honour assaults, or who becomes target in course of robbery of property. Active aspects are covered under ‘preventers and promoters’)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Accessible</li> <li>• Provocative (take care over this!)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reducing target vulnerability/ attraction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target absence/avoidance</li> <li>• Reducing provocation (careful)</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Target enclosure</b>  Compound, building, room, container, ATM lobby that is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable to penetration at its entry point or its boundary</li> <li>• Has a vulnerable interior</li> <li>• Contains attractive and vulnerable targets</li> </ul>	<p>Perimeter/ access security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding enclosure and access</li> <li>• Control of perimeter</li> <li>• Control of access</li> <li>• Screening at entrances/ exits</li> <li>• Control of interior</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Wider environment</b>  Housing estates, town centres, transport interchanges, which encourage crime because they are:  Logistically/ tactically favourable for the offender and for crime promoters, unfavourable for crime preventers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concealment/surveillance (sight / sound)</li> <li>• Rationale for legitimately being present – ‘cover’</li> <li>• Escape/pursuit</li> <li>• Presence of promoters offering support/ turning blind eye</li> </ul> <p>May attract the offence, or motivate it through the presence of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive or vulnerable targets</li> <li>• Conflict – such as a place where rival gangs fight for control over drug outlets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental design and management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Defensible space’ principles</li> <li>• Aiding surveillance</li> <li>• Intelligently planned lighting</li> <li>• Setting/ communicating rules</li> <li>• Conflict reduction (eg sound insulation)</li> </ul>

Immediate causes of criminal event	Possible interventions in cause
<p><b>10. Crime preventers</b>                      Potential victims, strangers, employees, police, probation, prison, private security staff, acquaintances, intimates who make crime less likely by playing active, or potentially active, roles involving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaping the situation or influencing the offender in advance of the criminal event (concealing phone, locking car doors when driving etc)</li> <li>• Intervening during the criminal event</li> <li>• Reacting after it (to make next event less likely)</li> </ul> <p>Factors which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert</li> <li>• Inform</li> <li>• Motivate and</li> <li>• Empower preventers (with knowledge, skills, tools, eg forensic kit, CCTV) and perhaps</li> <li>• Direct them (objectives, standards, regulations)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Boost preventers presence, competence, motivation/responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra surveillance of enclosed and wider environments</li> <li>• Aids for preventers - alarms, CCTV</li> <li>• Cultivating/ protecting witnesses and informants</li> <li>• Informal social control</li> <li>• Formal control</li> <li>• Self-protection and avoidance</li> </ul>
<p><b>11. Crime promoters</b>                      Make crime more likely, by unwittingly, carelessly or deliberately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaping the situation or influencing the offender (supplying weapons, tools or information, inducing the offender’s cooperation by illegal threat or reward, promising to buy stolen goods, promising to look away (corruption)</li> <li>• Intervening during the criminal event (giving encouragement, distracting the victim or preventers)</li> <li>• Reacting after it (helping dispose of stolen goods and weapons, providing an alibi etc)</li> </ul> <p>Factors which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lull</li> <li>• Deter and discourage</li> <li>• Hinder promoters</li> </ul>	<p><b>Discouraging/deterring promoters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Naming and shaming</li> <li>• Civil/ criminal liability</li> <li>• Tackling a criminal subculture</li> <li>• Market reduction for stolen goods</li> <li>• Procedural controls</li> </ul>

**Table 2 Dynamic and emergent causes**

Factors Bringing the Conjunction of Criminal Opportunity Together    emergent causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental processes - hot spots</li> <li>• Lifestyles and routine activities of offenders and victims</li> <li>• Market processes - demand for goods or illegal services</li> <li>• Niches for offending careers and criminal service providers such as fences</li> <li>• Planning and action by the offender or offending organisation - creating the opportunity</li> <li>• Social relations between the roles – including conflict, gang turf</li> </ul>
Crime as a process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual perceptions, expectations and interdependent decisions (as in game theory) of the roles of offender, preventer and promoter</li> <li>• Move and countermove in pursuit of goals</li> <li>• Displacement</li> <li>• Longer-term arms races</li> <li>• Offender replacement</li> <li>• Scenes and scripts – complex, multi-stage crimes (further developed in <a href="#">CCO Dynamic</a>)</li> <li>• Preparation (eg steal getaway car, forge passport)</li> <li>• Execution (eg rob bank)</li> <li>• Escape and covering tracks (eg destroy DNA evidence, launder money)</li> <li>• Consummation (spend/enjoy)</li> <li>• Crime ‘businesses’ – repeated, organised offending</li> </ul>