

# Can criminological theories help manage crime in the workplace



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Security management is a task that required diverse skills which include human management, time management and some fundamental theories as guiding principles. The essence of the knowledge of these theories in relation to criminology to Security Managers should not be undermined in order to have and effectively achieve the organisations set goals or key performance indicators. This essay shall focus on how the knowledge of these theories could enhance the performance of a Security Manager in the work place in relation to theft and theft related offences in the retail business environment. However, if we give heed to the macro theory of criminology, a bigger picture surrounding the cost of theft in the retail industry rather than just focusing on cost of goods stolen in isolation can be fully examined. It should be noted from the onset that there are some other offences which can be perpetrated as part of criminal conduct that can ensue alongside the particular offence of retail theft e. g. assault inflicted on staff who have no choice but to physically engage a thief in the workplace (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2009).

Various reports including the crime survey by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) indicate with interest that thefts in retail shops are also being perpetrated by employees, and therefore note should be made that the offence is not exclusively being perpetrated by customers. As mainstream surveys tend to cover those who are not under the category of the organisation's labour force, it is important to consider this dimension in the essay as the impact of such losses to retail industry cannot be ignored. On many occasions, there are complimentary offences but aspects relating to theft shall be considered in this essay.

There have been several schools of thought in relation to applying criminological theories to crime management. They suggested that effective crime managements could only be achieved by using these theories conjunctively. Strengths and weaknesses of these theories shall be analysed and their relevance to the theft management in a retail business environment shall also be considered. The class of the offenders guilty of this crime, motivational factors and how they are carried out shall also be discussed using the appropriate theories and a strategy to managing and reducing delinquency.

### **The 1968 theft act proscribes theft as;**

“..... A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriate property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it; and ‘ thief’ and ‘ steal’ shall be construed accordingly” (Theft Act 1968, sec 1: 1).

Shoplifting is a common delinquency in the retail business which impacts on stock shrinkage and cost of business insurance. However in general public and media discourse, it is widely accepted that retail theft is a petty crime and there are attempts to explain this phenomenon using theories such as criminal deviant behaviour. In this context, and in such a class based society as the UK, it is not unusually that retail theft is associated with the underprivileged in the society. Such perceptions make it difficult for the police and security managers to take seriously the impact this crime has on high tax paying industries such the retail sector, which incidentally offers employment to millions of workers in the country.

Some other criminological theories such as the expected utility principle can breed compliancy in the work done by security managers as this theory assumes that potential criminals are rational beings who can be deterred from committing offences because people will act in an a manner that will increase their benefits and reduce their losses. In this context, the expected utility principle suggests that the commitment of the supposed petty crime of retail theft by employees is unlikely to occur as workers will give heed to their vested economic interest in remaining employed. However, there may be a lack of indebt knowledge of what constitutes retail theft.

For instance, an employee inadvertently using part of the company's inventory such as stationeries, souvenirs for self benefit and is within the ambit of the theft act 1968 is guilty of theft. Another sinister form of retail theft involves employees who connive with criminals and pretend not to see the crime being committed. These usually involve the use of false drivers' licence and stolen bank statements.

". . . . . Fraud is an act of deception carried out for the purpose of unfair, undeserved and/or unlawful gain, especially financial gain". (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2009: pg24).

". . . . . Card fraud in the BCS (British Crime Survey) is defined as using plastic payment cards, such as bank, debit, credit or store cards, to take money without permission or prior knowledge from a bank, building society or credit card account (or to charge money to credit/debit cards)". (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 08/10: pg25).

The 2008/09 BCS report reported that plastic card owners who had fallen victim of card fraud had increased. Only 6.4 per cent of card fraud victims confirmed that they were aware that crimes had been committed with their cards within the last 12 months compared to 4.7 per cent in the previous year (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 08/10: pg25).

In a bid to demonstrate why people commit crime, the motivational factors, and various groups of people with criminal behaviours and how combinations of criminological theories help in crime management.

Rational Choice and Routine Activities theories shall be considered in relation to their relevance to crime management in a mobile phone retailer like Carphone Warehouse Plc. Rational Choice theorists believe that offenders' decision to commit crime is based on the available opportunity and that the benefit of their crime outweighs the costs (Nagin et al, 2002). Rational choice theorists believe that crime is a function of individual choice which is influenced by its costs and benefits (Akers et al, 2004).

Researches have shown that out of 50 interviewees in a research on shoplifting, 88% admitted that they had shoplifted and 42% of these people take stealing as the only way to earn their living. The average age of offenders as gathered during the interview was 12 years (Schneider, 2005).

It is important to have the in-depth knowledge of crime costs and its benefit, proportionate sentence and the types of punishment given to those who have committed similar crimes in the past or whether they avoided punishments. With this knowledge in place, it will be more likely to deter crime if its costs are made higher than the benefits e. g., enhancing the <https://assignbuster.com/can-criminological-theories-help-manage-crime-in-the-workplace/>

protection in places, target hardening, and more punishments when offenders are caught. In a situation where punishments are certain, motivated offenders may not want to subject themselves to hard work before committing the offence (Cullen & Agnew, 2002).

Rational choice theory is very extensive in range with simple basic elements which are strong but at the same time flexible. Offenders' decisions between choices at every point in time tend to be rational. However, the facts of the theory stands that for any crime to be committed, the perceived benefits associated with the crime outweigh its risk. Some people have taking criminal behaviour as a way of life. In some situations, decisions to commit crime are arrived at due to inadequate information available at the time of decision making and all these put together still reflect the important role opportunity plays in criminal act. In addition to opportunity, importance of the environment on crime cannot be undermined. In certain situations, offenders hardly ever have a detailed thought of all the various costs and benefits of their action as some decisions are taken spontaneously (Felson & Clarke, 1998).

In theory, there are three broad categories of offenders or workplace violence perpetrators; employees, strangers and the intending or potential customers or clients (Chappell and Di Martino, 2000). Employees in most cases take advantage of imperfect systems. In an ideal business environment, organisation should have records of their inventory through regular stock counts. The UK shrinkage rate as a percentage of retail sales stood at 1. 29% which was Europe's average in 2010 (Bamfield, 2010).

In a bid to control and manage crime, Opportunity-reducing techniques are a vital approach which could be achieved by increasing the perceived effort of crime by target hardening, security control access to target and deflecting offenders from target. In cases of card theft, crime facilitators could be controlled by having the owners' photos on credit cards, using plastic beer glasses in pubs etc. Another technique involves increasing the perceived risks of crime by security screening, formal surveillance by employees, manned guarding, CCTV and effective lightning which could take the place of a Natural surveillance and help in obtaining footage through the use of technology. Anticipated rewards of crime should also be reduced so as to discourage criminal act. Targets could be removed; there could be property marking, and reducing temptations by ensuring that every motivational factor is put under control. Educating everyone on codes of conducts, and acceptable norms would eliminate the excuses of being ignorant (Clarke, 1997).

It is important to understand the opportunities that facilitate workplace crime in order to combat or reduce the criminal act. In America, introduction of Caller identification devices have removed obscene and threatening phone calls which ordinarily depends upon telephone access and the ability of the caller to hide his own identity. However, rates of other crimes such as car theft and burglary would also be higher when, in fact, they are lower in Britain and some other countries in Europe.

Customer theft remains a major source of retail crime in line with general acquisitive crime trends reported by the Home Office. The survey recorded 498, 405 incidents of customer theft in total. The previous year's survey <https://assignbuster.com/can-criminological-theories-help-manage-crime-in-the-workplace/>

revealed that retailers suspected they identified perhaps as little as half of all customer theft. The real level of customer theft experienced by respondents was probably somewhere in the region of 750, 000 to 1 million thefts - or even as high as 2 million for the whole industry (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2009: Pg 12-13).

During 2008-09, the value stolen per incident has continued to decline as retailers continue to improve the protection of high value items. The average value of goods stolen fell by 34 per cent to £45 per theft. Whilst individual customer thefts may be many times this value, this figure falls comfortably within the range of Penalty Notices for Disorder, a disposal available to the police for first time offenders involved in low value crimes. Nevertheless, only about one third (37 per cent) of customer thefts are reported to the police. (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2009: Pg 12-13).

As a result, the Police Authorities, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Neighbourhood Policing Teams are unlikely to be aware of the true level of customer theft occurring in an area. This is reflected in national figures of reported crime which differ significantly from retailers' experience (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2009: Pg 12-13).

Contrary to rational choice theory which believes that opportunity is the main factor responsible for crime occurrence, routine activity theory as described by Cohen & Felson explained in one of their published articles in 1979 suggests that Crime occurs when there is an intersection in time and space of a motivated offender, an attractive target and lack of capable guardianship. Changes in routine activities in society (e. g. where both

couples are working, construction of new roads) can influence crime rates. People's daily routine activities affect the likelihood of crime being committed (Cullen & Agnew, 2002).

" . . . . The routine activity approach still offers the best explanation for the rise in burglary in the United States and Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. Included in this explanation is the finding that the best predictor of annual burglary rates is the weight of the smallest television set sold each year. Another important component of the explanation is that far more homes in this period were left unguarded in the day as more women entered Full-time paid work. In fact, the most general explanation of crime rate trends is an indicator of the dispersion of activities away from family and household settings. As people spend more time among strangers and away from their own homes, their risk of personal and property victimization rises" (Felson and Clarke, 1998).

Every individual has specific areas in which they carry out their daily routine activities and this is called the activity space, domain or a potential path area. This area includes both the places that are visited and routes to such locations from their places of abode. In as much as people are not static, crime will have a non-static nature. In reality, some places, properties or facilities attract more crime than others.

It is important to understand that in routine activity theory, crime do occur when there is interaction between a potential offender and a suitable target in time and space; opportunity which is being created by the lack of capable guardianship cannot be undermined. It is very essential to identify the

available opportunities and put in place measures to either make these opportunities less attractive or show that the cost outweighs the benefits. These could be achieved through the use of Security devices and technology, proper lighting of an area, orientation and educating staff and visitors through various audio visual devices etc. Many businesses and organisations combine some of these procedures to control and manage crime (Hayes, 1991).

Criminological theories play important roles in crime control and management as guidelines to what a Manager should look out for and how these factors should be managed in order to reduce crime. In some occasions where the capable guardianship is available, thefts are being attacked by the detectives in the store or those on patrol (Hayes, 1993; Jones, 1998).

“.....Fraud costs the UK in excess of £20 Billion. It recognised fraud as a low priority within UK Policing and the UK itself as having an uncoordinated approach” (Simms C, Chief Constable West Midlands Police, 2010).

In theory, victims are protected by law and most of the conveniences extended to them in the past will no longer be available when the credit reporting agencies have been contacted to report the crimes that thereby impress a theft flag on the victim's credit file. Future lenders would be sceptical in exposing themselves to such customers and as such would be demanding for additional information and documents to verify the genuineness of the person requesting for credit facilities.

Though, there are different types of customers who visit the organisations on daily basis, some visit with the intention to shoplift, window shop, to see demonstration of new products and to purchase products. It is certain that these groups of customers, with different motives behave differently when they are in the shop and their approaches to staff differ. This is where the level of education on delinquent and staff awareness about customers' behaviour have to be improved upon. Security and safety at work place is every employee's responsibility.

Theft as a workplace crime impacts negatively on all parties involved with the organisation. The business operational costs are increased as a result of losses due to theft and these costs are passed on to their clients and employees. In most cases, it results to increasing costs of security maintenance, insurance premium and other elements of operational costs which will affect employees' benefits depending on the magnitude of losses suffered by the organisation.

In recent years, retailers have taken action to reduce theft by employees which accounted for 7 per cent of all retail crime by value in 2008-09. Employee theft includes theft of anything of value from the retailer by an employee or an accomplice, such as stealing merchandise, cash, retaining receipts, voiding a sale after a customer has paid and taking the cash, overcharging, short-changing, false mark-downs, coupon and voucher stuffing, credits for non-existent returns or exchanging counterfeit goods for genuine merchandise, and sliding a product through a lane without charging. It can also include serious financial fraud, involving senior or managerial staff. Improved security measures and investigations by expert staff appear <https://assignbuster.com/can-criminological-theories-help-manage-crime-in-the-workplace/>

to have reduced the opportunity for offences therefore deterring employee-related theft (BRC Retail Crime Survey, 2008: Pg 15).

It is apparent that the true cost of theft crime in the workplace is unknown as some factors cannot be quantified. This includes business disruptions, employee morale, loss of customs, management time wasted on incident reporting and documentation (British Chambers of Commerce, 2002). High level workplace theft may also lead to company insolvency. Based on this, it is very important to understand the workplace and the nature of crime facing the business before putting in place any crime anticipatory measures or displacement measures. Rational choice emphasises that opportunity is core in the decision making by offenders when it comes to delinquencies.

It is obvious from all indications that once the opportunity is displaced or appears to be of any value, a motivated offender may not notice a likely target. As a result of this, opportunities have to be identified and modified before the related crime can be perpetrated. By virtue of the fact that opportunity is requisite to crime occurrence, it is agreeable that rational choice theory interrelates with the routine activity theory which believes that crime can only happen when there is interception of certain elements.

Working in an environment where there is an opportunity of having access to money and property does not translate to committing crime. This shows a subjective aspect of opportunity. It is therefore important to understand that certain factors like social desirability for the product or property, conceal ability of target and proximity do have supportive role to play in conjunction with opportunity for theft to occur (Hollinger and Clarke, 1983).

In conclusion, it is therefore compulsory that a Security Manager, who has understood the surroundings where he works, should recognize the risk component, opportunities, and inspirational factors for possible offenders; use the mix understanding of these theories to design an approach to prevent the entire potential crime avenues. The combine knowledge of rational choice and routine activities theories give an insight into what to look out for and how to put in place the preventive measures to control crime. Theft as a workplace crime that can be managed by understanding what items offenders are looking out for, opportunities surrounding such items, characteristics of the targets and detailed understanding of the environment where the targets are situated. It is therefore evident that the knowledge of criminological theories has an immense role to play in assisting the security Manager to manage crimes such as theft in the workplace.