

# Rational choice

## crime prevention



Justice

Rational Choice is based on the theory that criminals consider their decisions before they commit a crime. The decision to commit a crime is constrained by time, cognitive ability and information resulting in 'limited' reasoning for the offender. This theory highlights that following a reasoning process the intent to commit a crime is within the control of an offender.

An offender will commit a crime because of the benefits received from the act. The decision to commit a crime is based on the benefits being greater than the benefits of not committing the crime. This reasoning (although not necessarily sound) assists the offender to determine the risks of being detected against the expected end reward.

Rational Choice crime prevention methodology focuses on an offender's decision-making process, thus providing a framework within which to prevent crime through deterrence (e.g. effective urban planning and improved surveillance that increase the likelihood of detection). This methodology analyses the offender's perspective and how they use the environment, rather than just looking at what motivated the offender.

When analysing the offender's perspective, the factors that impact on the decision-making process vary at both the different stages of the offence and among different offences. Cornish and Clarke (1998) therefore stress the need to be crime-specific when analysing offender decision-making (e.g. initial involvement in the offence) and choice selection (e.g. target), and to treat separately decisions relating to the various stages of involvement in offences. This, they claim, allows a more 'holistic' view of offender decision and choice making and a greater analysis from which to implement appropriate interventions.

### Further information

For more information on crime prevention theories and methodologies, please visit [www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au](http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au)