THEORY: In the last twenty years, the growth of the intelligence-led paradigm in policing has placed a greater emphasis on the need to conduct analysis. The gathering of information and its interpretation is a key principle that underpins intelligence-led policing, be it for supporting the daily tactical and operational targeting of police patrols, assisting an investigation, or for identifying persistent issues that require a strategic response. The generation of good quality analysis is also at the heart of the problem-oriented policing approach introduced by Herman Goldstein in the 1990s.

The production of analysis has been formalised in several countries with the introduction of more routinised management processes. For example, the adoption of police management frameworks such as the UK’s National Intelligence Model (NIM) are designed to better integrate analysis and intelligence into the core of all police business and decision making (Ratcliffe, 2008). These formal, systematic processes have resulted in the creation of a more standardised approach to analysis report production. In UK NIM terms this includes problem profiles - analytical products that aim to help better understand particular crime problems.

With this increasing demand for analysis and the subsequent standardisation of intelligence products has come the production of templates that aim to determine a consistent structure and content to these materials. Over time, the routine production of these analytical materials has led to many reports being constrained in their analytical creativity, most often only providing a general descriptive narrative of a crime or public safety problem (providing interesting facts and figures on who, what, where, when and how), rather than understanding why the problem exists or has recently emerged.

PURPOSE: The hypothesis testing crime analysis approach is designed to help improve the explanatory content of analytical products such as problem profiles. It is based on the principle of identifying a number of plausible reasons for the crime problem (i.e. hypotheses) and using these to frame the direction and content of the analysis. Testing the hypotheses firmly focuses the analysis on determining ‘why’ the problem exists, drawing from techniques analysts would use for exploring who, what, where, when and how. For example, a reason/hypothesis to explain why burglary has increased in an area is “it’s because we have had an increase in burglars, due to an increase in the number of former prolific burglars recently being let out of prison into our area”. This hypotheses can then be tested by determining (using the available intelligence) who has recently been released from prison, where they live, have they committed any burglaries since their release, and if so where have these offences been committed. This will help conclude if the offending of these former prolific burglars is responsible for the entire increase in burglary, part of the increase, or not at all.

The process of deciding on the hypotheses to test is also designed to help improve the commissioning of analysis products. That is, it encourages a better dialog to occur between the person requesting the analysis and the analyst.