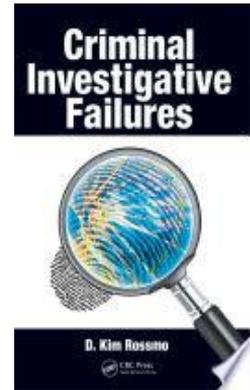


## *Criminal Investigative Failures*

by D. Kim Rossmo, editor  
CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL  
2008, hardback, 400 pages  
ISBN: 9781420047516

Reviewed by Dr Amber McKinley



In the last fifty years there has been a growing recognition of problems associated with failures in criminal investigations (Newburn, 2008). Examples of such failures may have critical outcomes, including wrongful convictions (Rossmo, 2009), broken lives (Jones, 2016), and a dissatisfied public who are distrusting of police investigators (Brandl & Horvath, 1991; Tufts, 2000). Although a vintage publication, *Criminal Investigative Failure* is still useful because it continues to provide practical insight into complex investigations. The author D. Kim Rossmo, who holds a PhD, has conducted research in the areas of criminal investigations, policing, and offender profiling, as well as being a Detective Inspector with the Vancouver Police Department. His policing service spanned twenty-one years.

Rossmo's book provides insights into the weaknesses that occur when a major crime investigation is undertaken, especially the complex processes that must be followed to succeed. Education, training, and open-mindedness appear to be the keys to this success because most people appear affected by the so-called "Hollywood effect." That is, crimes regularly featured as front-page news where the expectation is that the police will solve them and bring the perpetrator to justice, thereby not only keeping the public safe, but giving *just desserts* to the perpetrator (Tyler, 2005). This expectation is reinforced by a culture imbedded in popular entertainment: the nightly police, legal, and forensic television dramas that feature killers who are identified and brought to justice using seemingly unlimited resources (Schweitzer and Saks, 2007), all within sixty-minutes.

This unrealistic portrayal of police investigations has been encouraged by this "cops-and-robbers" cinema genre where the police always triumph. This also applies to popular fiction that ranges from children's entertainment, such as

Scooby-Doo, to the teenage detective in Veronica Mars, and continuing onto the adult realm of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Stuart McBride. In all these examples the main character(s) almost always solve the crime. The reality for police is that not all crimes are solved, raising questions about police performance.

Rossmo suggests that there are three main reasons for investigative failure: 1) cognitive biases; 2) organisational traps; and 3) probability errors, such as the prosecutor's fallacy, in forensic science and criminal profiling (Rossmo, 2009). The author discusses these issues via true crime examples that highlight logical mistakes made by veteran investigators, and analytical errors in several infamous criminal cases. He also examines specific strategies to minimise the risk of criminal investigative failures (Rossmo, 2009).

This book delivers what it promises with chapters two through to seven introducing concepts such as: cognitive biases including perception; intuition, tunnel vision; organisational traps; groupthink; rumour; ego; and probability errors (Rossmo, 2009: 9–54). He advocates that investigators must be prepared to dedicate themselves for the length and breadth of an investigation, no matter how complex it is; otherwise, the chances of the crime being solved diminish. If the investigation lacks quality at the beginning, then further efforts by detectives are not likely to solve the case (ICMA, 1991, as cited in Hunter, 1997: 35).

It is imperative that detectives and investigators keep an open-mind and see the evidence for what it is. Moreover, the style of detection is of primary importance due to cognitive bias and heuristic leaps. Chapters eight through to twelve provide case examples of unsolved, investigation failures, and wrongful convictions written by the affected family members, investigators and lawyers. Chapter fourteen, written by House, Eastwood, and Snook, present six Canadian cases, illustrating central contributing factors that lead to investigative failure. The final chapters are recommendations and conclusion directed specifically at all levels of law enforcement.

The critical review of major police investigations may be hard to reconcile with the powerful demands for confidentiality and solidarity often characterised in police culture, their policies and procedures (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Reiner, 2010; Terpstra and Schaap, 2013). Rossmo, in developing this book interviewed detectives and investigators in relation to major unsolved crimes and asked them to share where they consider their jobs went wrong, so this book is by police, for police. *Criminal Investigative Failures* systematically defines and investigates the

causes and issues identified within failed investigations. Most importantly, it details practical strategies for avoiding investigative pitfalls, with the intention of proactively preventing possible failures in the future.

#### NOTES

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#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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