

## Chapter 3

# Partnership Configurations in Illegal Drug-Importation

A consistent finding in criminological research is that the majority of crime events involve the collaboration of two or more people. This has been the principal fact at the center of co-offending research. Reiss (1986) was one of the first to look at the co-offending phenomenon from new perspectives. One twist that he offered concerned the focus of analysis. Whereas an assessment of criminal events (or arrests) confirm that half of crimes are committed by more than one person, a focus on individual offenders and their crime-commission patterns heighten the co-offending phenomenon even further. Using juvenile crime event (or arrest) data on burglaries and robberies, Reiss found that half of burglaries were committed by two or more offenders. The co-offending figure increased to 67% if the proportion of offenders who committed burglaries with two or more people was taken into consideration. Findings on robbery were also consistent. Just under half of robberies were committed by two or more offenders, while three-quarters of robbers committed their robberies with others (Reiss 1986: 124–125). Reiss also found that 17% of offenders always committed crimes with co-offenders, while 63% varied between lone and co-offending across their crimes (Reiss 1986: 125).

In regard to the duration and stability of co-offending relationships, Reiss was consistent with Sarnecki's past (1986) and more recent (2001) research on co-offending patterns in Sweden—that such relationships, particularly amongst juveniles, were generally short-lived. The instability of co-offending relationships was also a general pattern found by McGloin, Sullivan, Piquero, and Bacon (2008) in their research on a sample of juvenile offenders from Philadelphia. However, this pattern varied in accordance with the subsample under analysis and with the offending frequency and the size of co-offending groups. In the overall sample, offenders with a larger number of arrests and those who participated in larger co-offending groups were more likely to “reuse” previous co-offending relationships. These patterns were inversed when examining the same effects in the subsample of juveniles who did reuse their co-offending relationships—here, more active

offenders and those who offended in larger accomplice groups were less stable in their co-offending patterns.

McGloin et al. were correct in assuming that co-offending stability was largely a product of the limits in the pool of potential accomplices for offenders who are more active and involved in larger groups—the greater the number of offenses and the larger the co-offending group, the more likely past co-offenders will cross paths as repeat accomplices. But, in as much as co-offending is clearly revealed in official crime data, the phenomenon is even greater if we widen the scope beyond the arrest incident. This was Tremblay's (1993) main point. He argued that there was more to co-offending than the number of individuals who are arrested together for the same crime. Tremblay stressed that much crime is dependent on the general availability of offenders and that the co-offending concept should be expanded *not only to the subset of an offender's pool of accomplices but rather to all those other offenders he must rely on before, during, and after the crime event in order to make the contemplated crime possible or worthwhile* (p. 20). What Tremblay was referring to was the extent to which offenders are able to access necessary resources in a criminal network to varying degrees.

## I. Resource-Sharing in Crime

For some reason, research on co-offending and research on organized crime or criminal markets have not crossed paths as much as they should. The latter line of research has been concerned with the social organization of groups, enterprises, and criminal organizations, but few have built upon the basic aggregate-level facts provided by co-offending researchers. Take Reiss' findings on predatory offences, for example, and adapt them to the criminal market settings that have been of concern to organized crime researchers. We should expect co-offending to be higher within the context of market crimes, which are transactional by definition. The proportion of co-offending in drug-dealing, for example, should be higher than that found for robbery and burglary events. Drug-dealers should also have a higher proportion of co-offending experiences in their past arrests. Such offenders should also have more consistent co-offending experiences than the 17% experienced by burglars and robbers in Reiss' data set. If we widen the scope into Tremblay's co-offending framework, the claim that any criminal market offence could be committed by a single individual becomes a contradiction in itself. Even more so than all other forms of crime, criminal market offending requires an ability to collaborate with others.

That collaboration amongst offenders is a necessary condition for crime, and particularly market crimes, is indeed an obvious statement. However,

this evident condition has rarely been followed through. Instead, past research has often surpassed the co-offending condition and sought, instead, various levels of sophistication in the social organization of crime. To say that a venture to import illegal drugs is simply an illustration of offenders coming together to execute a crime in the quickest and safest way possible offers less in dramatic effect when contrasted to competing claims that the same venture is coordinated within the tightly regulated confines of a reputed criminal organization.

Indeed, mere partnerships have generally received less of a spotlight than the dominant criminal organization. However, the ability for individual illegal entrepreneurs to overlap their ventures in a multitude of partnerships offers the wide-scoped venturing that permits simultaneous participation in diverse criminal markets. This was one of Haller's (1990) main arguments in his analysis of American crime groups of the twentieth century. Partners in crime share risks and profits in joint business ventures. Diverse forms of expertise are carried into the venture from the various partners. Some may bring political protection to the mix, while others may bring financial investments, underworld and upperworld contacts, managing acumen, and trafficking or other criminal skills. Such resource sharing is the basic incentive underlying the criminal networks that offer the pool of accomplices that are necessary for most crime.

Haller's resource-sharing model is consistent with a number of studies on different levels of illegal drug-trafficking. At the street or retail level, Jacobs (1999) found a crack dealing context in St. Louis during the mid-1990s that was filled with freelancers and shifting business relationships. Eck and Gersh (2000) found that a "cottage industry" model was the most-accurate representation of the drug-trafficking trade in the Washington-Baltimore area between 1995 and 1997. Such a model was consistent with partnership configurations in that it was marked by small groups, easy entry/exit, no central control by any individual or specific group, weak organizational structures, minimal established leaders, an absence of specialization, and fluid group membership.

A similar model also reflected Hoffer's (2006) detailed research of a street-level heroin dealing network in Denver's Larimer district during the height of the "cleanup era" in the 1990s. Hoffer followed the experiences of two heroin users, Kurt and Danny, who become key dealers in the network that was heavily embedded in heroin consumption within this particular area. He provided a clear description of the transitory nature of this dealing network: *partnerships between members of this group were common. For example, in a typical three-month period Jerry and David might partner up one month, the next month David might partner up with Kurt, and the month after that Kurt would partner with Jerry. With a relatively small group, eventually*

*everyone got to know everyone else through this shifting partnership process* (Hoffer 2006: 24). The partnership that emerged between Kurt and Danny became the central object of Hoffer's study. After local politicians and police proceeded to crackdown in the Larimer area, the heroin market dried up and it became increasingly difficult for the many users to locate reliable suppliers. Kurt and Danny combined their resources and filled the void. Each needed the other for the enterprise to flourish, which it did for about 5 years. Kurt had excellent contacts with local users. Danny had excellent contacts with suppliers. Furthermore, because police were concentrating on looking for tighter and larger criminal organizations of immigrant dealers, the local and discrete partnership that was in place between Kurt and Danny remained far from the scope of targeting. In time, the partnership became even more insulated as brokers were added between Kurt and the growing number of customers. The partnership came to an end when ambitions grew and Kurt and Danny attempted to expand through a franchise system. The failure of this system is another lesson in the limits to growth facing most criminal trade operators who have ambitions to expand beyond the mere partnership (Reuter 1983; Tremblay, Cusson, and Morselli 1998).

Partnerships are not restricted to the street or retail level. Block (1979) found partnerships, which he referred to as "combinations," at retail, franchise, wholesale, and importation levels of the cocaine trade in 1920s New York City. Adler (1985/1993) also observed such loose collaborative ventures in her ethnography of an illegal drug smuggling "community" in southern California during the 1970s. Reuter and Haaga (1989) conducted interviews with incarcerated high-level traffickers in five American correctional institutions and similarly emphasized the *small partnerships in which each partner is also involved in trading on his own account* (p. 40). Pearson and Hobbs (2001) interviewed criminal justice agents and inmates who had been active in middle-level drug distribution of cocaine, heroin, cannabis, and ecstasy markets throughout the United Kingdom. Although not dismissing it completely, they found the monolithic hierarchy model to be a limited representation and concurred with previous research that it was more *useful to think of drug trafficking as partnerships between independent traders* (p. 12). Most recently, and within Canadian and Quebec contexts, Desroches (2005) provided us with a number of examples from the experiences of 70 incarcerated importers, wholesalers, and manufacturers of illicit drugs. In almost 30% of the cases in this sample, respondents reported having been active in partnerships in their trafficking ventures. Some of these cases were 50/50 ventures that involved the long-term collaboration between participants in the partnership. Others were less cohesive and involved independent traffickers coming together for the simple advantages of resource pooling.

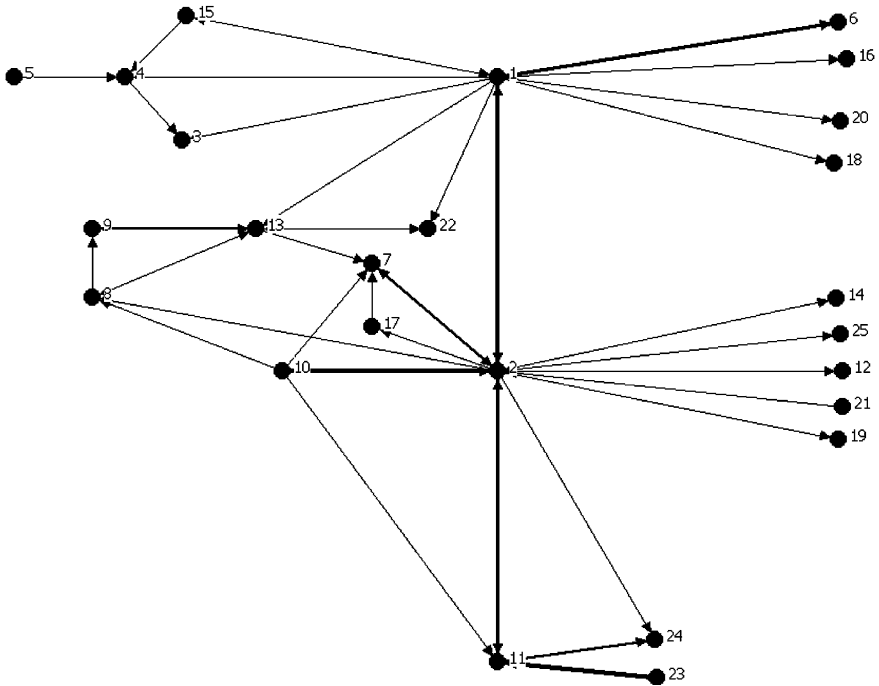
Co-offending, once again, is the necessary condition, but it does not have to take a form beyond the basic short or long-term partnership. The most important point to be retained from past research is that in as much as hierarchical and large criminal enterprises may sometimes be identified in criminal market settings, the presence of such governance structures are not necessary and flexibility is generally a more common and better option for crime.

In this chapter, further support is added to the basic partnership model with an analysis of a small drug-importation network. This case study illustrates the inner workings of the liquid hashish importation network that was targeted during the Project Ciel investigation in the mid-1990s. The investigation began as an offshoot of an earlier case in which officials from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were monitoring the actions of a reputed Montreal drug-trafficker. This earlier case focused on a suspected importation operation that involved the shipping of campers with hidden consignments of hashish from France to Quebec. While the investigators of this particular camper scam did not gather enough evidence to proceed with any form of intervention, it did offer a new lead. Project Ciel was the result of the investigators' growing awareness that the traffickers in their monitoring scope were not importing hashish-filled campers from France, but were instead operating a hashish importation channel between Jamaica and Montreal.

Typical of many Canadian investigations of drug-smuggling and trafficking, the operations in Project Ciel were described as taking place within a tightly governed organization. Reports from investigators maintained that their main target (Node 1, or N1, in the network) was the "criminal organization's boss," who was described as having a firm control over his main "lieutenant" (N2) and a series of other subordinates. The investigation produced three separate seizures, with two taking place at Mirabel airport near Montreal and another occurring at Sangster airport in Jamaica.

## II. Two Networks in One

Drug-trafficking operations such as those found during the Project Ciel investigation could easily be presented as a hierarchy or a looser partnership configuration. This decision is left largely to the (law-enforcement or scholarly) investigator's discretion, but a closer analysis of the inner workings of this trafficking venture does help weigh the decision in favor of one configuration over the other. An initial visualization of the Ciel network immediately points out that although the investigators' assessment of the drug-importation network maintained that the importations were tightly coordinated by N1, the network was clearly centered on two participants. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 offer

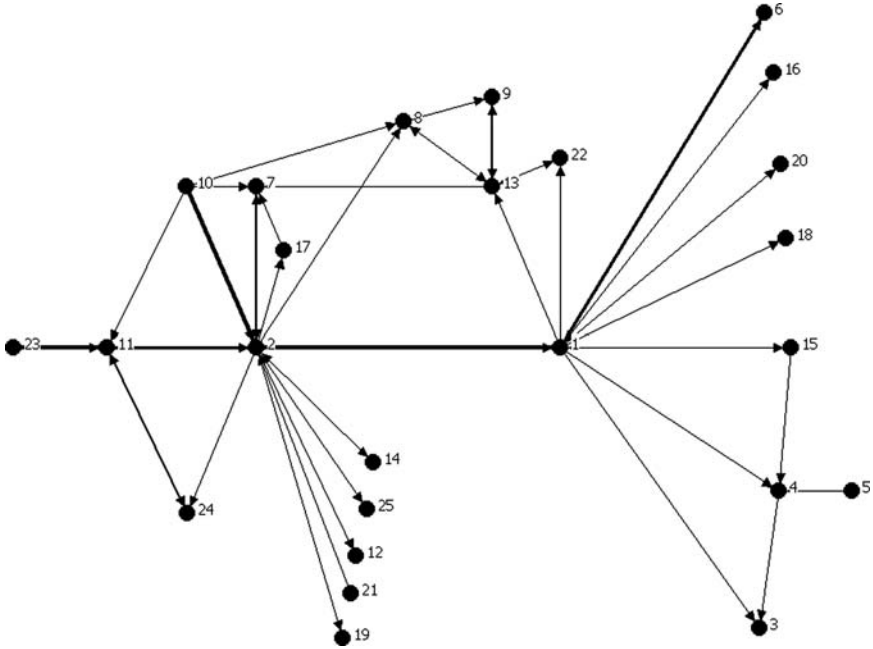


**Fig. 3.1** The Ciel network as a hierarchy

two distinct interpretations of the Ciel network. The first presents a hierarchy model and the second presents a partnership model. In both figures, the darkened lines represent the more active or main communication channels between the 25 participants that comprised this network.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, both figures appear valid. In the hierarchy model, N1 is positioned as the ring leader or, using Dorn, Oette, and White's (1998) term, the "cut out." This was the principal depiction maintained in the police interpretation of this drug-importation ring. N1 distanced himself from operational matters by delegating coordination to N2, who was presented as N1's lieutenant in the police reports. N2 was subsequently in contact with N11, who was the main organizer of the drug mules who were carrying the hashish across the border. These mules, N23 and N24, were N11's son and daughter. The operational risks were taken primarily within this set of mules. The remaining key link was between N2 and N10, who was incarcerated at Donnacona prison near Quebec City during the scope of the investigation and the drug-importation operations.

<sup>1</sup>The valued and directive matrices will only be used for these illustrative purposes. Later centrality analyses will rely on the binary, nondirective matrices.



**Fig. 3.2** The Ciel network as a partnership

When we analyze the Ciel network and its main channels of communication within the Fig. 3.1 representation, the makings of a hierarchy are observable: N1 delegated to N2; N2 dispatched to N11; N11 took care of the drug mules. N1, as ring leader or boss, was insulated from the most likely targeted action that was executed by these border crossers. The hierarchy model centered on N1’s leadership does have some initial support, but some questions do emerge to contest this interpretation. For example, why was someone in prison so implicated in this drug-importation operation? More details regarding N10 revealed that he was amongst the most highly reputed drug-traffickers in Quebec and had been implicated and incarcerated for his participation with established criminal groups in the Montreal region from as far back as the 1970s. Of course, a case may be made that, based on his reputation, N10 was the true leader of this hierarchy and regardless of his inmate status, remained powerful enough to govern a drug-importation ring from such a confined position. But his scattered involvement with past groups revealed a different pattern since it would be less conceivable that he was the leader of all operations with all past criminal groups, most having reputed leaders of their own. In the Ciel case, investigators reported that it was N10 who brought N11 into the network by introducing her to N2. By creating this link between a coordinator and a mule in the network, N10 continued to preserve a stake in these importations even though he was sitting in a federal

penitentiary. N10 brought a key resource into the network and such resource sharing is the basis of the next organizational model within which the Ciel network could be refitted.

Figure 3.2 is based on exactly the same communication network as Fig. 3.1. In Fig. 3.2, the Ciel network was redesigned to fit the partnership model. The network was centered primarily on the resource sharing of N1 and N2. Thus, in this representation, central participants are identified, but any form of hierarchically induced order and command structure is omitted from the analysis. We already know that N10 connected N2 and N11, but N2 contributed much more considerably to the network. N2 was responsible for what is referred to as the “action segment” of the network. This action segment incorporates all relationships that revolve around the movement of drugs across borders in the most efficient manner possible. N2 kept track of the actions of the drug mules (N11, N23, and N24) and was consistently informed by a group of employees and patrons who transferred messages to him from his Montreal bar (N7, N12, N14, N17, N19, N21, N25). N1 remained a key player, but in this configuration, he had a “hands on” role. He brought security to the partnership through his contacts with upperworld actors, such as an airport official (N6) and another contact who lent his name for money transfers (N16). While the links with N3, N4, N5, and N15 were retained as part of the Ciel network, a closer analysis shows that this particular segment was part of another operation that N1 was partnering beyond his resource sharing with N2. Finally, both N1 and N2 were in direct contact with buyers (N8, N13) who were waiting to distribute the hashish that was carried into the Montreal region through this importation network.

This partnership model combines N2’s action segment with N1’s security (or complimentary) segment to create the efficiency–security tandem that is the basis of any collective criminal operation. Whereas a hierarchy model could assure such features by imposing a division of labor and the insulation of leaders, there is no evidence that supports this configuration exclusively. On the contrary, much more can be made and understood in regard to the communication structure of the Ciel network with a partnership and simple resource-sharing focus. In short, a boss is not needed if individuals are able to come together in a network and perform the necessary tasks to execute a criminal operation.

### **III. Direct and Indirect Connectivity Within the Ciel Network**

Analyses of centrality in the Ciel network provide additional support for the partnership model (see Table 3.1). Centralization for the overall network



**Table 3.1** Degree and betweenness centrality for the Ciel network

Node number	Degree centrality (rank)	Betweenness centrality (rank)
N1	0.417 (2)	0.591 (2)
N2	0.500 (1)	0.641 (1)
N3	0.083 (5)	0
N4	0.167 (4)	0.085 (4)
N5	0.042 (6)	0
N6	0.042 (6)	0
N7	0.167 (4)	0.023 (6)
N8	0.167 (4)	0.052 (5)
N9	0.083 (5)	0
N10	0.167 (4)	0.015 (7)
N11	0.167 (4)	0.085 (4)
N12	0.042 (6)	0
N13	0.208 (3)	0.087 (3)
N14	0.042 (6)	0
N15	0.083 (5)	0
N16	0.042 (6)	0
N17	0.083 (5)	0
N18	0.042 (6)	0
N19	0.042 (6)	0
N20	0.042 (6)	0
N21	0.042 (6)	0
N22	0.083 (5)	0
N23	0.042 (6)	0
N24	0.083 (5)	0
N25	0.042 (6)	0

was shaped more in terms of betweenness centrality (betweenness centralization = 60%) than direct connectivity (degree centralization = 42%). In both analyses, N1 and N2 were the key participants accounting for most of the centralization at the whole network level. However, whereas N1 was the central target of the law-enforcement investigation, N2 was ranked slightly higher in both degree and betweenness centrality.

How important is it to understand these centrality scores? If we were to assume the hierarchy that was argued to be in place by investigators monitoring these operations and completely ignore the communication patterns that make up the targeted network, the most-vulnerable participants in the importation ventures would be those who were most easily targeted from a traditional investigative approach. Traditional investigative approaches do not incorporate observations of aggregate relational data and, as mentioned above, the most-vulnerable participants in such an approach would likely be

the drug mules. As discussed in Chapter 1, centrality may be an indication of an actor's importance in noncriminal settings, but in criminal networks, the case has been convincingly made that an actor's centrality is a sign of vulnerability since the most central actors are the most visible and, therefore, the most subjected to unwanted attention by law-enforcement monitoring and eventual prosecution—this would assume, of course, that investigators and prosecutors were observing the network from a centrality perspective.

Actor centrality should be patterned distinctly in the hierarchy and partnership models. In a hierarchy, the top organizational member (the head, the boss) would be in direct contact with the least number of other participants as possible so as to reduce visibility. The top member capitalizes on indirect access to opportunities offered by others in the organization. Delegation and subordination are the principal processes in a hierarchy and centrality would be expected to increase as we descend toward the lower levels of the organization. Thus, in a hierarchy, the top member should be low in degree centrality. In a partnership model, in contrast, centrality is shared by two or more participants who do not have a higher-level organizational member to contend with. Such participants may increase their strategic positioning in the network by also taking on brokerage positions, but their status as partners and the principal benefactors in a short-term scheme nevertheless places them in a risky position.

In the Ciel network, the assumed head of the hierarchy (N1) was too hands-on to justify his status as a leader. At the same time, the fact that the suspected lieutenant (N2) shared the same positional features within the network as N1 would in itself dismiss the premise of a neat hierarchy. The partnership model is more fitting here because it accounts for why and how key participants put themselves in a vulnerable, hands-on position while also assuring strategic control of the resources exchanged within the network at hand.

## **IV. Conclusion**

What the Project Ciel network represents is likely to be typical of most criminal enterprise ventures—aside from the motivation to take such risks and the capacity to develop the acumen for transacting an illegal commodity or service within or beyond national borders, the level of organization found inside this network is not much more than a rudimentary example of co-offending before, during, and after the act of smuggling illegal drugs over a border. This act is the riskiest of criminal acts within the illegal drug-importation sequence—indeed, the fall of the network began with the drug seizures and arrests of the drug mules at the airport border crossings. Widening the scope,

however, illustrates how vulnerability could be shared by others who may not act in the riskiest of segments, but who nevertheless expose themselves in the network patterns that are required for the complete execution of the co-offending sequence. If we turn back to past research on such matters, such basic organizational patterns appear to be sufficient for the execution of most criminal ventures. But as the next chapter will demonstrate, some forms of crime differ substantially from the typical short-term criminal enterprise venture. Accordingly, the criminal networks that emerge also take on distinct structural features.