RedLeaf Consultancy
A Security Practice

Tiger Kidnapping – A Constant Threat

Tiger Kidnapping – A Crime Brought to the World's Attention in December 2004 but still relevant

Tiger Kidnapping

In December 2004, the term Tiger Kidnapping, which probably didn't mean a lot to most people, hit the headlines following the Northern Bank robbery in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In what was at that time the largest cash robbery in UK history, 2 members of Bank staff and their families were kidnapped by a terrorist group, the Provisional IRA and forced to hand over GBP26.5 million. The kidnapping attracted worldwide media interest as television crews and their satellite uplink vehicles camped outside Northern Bank head office.

This was not the first Tiger Kidnapping in Northern Ireland as they had occurred periodically over a number of decades. However, 2004 saw the start of a sustained period of criminal activity, which spread with the same intensity to the Republic of Ireland. Initially directed at banks and cash in transit companies, the kidnappers later targeted Post Offices, retailers and even fast food restaurants. At one time the ratio of kidnappings to head of population in Northern Ireland stood at 1:145800 and as most of the incidents were directed at a relatively small group of people, that ratio was much lower.

In Ireland, Tiger Kidnapping was always about cash, normally taken in quantities that was manageable for those involved. Over a period of time, due to the effective work undertaken by the businesses involved and the police, the incidence of Tiger Kidnapping in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has significantly reduced.

But Tiger Kidnapping, like bank robberies is not a crime that can be dismissed just because its incidence has reduced. Once a kidnapping has started it is incredibly difficult to stop, placing staff at serious personal risk and the organisation under incredible strain.   Planning for Tiger Kidnapping is as necessary for those who hold a physical key to a safe, as much as for those who hold the cryptographic key for electronic funds transfer. And in a world of emerging risks, cash may not be the only demand.

This document is not an answer on how to prevent Tiger Kidnapping, but its objective is to explain:

- What Tiger Kidnapping is
- Who the 3 main players are
- Quantifying the risk
- Explain why Tiger Kidnapping is a risk that is still relevant

Victims feel they are dragged into a black hole from which there is no escape
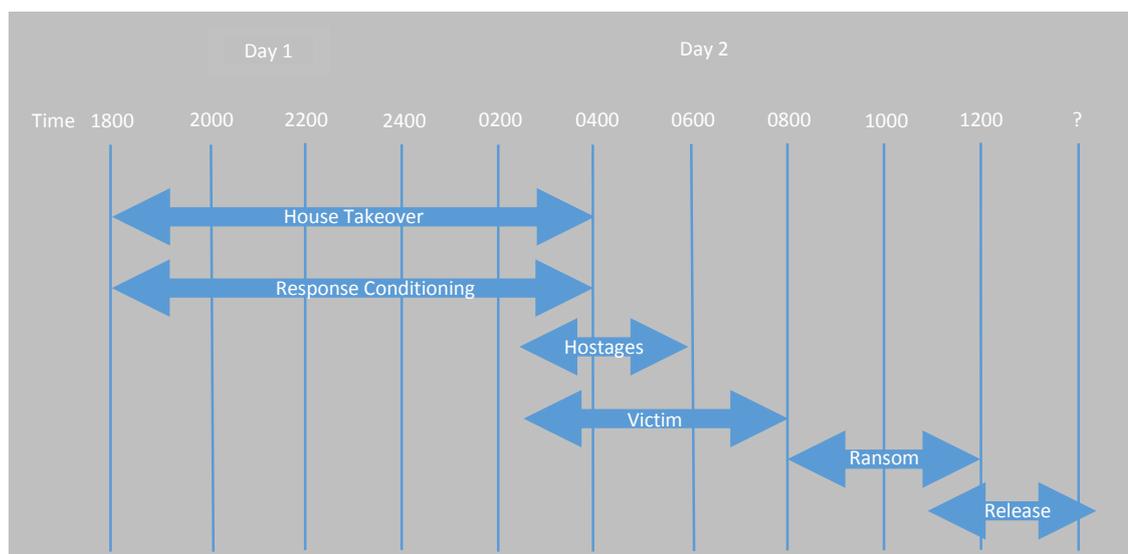
What is Tiger Kidnapping

Although there are many definitions of Tiger Kidnapping, the one used by the Police Service of Northern Ireland is, "the abduction or holding of a hostage (or claiming to have done so) with the intention of forcing another person to facilitate the immediate theft of valuables or concede some other form of ransom from an institution or business organisation".

For the victim, Tiger Kidnapping is a sudden, violent crime that leaves them and their family traumatised, as they are dragged into a black hole from which they think there is no option other than to pay a ransom

The definition of Tiger Kidnapping is clear but what does it actually mean?

Whether it's a knock on the door in the early evening or by the house being broken into while the occupants are sleeping, the diagram below illustrates that the kidnappers **take the house over** and everyone in it, at a time normally between 1800 hours to 0400 hours the following morning. From that point the kidnappers will terrify and question the victim and their family to ensure that the victim is **conditioned to respond** in the way that the kidnappers want. At some point the family are taken **hostage and separated** from the victim, usually by being taken away, blindfolded and tied up, leaving the **victim alone** with the kidnappers, who continue their questioning and instructing the victim on what to do. The kidnappers will send the victim alone to their place work, to take the **ransom demand** and deliver it to an agreed drop off point. Once the ransom has been dropped off the **hostages are released,** but that cannot be guaranteed.

From the moment the Kidnappers enter the house they put the victim under intense psychological pressure to comply. The victim's family are taken away hooded and tied, putting more pressure on the victim, to get the ransom demand and drop if off where instructed. There is no negotiation: Period.

A diagrammatic representation of a typical Tiger Kidnapping, which can last over a 2 day period.

Three of the players in Tiger Kidnapping

Although there are a number of players in Tiger Kidnapping, not least the victim and hostages, those with the most influence are:

- The criminal gangs themselves
- The targeted organisations and their preparedness to counter Tiger Kidnapping
- The police forces involved and the capabilities that they possess

Criminal gangs. Kidnapping is a sophisticated crime and therefore tends to be undertaken by higher level criminals – but not always. Not only must they be able to identify potential victims but they must be able to undertake long term surveillance of the victim, their family and the victim's work colleagues.

It is not unknown for kidnappers to be targeting several people concurrently, before literally seizing the person they want.

To avoid detection throughout the course of their activities these criminals are both surveillance conscious and forensically aware. To a large degree they understand police tactics, not only when planning and undertaking the kidnapping, but subsequently in laundering the proceeds of the crime.

Targeted organisations. If the objective is cash, then any organisation that deals in cash is a potential target. However it does tend to be major cash users, particularly banks, cash in transit companies and large retailers. Within an organisation countering kidnapping is a long term and continual process that does require a thorough understanding and application of the pre event, event and post event measures that should be undertaken.

Countering the tiger kidnapping threat goes much deeper than the installation of security equipment or the dissemination of procedures. And undertaking annual awareness training with staff is unlikely to have any effect, particularly if the frequency of kidnapping is low.

The onus for dealing with Tiger Kidnapping rests centrally within an organisation. From the ability of being able to analyse and act upon information, to generating certainty for victims that their families will be safe, when an incident is reported, are crucial in countering this crime. If an organisation cannot do that, it and its staff are at a higher risk than other organisations who do.

Police. The police are key in countering Tiger Kidnappings, they have the intelligence on the criminals involved, they run the operation to recover the hostages and they are the ones charged with bringing those responsible for the crime to court. It is necessary for the police and the potential victim organisations to have a good relationship, there is a need for a free flow of information and while the police are clearly in the lead in recovering the hostages, there has to be an understanding of the organisation's needs.

When a kidnapping is in progress the victim needs to trust those responsible for recovering their family. If a victim feels that either the police or the organisation are unprofessional or uncaring, that information will spread around all their colleagues, making it much less likely that a member of staff will call a kidnapping in. Tiger kidnappings succeed because of the extreme emotional anxiety victims are under. If some fundamental elements are not in place the kidnappers will succeed in their objective.

Criminals target victims online as well as physically

Quantifying the Risk

The risk associated with Tiger Kidnapping, as with any other risk, is made up of several component parts and it is the sum of those parts that reflects the risk to an organisation.

Threat. The severity of the threat, in terms of the frequency that any Tiger Kidnappings might be carried out, combined with those who have the ability to undertake them, does vary with time and geography. Criminals gangs, by and large, are after money and will pursue any means of obtaining it. They will, if it suits their purpose, alter their criminal behaviour, if they believe it will pay them to do so. There are sophisticated organised criminal gangs who probably do have the characteristics necessary to undertake successful Tiger Kidnappings. Whether they currently see that as a way of extorting cash is not known. However the production of a threat assessment is about taking the information that is available and through analysis, producing an intelligence assessment on what may reasonably be expected to happen.

Vulnerability. Kidnapping is not a robbery or fraud and the physical and procedural security measures that might be in place to mitigate those crimes, are probably not sufficient to deter or even prevent a Tiger Kidnapping. Vulnerabilities can exist throughout the pre-event, event and post event phases and these should be identified, as they will have a direct bearing on the impact that a kidnapping will have.

Impact. Taking into account the threat and the vulnerabilities that there are, will give a measurement on the impact any Tiger Kidnapping would have. The overriding impact is on the victim and the hostages, as well as their colleagues. The monetary loss will vary depending on where the incident happened, a bank branch will clearly lose less than a cash centre and a cash centre less than an electronic transfer of funds. In addition there might be reputational damage and loss of business, stakeholders might lose faith in the organisation and the adequacy of its management could be questioned.

Risk based judgement. Taking together the sum of the threat, the vulnerabilities and the impact will lead to the risk that an organisation is under. Set within the an Enterprise Wide Risk Management framework the degree of that risk can be readily measured against other business risks and prioritised as necessary.

Bringing Tiger Kidnapping within a monitoring plan, will allow the risk to be continuously monitored and reported upon. Not only in terms of the immediacy of any threat but the ongoing effectiveness of the control measures on it.

In what may seem like a low risk environment gaining traction for any form of controls on Tiger Kidnapping within a business can be difficult. Businesses have other aims and objectives that take priority, especially over any controls which may lead to increased expenditure or a loss of productivity.

However kidnapping is not just about cash, it can be used to express a political point of view, gain publicity or further a terrorist groups aims. The definition of Tiger Kidnapping states that it is, "…….to facilitate the immediate theft of valuables or concede some other form of ransom…….", it is clear that cash should not always be taken as the kidnappers only goal.

Limiting the scope of kidnapping to cash does not allow for other damage that might be caused to an organisation or the wider business sector.   Individuals being forced to undertake actions they normally wouldn't, are in effect conceding a form of ransom, which could potentially cause more damage than the theft of cash.

The relevance of kidnaping within modern day business is that it is a risk that must be monitored and reported upon. To that end it is no different from any other risk that a business may face and should be treated in the same way. It is a risk that does need to be planned for, receiving a heart stopping telephone call to say that a member of staff has been kidnapped is bad enough, without having assessed the risk correctly and introduced comprehensive measures to deal with it, is even worse.

From pre to post incident, RedLeaf Consultancy is a Security Practice that has a depth of knowledge on Tiger Kidnappings, gained from dealing with incidents in a Northern Ireland bank over an 18 year period.

For more information visit our website:
www.redleafconsultancy.co.uk

Or to discuss your needs, email:
info@redleafconsultancy.co.uk