

Study of Human Factors in Forensic Science Practice

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DESCRIPTION

Synergy was founded to promote the knowledge and application of cognitive psychology discoveries in forensic practice. These articles compose the "Human Factors in Forensic Science Practice Sourcebook," which the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) directed RTI International's Forensic Technology Centre of Excellence to create. Each paper in this issue is designed to explore a specific branch of knowledge within the cognitive psychology literature and how it may apply to and strengthen forensic science. Synergy was founded to promote the knowledge and application of cognitive psychology discoveries in forensic practice.

A joint team of forensic science practitioners and cognitive psychologists met in person three times over two years to investigate concerns concerning human elements in forensic science. Each article team was led by a psychologist with cognitive skills who was assisted by a number of forensic science practitioners who gave background and operational insights into forensic science needs and practices. The practitioners were chosen based on their professional standing and experience from an open call for volunteers issued by the Forensic Technology Centre of Excellence. They work in a variety of forensic scientific fields, including latent prints, crime scenes, controlled drugs, DNA, bloodstain pattern analysis, guns, footwear, questioned papers, fire investigation, and laboratory administration.

Three of our practitioners, as well as one of our psychologists, were unable to commit to the full scope of the project. The purpose of the source study is to introduce readers to new aspects of human factors. These papers are designed to be useful and instructional to the forensic science community, and to provide tools to improve the work experience and product, to provide assistance in court, and to present to laboratory management to seek support if necessary. Documentation, fire investigation, and laboratory management are all areas of expertise. The source study makes no clear recommendations for changes in practice application of cognitive psychology principles to forensic science

problems is still in its infancy, and in many circumstances, there is insufficient directly relevant literature to support such recommendations. Instead, we select areas of cognitive psychology that are relevant to forensic science practice, present an overview of the theory and existing literature in those domains, and show how forensic science may benefit from their application.

We hypothesize on certain practice improvements that are likely to be beneficial and propose recommendations for future research. Human factors can refer to any way that people's psychological or physiological characteristics influence a system or process. Physiological factors include things like the ergonomics of laboratory workstations and the illumination in comparison areas. Psychological considerations the primary focus of this source study may include how people learn new processes or are influenced by stress. Cognitive psychologists examine how the human mind works, including capacities such as attention, memory, language processing, perception, and problem-solving. Cognitive psychology is a subset of human factors that can assist people and organizations in developing strong systems based on the strengths and limits of the human mind.

Although cognitive psychologists have spent much of their emphasis on cognitive bias issues in forensic science to date. The steering committee of the source study chose five current key forensic science challenges to include in this project. The articles are organized in a chronological order, beginning with those that address specific times in an analyst's career or specific tasks that analysts perform, and progressing to those that address the broader context in which analysts work. The topic of the first article is initial personnel selection and evaluation. The second, who is clearly related to the first, addresses initial training as well as assessment administration throughout a scientist's career. In the third section, we look at the psychology that underpins the day-to-day work of feature-comparison and process analysts. The fourth article examines how the culture and policies of a laboratory can influence an analyst's reactions to stressors, for better or worse.

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