

GOVERNANCE AND THE POWER OF FORENSICS

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The forensic science sector is in transition. New insights, technologies, and customers, combined with falling costs and increasing capabilities cause the sector to grow rapidly. As a consequence the role of forensic laboratories is changing. Today's laboratories are able to investigate more and a greater variety of traces, and to extract more information from less material, than ever before.

Whereas before, forensic science was cast in a supporting role, it is now set to become the playmaker in many types of investigation, providing quick and reliable information on scenarios and suspects and thus, in a sense, directing the efforts of investigators. At the same time, forensics is changing from a profession in which individual experience and expertise of practitioners play a dominant role to one where skilled knowledge workers are integrated in an increasingly complex infrastructure of empirical science and cutting-edge technology.

One of the clearest and most important trends in forensics is its remarkable growth over the past 15 years. This growth has been driven by three main factors: (1) the introduction of new technological capabilities, (2) increased general awareness among customers regarding the value and efficiency of forensic science, and (3) the advent of new types of customers from outside the scope of traditional forensics.

This vast growth rate has created some challenges for the forensic sector that can be attributed to the structure of the field. Forensic institutes are faced with large backlogs, long delivery times and in turn these has become inhibitors for research and innovation.

Several years ago, the NFI saw itself faced with these challenges and, in response, developed and implemented a number of measures that have enabled it to eliminate its backlogs and dramatically improve the quality and delivery times of its forensic investigations. In this way, it has been able to markedly improve customer satisfaction and has shown that its integrated model is a viable way forward. The forensic sector has great potential, but it will certainly find itself challenged to live up to the high expectations that customers and society have of it. It is equally certain that the sector can only succeed if it takes up the challenge and makes fundamental changes where necessary.