

Review - Forensic DNA Analysis Team

RELEVANT BACKGROUND

Health Support Queensland (HSQ) businesses provide critical services to Hospital and Health Services, other government agencies, commercial clients and the community.

Within HSQ, Forensic and Scientific Services (FSS) delivers products and services in the areas of DNA profiling and forensic chemistry, clinical forensic medicine, coronial services, and scientific services to support public and environmental health investigations.

Within the Police Services Stream, managed by Ms Cathie Allen, DNA Analysis and Reporting is undertaken by the Forensic DNA Analysis Team.

FORENSIC DNA ANALYSIS TEAM

The Forensic DNA Analysis Team has seen a number of significant changes, both technical and operational, over at least the past decade, some of which have resulted in adjustments to the organisational structure.

These changes include the way that samples are received, changes in analytical procedures and technology and a recent change of information management system, from Auslab to Forensic Register.

The most significant development which contributed to the requirement for adjustments to operating procedures and organisational structure was the change from receiving evidence in the form of whole items to receiving evidentiary materials in tubes, after initial processing of the whole material by the Queensland Police Service (QPS).

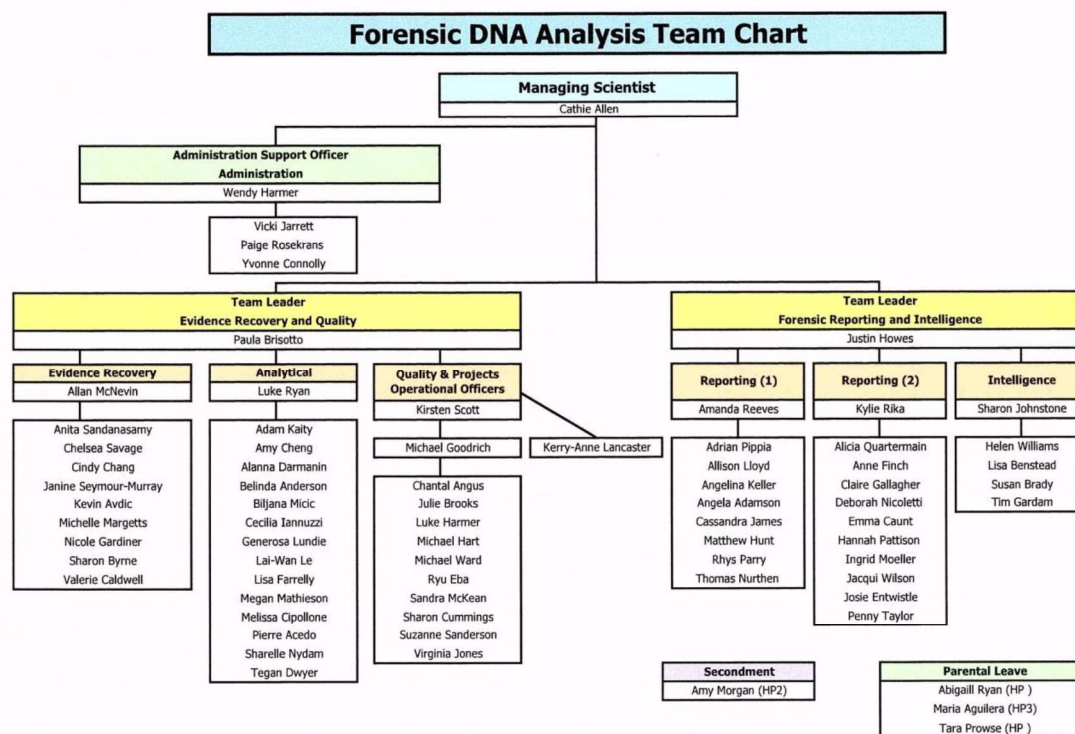
The QPS then allocates a priority level to the sample which, effectively, acts as a measurable performance standard, for example Priority 1 samples are to be processed within 3 days, Priority 2 samples between 1 to 2 weeks and Priority 3 samples within 2 to 3 weeks.

This change in the evidence handling process enabled the Forensic DNA Analysis Team to arrange its Evidence Recovery and Analysis activities to operate as a throughput laboratory with sequential operations delivering results to reporting teams which then refine the information and generate the end product.

Consequently, the current organisational structure reflects a production line approach where materials are put through a refining process to produce an end-product that meets the requirements of customers.

From the information available, the last significant assessment of the organisational structure occurred in about 2008 and, given the number of significant changes that have occurred, since then, together with the recent history of significant interpersonal and operational dysfunction within the group, it is timely that the operating model is reviewed with a view to the revising the organisational structure.

Organisational Structure @ 9 January 2018



CURRENT SITUATION

During the period since at least early to mid-2016, the Forensic DNA Analysis Team has been managing complex human resource issues that have adversely affected the operational efficiency and morale of the Team, at both the management and operational levels.

To assist FSS to better understand the basis for the ongoing operational dysfunction in the Forensic DNA Analysis Team, Workplace Edge has conducted interviews with senior management, the members of the management team and operational staff from the two Reporting Teams.

Contributing factors to the dysfunction in the Forensic DNA Analysis Team and the primary issues of concern to staff, identified in the course of these interviews, are shown below:

1. Operations, Operating Model and supporting Structure

- a) The production line model has not achieved the optimal delivery of services under the current structure with the existing systems and processes, and resource allocation.
- b) The organisational structure does not fully support the current operating model as illustrated by comments provided by staff:
 - The Team, as a whole is over governed with 10 supervisors managing approximately 60 staff, giving a ratio of 1:6 actuals and between 1:4 and 1:5 FTE.

- Projects take too long to establish and complete and there is no single point of accountability for bringing projects to completion.
- The Quality and Projects, and Operational Officers Team provides Operational Support to the other Teams, but is not accountable for the delivery of projects and does not have a significant role in monitoring quality in the forensic reporting and intelligence teams. Combining the functions of Quality, Projects and operations support and placing this as a Team with a subgroup together with Evidence Recovery and Analysis has not met the organisational needs in the areas of Quality and Project management.
- The staff in the Reporting Teams are paid at a higher level than similarly qualified staff in the other teams, due to the presumption that they will be required to present results to the Courts and respond to examination by prosecution and defence attorneys. However, only around 10% of results are presented in Court and some members of the Reporting Teams may never, or only rarely, attend Court, which is seen by some as an inequity that contributes to disharmony in both the Reporting Teams and the Forensic DNA Analysis Team, as a whole.
- The Production Line concept contributes to feelings of frustration among highly qualified staff, who would prefer to see less rigidity in the organisation and more equitable distribution of work.
- The Production Line concept has also led to the relative isolation of Teams. The restricted information sharing and limited professional interaction between staff has contributed to deskilling and re-work during the case management stage.
- There is a management team comprising nine people who identify as managers for an overall compliment of around 70 people. It is large and unwieldy and has become dysfunctional, partly due to the interplay of particular personalities, but a contributing factor must also be its size and lack of internal structure and the expectations it generates.
- This dysfunction is evidenced by the failure to deliver projects and the failure to address critical issues such as the impending technical changes to DNA Analysis for intelligence purposes, the breakdown of the Intelligence Team and the failure to manage to bottleneck in the production line between Analytical and Reporting.
- Within the Reporting Teams the piecemeal basis on which work is allocated contributes to inefficiencies, particularly an overall low work output, inequitable sharing of the workload and low levels of reported work satisfaction.

2. Culture

a) Whole Group Issues

- There has been a failure, over the long term, to effectively address human resource management issues so that by the end of 2017:
 - o ordinary line management reporting was not in operation between the Reporting Teams and the Managing Scientist;
 - o the management team was not functioning effectively, due to an undercurrent of personal disagreements;
 - o a number of personal grievances remained unresolved; and

- the Intelligence Team was without an effective compliment of staff.
- Vertically and horizontally, within the Forensic DNA Analysis team, there are significant communication issues. It is perceived that there is inadequate communication by senior managers, which contributes to the circulation of pernicious rumours.
- There is a perceived lack of transparency in decision making, which contributes to high levels of suspicion and separation into cliques, with the resultant breakdown in trust amongst staff and management.
- There are significant issues regarding priorities for action, where personal relationship and grievance issues have distracted management from priority operational decisions. This has resulted in inefficiencies and a failure to resolve bottlenecks with a resultant perceived impact on customer service.
- There is a breakdown in line management processes and respect for normal workplace behaviour, as a result of the failure to apply ordinary performance standards in relation to conduct and professional output.
- There is a lack of flexibility in leadership and management to address operational performance issues and to adjust the operating model and allocation of resources to address these issues.
- Morale is low, and the reporting list is growing without any clear plan to reduce the list. This is very upsetting for all of the Reporting staff. Overtime is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

b) Reporting and Intelligence Team Issues

- The Reporting function is over-governed with two supervisors when in effect, it operates as a single team.
- The system of work allocation is inefficient, with reported co-dependence of the supervisors, resulting in inequitable piecemeal allocation of work.
- There is a lack of appropriate performance standards and monitoring, with a resultant lack of accountability for individual performance, which contributes to less than optimal production outcomes. This contributes to a lack of job satisfaction, and concern by individuals at the performance variability amongst staff.
- The Reporting Team comprises staff with a wide variety of skills qualifications and experience, which is not fully utilised due to the rigidity of the production line operating model. This has created silos, with little opportunity for staff to broaden the use of their skills and experience.
- There is considerable re-work when a particular case is received by the Reporting Team, and full consideration is given to the evidentiary issues. This is primarily due to a lack of consultation across silos, as the case progresses through the Evidence Recovery and Analytical areas.
- The Intelligence Team has virtually ceased to operate due to the loss of an effective compliment of staff.

- This Unit currently uses the nine loci DNA kit, which is no longer in commercial production, and there is a requirement for new business rules to be developed with QPS to support the use of the 21 loci DNA kit for intelligence purposes.
- The Intelligence Team is responsible for uploads to the national data base, which is not the most efficient allocation of this task. There is merit in considering merging of Intelligence with Reporting and then training the integrated team to perform uploads.

3. Systems and Processes - Forensic Register (FR)

The introduction of FR is an opportunity to review systems and processes, particularly to inform the further development of FR. Whilst the new system has not been fully implemented at this stage, it will result in changes to work processes and work practices and ultimately structure and resourcing. Any immediate changes from this review need to take into account that further adjustments may be necessary as FR is fully implemented.

4. Conditions of Employment

It has been raised that part-time staff are not allowed to accumulate TOIL and that this is a blanket ban which is not applied to other FSS staff. It is reported that, part-time staff in Forensic Chemistry do have access to TOIL.

Staff have put the view that denial of access to TOIL and the rigidity applied to 'spread of hours' affects flexibility in the workplace and personal wellbeing and is not consistent with the family friendly policies of the Department.

5. Training & Development

Staff reported that there were few opportunities to gain broader experience in other roles and that limited training opportunities exacerbate this problem.

Training is ad hoc and restricted to the work staff are undertaking in their substantive role. It is poorly organised and not needs-based.

There are limited opportunities for teams to share what they are undertaking and to learn from each other.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Operating Model and Structural Options

Option 1: Process Integrated Team Approach

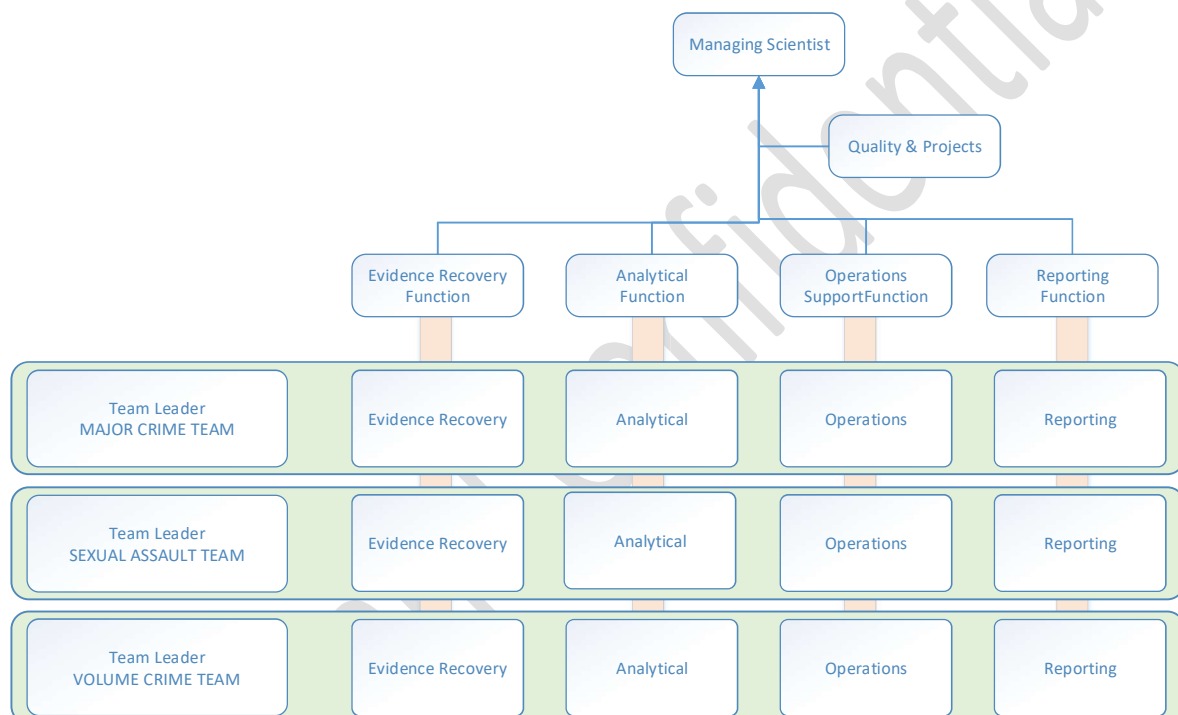
This option would involve a shift from the production line model to integrated horizontal teams which would handle cases through all process stages. The model would split the teams horizontally into product segments, for example:

1. Major crime;
2. Sexual assault; and
3. Volume crime.

There are some significant benefits in adopting this model, as follows:

1. Reduction of silos;
2. More flexible working arrangements;
3. Greater variety of work for individual staff;
4. Increased skills and experience development opportunities for staff;
5. An opportunity to develop a more collaborative and cooperative team-based operating approach, which would increase the flexibility to allocate resources where the greatest demand for work was located, and to speedily remove any blockages such as in the reporting area; and
6. Potentially less re-work which currently occurs under the production line model due to the siloed nature of work.

Process Integrated Team Approach



Implications:

1. Three new Team Leaders at HP6 levels to lead the teams.
2. Reduction in Supervisors – 5 x HP5's (Evidence, Analytical, Reporting x 2, Intelligence x 1) and 1 x HP4 (Operations).
3. Reduction in two Team Leaders - 2 x HP6 (may be successful in the three new Team Leader positions)
4. Possible shift in resources to strengthen Quality and Projects Unit.

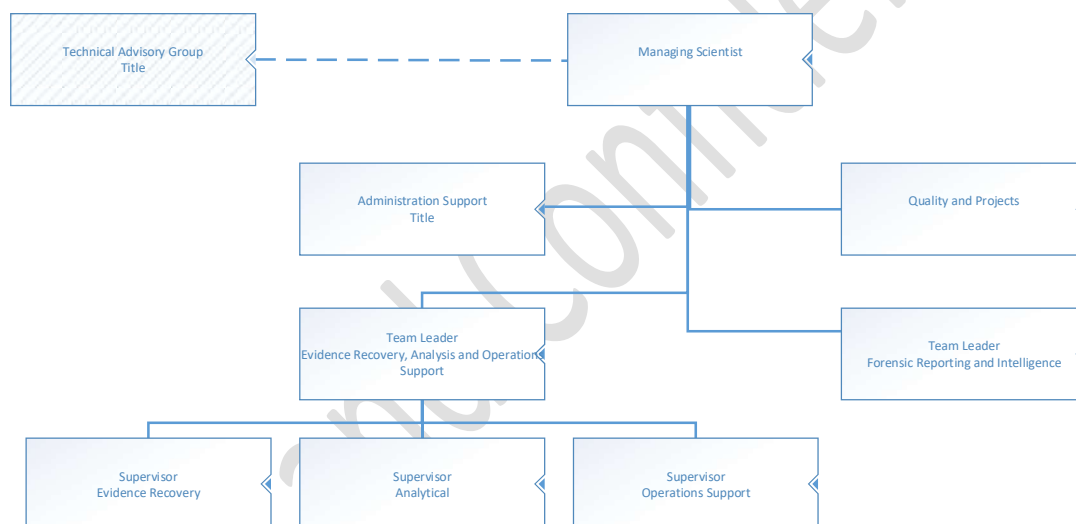
Option 2: Enhanced Production Line Model

This option would involve structural and process changes to address many of the concerns expressed above.

The proposed changes to the current model would involve:

1. Separating the Quality and Projects functions from Operational Support. Having this function report directly under the Managing Scientist will provide an overarching service to all program activities and units.
2. Merging the two reporting teams into one unit and also merging the Intelligence Team into the merged Reporting Team.
3. Reducing the size of the management team to four positions namely:
 - a. Managing Scientist
 - b. Quality and Projects Manager
 - c. Team Leader Evidence Recovery and Quality;
 - d. Team Leader Forensic Reporting and Intelligence
4. Establishing a Technical Advisory Group (or Reference Group), which would comprise Supervisors in Evidence Recovery, Analytical, Reporting, Operations and Quality/Projects and other staff on an as-needs basis, depending on the nature of the technical, scientific or operations matter for consideration.

Draft Structure Chart Forensic DNA Analysis Team



Implications:

1. Reduction in supervisors – 3 x HP5 – these positions may take up other roles or take up the duties of the area on a (Present Incumbent Only) PIO basis.
2. Quality and Projects is elevated to a whole of team oversight and support position reporting directly to the Chief Scientist.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- REC 1. **Operational Model** - consider the options for operational model and structural change, and assess the merits of each option and the implications, and decide which is the most appropriate option. Should Option 2 be the most appropriate option, consider the establishment of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) or Reference Group, the function of which would be to support decision making at the technical and operational issue level. This Group would comprise Senior Team Leaders and Supervisors and others on an as-needs basis. This Group would not usurp the role of management, but rather address operational and technical issues and provide advice to the management team, thus freeing up the management team to address strategic issues.

- REC 2. **Quality and Projects** - notwithstanding the choice of operating model, it is recommended that Quality and Projects is strengthened with additional resources, and reports directly to the Managing Scientist, to enable the Unit to provide overarching quality review and project delivery across the whole business.
- REC 3. **Court attendance** – review the officers currently qualified to attend court and undertake an assessment of the need for court attendance, the number of staff required for this function, and the most appropriate staff members to attend court. This may involve additional training and development for some officers.
- REC 4. **Performance Framework** – develop and implement an appropriate performance framework and system with clear standards for operational delivery and throughput for each position. Ensure there is alignment of expectations between staff and managers/supervisors, and that staff are regularly assessed and coached against agreed KPIs and performance criteria. This will ensure equitable allocation and delivery of work.
- REC 5. **Bottlenecks** – with whichever model is chosen, and whatever recommendations are adopted, ensure that managers and supervisors identify fluctuations in capability and capacity to deliver in certain areas early, and develop appropriate strategies to address the shortfall speedily prior to the gap becoming a major problem.
- REC 6. **HR Issues** – ensure the appointment of an HR Manager and supporting resources at FSS to provide on time HR advice, and support, including advice on process and strategic interventions. Ensure that all HR issues are triaged, and addressed equitably and promptly to avoid escalation and dysfunction in the organisation.
- REC 7. **Communication** – develop an internal communications strategy based on the communications issues identified, and ensure that the strategies are implemented using approaches such as more regular team meetings, timely communication of decisions impacting staff, internal communiques, intranet posts, management “walking the talk” and other targeted strategies and actions.
- REC 8. **Systems and Processes** – ensure there are appropriate processes in place to support the implementation of FR, and ensure that internal systems and processes are developed to ensure staff utilise the full capacity and capability of FR, which may result in streamlining of workflows and an increase in productivity.
- REC 9. **Conditions of employment** – review the conditions of employment in areas such as TOIL, and rigidity in the spread of hours, and ensure that staff are treated equitably across different professional, operational and administrative areas.
- REC 10. **Utilisation of skills and experience base** – depending on the operating model chosen, ensure that all staff have an equitable opportunity to undertake work and duties in areas where their skills and experience can be applied, and they have opportunities to enhance their skills through targeted training and development.
- REC 11. **Outstanding operational issues** – ensure that processes are in place to address outstanding operational changes, and that staff are up to date with the latest techniques and approaches eg change from nine loci DNA kits to 21 loci DNA kits.