J6 Handwriting Examination and Human Factors: Update of the Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Handwriting Analysis

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about human factors principles, the relationship between human error and human factor influences, and the benefits of documenting a process. Attendees will have an opportunity to preview the Expert Working Group's handwriting analysis process map.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing forensic science practitioners, managers, and other key criminal justice system stakeholders about how error can affect handwriting analysis and gain a better understanding of the process of handwriting examination.

Human error is an inevitable part of everyday life. In most instances the results of human error are harmless and correctable, but in circumstances such as forensic analysis, where errors may lead to the loss of life or liberty, error prevention is imperative. Through the study of human factors, the forensic science community can assess the effects of human and organizational factors on the forensic analyses and gain a deeper understanding of when and why errors occur.

The National Institute of Justice and the National Institute of Standards and Technology are sponsoring a series of expert panels to examine the effects of human factors in forensic analyses and recommend practices to reduce the likelihood of error. Each discipline-specific working group will be comprised of experts from relevant forensic disciplines, statisticians, psychologists, researchers, and other scientific experts, in addition to representatives from the legal community, professional organizations, and other identified stakeholder groups. The second working group in this series will focus on handwriting analysis.

The Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Handwriting Analysis was convened in late 2013 and will conduct a scientific assessment of the effects of human factors on forensic handwriting analysis. The working group will evaluate existing scientific or technical knowledge in forensic handwriting analysis related to errors, where information is lacking, and apply their best professional judgment to develop recommendations on how to address human factors issues. The final report will likely address all aspects of forensic handwriting analysis, ranging from the effects of the work environment to training issues and from interpretation to research into emerging technology.

The first task the working group has taken on is developing a process map that accurately depicts the analysis process and identifies critical decision points in the process. Understanding and documenting the steps in a process, their order and dependencies, and other critical pieces of information provides a common understanding of the entire process and helps to identify problem areas. Before you can improve a process, you must understand it. This presentation will include an update on working group activities and present the forensic handwriting analysis process map developed by working group members. A brief review of the findings of The Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Latent Print Analysis will be presented as well.

Handwriting Analysis, Human Factors, Process Mapping

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