

Advancing a paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence: The rise of forensic data science

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I dedicate this paper in memory of Prof Terrance M Nearey, my former PhD supervisor, who taught me how to be a scientist. Terry passed away on December 18, 2021.

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5 **Abstract**

6 Widespread practice across the majority of branches of forensic science uses analytical
7 methods based on human perception, and interpretive methods based on subjective
8 judgement. These methods are non-transparent and are susceptible to cognitive bias,
9 interpretation is often logically flawed, and forensic-evaluation systems are often not
10 empirically validated. I describe a paradigm shift in which existing methods are
11 replaced by methods based on relevant data, quantitative measurements, and statistical
12 models; methods that are transparent and reproducible, are intrinsically resistant to
13 cognitive bias, use the logically correct framework for interpretation of evidence (the
14 likelihood-ratio framework), and are empirically validated under casework conditions.

15 **Keywords**

16 forensic science; forensic data science; likelihood ratio; paradigm shift; validation

17

18 **1 Introduction**

19 The present paper is a written version of a keynote presentation given at the European
20 Academy of Forensic Science 2022 conference. It discusses an ongoing paradigm shift
21 in evaluation of forensic evidence. It describes:

22 • the current state of affairs (*staus quo*)

23 • the new paradigm (*quo vadis?*)

24 • obstacles to the advancement of the paradigm shift (*impedimenta*)

25 • a strategy to advance the paradigm shift (*via progredi*)

26

27 **2 A paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence**

28 **2.1 Status quo**

29 Curran [1]:

30 Is forensic science the last bastion of resistance against statistics?

31 UK House of Lords Science and Technology Committee (HoL) [2]:

32 In regard to pattern comparison methods, ... “the comparison of fingerprints,
33 toolmarks, footwear, tire marks and ballistics” [are] “spot-the-difference”
34 techniques in which “there is little, if any, robust science involved in the analytical
35 or comparative processes used and as a consequence there have been questions
36 raised around the reproducibility, repeatability, accuracy and error rates of such
37 analysis.” (§155)

38 In forensic science, the process of *evaluation of strength of evidence* consists of:
39 *analysis*, i.e., extraction of information from items of interest (the evidence);¹ and
40 *interpretation*, i.e., drawing inferences with respect to the meaning of the information
41 extracted by the analysis. Items of interest may be, for example:

42 • a fingermark of questioned source recovered from a crime scene and a fingerprint

¹ In the forensic-inference-and-statistics literature “evidence” is the term commonly used to refer to the items of interest (i.e., the input to the analysis) or to the information output by the analysis (i.e., the input to the interpretation). Usage is somewhat fluid, but, either way, this is evidence from the perspective of the forensic practitioner. From the perspective of the court, evidence is the oral testimony or written submission of the forensic practitioner. In wider forensic-science literature, the term “trace” is often used to refer to items of interest (Roux et al. [3]).

- 43 collected from a known individual
- 44 • a recording of a speaker of questioned identity on an intercepted telephone call
45 and a recording of a police interview with a speaker of known identity
- 46 • a fired cartridge case recovered from a crime scene and cartridge cases fired in a
47 forensic laboratory from a gun found in the possession of a suspected shooter
- 48 Forensic practitioners conduct evaluations in order to assist legal-decision makers to
49 make decisions with respect to questions of legal concern such as:²
- 50 • Do the fingermark and fingerprint originate from the same finger?
- 51 • Is the speaker of questioned identity on the intercepted recording the same as the
52 speaker of known identity?
- 53 • Was the cartridge case recovered from the crime scene fired from the suspect's
54 gun?

55 Currently, across the majority of branches of forensic science, widespread practice is
56 that analysis is conducted using *human perception*, and interpretation is conducted
57 using *subjective judgement*. Even in branches of forensic science in which analysis is
58 conducted using instrumental measurement, interpretation is commonly based on
59 subjective judgement, e.g., by eyeballing graphical representations of the measured
60 values. Human-perception-based analysis methods and subjective-judgement-based
61 interpretation methods are non-transparent and are susceptible to cognitive bias.

62 Currently, across the majority of branches of forensic science, even branches of
63 forensic science in which interpretation is conducted using statistical models,
64 interpretation of evidence is often logically flawed, and forensic-evaluation systems
65 (the end-to-end combination of analysis and interpretation methods) are often not

² The present paper restricts its scope to the problem of source attribution.

66 empirically validated or not adequately empirically validated.³

67 **2.2 Quo vadis?**

68 **2.2.1 Introduction**

69 Saks & Koehler [4]:

70 we envision a paradigm shift in the traditional forensic identification sciences in
71 which untested assumptions and semi-informed guesswork are replaced by a
72 sound scientific foundation and justifiable protocols. Although obstacles exist
73 both inside and outside forensic science, the time is ripe for the traditional forensic
74 sciences to replace antiquated assumptions of uniqueness and perfection with a
75 more defensible empirical and probabilistic foundation. (p. 895)

76 US President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST [5]):

77 neither experience, nor judgment, nor good professional practice ... can substitute
78 for actual evidence of foundational validity and reliability. The frequency with
79 which a particular pattern or set of features will be observed in different samples,
80 which is an essential element in drawing conclusions, is not a matter of
81 "judgment." It is an empirical matter for which only empirical evidence is
82 relevant. (p. 6)

83 Objective methods are, in general, preferable to subjective methods. Analyses that
84 depend on human judgment (rather than a quantitative measure ...) are obviously
85 more susceptible to human error, bias, and performance variability across
86 examiners. In contrast, objective, quantified methods tend to yield greater
87 accuracy, repeatability and reliability, including reducing variation in results
88 among examiners. Subjective methods can evolve into or be replaced by objective

³ Claims made in §2.1 are supported by details and references provided in §2.2 and in §2.3.

89 methods. (p. 47)

90 *A paradigm shift* in evaluation of forensic evidence is ongoing in which methods based
91 on human perception and subjective judgement are being replaced by methods based
92 on *relevant data, quantitative measurements, and statistical models / machine-learning*
93 *algorithms*; methods that:

- 94 • are *transparent and reproducible* (§2.2.2);
- 95 • are *intrinsically resistant to cognitive bias* (§2.2.3);
- 96 • use the *logically correct framework for interpretation of evidence* (the
97 *likelihood-ratio framework*) (§2.2.4); and
- 98 • are *empirically validated under casework conditions* (§2.2.5).

99 I address each of these elements of the new paradigm in the following four subsections.
100 They are, in turn, followed by a subsection which discusses the applicability to this
101 paradigm shift of Kuhn's [6] description of a paradigm shift, and the implications
102 thereof (§2.2.6).

103 **2.2.2 Transparency and reproducibility**

104 Methods dependent on human perception and subjective judgement are intrinsically
105 non-transparent and therefore not reproducible by others. Human introspection is often
106 mistaken, hence a forensic practitioner's explanation of how they reached their
107 conclusion may not reflect how they actually reached that conclusion (Edmond et al.
108 [7]).

109 In contrast, methods based on data, quantitative measurement, and statistical models
110 are transparent and reproducible: measurement (feature-extraction) and statistical-
111 modelling / machine-learning methods can be described in detail, and data and software
112 tools can potentially be shared with others.

113 **2.2.3 Cognitive bias**

114 There has been a great deal of concern about cognitive bias in forensic science
115 (National Research Council [8]; Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Latent
116 Print Analysis, EWG [9]; Found [10]; Stoel et al. [11]; PCAST [5]; Edmond et al. [7];
117 Cooper & Meterko [12]; Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Handwriting
118 Examination [13]; Spellman et al. [14]). Cognitive bias is subconscious bias, it cannot
119 be controlled by strength of will.

120 Forensic practitioners are susceptible to cognitive bias when making perceptual
121 observations: their degree of belief in the probability that a hypothesis is true can affect
122 their analysis of the evidence. Since the output of the analysis is the input to the
123 interpretation, bias in the former affects the latter. Forensic practitioners are susceptible
124 to cognitive bias when they are making subjective judgements and are exposed to
125 information that could influence their degree of belief in the probability that a
126 hypothesis is true but that would not logically affect the probability of obtaining the
127 evidence conditional on whether the hypothesis were true.

128 Some potentially biasing information is task-irrelevant and should be withheld from
129 practitioners, but some potentially biasing information is task-relevant and
130 practitioners employing human-perception and subjective-judgement methods will
131 need to be exposed to it at some point in the evaluation process, e.g., practitioners who
132 visually compare known-source fingerprints and questioned-source fingermarks must
133 be exposed to both, but exposure to a higher-quality print may bias their analysis of
134 ambiguous details in a lower-quality mark.

135 Systems in which the strength-of-evidence conclusion is directly the result of
136 subjective judgement are particularly susceptible to cognitive bias.

137 Systems based on quantitative measurements and statistical models require subjective
138 judgements on decisions such as whether the data used for training the system and the

139 data used for validating the system are sufficiently representative of the relevant
140 population for the case and sufficiently reflective of the conditions of the items of
141 interest in the case so that the output of the system will be a meaningful answer to the
142 question posed in the case and so that the results of the validation will provide a
143 meaningful indication of the performance of the systems under the conditions of the
144 case. These decisions, however, are made at the beginning of the process before the
145 practitioner has analyzed the items of interest, hence the practitioner cannot know what
146 effect these decisions will have on the strength-of-evidence conclusion. The remainder
147 of the evaluation process is automated, hence not susceptible to cognitive bias.

148 **2.2.4 Likelihood-ratio framework**

149 In current practice, interpretation of evidence is often logically flawed, e.g., it is based
150 on the uniqueness or the individualization fallacy (Saks & Koehler [15]; Cole [16],
151 [17]), and conclusions are often expressed categorically, e.g., “identification”,
152 “inconclusive”, “exclusion” (i.e., posterior probability of 1 or 0 with respect to the
153 same-source hypothesis, with “inconclusive” meaning no conclusion rather than an
154 intermediate probability), or using some form of uncalibrated verbal posterior-
155 probability scale, e.g., “identification”, “probable identification”, “inconclusive”,
156 “probable exclusion”, “exclusion”. Jackson [18] and Kaye [19] review these and other
157 commonly used but logically flawed conclusions.

158 In contrast, the likelihood-ratio framework is advocated as the logically correct
159 framework for evaluation of evidence by the vast majority of experts in forensic
160 inference and statistics (including: Aitken et al. [20]; Morrison et al. [21]; Morrison et
161 al. [22]; with 31, 19 and 20 authors and supporters respectively), and by key
162 organizations including:

- 163 • Association of Forensic Science Providers of the United Kingdom and of the
164 Republic of Ireland [23]

- 165 • Royal Statistical Society (Aitken et al. [24])
- 166 • European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (Willis et al. [25])
- 167 • National Institute of Forensic Science of the Australia New Zealand Policing
168 Advisory Agency (Ballantyne et al. [26])
- 169 • American Statistical Association (Kafadar et al. [27])
- 170 • Forensic Science Regulator for England & Wales (FSR) [28]
- 171 The likelihood-ratio framework requires assessment of:
- 172 • the probability of obtaining the evidence if one hypothesis were true
- 173 versus
- 174 • the probability of obtaining the evidence if an alternative hypothesis were true
- 175 The two hypotheses must be mutually exclusive. One hypothesis should represent the
176 position of the prosecution in the case, and the other the position of the defence, e.g.,
177 the fingerprint of questioned origin was deposited by a finger of a particular known
178 individual, versus the fingerprint of questioned origin was deposited by a finger of
179 some other individual selected at random from the relevant population. In this example:
- 180 • the numerator of the likelihood ratio quantifies the *similarity* between the mark
181 and the print
- 182 • the denominator quantifies the *typicality* of the mark with respect to the relevant
183 population
- 184 For continuously-valued data, likelihood ratios can be calculated as the ratio of two

185 probability-density functions evaluated at the value of the evidence.⁴

186 **2.2.5 Empirical validation**

187 Empirical validation under conditions reflecting those of the case to which a forensic-
188 evaluation system is to be applied is the only way to know how well that system
189 performs under the conditions of the case. The need for validation under casework
190 conditions has been emphasized by FSR [31], and by PCAST [5]:

191 Without appropriate estimates of accuracy, an examiner’s statement that two
192 samples are similar—or even indistinguishable—is scientifically meaningless: it
193 has no probative value, and considerable potential for prejudicial impact.
194 Nothing—not training, personal experience nor professional practices—can
195 substitute for adequate empirical demonstration of accuracy. (p. 46)

196 Protocols for validating systems that output likelihood ratios have been developed,
197 including metrics and graphics appropriate for representing the results of such
198 validations (Meuwly [32]; Brümmer & du Preez [33]; Morrison [34]; Meuwly et al.
199 [35]; Ramos et al. [36]; Morrison et al. [22]). Much of the latter work has been
200 conducted in the context of forensic voice comparison, but the results are applicable
201 across forensic science in general.

202 **2.2.6 A Kuhnian paradigm shift**

⁴ In the forensic inference and statistics literature “likelihood ratio” is commonly used as a cover term for both likelihood ratios based only on sample data and for Bayes’ factors based on sample data and prior distributions for model parameters. The present discussion is intended to be neutral with respect to likelihoodist or Bayesian approaches. For simplicity, the present paper glosses over the differences between likelihoodist and Bayesian approaches. For readers particularly concerned with the differences between these two approaches, or with the nuances of one or the other of them, the present paper may be frustratingly vague and such readers may feel that it conflates concepts that they considered to be importantly different. Addressing the concerns of such readers would, however, likely lead to greater confusion for the broader audience of forensic scientists and lawyers to whom the present paper is primarily addressed. Readers interested in the differences between likelihoodist and Bayesian approaches may wish to consult Ommen & Saunders [29], [30].

203 The idea that evaluation of forensic evidence is undergoing a paradigm shift is not new.
204 The most famous article heralding a paradigm shift is Saks & Koehler [4]. Allowing
205 for differences in wording and level of detail and the passage of time, I believe that
206 Saks & Koehler [4] and the present paper describe the same paradigm shift. In contrast
207 to Saks & Koehler's [4] statement that they intended "paradigm shift" as a metaphor,
208 however, I view the paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence as a true *Kuhnian*
209 *paradigm shift* (Kuhn [6]) in the sense that:⁵

- 210 • it requires rejection of existing methods and the ways of thinking that underpin
211 them,
- 212 • and rejection of the idea that progress can be made by incremental improvements
213 to existing methods.
- 214 • Instead, it requires the wholesale adoption of an entire constellation of new
215 methods and new ways of thinking.

216 That a paradigm shift requires the wholesale adoption of an entire constellation of new
217 methods and new ways of thinking remains the case irrespective of whether one
218 considers the shift to be from one paradigm to another or to be from a pre-paradigm to
219 a paradigm period of science. As suggested in Saks & Koehler [4], a pre-paradigm
220 period would seem to be a more accurate description of the *status quo*, with multiple
221 traditions of evaluation of evidence used both within individual branches of forensic
222 science and across different branches of forensic science, and hence there being no
223 established widely-accepted overarching paradigm in use.

224 Some authors have used the term "paradigm shift" in relation to a single element or a
225 subset of the elements of the paradigm shift as I have outlined it above, but I believe

⁵ The only aspects in which I think the current paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence deviates from Kuhn's [6] description of paradigm shifts relate to forensic science being an applied science which is not isolated from societal pressures.

226 that all of these elements are required as part of the constellation. This may be viewed
227 as a radical stance, and it faces resistance, but, over the last decade and a half, my
228 colleagues and I have had substantial success in contributing to advancing this
229 paradigm shift in forensic voice comparison.

230 **2.3 Impedimenta**

231 **2.3.1 Introduction**

232 The paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence is ongoing, but progress is slow
233 or stalling for multiple reasons including the following:

- 234 • The new paradigm has only been adopted in a few branches of forensic science,
235 and only by a minority of researchers and practitioners (§2.3.2).
- 236 • Only some elements of the new paradigm have been adopted as part of
237 incremental change (§2.3.3).
- 238 • There is misunderstanding of the new paradigm and resistance to its adoption
239 (§2.3.4).
- 240 • Research is often not informed by practice and has no impact on practice (§2.3.5).
- 241 • It is difficult to obtain funding for evidential-forensic-science research (§2.3.6).
- 242 • There are genuine practical impediments to implementing the new paradigm
243 (§2.3.7).

244 I discuss each of these impediments in the following six subsections.

245 **2.3.2 The new paradigm has only been adopted in a few branches of forensic** 246 **sciences, and only by a minority of researchers and practitioners**

247 In the 1990s, the new paradigm was widely adopted for **forensic evaluation of DNA**

248 (Foreman et al. [37]). Although the volume and importance of casework in this branch
249 of forensic science makes it influential, single-source DNA profiles are invariant and
250 discrete. They therefore have a very different structure from the continuously-valued
251 data with within-source variability that results from analyses in most other branches of
252 forensic science. The situation is more complex for low-template DNA and for DNA
253 mixtures, but there is still a difference in data structure. Interpretation of DNA profiles
254 is also dependent on well-developed theory of genetic inheritance, whereas
255 interpretation in most branches of forensic science will have to be data driven (as is the
256 case in machine learning in general, including in biometric applications). The potential
257 for transfer of new-paradigm knowledge and methods from DNA to other branches of
258 forensic science is therefore limited.

259 Since around 2000, a growing number of researchers and practitioners in **forensic voice**
260 **comparison** have developed and adopted methods for calculation of likelihood ratios
261 based on acoustic measurements and statistical models / machine-learning algorithms,
262 and have developed and adopted methods for calibration and validation of likelihood-
263 ratio systems under casework conditions. This has included adoption of state-of-the-
264 art machine-learning approaches to automatic speaker recognition (Lee et al. [38];
265 Matějka et al. [39]; Villalba et al. [40]; Morrison et al. [41]; Morrison et al. [42]; Weber
266 et al. [43]). At present, however, only a minority of practitioners have adopted the new
267 paradigm. Survey results published in 2011, 2016, and 2019 (Gold & French [44];
268 Morrison et al. [45]; Gold & French [46]) suggest that, although the proportion of
269 practitioners who have adopted human-supervised-automatic approaches and numeric
270 likelihood ratios is growing, they are still a minority.⁶ In addition, inconsistent with the

⁶ Percentages of respondents who reported that they used human-supervised-automatic approaches and numeric likelihood ratios were 20% and 9% respectively in the first survey, 33% and 23% respectively in the second, and 41% and 13% respectively in the third. Respondents in the first and third surveys included private practitioners and practitioners in government labs, and the results of these two surveys should be directly comparable. Respondents in the second survey were from a different population, law-enforcement agencies in INTERPOL member countries, which likely accounts for some of the difference between the results of this survey and those of the other two.

271 new paradigm, most respondents in the most recent survey who reported using a
272 human-supervised-automatic approach also reported that they combined it with
273 human-perception-based analysis and subjective-judgement-based interpretation.

274 Data in human-supervised-automatic approaches are continuously valued and have
275 intrinsic within-source variability, a data structure shared with many other branches of
276 forensic science. Compared to DNA, new-paradigm knowledge and methods from
277 forensic voice comparison, including statistical models and calibration and validation
278 methods, should therefore be easier to transfer to and adapt for use other branches of
279 forensic science. For an example of such transfer and adaptation, see Basu et al. [47].
280 Forensic voice comparison is, however, a relatively niche branch of forensic science,
281 which limits the extent to which developments in forensic voice comparison are noticed
282 and adopted by researchers and practitioners in other branches of forensic science.

283 Curran [1] lamented that only 13% of laboratories surveyed used the likelihood-ratio
284 framework for **glass evidence**, but this may be one of the highest rates of adoption after
285 DNA. In many **other branches of forensic science** the rate of adoption of the
286 likelihood-ratio framework by practitioners is near zero (Bali et al. [48]; Cole & Barno
287 [49]).

288 **2.3.3 Only some elements of the new paradigm have been adopted as part of** 289 **incremental change**

290 Although in the short term adopting some elements of the new paradigm as part of
291 incremental change may be viewed as a step in the right direction, in the long term it
292 may actually impede a paradigm shift.

293 Just because it is a transition between incommensurables, the transition between
294 competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, ... Like the gestalt switch,
295 it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all. (Kuhn
296 [6], p. 149)

297 Some practitioners **assign likelihood-ratio values based on subjective judgement,**
298 and the values they assign are not subject to empirical calibration or empirical
299 validation (see Risinger [50]; Morrison & Thompson [51]; Morrison et al. [52]). Some
300 authors emphasize the logic of the likelihood-ratio framework and consider subjective
301 assignment of likelihood ratio an acceptable end goal or consider it a step in the right
302 direction, but such incremental steps potentially impede a paradigm shift which
303 requires the abandonment of interpretation methods that are entirely dependent on
304 subjective judgement.⁷ In addition, placing an emphasis on subjectivist concepts of
305 probability is detrimental to attempts to encourage practitioners to adopt methods based
306 on relevant data, quantitative measurements, and statistical models, and to adopt
307 empirical validation under casework conditions (Morrison [54]).

308 The majority of **proposals to address cognitive bias** in forensic science (e.g., EWG
309 [9]; Stoel et al. [11]; Thompson et al. [55]; FSR [56]) **assume the continued use of**
310 **human-perception- and subjective-judgement-based methods.** Although this may
311 be necessary in the short term, it potentially impedes a paradigm shift to quantitative-
312 measurement- and statistical-model-based methods.

313 Some practitioners **make use of systems based on quantitative measurements and**
314 **statistical models, but do not empirically calibrate or validate** their system using
315 data that reflect the relevant population and the conditions for the case, and/or **rather**
316 **than directly report the output of the system, they use it as input to a subjective-**
317 **judgement process** that also considers other information including from human-
318 perception-based analyses (see Morrison & Thompson [51]; Morrison [57], [58]). Such
319 approaches are pernicious in that use of technology may give the false impression of
320 scientific validity, and reaction against this may impede a paradigm shift that includes
321 adoption of quantitative measurements and statistical models.

⁷ My stance on where in the forensic-evaluation process use of subjective judgement is acceptable is more restrictive than that of some leaders in the field of forensic inference and statistics, e.g., Evett et al. [53].

322 **2.3.4 There is misunderstanding of the new paradigm and resistance to its** 323 **adoption**

324 As with all Kuhnian paradigm shifts, there is misunderstanding of the new paradigm
325 and resistance to its adoption.

326 **Some resistance is cultural.** The cultures of some branches of forensic science seem
327 to be especially resistant to the adoption of statistical-model-based methods and of
328 validation (see Mnookin et al. [59]; Curran [1]; Morrison [60]; Morrison & Stoel [61];
329 Swofford et al. [62]). Practitioners in multiple branches of forensic science often claim
330 that training and experience provide sufficient warrant for their conclusions (see
331 Mnookin et al. [59]; Risinger [50]; PCAST [5]; Morrison & Thompson [51]), and deny
332 or obfuscate about the need for validation (see Cole [63]; Morrison [60]; PCAST [5];
333 Koehler [64]; Morrison et al. [52]), or propose lax validation protocols that do not
334 require demonstration of performance under casework conditions (see Morrison et al.
335 [65], [66]).

336 People in general tend to prefer methods which involve greater human input even when
337 validation results indicate that data-driven methods lead to better results. Over time,
338 however, people can come to accept data-driven methods (Swofford & Champod [67]).

339 There is a **belief that likelihood ratios are difficult to understand** (see Bali et al.,
340 2020; Swofford et al. [62]; Swofford & Champod [68]). Commonly occurring
341 misunderstandings have even been given names, e.g., the “prosecutor’s fallacy” and
342 the “defense attorney’s fallacy” (Thompson & Schurmann [69]). There are many
343 examples of legal rulings in which judges have misunderstood the meaning of a
344 likelihood ratio (the England & Wales Court of Appeal 2010 ruling in *R v T* is an
345 infamous example; see, e.g., Berger et al. [70]; Redmayne et al. [71]; Morrison [72];
346 Thompson [73]). Results of empirical research on lay understanding of expressions of
347 strength of evidence are mixed (Eldridge [74]; Martire & Edmond [75]).

348 Despite legal rulings and recommendations concerning the need for validation, **courts**
349 **often do not understand empirical validation and its necessity**, and accept
350 testimony based on forensic-evaluation methods that have not been validated under
351 conditions reflecting those of the case under consideration, or even that have not been
352 empirically validated at all (see Bernstein [76]; Morrison [60], [57], [58]; Cooper [77];
353 Edmond [78]).

354 **2.3.5 Research is often not informed by practice and has no impact on practice**

355 **Research that appears to be about forensic science may not actually be about**
356 **solving real forensic-science problems.** For example, research may really be about a
357 method in statistics or machine learning with an apparent forensic-science problem
358 being used as an example of the application of that method.

359 Research in forensic science is sorely needed, but it should address primarily
360 forensic science questions—not questions relating to the application of chemistry,
361 biology, statistics, or psychology. (Margot [79], p. 801)

362 it is critical that researchers and funding bodies understand the importance of
363 conducting research that is informed by practice and can be translated into
364 practical applications. (Roux & Weyermann [80], p. 2)

365 Research that is divorced from forensic practice may lead to academic papers but
366 nothing else. Even research that does address real forensic-science problems will fail
367 to have impact unless it involves genuine collaboration in which researchers
368 understand the demands of practice, and in which practitioners are willing to embrace
369 research-informed change (Curran [1]).

370 **2.3.6 It is difficult to obtain funding for evidential-forensic-science research**

371 **Few funding agencies have sustained funding targeted at forensic science**, and
372 funding agencies seldom have panels of reviewers knowledgeable about evidential

373 forensic science. Applications for funding for evidential-forensic-science research
374 made to non-forensic-science-targeted calls are often rejected because reviewers do not
375 understand the epistemology or value of forensic-science research. Applications are
376 often rejected because their goals are to improve forensic science, which is an applied
377 science, and **funding-agency criteria or reviewers often do not value applied**
378 **science.**

379 The larger scientific community must now come to the aid of our forensic
380 colleagues in advocating both for: (i) the research and financial support that is so
381 clearly needed to advance the field and (ii) the requirement for empirical testing
382 that is so clearly needed to advance the cause of justice. ... Forensic scientists have
383 long complained that their work is not always valued by their scientific colleagues
384 because of its applied nature; it is time for the scientific community to move
385 beyond that conceit. (Bell et al. [81])

386 At the other extreme, when there are calls specific to forensic science, they usually
387 **focus exclusively or primarily on short-term goals related to law-enforcement**
388 **investigative applications rather than on courtroom-evidential applications**
389 (investigative and evidential applications have very different requirements), and they
390 usually **focus on technology rather than on forensic inference.**

391 technology-oriented development ... often overrul[es] the importance of
392 appropriate scientific reasoning to solve actual problems (Roux et al. [82], p. 679)

393 Research calls requiring deliverables with a high technology readiness level (TRL) are
394 not sources of funding for paradigm-shifting research.

395 In 2018, United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) informed the UK House
396 of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee that UKRI had invested GBP 56M
397 over 10 years in forensic-science research (less than 0.1% of UKRI's total budget), but
398 on closer inspection most of the funding counted to obtain that figure was not for

399 research projects that actually focused on (or even made any contribution to) forensic
400 science: only about GBP 17M went to forensic-science focussed research, and GBP
401 15M of that went to TRL research, only GBP 2M to foundational research (HoL [2];
402 Morgan & Levin [83]). HoL [2] recommended that UKRI “urgently and substantially
403 increase the amount of dedicated funding allocated to forensic science” (§187), but,
404 more than 3 years after the publication of the HoL report, this has not (yet) happened.

405 **2.3.7 There are genuine practical impediments to implementing the new** 406 **paradigm**

407 Even if practitioners want to adopt the new paradigm, they will be unable to do so
408 unless they are provided with the quantitative-measurement and statistical-modelling /
409 machine-learning tools and the case-relevant data necessary to calculate likelihood
410 ratios and validate systems under the conditions of the cases on which they work.
411 Practitioners will also not be able to adopt the new paradigm unless they are provided
412 with training on understanding the new paradigm in general and on how to implement
413 it for the types of cases they work on.

414 **2.4 Via progredi**

415 Kuhn [6]:

416 The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience
417 that cannot be forced. ... a generation is sometimes required to effect the change
418 ... Conversions will occur a few at a time until, after the last holdouts have died,
419 the whole profession will again be practicing under a single, but now a different,
420 paradigm. (pp. 150–151)

421 Kuhnian paradigm shifts are not rapid and individuals cannot be forced to embrace the
422 new paradigm, but my aim is to facilitate and thereby advance the adoption of the new
423 paradigm. My **strategy** is to work with researchers and practitioners who want to adopt
424 the new paradigm, to work with them on addressing practical impediments to applying

425 the new paradigm in casework, i.e.:

426 1. to provide researchers, practitioners, and lawyers with training leading to
427 understanding of the new paradigm;

428 2. to collaborate with researchers and practitioners on building relevant databases
429 and on developing and validating statistical models applicable in their particular
430 branches of forensic science; and

431 3. to conduct research on how to present likelihood ratios and validation results so
432 as to maximize understanding by laypeople, and thereby provide guidance to
433 forensic practitioners on how to communicate forensic-evaluation results to legal-
434 decision makers.

435 I invite others to consider whether this is a strategy that they would also be interested
436 in adopting, either in part or in whole.

437 Element 2 of the strategy requires collaboration between researchers with expertise in
438 forensic data science and researchers and practitioners with expertise in particular
439 branches of forensic science. Academic publications are unlikely to convince
440 practitioners to adopt the new paradigm, but other practitioners successfully applying
441 the new paradigm are potentially convincing. In any branch of forensic science, the
442 number of practitioners who initially want to adopt the new paradigm and who want to
443 collaborate on this endeavour will almost certainly be a very small minority, but it will
444 be more productive to work with a small minority on developing practical solutions
445 than to try to convince the majority of practitioners without providing practical
446 solutions. Once the practical solutions are being used by the small minority, use of the
447 new paradigm has the potential to spread. Even then, I do not expect adoption of the
448 new paradigm to be rapid, but I do expect higher rates of adoption among newer
449 practitioners and trainees, leading to a generational shift.

450

451 **3 Conclusion**

452 A paradigm shift in evaluation of forensic evidence is ongoing. The shift is away from
453 methods based on human perception and subjective judgement, to methods based on:

- 454 • relevant data,
- 455 • quantitative measurements,
- 456 • and statistical models.

457 New paradigm methods:

- 458 • are transparent and reproducible
- 459 • are intrinsically resistant to cognitive bias
- 460 • use the logically correct framework for interpretation of evidence (the likelihood-
461 ratio framework)
- 462 • are empirically validated under casework conditions

463 This is a Kuhnian paradigm shift, which requires:

- 464 • rejection of existing methods and the ways of thinking that underpin them
- 465 • rejection of the idea that progress can be made by incremental improvements to
466 existing methods
- 467 • the wholesale adoption of an entire constellation of new methods and new ways
468 of thinking

469 Some branches of forensic science, such as forensic voice comparison, are more
470 advanced in the paradigm shift than others. Knowledge gained in advancing the
471 paradigm shift in forensic voice comparison can assist in advancing the paradigm shift

472 in other branches of forensic science. Validation protocols, metrics, and graphics
473 developed in the context of forensic voice comparison are immediately applicable in
474 other branches of forensic science. Statistical models / machine-learning algorithms
475 used in forensic voice comparison can even be transferred and adapted for use in other
476 branches of forensic science.

477 My strategy for advancing the paradigm shift requires collaboration between
478 researchers with expertise in forensic data science and researchers and practitioners
479 with expertise in particular branches of forensic science. My strategy is to work with
480 researchers and practitioners who want to adopt the new paradigm. My strategy is to
481 work with them on addressing practical impediments to applying the new paradigm in
482 casework, i.e.:

- 483 1. to provide researchers, practitioners, and lawyers with training leading to
484 understanding of the new paradigm;
- 485 2. to collaborate with researchers and practitioners on building relevant databases
486 and on developing and validating statistical models applicable in their particular
487 branches of forensic science; and
- 488 3. to conduct research on how to present likelihood ratios and validation results so
489 as to maximize understanding by laypeople, and thereby provide guidance to
490 forensic practitioners on how to communicate forensic-evaluation results to legal-
491 decision makers.

492 In any branch of forensic science, the number of practitioners who initially want to
493 adopt the new paradigm and who want to collaborate on this endeavour will almost
494 certainly be very small, but it will be more productive to work with a small minority
495 on developing practical solutions than to try to convince the majority of practitioners
496 without providing practical solutions. Once the practical solutions are being used by
497 the small minority, use of the new paradigm has the potential to spread. Even then, I

498 do not expect adoption of the new paradigm to be rapid, but I do expect higher rates of
499 adoption among newer practitioners and trainees, leading to a generational shift.

500 I have been asked several times over the years whether I could suggest a name for the
501 new paradigm other than “new”. Here, I propose that the new paradigm could be called
502 “forensic data science”. My hope is that, after the paradigm shift is complete, it will
503 simply be called “forensic science”.

504

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