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Commentary – Perspective type of article

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Digital transformations and the viability of forensic science laboratories: crisis-opportunity through decentralisation

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Rapid proliferation of technology in modern society is changing the way people behave and is dramatically increasing the traceability of individuals. In particular, new portable and miniaturized technologies put powerful capabilities in everyone's pocket, and capture a large quantities of detailed information in a digital format. These technological advances are undermining the traditional business model of forensic science laboratories by placing forensic capabilities directly in the hands of police. Simultaneously, these advances create new opportunities for laboratories to harness the power of big data and play a more central role in problem solving collaboratively with the police and other stakeholders.

### **Resistance is futile – embrace the change**

The forces driving decentralisation of forensic capabilities are irresistible, and will continue to grow in the future, particularly for digital traces. This is also true for many traditional forensic activities. Inevitably, problems are arising when non-scientists apply forensic capabilities that they do not fully understand, resulting in mistakes and missed opportunities. A subtler problem is that diffusion of forensic expertise makes it more difficult for individuals to learn about existing solutions to problems they encounter. Ultimately, individual investigators cannot cope with the growing quantities of data, rapid advances in technology, and varied contexts and criminal behaviours.

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