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Constructing the “Ideal” First-Post Sonographer: Mapping the views of Ultrasound Department leads in the UK

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disclosure of conflict of interest

• There are no potential conflicts of interest or relevant relationships to report.
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Background

• Current chronic lack of sonographers in the UK healthcare services (Society and College of radiographers, 2014),
• DEUS Postgraduate course University of Cumbria 2016
• Original HENW study investigated in-depth interviews with Ultrasound Department Leads throughout the North West of England.
• Research evaluated participants' views on the best course(s) of prospective action in relation to:
  – future workforce development strategies;
  – proposed sonographic education models.

Design

• An opportunity sample of participants (N=20) was recruited from Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria, working both within NHS Trusts (N=17) and independent providers (N=3).
• Interviews were semi-structured, conducted and recorded by telephone and transcribed verbatim. Key identifiers were removed to preserve participant anonymity. Mean interview length was 25 minutes.
• A Straussian Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to investigate qualitative contributions, allowing for the accommodation of both range and depth in the data: Inductive Approach.

"Ideal" Identities

• Following their evaluations of the prospective educational models, participants were finally asked to outline the defining attributes of their “ideal” first-post sonographer.
• Expectation of repeated and consistent official lines on “Essential” and “Desirable” characteristics in role specs.
• Findings indicated something different, more closely related to evidence arising from current social psychological literature on Talent Identification (henceforth TI: Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015).

"Ideal" Identities

• "A fairly key facet is being able to cope with the academic requirements."
• "Communication is the most important thing."
• "The ability to work autonomously."
• "You have to be able to talk to people."
• "The ability to prioritise a workload."

Sorting Attributes

• When describing the ideal attributes that they would look for in a new sonographer, participants largely sorted them (implicitly and explicitly) into:
  1. The Innate (i.e. core properties of a person), and;
  2. The Malleable (i.e. skills that could be developed).
**Trends**

- **Technical** attributes (i.e. specifically sonographic proficiencies) were generally taken to be highly malleable; they had been trained and could be trained further.

- **Personal** attributes (i.e. nominally psychological traits and baseline social skills) were generally taken to be rather less malleable than technical attributes, and often innate.

  - *Manipulation of the machine should be a priority*

  - *It’s important that it’s a caring person*

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**“Technical” Smörgåsbord!**

- There was some overlap between how technical and personal skills were defined.
  - E.g. Communication skills, resilience, hand-eye coordination and capacity to understand personal limitations were variably framed as technical or personal attributes, or both.

- There was also considerable variability in interpretation around the malleability of personal attributes such as resilience, academic capacity, empathy, drive, communication and teamwork.

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**“Personal” Smörgåsbord!**

- **BUT!**

  - Participants did not always agree upon what constituted the desirable technical and/or personal attributes of a new sonographer.

  - Participants did not always agree on which attributes were innate and/or malleable within a new sonographer.

  - Participants did not always agree on whether the more malleable attributes of a new sonographer could be actively developed, or should be passively allowed to develop.

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**Even the Psychobiological..?**

- **Strong hand-eye coordination as innate:**
  
  - *“Good hand-eye coordination, they’ve got to have that dexterity to actually physically scan.”*

- **Strong hand-eye coordination as malleable:**
  
  - *“There is a requirement for basic hand-eye coordination, which will be built on in any department.”*
Personal Experience

Clear implications for candidate-selection
University of Cumbria 3 stage selection process:

• Academic,
• interpersonal/communication,
• hand eye coordination/spatial awareness,
• knowledge of Ultrasound,

"Someone who is responsible enough to pick up the reporting challenges we face"

But ..........

• Psychological work on TI indicates that no matter what the formal selection processes might be...

- "...no set of directives can [ever] be specified to cover all empirical contingencies (Garfinkel, 1967). As such, even if a prescribed model is nominally being utilised to the letter, there always remains some degree of situated (and thus experiential) interpretation involved in any involved decision." (Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015, p.646)

Manifesto Point

• So, we might propose, that some of the inconsistent opinions of employers with inconsistent first post sonographers inevitably gives rise to inconsistent ways of interpreting and valuing their attributes.

• Ultrasound training programmes are challenging and there are many facets to consider when designing a curriculum or developing a selection process

- "Our business is to address any inconsistency within the educational domain"

Summary

• There are varying opinions of the ideal attributes of a first post sonographer

• Some attributes are unanimously seen as essential but there are differing opinions on whether these are 'trainable'

• To invoke more consistent standards, we need to produce more consistent sonographers.

• Can the initial selection process and curriculum help with this?

References


