

Table 1.1 Main approaches to determining skill mix

Approach	Methods	Strengths/weaknesses
Task analysis	Frequency and cost of 'task' elements of jobs identified. Skills and knowledge required for agreed 'tasks'; used to profile staff and identify gaps	Reliance on trained observers (costly; problematic if no agreement of skills/knowledge required). Task-based approach criticized because it focuses on the "measurable"
Activity analysis/ activity sampling	Activity performed by each staff member recorded by observers at predetermined intervals, for agreed time period. Frequency of different activities/time required identified. Data analysed, used as basis for reallocation of activities/tasks to staff	Quantitative approach can be used as basis for discussion and debate. Observers can be expensive; difficult approach if workplace is not a 'fixed' ward or unit; danger that if staff are not involved they will not accept results
"Daily diary"/ self-recording	As above, but staff record activities	Can overcome cost implications of using observers (<u>but</u> has an opportunity cost). Staff may not provide accurate details. Strength is direct involvement of staff
Case mix/patient dependency	Patients/clients classified in groupings according to diagnosis or dependency. Formula is used to relate "scores" to staff hours required	Uses mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Benefits can include determining variations in staffing over time to match changing workload. Gives only overall numbers of staff; further work required to determine mix
Reprofiling/" re-engineering" ("zero-based")	Detailed analysis of current mix, activity, skills and costs. Working group considers alternatives within available resources; aim is to achieve 'ideal' mix	Often radical and fundamental. Rarely applied in full, because of organizational/political constraints. Danger of becoming a "wish list", with less focus on "how to get there"
Professional judgement	Staff/management in work area assess current activity and staffing, review data available, apply collective judgement to reallocation of work	"Low tech" approach; involves staff, can be quick. Constraints are possible lack of transparency/objectivity; possibility of little change
Job analysis interviews/role reviews	Detailed individual or group interviews; can include critical incident technique; repertory grid	Structured approach, if interviewers are skilled, can reveal much relevant information. Involves staff. Main problems are potential for bias and lack of objectivity
Group discussion/ "brainstorming"	Facilitates workshop/discussion group of staff to identify issues requiring change. Use of available data as basis for discussion	Can be quick – often used as 'diagnostic' phase of other approaches. Involves staff. Requires skilled facilitation; raises expectations and can generate mass of contradictory information