

Evidence-Based Management Assessment for Organizations

How evidence-based are the decisions made in your organization? This assessment is designed to help you think about how your organization goes about making decisions about what to do – whether that’s a decision about how to capitalize on a new opportunity or how to solve or prevent an existing or potential problem.

Note: *This is not a validated assessment tool, rather a set of statements that can be used to stimulate discussion and think about what evidence-based management might mean to you, your team, and your organization.*

Statements

For each statement, please circle the response that best reflects your opinion and experience.

1. We believe it is important to adopt new and cutting-edge practices.

Never Always

2. We make decisions by looking at what other organizations are doing, and how it's working for them.

Never Always

3. We use benchmarking to identify best practices used in other organizations to help improve our organization.

Never Always

4. We use consultants to help us make decisions.

Never Always

5. Before any decision is taken we systematically evaluate internal data to better understand the nature of the problem.

Never Always

6. Our managers have access to a management information system.

None of them All of them

7. A data set, randomly pulled from the management information system, will be accurate and can be trusted.

Never Always

8. We use evidence from academic research to help us make decisions about how to solve our problems.

Never Always

9. Our managers know how to use the Internet to search for scientific evidence to guide their decisions.

None of them All of them

10. Our managers know how to critically appraise both internal data and evidence from scientific research.

None of them All of them

11. Managers in my organization tend to believe that the organization is unique and hence the outcome of scientific research is not applicable

None of them All of them

12. Managers in our organization tend to believe that experience and knowledge gained on the job is the only important source of information when considering how to tackle a problem.

None of them All of them

13. Internal politics and power struggles influence the way we make decisions about policies and practices

Never Always

14. We spend time identifying and exploring a range of possible solutions to the problems we face

Never Always

15. We systematically evaluate the effectiveness of new policies and practices we introduce.

Never Always

16. If we make mistakes in our decision-making we try to learn from them.

Never Always

Scoring

Question 5 - 10 and 14 - 16

Never / None of them Always / All of them
 1 2 3 3 5 7 7

Question 1 - 4 and 11 - 13

Never / None of them Always / All of them
 7 7 5 3 3 2 1

0 - 55 points

The results suggest that your organization is not particularly evidence-based and while you engage in some practices that might promote evidence-based management your decisions are, on the whole, based on other things rather than the best available evidence.

56 - 83 points

The results suggest that your organization is quite evidence-based and that your approach to decision-making is sometimes compatible with the principles of evidence-based management.

84 - 112 points

The results suggest that your organization is doing many of the things we would expect to see in an organization that takes evidence-based management seriously and is taking steps to ensure that its procedures and approach are consistent with the principles of evidence-based management.

Feedback

1. We believe it is important to adopt new and cutting-edge practices.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are less likely to adopt new and cutting-edge practices.

Sometimes ‘cutting-edge’ or ‘leading-edge’ practices can turn out to be valuable and useful, but more often than not they simply represent the latest management fads and fashions that are ultimately of little value.

This question also relates to the ‘solution in search of a problem’ problem where organizations introduce new and exciting ‘cutting-edge’ practices without being clear about what the problem is they are trying to fix and so start to see the problem in relation to what it is claimed the new practice will fix.

2. We make decisions by looking at what other organizations are doing, and how it's working for them.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are less likely to copy what other organizations are doing.

In general, copying what other organizations do is regarded as an unhelpful decision making-practice because organizations are very different from each other and usually require specific and tailored solutions.

3. We use benchmarking to identify best practices used in other organizations to help improve our organization.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are less likely to use benchmarking and adopt so-called ‘best practices’

Both benchmarking and adopting so-called ‘best practices’ do not reflect evidence-based decision-making. In the case of benchmarking what other

organizations do is interesting but in itself irrelevant. What is important is what works.

Copying what others do only makes sense if you know that what was done was effective and is likely to be in your context. The expression 'best practices' implies that these practices are best for most organizations and that there is good evidence to support this claim: Both are unlikely.

4. We use consultants to help us make decisions.

Organizations that are more evidence-based will use consultants carefully and very selectively and demand that the advice they provide is based on a good quantity of high quality evidence and for that evidence to be made explicit

While some consultants can be useful in some ways for some purposes, consultants do not tend to be particularly evidence-based-oriented in the way they work. Few consultancies gather systematic evidence about the effectiveness of their advice, products and services and few engage with research evidence.

The next time a consultant makes a recommendation ask them for the evidence behind it.

5. Before any decision is taken we systematically evaluate internal data to better understand the nature of the problem

Organizations that are more evidence-based will make much use of critically evaluated internal data.

The use of internal data in making decisions is vital to evidence-based practice. This involves a process with interlinked stages including collecting the data, ensuring it is valid and reliable, analysing and interpreting the data, communicating the data, making it accessible to managers and incorporating it into decisions.

Many organizations are good at some of these stages but it appears that few have the capacity and skills required to fully complete this process

6. Our managers have access to a management information system.

Organizations that are more evidence-based will take steps to ensure all managers have access to the information they need to make decisions

If it is very difficult to get hold of information relevant to decisions (obtain it or understand it) then it becomes very difficult to practice EBMgt

7. A data set, randomly pulled from the management information system, will be accurate and can be trusted.

Organizations that are more evidence-based make sure that its internal databases are accurate and usable.

If internal data or evidence about management issues are unreliable it becomes very difficult to practice evidence-based management.

8. We use evidence from academic research to help us make decisions about how to solve our problems.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are likely to look for published evidence that may be relevant to their problems.

While evidence from scientific research can be difficult to interpret, of poor quality, and not directly relevant to your problem, searching for it and critically evaluating it can help with decision-making

9. Our managers know how to use the Internet to search for scientific evidence to guide their decisions.

Organizations that are more evidence-based train their managers in the skills required to search for relevant evidence available on the Internet.

The Internet contains a lot of information - some of it relevant and reliable and some less so. If managers don't know how to search for such evidence then they are very unlikely to try to use it to help them make decisions.

10. Our managers know how to critically appraise both internal data and evidence from scientific research.

Organizations that are more evidence-based will tend to be managed by individuals who have these critical appraisal skills.

Evidence-based management means using critically appraised evidence. This involves carefully and systematically assessing evidence (internal data or the outcome from scientific research) to judge its trustworthiness, value and relevance in a particular context. Critical appraisal examines factors such as internal validity, generalizability and relevance.

Some initial appraisal questions include:

1. Is the evidence from a known, reputable source?
 2. Has the evidence already been evaluated in any way? If so, how and by whom?
 3. Are the authors' interpretations of the evidence reasonable? Could there be other explanations of the findings?
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11. Managers in my organization tend to believe that the organization is unique and hence the outcome of scientific research is not applicable

Organizations that are more evidence-based are more likely to have managers who believe that evidence from scientific research can be relevant to their own organization.

One objection managers have to using research evidence is that they believe that their organization is unique and thus any research findings from other organizations will simply not apply. While it is the case that organizations are different it is also the case they face very similar problems and may work in similar ways.

Put differently, what works in one narrowly defined setting might not work in another, but some psychological principles are generalizable to all human beings. Hence research conducted in other organizations can be extremely relevant.

12. Managers in our organization tend to believe that experience and knowledge gained on the job is the only important source of information when considering how to tackle a problem.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are more likely to have managers who believe that their experience is not necessarily the only important source of information or evidence when considering how to tackle problems.

While experience can be a great teacher and is a vital component of learning, evidence-based management is about using a range of sources of information and not using only one, in this case experience, or seeing one source of information as necessarily better than any other.

13. Internal politics and power struggles influence the way we make decisions about policies and practices

Organizations that are more evidence-based are less likely to make decisions on the basis of politics and power.

While politics and power are an inevitable feature of organizational life, the more these drive decisions about policies and practices the less likely it is that evidence, of any type, will be used.

14. We spend time identifying and exploring a range of possible solutions to the problems we face

Organizations that are more evidence-based are more likely to consider a range of diverse solutions to problems before making decisions.

Spending time identifying a range of possible (and diverse) solutions is vital for evidence-based practice. Focusing on just one or two solutions means it is very

likely other equally or more effective solutions will be missed. Moreover, focusing narrowly on one or two solutions may inhibit thinking about other solutions and encourage the 'solution in search of a problem' problem.

15. We systematically evaluate the effectiveness of new policies and practices we introduce.

Organizations that are more evidence-based are more likely to evaluate new policies and practices.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of new policies and practices is essential to evidence-based practice. Without such evidence it is impossible to know whether and why new policies and practices are working, to what extent they are working, they have unintended negative consequences.

16. If we make mistakes in our decision-making we try to learn from them.

Organizations that are more evidence-based evaluate the results of the decisions they made and dedicate time to analyze the decision making process when things don't work out as expected.

Learning from mistakes is essential to evidence-based practice. Finding out that something doesn't work or went wrong is a vital piece of evidence that needs to be incorporated into future decision-making. Analyzing why mistakes were made and precisely what went wrong is essential for learning to take place.