

Keeping ahead of the game...

How can evidence-based practice be applied to HR and L&D?

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Underlying Assumptions

HR and L&D should:

- a) “Do stuff” that addresses important business issues or opportunities and
 - b) “Do stuff” that is more likely to work rather than things that won’t or will have little or minimal impact.
- Evidence based practice is one way of doing this. It aims to focus and what is genuinely important and what is likely to work.

What does it mean in HR and L&D?

In practice it can mean many different things although the following are the most common:

- Collecting evidence to evaluate practice
- Looking at the science **and**
- Collecting Organisational data.

Why Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)? The elevator pitch:

Decisions about important problems and opportunities and the most likely solutions should be based on the best evidence available.

All practitioners tend to use evidence in their decisions but do not always consider its relevance, quality or scope.

Origins: EBP first emerged from medicine in 1990 reaching Management and HR around 2005.

What is it?

The conscientious, explicit and judicious use of evidence from multiple sources to increase the likelihood of a favourable outcome.

It is about the process, probabilities and reducing uncertainty.

The aim is to make a better- informed decision not a perfect one. Practitioners are encouraged to look at evidence in a critical way across multiple sources.

CIPD Infographic: Illustrates in one visual what EBP looks like in practice:

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/EBHR-infographic-v.2_tcm18-54304.pdf

Sources of Evidence:

4 main sources are used:

- Scientific Literature: Empirical studies
- Organisation: Internal data. (Engagement surveys, turnover, absence)
- Stakeholder: Views and concerns. Internal and external (Customers)
- Practitioners: Using their own professional expertise. (This is encouraged.)

At all stages ask: “How relevant, applicable and trustworthy is this evidence?”

How evidence-based is L&D currently? The 2018 *Towards Maturity Survey* results (700 respondents) suggest work to do:

56% report their interventions support critical business skills (What do the rest do?)
44% regularly review their programmes and check they support Organisational goals.
14% use business metrics to evaluate their training.
20% regularly collect data on the extent to which learning is applied at work

Consider these responses against the Is it important/will it work tests.

Three likely key differences between EBP and what we already do:

1. How we use evidence: We must become: **Conscientious** (persevere), **Judicious**: Judge quality and don't automatically trust.
2. Use Multiple Sources: To triangulate and cross-check also to contextualize.
3. Use a structured/ stepped approach. Get evidence for the possible problem first only after that move to considering possible solutions.

Key questions for HR/L&D

- a) Do I have sufficient good quality evidence that our activities are addressing a real business problem or opportunity?
- b) To what extent do I have sufficient good quality evidence that our activities are likely to be effective?

The paradox of EBP in HR/L&D: Nobody disagrees with the principle so why isn't it happening much or at all?

Barriers to EBP:

- **Misconceptions of EBP:** e.g. You can't use your experience/expertise. Looking for the perfect answer.
- **Cognitive Biases:** Our in-built preference for fast emotional (System 1) thinking and decisions and the belief we are immune from such biases.
- **Strong/wrong beliefs:** Ignorance is fine-false beliefs not so. Be sure of your facts before using!
- **Management Fads and Fashions:** They can obscure clear and critical thinking and encourage solutioning.

Summary:

EBP in HR/L&D is about using the best available evidence from multiple sources to identify problems and solutions.

HR/L&D as a profession is not very evidence based yet.

There are many barriers to EBP (see above).

Tips For getting Started

- Always start with and spend more time getting evidence about and understanding the issue.
- Beware of the tendency to look too quickly for solutions.
- Be sceptical of new/ "cutting edge" fads and fashions.
- Acknowledge that we are all full of biases.
- Remember it is about better informed, not perfect decisions!

Useful Resources:

Books:

Barends Eric and Rousseau Denise M, 2018, *Evidence-Based Management: How to use evidence to make better business decisions*

Neelen Mirjam and Kirschner Paul, 2020, *Evidence-Informed Learning Design: Use evidence to create training which improves performance*

Scarlet Hilary, 2019, *Neuroscience for Organizational Change: An evidence-based practical guide to managing change*

Tarki Atta, 2020, *Evidence-Based Recruiting: How to build a company of star performers through systematic and repeatable hiring practices*

Weblinks:

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/in-search-of-the-best-available-evidence_tcm18-16904.pdf

<https://www.cebma.org/wp-content/uploads/Briner-The-Basics-of-Evidence-Based-Practice.pdf>