

Evidence-Based Management Assessment for Organizations

(version Aug 2021)

How evidence-based are the decisions made in your organization? This short 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 an existing or potential problem.

The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete

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. My organization believes it is important to adopt new and innovative practices.

Never Always

2. My organization makes decisions by looking at what other organizations are doing.

Never Always

3. My organization uses benchmarking to identify best practices used in other organizations.

Never Always

4. My organization uses consultants to help us make decisions.

Never Always

5. Before any decision is taken we consult experienced professionals within our organisation to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions.

Never Always

6. Before any decision is taken we consult the most important stakeholders (people inside or outside the organisation that may be affected by the decision) to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions.

Never Always

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

Never Always

8. Managers in my organisation have access to information systems that contain People Data (e.g. absenteeism, turnover, job satisfaction), Client Data (# of clients served, # of complaints, client satisfaction) and Business Performance Data (e.g. productivity data, financial indicators).

None of them All of them

9. Before any decision is taken my organisation consults the scientific literature to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions

Never Always

10. Managers in my organisation know how to use the Internet to search for scientific evidence to guide their decisions.

None of them All of them

11. Managers in my organisation know how to critically appraise the trustworthiness of organisational data.

None of them All of them

12. Managers in my organisation know how to critically appraise the trustworthiness of findings from scientific research.

None of them All of them

13. Before we implement new policies or practices we obtain a baseline against which subsequent evaluations can be compared

Never Always

14. Our organisation systematically evaluates the effectiveness of new policies and practices we introduce.

Never Always

15. 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

16. Managers in my 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

17. Internal politics and power struggles influence the way my organization makes decisions about policies and practices

Never Always

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

Never Always

Scoring

Question 1 - 4 and 15 - 17

Never / None of them Always / All of them

7 7 5 3 3 2 1

Question 5 - 14 and 18

Never / None of them Always / All of them

1 2 3 3 5 7 7

0 - 54 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.

55 - 90 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.

91 - 126 points

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

Feedback

1. My organization believes it is important to adopt new and innovative practices.

Sometimes new and innovative 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 limited 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.

2. My organization makes decisions by looking at what other organizations are doing.

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

3. My organization uses benchmarking to identify best practices used in other organizations.

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 effective in your organizational 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. My organization uses consultants to help us make decisions.

Organizations that are 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 consult experienced professionals within our organisation to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions.

6. Before any decision is taken we consult the most important stakeholders (people inside or outside the organisation that may be affected by the decision) to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions.

Organizations that are more evidence-based will make much use of evidence from experienced professionals and stakeholders. Their knowledge and experience can be vital for determining whether an assumed organizational problem really does require attention, if the available organizational data are trustworthy, and how likely a proposed solution is to work in a particular context.

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

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

8. Managers in my organisation have access to information systems that contain People Data, Client Data and Business Performance Data

Organizations that are evidence-based will take steps to ensure all managers have access to the information they need to make decisions. If it is difficult to get hold of information relevant to decisions (obtain it and/or understand it) then it becomes very difficult to make evidence-based decisions.

9. Before any decision is taken my organisation consults the scientific literature to verify claims regarding assumed problems or effective solutions

Organizations that are evidence-based are more likely to look for findings from scientific studies that may be relevant to their problems. While evidence from scientific research can be difficult to interpret, of poor quality, or not directly relevant to your problem, searching for it and critically evaluating it can help with decision-making.

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

Organizations that take evidence-based decision-making seriously 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 scientific studies then they are very unlikely to use it to help them make decisions.

11. Managers in my organisation know how to critically appraise the trustworthiness of organisational data.

12. Managers in my organisation know how to critically appraise the trustworthiness of findings from scientific research.

Organizations that are more evidence-based will tend to be managed by individuals who have critical appraisal skills. After all, evidence-based management means using *critically appraised* evidence. This involves systematically assessing evidence (internal data or findings from scientific research) to judge its trustworthiness, impact, and practical relevance in a particular context.

13. Before we implement new policies or practices we obtain a baseline against which subsequent evaluations can be compared.

Evidence-based organisations take a baseline measure *before* they implement a decision. After all, if we don't know what the situation was before the decision was executed, it is very hard to determine whether the decision delivered the desired results. In addition, if we don't have a baseline, we can't say with certainty whether it was the decision (or other factors) that caused the outcome.

14. Our organisation systematically evaluates the effectiveness of new policies and practices we introduce.

Assessing the outcome of the decision taken is the final step of the evidence-based process: did the decision (e.g. the implementation of new practice or policy) deliver the desired results? Systematically assessing the outcome of a decision taken is one of the key ways in which an organization can improve the quality of its decisions - it often leads us to challenge our assumptions, change our judgment and reconsider our conclusions. Unfortunately, many organizations fail to evaluate the outcome of their decisions.

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

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.

16. Managers in my 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.

17. Internal politics and power struggles influence the way my organisation makes 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.

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

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.
