Understanding and overcoming individual and organisational barriers to evidence-based management

Canberra 15.07.19

Rob B Briner
@Rob_Briner

My assumptions: Management (and all?) professionals should…

- ◆ …do stuff that addresses *important* business/organizational problems and opportunities (rather than trivial issues)

- ◆ …do stuff *that is more likely to work* (rather than stuff that is unlikely work or has little effect)

- ◆ Do you agree? If so, how are we going to do that?

Why evidence-based practice? The elevator pitch

◆ Decisions about what are important problems/opportunities and most likely solutions should be based on the best available evidence

◆ Evidence = any relevant information and data = scientific findings, organizational/context data, professional expertise, stakeholder concerns/perceptions

◆ *All* practitioners use evidence in their decisions on evidence but
  – Limited attention to quality (and relevance) of evidence
  – Limited sources and types of evidence

◆ We always use evidence – but that's not the same as adopting an evidence-based approach

3

Where did the idea of evidence-based practice come from? Yes, it's a 'thing'!

- 1990 Medicine
- 1998 Education
- 1998 Probation service
- 1999 Housing policy
- 1999 Social care
- 1999 Regeneration policy and practice
- 2000 Nursing
- 2000 Criminal justice
- 2005 Management?

Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy
In the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Evidence-Based Policing

Evidence-Based Policing Home	Current and Completed Projects	Evidence-Based Policing Matrix	EBP Hall of Fame	Collaborators & Sponsors	Resources & Tools	CEBCP Home

Six of the 16 "Ideas in American Policing" Lectures have been given by CEBCP affiliated scholars:

• Evidence-Based Policing (Lawrence Sherman, 1998)

• Policing for People (Stephen Mastrofski, 1999)

• Place-Based Policing (David Weisburd, 2008)

• Translating Police Research into Practice

Translating Research into Practice

News and Events:

We invite researchers and practitioners to submit articles to *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.

David Weisburd and Cody Telep, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, publish **"Police and the Microgeography of Crime" in English and Spanish.**

6

Center for Evidence-Based Education (CEBE)
Shaping, Supporting & Sustaining Transformation

...Every Piece Counts

f Like 10

NAVIGATION

- About our Work »
- About Us »
- Conversations »
- In the Spotlight »
- Suite of Tools »
- Forthcoming Events »

SEARCH: Query   Go

🏠 WHAT IS CEBE?

CEBE – the Center for Evidence-Based Education – is an independent network of experienced educators committed to assisting schools, networks of schools, and school systems in improving performance, transforming practice, and eliminating achievement gaps. Focusing on *Designing Learning, Leadership for Learning, and New Cultures for Learning,* CEBE draws upon a diverse range of strategies and tools, including *Learning Rounds, Job-Embedded Coaching, Innovation Catalysts,* and *Strategic Networking,* in support of its *evidence-based* approach

🏅 HAVE YOU READ?

"*Finnish Lessons-What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland*" by Pasi Sahlberg and published by

9

MAIN MENU

BACK TO ABOUT AIPCA

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE BASED AGED CARE

Australian Centre for Evidence Based Aged Care

The staff of ACEBAC are passionate advocates of person-centred, evidence-based care of older people. We are involved in research, education and professional practice and hope through this site we can share our learnings and assist visitors to link with other relevant resources.

A major factor in quality outcomes in the care of older people is interdisciplinary practice that is driven by the person receiving care; not by the 'experts'. This theme pervades our work. All of our research involves collaboration with a mix of disciplines and consumers.

Too often research is undertaken and never makes a difference in practice. For this reason we have a focus on translating evidence into the real world and making a quality difference for patients/residents, families and staff.

10

Social Work Policy Institute

EVIDENCE-BASED Practice

Partnerships to Promote Evidence-Based Practice

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a process in which the practitioner combines well-researched interventions with clinical experience and ethics, and client preferences and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services. The practitioner, researcher and client must work together in order to identify what works, for whom and under what conditions. This approach ensures that the treatments and services, when used as intended, will have the most effective outcomes as demonstrated by the research. It will also ensure that programs with proven success will be more widely disseminated and will benefit a greater number of people.

This Web resource was partially funded by a contract to IASWR from NIMH. It seeks to promote the integration of evidence-based mental health treatments into social work education and research. The *Evidence-Based Practice Resources* section provides tools that can be used to identify EBPs, online resources that can inform the EBP process and a list of publications for further information. The *Partnership Examples* section highlights some existing partnerships created between researchers and practitioners that further EBP.

Search for:

Search

Recent Posts

- Research Partnerships Target Improved Child Well-Being and Child Welfare Outcomes

- Social Work Policy Institute Releases Report on Advanced Practice Doctoral Degrees in Social Work

- SWPI Releases Report from Veterans Policy Symposium

11

More materials available online
www.cebma.org

Welcome to the Center for Evidence-Based Management

CEBMa
Helping managers and organisations make better decisions

The Center for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMa) is a non-profit member organization dedicated to promoting evidence-based practice in the field of management. We provide support and resources to managers, consultants, organizations, teachers, academics and others interested in learning more about evidence-based management.

WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT?

DECIDE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

RESOURCES
presentations, articles, tools

CEBMa NEWSLETTER

ABOUT CEBMa

Question for you

◆ What do you think "evidence-based practice" in management means? How would you define it?

What is evidence-based practice

- The **conscientious** (effort), **explicit** (clarity) and **judicious** (critical of quality) use of evidence from **multiple sources** to increase the **likelihood** of a favourable outcome

- It's about the process

- It's not about certainties (*this **will** work*)

- It's is about probabilities and likelihoods

- It **is** about reducing **un**certainty (*given our context this **is more likely** to lead to the outcome we want than doing something else or doing nothing*)

Used **first** to identify problem or opportunity and **if** one identified...

Future of HR and Learning

Evidence-based practice

4 SOURCES

Scientific literature empirical studies

Organisation internal data

Stakeholders values and concerns

Practitioners professional expertise

Evidence-based practice is about making decisions through the conscientious, explicit **6 STEPS** and judicious use of the best available evidence from multiple sources by:

1 Asking Translating a practical issue or problem into an answerable question

2 Acquiring Systematically searching for and retrieving the evidence

3 Appraising Critically judging the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence

4 Aggregating Weighing and pulling together the evidence

5 Applying Incorporating the evidence into the decision-making process

6 Assessing Evaluating the outcome of the decision taken

To increase the likelihood of a favourable outcome.

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Content provided by: cebma.org

Then used to identify possible solution or intervention

1 Asking
Translating a practical issue or problem into an answerable question

2 Acquiring
Systematically searching for and retrieving the evidence

3 Appraising
Critically judging the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence

4 Aggregating
Weighing and pulling together the evidence

5 Applying
Incorporating the evidence into the decision-making process

6 Assessing
Evaluating the outcome of the decision taken

To increase the likelihood of a favourable outcome.

An example: Employee engagement

◆ Everybody knows what employee engagement is…right?

4 Keys to Happiness and Fulfillment at Work

Employee Engagement for Everyone

New York Times Bestselling Author
Kevin Kruse

Discover Your Personal Engagement Profile

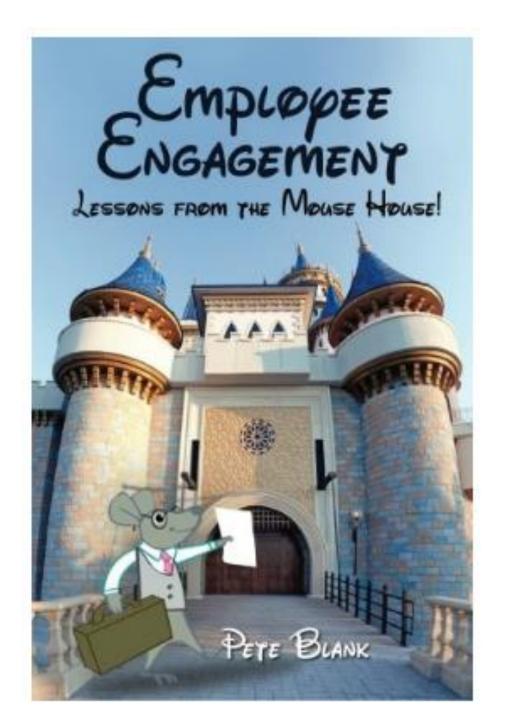TRACY MAYLETT, Ed.D. & PAUL WARNER, Ph.D.

MAGIC

FIVE KEYS TO UNLOCK
THE POWER OF
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLER

THE
TRUTH ABOUT
EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS *THE THREE SIGNS OF A MISERABLE JOB*

A FABLE ABOUT ADDRESSING THE

THREE ROOT CAUSES OF JOB MISERY

PATRICK LENCIONI

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BEST-SELLER *THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM*

Example of employee engagement (EE)

◆ Suppose you or your organization believe that low EE (as measured in a survey) is somehow a problem in your organization

◆ And because it is you should measure or look at your EE scores and attempt to increase 'low' scores somehow

◆ *How would you (a) approach this* **problem** *and (b) identify a* **solution** *from an evidence-based practice approach?*

Element 1: Practitioners' professional expertise

- Identifying the problem
  - Have I/we seen EE problems before? What happened?
  - Based on our experience, is the level of EE a problem?
  - What do I/we believe about causes and consequences of low EE?

- Identifying solution (only *if* EE is a problem)
  - Have I/we seen EE interventions before? What happened?
  - What do I/we believe about EE interventions?
  - Based on our experience, is the level of EE here a problem? What are costs & benefits of intervening?

- How relevant and applicable and trustworthy is my/our expertise?

Element 2: Organizational data

◆ Identifying the problem
  – What actually *is* the EE level?
  – Are our measures of EE valid and reliable?
  – Do data show that low EE is *causing* problems?

◆ Identifying solution (only *if* EE is a problem)
  – What attempts to enhance EE are currently in place and are they working?
  – Are there relationships between EE and other data? Employee type? Shift?
  – Does cost/benefit indicate if increasing EE is worth it?

◆ How relevant and applicable and trustworthy are our organizational data?

Element 3: Scientific literature

- Identifying the problem
  - What are the average rates of EE in my sector and location – is the level here 'low'?
  - What does systematically reviewed scientific evidence suggest are the problems with low EE?

- Identifying solution (only *if* EE is a problem)
  - What does research evidence from systematic reviews of scientific evidence suggest are major causes of low EE?
  - What does research evidence from systematic reviews of scientific evidence tel lus about interventions to increase EE?

- How relevant and applicable and trustworthy are the scientific findings?

Element 4: Stakeholders values and concerns

- ◆ Identifying the problem
  - How do employees feel about and view the EE 'problem'?
  - Do they see negative consequences?
  - What do managers think about the problem?
  - Do customers or clients or service users have a view?

- ◆ Identifying solution (only *if* EE is a problem)
  - How do employees feel about and view the solutions?
  - What do managers think about the solutions?
  - What alternative explanations and proposed solutions do others have?

- ◆ How relevant and applicable and trustworthy is evidence about stakeholder concerns?

Questions for you...

- Does that make sense?

- Concerns?

- Thoughts?

- Is is do-able?

The HUGE challenge or paradox of evidence-based management

- ◆ Seems nobody really disagrees with evidence-based practice *in principle*

- ◆ So why isn't it happening much (or at all)?

What gets in the way of evidence-based practice *in general*?

- **Misconceptions of EBP**

- **Individual and group cognitive biases**

- **Strong and wrong beliefs**

- **Fads, fashions & (some) consultancies**

- Individual and group cognitive biases

- Organizational politics/power

- Poor logic models/theories of change

- Over-claiming about the quality and quantity of evidence (critical appraisal essential)

- **Career incentives**

- Pre-enlightenment views

- Not necessarily a lack of or poor

evidence – it's about the *best available* evidence and a *process*

- A lack of focus on a *specific* and well-identified problem (or opportunity)

- Contexts in which practitioners' practice is not evaluated (it doesn't matter what they do)

- Good intentions (road to hell paved with)

- Erroneous belief that we *already are* evidence-based (or evidence-based enough)

- Access to only some sources/types of evidence

- The perceived need for speed

- Crude benchmarking

EXAMPLE BARRIER 1: MISCONCEPTIONS

Some general misconceptions of evidence-based management

- Practitioners can't use their experience and expertise - *nope*

- Evidence tells you the truth and can prove things - *nope*

- It's about making perfectly-informed decisions using all the necessary information - *nope*

- Gathering the evidence will give you **The Answer** – *nope*

- We're doing it already – *possibly but unlikely – we always use evidence but that's not EBP*

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

1. Approach to use of evidence
   - **Conscientious:** Persevere, be diligent, build capacity and capability
   - **Explicit:** Share, discuss, write down, capture
   - **Judicious:** Judge quality, don't automatically trust, put probability on it, focus on best evidence

2. Multiple sources
   - To triangulate and cross-check
   - To contextualize and make sense and better use of evidence from other sources

3. A structured and stepped approach
   - Get evidence for possible problems/opportunities first only then consider evidence for possible solutions
   - We are easily distracted and pushed off course
   - Many individual and organizational obstacles - structure can help

Some misconceptions of the role of *science* in evidence-based management

- 'Breakthrough' studies or latest ideas/techniques in science are the most important/useful – *nope*

- Single scientific studies can be important - *nope*

- Science published in peer-reviewed journals can be automatically trusted – *nope*

- Science is the highest quality evidence you can get compared to the other sources – *nope*

- Scientists are reliable sources of scientific evidence (particularly if they are 'eminent' or work at prestigious universities) - *nope*

- Doing Randomized Controlled Trials or nudge stuff in your own organization provides all or the best scientific evidence you need – *nope*

- "Science shows", "studies find", "we know from science that"- *nope*, *nope*, *nope*

- Neuro-whatever is the best science cos it's about the brain – *nope*

Neuroscience hype-detectorists

neurobollocks

@neurobollocks

Debunking pseudo-neuroscience so you don't have to.
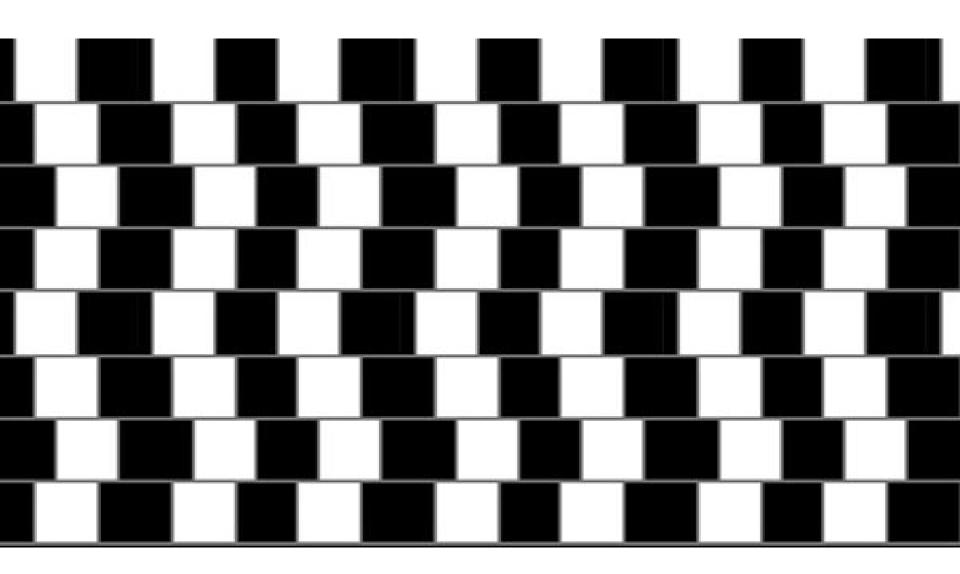
Neuroskeptic

@Neuro_Skeptic

Neuroscience, psychology and psychiatry through a skeptical lens. Just a brain with some eyes. Blogs for @DiscoverMag and @PLOSNeuro.
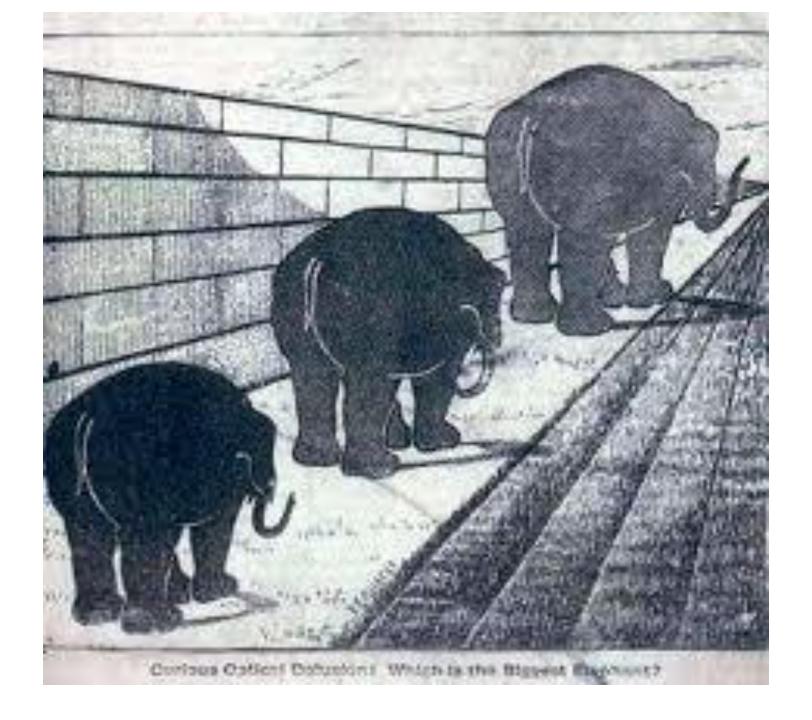
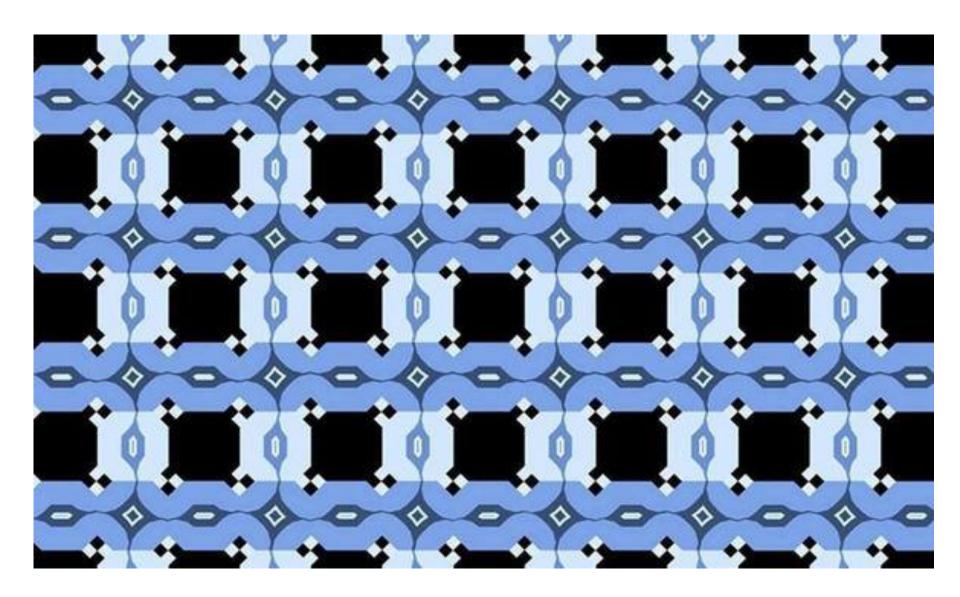# EXAMPLE BARRIER 2: COGNITIVE BIASES

Individual and group cognitive biases

- ◆ System 1 and System 2 thinking
  - – System 1 – fast, emotional, low effort, use of cognitive short-cuts, 'that's cool', 'wow' moments
  - – System 2 – slow, more critical reasoning, higher effort

- ◆ We are 'hardwired' to make fast System 1 decisions – which is good for most everyday decisions

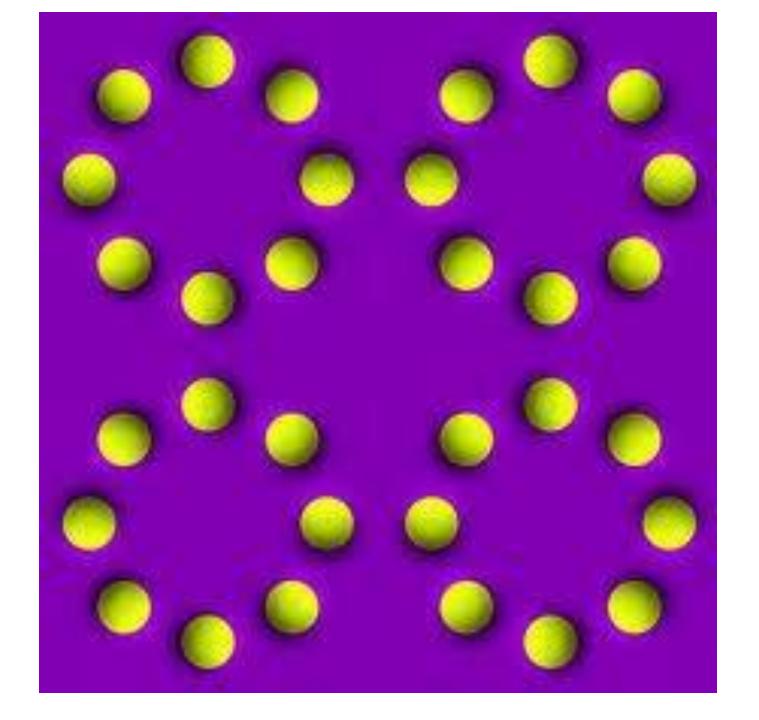- ◆ *Not* good for larger more complicated and more important decisions

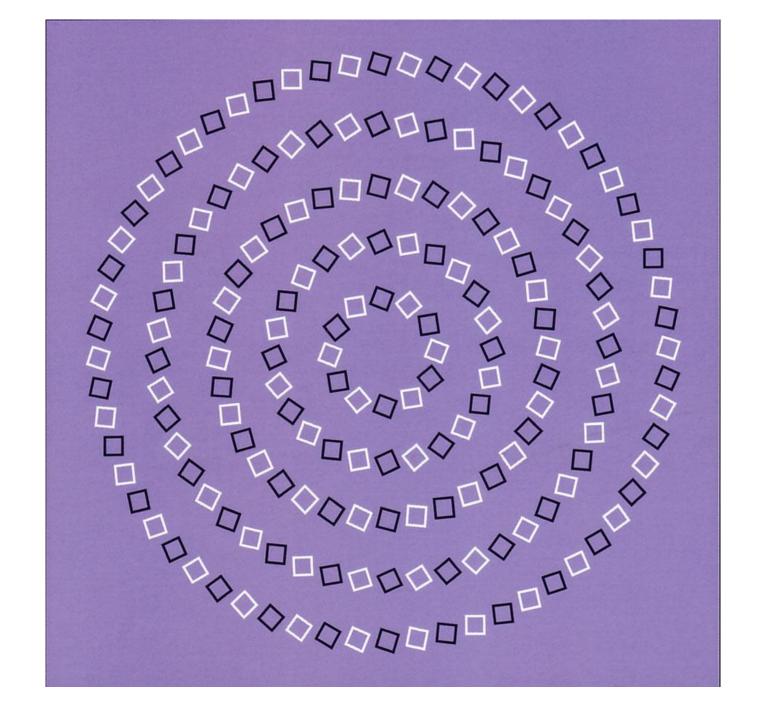# Visual biases too: Some classic optical illusions

Curious Optical Delusion: Which is the Biggest Elephant?

Implementing &
sustaining for
change

8.   Make it stick

7.   Build on the change

Engaging &
enabling the
organisation

6.   Create quick wins

5.   Empower action

4.   Communicate the vision

Creating the
climate for
change

3.   Create a vision for change

2.   Form a powerful coalition

1.   Create urgency

46

49

PARIS
IN THE
THE SPRING
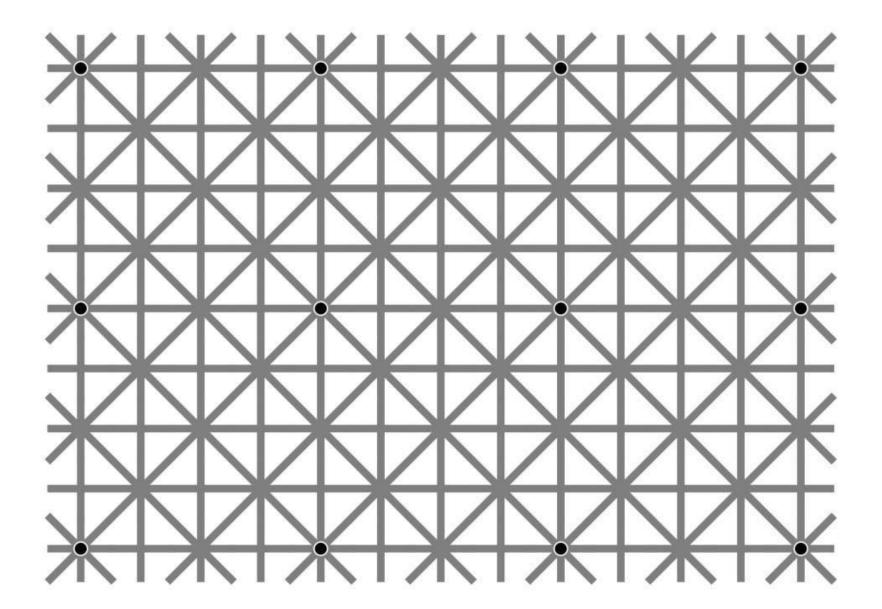
HR / TALENT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

01 ORGANISATION STRATEGY
- VISION
- VALUES
- MISSION
- PRIORITIES

02 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
- FOCUS
- CORE CAPABILITIES BUILDING
- DEFFERENTIATION STRATEGY

03 HR SYSTEMS & METRICS

ATTRACT	ENGAGE	DEVELOP	RETAIN	REWARD
• Branding	• Employee	• Core	• Career	• Total Rewards
• Profiling	Engagement	Competencies	• Progression	• Pay For
• Recruiting	• Performance	• Development	Ladders	Performance
• Selecting	Management	Planning	• Succession	• Garding
• On-boarding	• Teamwork	• Leadership	Planning	• Salary
		Deployment	• Talent Reviews	Structures
		• Blended		
		Learning		

HR POLICIES & PROCEDURES

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

04 TEAM PERFORMANCE & SUCCESS
- • Leadership
- • Productivity
- • Innovation
- • Collaboration
- • Quality
- • Speed
- • Engagement
- • Adaptability
- • Culture & Mindset

05 ORGANISATION PERFORMANCE
- • Profit
- • Growth
- • Customer Satisfaction
- • Competitive-ness

TRAINING, LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

53

Cognitive biases

A bat and ball cost one pound and ten pence. The bat costs a pound more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?

Error and biases in problem-solving and decision-making – some *examples*

- *Confirmation bias:* Tendency to interpret and search for information consistent with one's prior beliefs

- *Hindsight bias:* Tendency to see past events as being more predictable than they were before the event occurred

- *Loss aversion:* Tendency to prefer avoiding losses than to acquiring gains

- *Anchoring effect:* Tendency to rely too heavily or over-emphasize one piece of information (e.g., restaurant wine lists, large reductions in price in sales)

- *Framing effect:* Drawing different conclusions from exactly the same information presented in different ways (e.g., would you prefer a ready meal that's "85% fat free" or "15% fat"?)

- *Meta-cognitive bias*: The belief we are immune from such biases

EXAMPLE BARRIER 3: STRONG AND WRONG BELIEFS

Strong and wrong beliefs

- *It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.* (Mark Twain)

- *The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge* (Stephen Hawking)

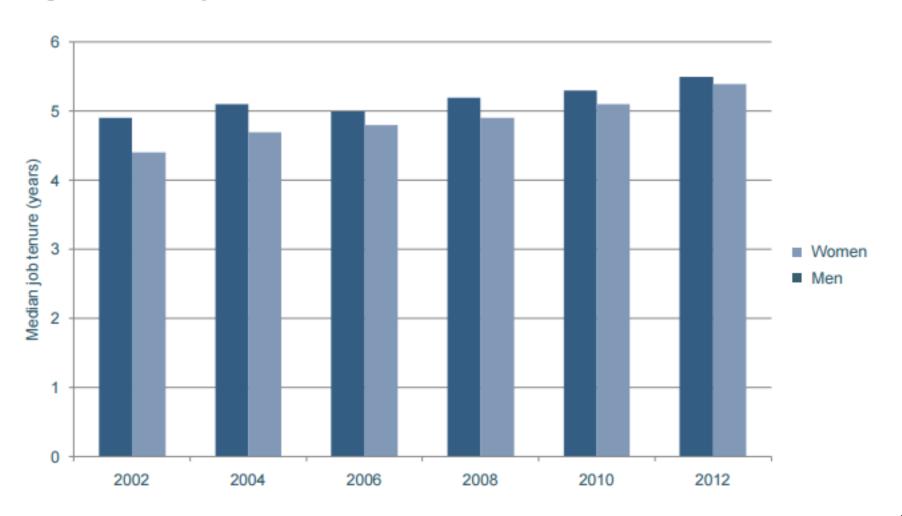- Ignorance is fine – false beliefs not so

Some examples…

1. What's happened to average job tenure in the past 10 years? Up? Down? Stayed same? (UK, US)

2. Percentage of workforce in permanent employment in past 20 years? Up? Down? Same? (UK)

Job tenure UK

A number of studies suggest that the average amount of time people spend with an employer – average job tenure – did not shift greatly between the mid-1970s and the mid-2000s. Average job tenure appears to have increased slightly in recent years – consistent with falling job turnover.
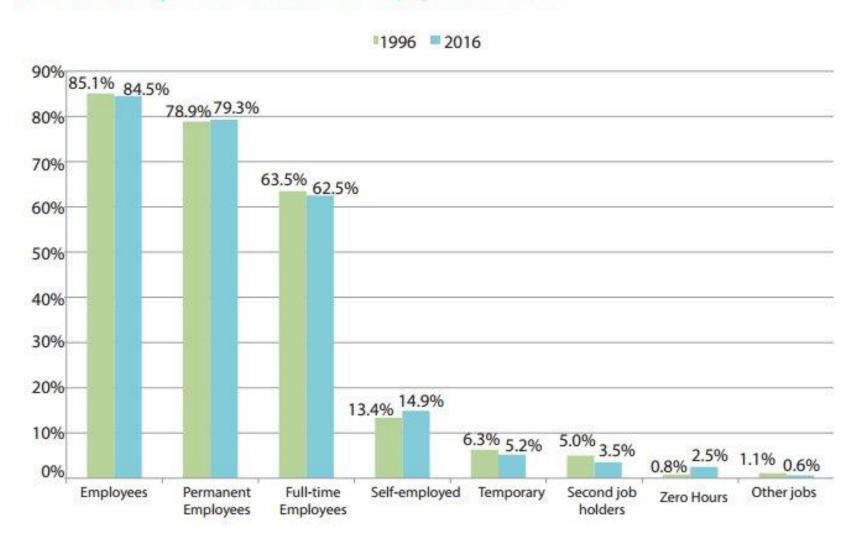
Job tenure USA

Figure 7: Median job tenure in the USA, 2002–2012

% in permanent employment?

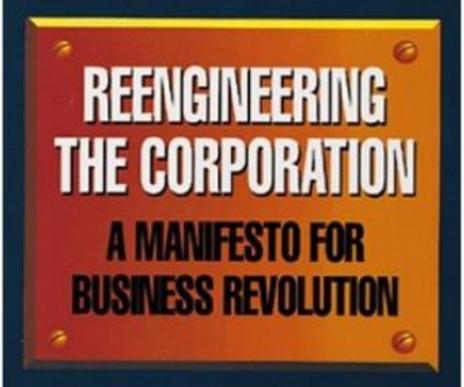Chart One: Changes in the structure of UK employment 1996-2016

1996   2016

Category	1996	2016
Employees	85.1%	84.5%
Permanent Employees	78.9%	79.3%
Full-time Employees	63.5%	62.5%
Self-employed	13.4%	14.9%
Temporary	6.3%	5.2%
Second job holders	5.0%	3.5%
Zero Hours	0.8%	2.5%
Other jobs	1.1%	0.6%

So what? What's wrong with strong and wrong beliefs?

◆ How might such beliefs affect the decisions a manager makes in relation to (for example)

- – Recruitment practices?
- – Retention practices?

EXAMPLE BARRIER 4: MANAGEMENT FADS AND FASHIONS

MICHAEL HAMMER AND JAMES CHAMPY

REENGINEERING THE CORPORATION

A MANIFESTO FOR BUSINESS REVOLUTION

"The best-written, most well-reasoned book since *In Search of Excellence*... the hottest management concept since the quality movement."

● *Business Week* ●

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FOR DUMMIES

A Wiley Brand

Learn to:

- Boost employee engagement levels, productivity, and creativity
- Create and sustain an engaging culture
- Attract and retain the best people

Bob Kelleher
Author, speaker, and founder of The Employee Engagement Group

Business Fads 1950 – 2000
(Richard Pascale)

Fads and fashions get in the way of evidence-based practice

- Fads get in the way of clear and critical thinking

- Encourage solutioneering – identifying a 'problem' by the absence of the 'solution' (e.g., *the problem is we don't do emotional intelligence training, we need to increase our engagement scores, we don't have an talent management strategy*)

- Fads as interventions *may* be effective but
  - Are not the panaceas they often claim to be
  - Even if they work, effect may not be large
  - May be no more effective than existing interventions
  - Can be harmful
  - Over-applied – to all organizations and problems

How to spot a likely management fad

◆ Buzzy and exciting (appeal to System 1 thinking)

◆ Massive claims with no good quality supporting evidence

◆ Involve management gurus and academic superstars

◆ It's all good! No downsides considered

◆ Presented as universal panacea – work everywhere for everything for everyone

◆ Use of unverifiable anecdotes and success stories (usually from big well-known companies whose success is attributed to fad with no good evidence)

◆ Involve new words which don't actually describe anything new - e.g., metrics (=measures), analytics (=analysis), big data (=data), talent (=people), human capital (=people)

Why do people go with fads?

- Cool, fun and neat – appeals to System 1 thinking – fine if you're buying a new pair of trousers, wondering what to eat, or **buying a piece of kitchen equipment** - but not if making very important decision

- Defensive – can't get into trouble if you do what everyone else and 'winners' seem to be doing

- Believe the latest thing is probably the best thing

- If others are doing it then surely it 'works'

- Less thinking required (cognitive ease)

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★★★★☆ ☑ (11 customer reviews) 👍 Like (0)

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Get perfectly filtered water every time and fi
colours, sizes and styles. Make water better.

Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought

Fruity Faces Inflatable Fruit Case Sesey by Fruity Faces
★★★★☆ (4)
£1.60

T&G Banana Tree in Natural Hevea Wood by T&G Woodware
★★★★½ (11)
£10.69

Banana Shaped Stress Reliever by SAR-Holdings Limited
★★★★½ (3)
£5.99

EXAMPLE BARRIER 5: MANAGEMENT CAREER INCENTIVES

What are (some) managers *really* incentivized to do?

◆ Doing 'stuff' rather than doing stuff well (few evaluations, performance hard to measure)

◆ Doing what will please (or not annoy) boss

◆ Focusing on behaviours that will lead to promotion (or bonuses)

◆ Why would such managers be interested in EBP? It is not in their interests

Summary so far

- Evidence-based practice in management is about using the best available evidence from multiple sources to identify problems and solutions

- Management as a profession or the functions within it are not particularly evidence-based yet

- There are many barriers to evidence-based practice such as…
  - Misconceptions of EBP
  - Cognitive biases
  - Strong and wrong beliefs
  - Fads, fashions and (some) consultancies
  - Career incentives

Overcoming barriers

- Work in teams and groups (avoid the lone wolf and the evidence police)

- Public commitment

- Understand more about why it's hard

- Provide support and strategies

- Emphasize again and again it's about better-informed not perfectly-informed decisions

- It's not for everyone or every organization or every problem

- What else can we do?

How can the management profession become more evidence-based?

- Spend more time getting evidence about *real* business problems/opportunities and dealing with those – more diagnosis less intervention

- Ask and answer the question "why?" a *lot*

- More humility and honesty about what we know and *don't* know

- More of our own evaluations where evidence is poor

- Less solutioneering (solutions in search of problems)

- Healthy scepticism – jump of the fad bandwagon

- Use evidence-based practice decision supports

Disadvantages of EBMgt

◆ Challenges beliefs, prejudices and pet projects

◆ Requires more effortful critical thinking

◆ Requires collecting and using more data (of different types from different sources)

◆ Makes it hard to follow fads

◆ Challenge to authority and power based on hierarchy or "because I say so" or JFDI or HiPPO

◆ Reduces action-orientation of management where doing stuff and implementing solutions more important than doing stuff and implementing solutions that work

Advantages of EBMgt [1]

- The disadvantages are **also** advantages
  - Challenges beliefs, prejudices and pet projects
  - Requires more effortful critical thinking
  - Requires collecting and using more data (of different types from different sources)
  - Makes it hard to follow fads
  - Challenge to authority and power based on hierarchy or "because I say so" or JFDI or HiPPO
  - Reduces action-orientation of management where doing stuff more important than doing stuff that works

- Develops deeper knowledge and understanding of our work and organizations

- Develops essential skills AND…

Advantages of EBMgt [2]

◆ It's the only way we can…

   – …do stuff that addresses *important* business/organizational problems and opportunities (rather than trivial issues)

   – …do stuff *that is more likely to work* (rather than stuff that is unlikely work or has little effect)

Questions? Comments? Thoughts?

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