

Professional Services Resources & Tools

SHARPEN YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS WITH EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

AT A GLANCE

Putting Evidence-based Management into Practice

1. **Focus on areas where the science is clear.**
2. **Recognize that any decision is an opportunity to apply evidence.**
3. **Diagnose underlying factors that influence a decision.**
4. **Adapt knowledge to your own circumstances.**
5. **Develop tools such as checklists and questionnaires to promote evidence-based practices.**
6. **Be prepared to continually update your knowledge base.**



03/17/2008 — Bring new insight into your decision-making process by relying on evidence and data, rather than past experiences.

By Susan Ladika

Far too often, managers rely on past practices when it comes time to make a decision. But some professional services businesses are beginning to take a lesson from the medical profession and examine all the evidence before deciding what path to pursue.

Evidence-based management couples the best in management research with an examination of an organization's own data to determine the best course to take. It follows in the footsteps of evidence-based medicine, which began to come into full force in the 1970s.

By taking an approach that combines scientific research with an organization's own experiences, managers can reflect and think more about problems, says Denise Rousseau, professor of organizational behavior and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and director of the project on evidence-based organizational practices.

Do Your Research

On the corporate side, managers can use their own information technology to review information such as the organization's business processes, types of clients or issues surrounding a problem. Although an organization's problems, like customer complaints, seem unique, they're typically generic, she says. This means managers should be able to utilize the vast amounts of research on most subjects.

To successfully implement evidence-based management, managers should first identify best practices in the professional services sector that produce positive, examined results while being aware of trendy practices that organizations use again and again, without effectiveness, says Mary Key, Ph.D., leadership practice director for the Institute for Corporate Productivity, or i4c, the world's largest network of companies focusing on work force productivity, with headquarters in Seattle and St. Petersburg, Fla.

Narrow Your Focus

An organization's leaders then should determine what management practices are ripe for improvement, Key says. They can determine what to focus on by reviewing data, taking surveys or talking to employees who work in a particular area.

Rousseau suggests managers begin by focusing on practices that are done on a regular basis. "An isolated decision might not be the best place to look for improvement," she says.

Before a full scale change in systems, organizations can institute a pilot program, and if it's a success, expand the program further, Key says. That gives them an opportunity to give it a test before diving in completely.

For the process to work, organizations need to be willing to allow devil's advocates to speak up and ask what the evidence is for making a particular decision. "It causes people to think about what they base their conclusions on," Rousseau says.

Becoming an organization that focuses on evidence won't happen overnight. Not only does it require a change in strategy but also a shift in an organization's culture, says **Billie Blair, president and CEO of Leading and Learning Inc.**, an organizational change management firm based in Los Angeles. "Setting out the company's strategies will ultimately involve everyone in the firm and will be the sound beginnings of that culture shift toward a culture of evidence."