

Q & A with Prof Briner on Evidence based HR Management

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Memory Nguwi interviewed one of the top Professor in Organisational Psychology Professor Rob Briner.

Rob Briner is Professor of Organizational Psychology in the School of Business and Management. He conducts research into several areas of organizational psychology and HR such as work and well-being, the psychological contract, work-nonwork relationships and ethnicity. In addition, he is very active in developing evidence-based practice in management, HR and organizational psychology.

MN: What is evidence based human resources management and where did it come from?

***Prof Briner:** Evidence-based practice as an idea and a way of making decisions has been around for many decades. It started in medicine and has spread to many other professions including the police, educators, policy-makers and, more recently HRM and other areas of management. It's about using the best available evidence from four sources – professional expertise, organizational data, scientific findings, and stakeholder perspectives – in order to both diagnose and identify problems (or opportunities) and likely solutions. The CIPD/CEBMA infographic is useful visual guide. (SEE END OF THIS DOCUMENT)*

MN: Do HR professionals have the capacity to use evidence and assess the quality of evidence?

***Prof Briner:** In general, HR professionals, like many other professionals, have not been trained or educated in evidence-based practice so for this reason may have limited capacity to gather, use and assess the quality of evidence. However, the skills can be learnt though practice and there are many free resources from the Center for Evidence-Based Management that can help (www.cebma.org).*

MN: How does going the evidence based route help HR drive business performance?

***Prof Briner:** If HR wants to address important business problems and implement policies and programs that are more likely to work there is only one way to do this – by using more and better quality evidence. Without such evidence HR is unlikely to be helping drive business performance.*

MN: Has there been areas where evidence based HR has been applied with positive outcomes for the business?

***Prof Briner:** I don't think there are any specific areas of application because evidence-based practice would help positive outcomes in any area of HR activity – from recruitment and selection to performance management and diversity.*

MN: You have questioned the concept of employee engagement and its connection with business outcomes? What have you discovered through research in relation to employee engagement and business performance?

Prof Briner: It may be that employee engagement is an important cause of business outcomes. However, the publically available data shows quite small or limited links between engagement (and indeed a whole range of employee attitudes including job satisfaction) and performance. It is not the case there a no links at all but, rather, these effects where they are found are really quite small. In other words, if you really wanted to enhance employee performance it wouldn't make much sense to target employee engagement. There is more information here

<http://engageforsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Rob-Briner.pdf>

MN: Which area of HR practice has the greatest impact on business performance?

Prof Briner: Sorry I don't know!

MN: You have argued against people following fads especially management fads? What exactly is the issue and how do you know this is a fad?

Prof Briner: Following fads is not a sensible way to manage an organization and can distract managers and HR professionals away from real problems and effective solutions. I think it's quite easy to spot fads as they tend to be presented as entirely positive panacea-like interventions which are heavily marketed using 'star' organizations as examples. Rather than being supported by good quality evidence anecdotes and success stories are used to persuade potential users of their benefits.

MN: In HR which specific areas have more fads that may mislead people?

Prof Briner: Good question! I think you find it in quite a few areas of HR but ones I've noticed recently are in areas such as talent, diversity and data analytics.

MN: What advice would you give to HR professionals wanting to go the evidence based route?

*Prof Briner: First, get familiar with the precise definition and process of evidence-based practice in HR. There are a lot of myths and misconceptions around what evidence-based practice is and is not. Second, take a good look at the way you and your HR team make decisions: To what extent are they evidence-based? What sources of evidence do you use most? Which least? Do you critically evaluate the quality of the evidence you use? In what ways might you be looking at things in a biased way? Third, have a go at actually doing it! Look at the CIPD/CEMBA infographic and the materials on the CEMBA website and see if you and your team can start to apply the principles to the next important decision you've got coming up. Finally, remember that evidence-based HR isn't about making perfect decisions – it's simply about making **better-informed** decisions.*



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