EVIDENCE-BASED HR:
A NEW PARADIGM

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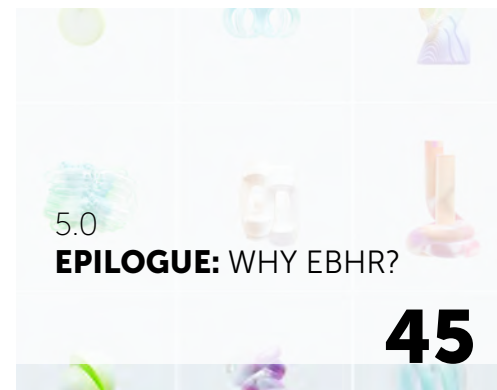
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Prof. Rob Briner

ABOUT **CRF**

Founded in 1994, **Corporate Research Forum (CRF)** is a membership organisation whose purpose is to increase the effectiveness of the HR function, in order to drive sustained organisational performance, through developing the capability of HR professionals. Through more than 25 years of research and the expertise of our team, we have developed a deep understanding of the ways HR can contribute to business outcomes, what works, what doesn't, and in what circumstances. With a network of over 250+ leading organisations, we continue to grow as the respected focal point and knowledge source for improving corporate and individual performance.

We support our members in enhancing their personal capabilities and building organisational effectiveness, guiding them through topics relevant to success, identifying actionable insights and practical recommendations and facilitating networking opportunities. Our work helps organisations and the HR function make sense of the environment in which they operate, and develop capacity to deal with continuous uncertainty.

For more details on how your organisation can benefit from CRF membership please contact Richard Hargreaves, Managing Director, at richard@crforum.co.uk. Alternatively, please visit our website at www.crforum.co.uk.

ABOUT THE **AUTHOR**

ROB BRINER is Professor of Organizational Psychology at Queen Mary, University of London and Associate Research Director CRF. He is also currently a Visiting Professor of Evidence-Based HRM at Birkbeck (University of London) and Professor at Oslo Nye Høyskole.

He was previously co-founder and Scientific Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Management and has held positions at the Institute for Employment Studies, London School of Economics, Kings's College (University of London), Bath University and University of Edinburgh.

His research has focused on several topics including wellbeing, emotions, stress, ethnicity, the psychological contract, organisational culture and climate, absence from work, motivation, work-nonwork and everyday work behaviour.

Beyond academic research and teaching Rob helps practitioners and organisations make better use of evidence, including research evidence, in decision-making as well as encouraging academics to make scientific research more accessible. He has written for and presented to practitioners on many aspects of management, HR and organisational psychology and is now involved in many initiatives aimed at developing and promoting evidence-based practice. He has received several awards for his work in this area including the British Psychological Society Division of Occupational Psychology Academic Contribution to Practice Award in 2014 and topped HR Magazine's Most Influential Thinker list in 2016 and in 2019 received a Lifetime Achievement Award and was admitted to HR Magazine's Hall of Fame.

BIRD & BIRD COMMENTARY

Bird & Bird

As this report shows, evidence-based practice is critical for HR, in ensuring that strategies around performance, recruitment and compensation are successful in supporting business objectives, as well as ensuring that HR maintain the trust and respect of stakeholders across their organisation.

It is important to harness a diversity of evidence, and there are many sources of evidence for HR to lean on.

As lawyers, whether in-house counsel or in external firms, we are often relied on to provide evidence that is independent and objective, with the ultimate aim of reducing legal risk and the financial costs of getting the law wrong. Of course, we acknowledge that organisations need to balance legal compliance alongside commercial drivers, which may not mean simply adopting the lowest risk approach.

One of this report's recommendations is to ask the right questions. This applies both to the questions our clients ask us and to the information that we request from them. The legal position is often fact-dependent so the more information we have the better; context is key. Sometimes lawyers are criticised for giving options, but that is partly because the right approach depends on the context. What is the organisation's commercial strategy? What data does the company have about the issue? What has worked well for the business in the past, and what has not? What is the appetite for risk?

Of course, as lawyers, we then combine evidence from our clients with other sources of evidence that we can leverage – from constantly evolving employment laws and regulations, to court and tribunal decisions, to legal commentary, to our previous experience in advising other companies on similar issues across different industry sectors.

Whether dealing with lawyers, peers, or senior leaders within the business, evidence-based HR is not just about the evidence that HR use in coming to their decisions, but also the evidence they share with their partners in return. By working in partnership, an evidence-based approach can help drive a culture of high performance, financial success, and legal compliance.

Rob Briggs, Employment Senior Associate, Bird & Bird LLP

MINDTHRIVEN COMMENTARY

BUILDING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE IN EVERY LAYER OF YOUR ORGANISATION. EVIDENCE-BASED HR WAS NEVER THIS ACCESSIBLE

In the broad landscape of Human Resources, implementing evidence-based practices can often feel like scaling a mountain. As this report highlights, there are three key principles when it comes to evidence-based practices. Incorporating multiple sources and types of evidence, adopting a structured process of gathering and using evidence, and focusing on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence. This presents a challenge for many organisations without the time, resources or knowledge of evidence-based HR. The complexity of each of these principles becomes a substantial barrier, which can hinder the accessibility of evidence-based practices.

Organisations today, even those with dedicated people teams and substantial resources towards evidence-based HR, struggle with the challenge of seamlessly integrating evidence-based practices in all aspects of the workplace. Despite the growing recognition of the important role evidence-based HR plays in fostering organisational success, there remains a gap between ambition and successful practical implementation.

The ever-changing nature of work, with recent trends such as the increase in remote work, the shift towards a shorter workweek and the increased focus on employee well-being initiatives further add to the complexities HR professionals are facing today. These trends collectively signify a departure from conventional structures and methods. We strongly believe technology can offer an innovative solution to assist professionals and organisations in navigating this growing need for an adaptive approach to evidence-based HR.

In attempting to address these challenges, we created Mindy to be a transformative tool for organisations of all shapes and sizes, grounded in an evidence-based approach. Mindy stands out in its commitment to the three key principles of evidence-based HR, by fostering a culture of structured change and monitoring real value. It's not just about gathering evidence, it's about shaping the future of work with a methodical and adaptive approach. With real-time monitoring of changing work patterns and metrics, translating that data into actionable insights, we let data drive meaningful interventions and help HR professionals make strategic decisions in every layer of the organisation.

At the core of Mindy's philosophy is the empowerment of employees. Today, it's no longer just about HR managing resources, it's about engaging employees to actively shape a healthy and adaptable workplace environment. By putting employees in the driver's seat, we aim to give every employee control over their data and their own journey in the organisation, resulting in a greater sense of involvement and making participation feel like less of a chore.

In essence, the path to evidence-based HR doesn't have to be a Herculean task. With Mindy, we've provided a different lens, a practical approach to making evidence-based HR less of an ambition and more of a reality. As we contribute to a broader conversation in this report, we invite you to see Mindy as a tool to make evidence-based HR a feasible, down-to-earth and most importantly, accessible practice. If our approach resonates with your vision, we welcome you to engage in a personalised demonstration and explore how Mindy can redefine your journey towards a data-driven, employee-centric future of work.

Ruben Vanmaelsaeke, Industrial and Organizational Psychologist, Research and Development Lead, Mindthriven

EVIDENCE-BASED HR:
A NEW PARADIGM

Evidence-based HR (EBHR) is a process which delivers more informed and hence more accurate answers to two fundamental questions: first, which are the most important problems (or opportunities) facing the organisation which are relevant to HR? Second, which solutions (or interventions) are most likely to help? The overarching benefit of EBHR is increasing the ability of HR to be more effective in helping the business achieve its objectives. Therefore, the start point for EBHR is to identify and understand the business issues facing the organisation.

This is the third CRF report on EBHR produced since 2011 and since then the pace and scope of EBHR activity has increased considerably. While there is now widespread acceptance within the profession that when it comes to using evidence we certainly can and should do better, we find that take-up of EBHR within the profession could be accelerated. The purpose of this report is to do exactly this through providing a new and unique set of practical tools – the EBHR Toolkit – supported by advice from HR professionals that HR practitioners can use to embed EBHR in their work.

As well as helping HR increase its effectiveness in addressing important business issues, the benefits of EBHR include helping HR mitigate risks, prioritise its activities, increase the credibility of the function and reduce waste.

EBHR is underpinned by three principles:

1. Incorporate multiple sources and types of evidence and information.
2. Adopt a structured and explicit process of gathering and using evidence.
3. Focus on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence.

KEY
TAKEAWAYS

One of the biggest developments in HR over the last decade has been the rise of people analytics. It is important to recognise that while people analytics can be an essential source of evidence, it is not the same as EBHR. In order to realise the potential of people analytics, it's important to start in the right place – by focusing on the business strategy to identify where analytics is likely to add value to the most important business outcomes.

Our survey identified potential facilitators which could help HR practitioners increase the effectiveness of evidence-based practice. The most highly rated enablers were the organisation and senior leaders placing greater value on taking an evidence-based approach (including explicitly asking the function to role model evidence-based behaviours), providing easy-to-use toolkits, checklists and templates to follow, ensuring evidence from all four sources is accessible and easy to interpret, and providing training and support.

Interviews with experienced EBHR practitioners highlighted some practical recommendations on how to improve the practice of EBHR. These include prioritising the biggest opportunities for maximising business impact, focusing on asking and answering good and relevant business questions, starting with where the organisation currently is rather than looking for perfection, incorporating structured EBHR practices into core HR processes and projects, engaging key stakeholders – especially business and HR leaders–-in the practice of EBHR, upskilling the whole HR function, role modelling EBHR behaviours, and being prepared for the evidence to challenge your own and others' thinking and practice.

Three case studies *(encompassing both private and public sector organisations)* demonstrate how EBHR can be used in practice to better understand the business issue, identify solutions that are more likely to work, and help design internal HR and people analytics consulting processes.

The EBHR Toolkit provides a range of practical models, checklists and tips which can readily be used to embed EBHR practice within the function. The process outlines six key steps that HR practitioners can adopt to take an evidence-driven approach to understanding the business issue, and six steps to identify and apply solutions to those questions. It highlights four key sources of evidence: scientific and other external evidence, evidence from inside the organisation, stakeholders' views, and professional expertise. The toolkit also identifies when HR practitioners should use EBHR, and when the effort is not worth the potential outcomes.

The goal we are seeking in encouraging EBHR is to make better informed rather than perfect decisions. By adopting the EBHR processes and tools set out in this report we will be better positioned to identify the most relevant business issues, develop the most effective solutions and have a positive impact on business outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Our research consisted of:

- Interviews with 20 senior HR practitioners. We are most grateful to all our research participants, some of whom preferred to remain anonymous, and who are listed in the Appendix.

- Feedback on the EBHR model and approach was gathered with a group of CRF members at our Annual Conference through a workshop with a member's HR function, and discussions with individual CRF members.

- A review of academic and practitioner literature and information from professional bodies to provide an EBHR timeline.

- An online survey of CRF members and others, completed by 237 respondents between 11th October and 14th December 2023. Respondents were predominantly HR Directors and senior functional leaders (representing 37% of all respondents). Respondents covered a wide range of industry sectors, with the highest representation from the public sector (16%), financial services (15%) and professional services (14%). 30% worked for organisations of 10,000 employees or more. 50% were UK-based, with the remainder predominantly from Europe and North America.

1.0
INTRODUCTION

CRF produced its first report on Evidence-Based HR (EBHR) in 2011. *Evidence-Based HR: From Fads to Facts?* examined the then relatively new idea of EBHR to better understand its meaning and relevance to the HR profession. We discussed the idea with a range of academics and practitioners who first advocated its adoption.

Our second EBHR report, *Strong Foundations: Evidence-Based HR,* published in 2023, provided a stock take of where we are now by examining what had changed since 2011, seeking the views and perspectives of senior HR professionals, exploring the role of people analytics within EBHR, and providing some initial suggestions for how we can start to strengthen our EBHR practice.

The current report takes us even further by providing advice from HR professionals and a new and unique set of practical tools – the EBHR Toolkit – HR practitioners can use to embed EBHR in their work.

1.1
WHY EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN HR?

The effectiveness of any profession is determined by the extent to which it is able to identify the most important issues faced by its clients and, once identified, is able to choose interventions that are most likely to resolve those issues. In other words, what is it clients really need and how can we best help them?

Evidence-based practice has developed and been applied across a range of fields, including HR, to help professionals more effectively ask and answer these key questions by making better use of evidence and data.

HR as a function has, for many decades, come under considerable scrutiny from within and outside the profession. Concerns have been raised repeatedly about whether we are sufficiently focused on the needs of the organisation and the extent to which we add value. Concerns, in other words, about the extent to which HR is evidence-based.

Such concerns about the value of HR have, over time, come to be seen as mostly valid. There is now widespread acceptance within the profession that when it comes to using evidence we certainly can and should do better.

As the timeline shows, our first report appeared at an early stage in the development of EBHR. Since that time many other reports, articles and academic papers have appeared along with initiatives from HR professional bodies and other organisations.

Although EBHR has been around for almost 25 years it is clear that uptake has been slower than it should be. The purpose of this report is therefore to act as a catalyst to speed up our progress. It does so by focusing directly on helping the profession become more evidence-based by providing insightful and usable advice from experienced HR practitioners and a set of practical tools developed with and for practitioners.

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Evidence-Based Practice: A Critical Appraisal – Evidence-Based Human Resource Management
Chapter in book
ROB BRINER
2000

Why HR Practices are Not Evidence-Based
Article in *Academy of Management Journal*
EDWARD E LAWLER III
OCT. 2007

Becoming an Evidence-Based HR Practitioner
Article in *Human Resource Management Journal*
DENISE ROUSSEAU & ERIC BARENDS
2011

Evidence-Based HR: The Bridge Between Your People and Delivering Business Strategy
Publication of KPMG Report
KPMG
2015

The Role of Scientific Findings in Evidence-Based HR
Article in *SHRM's People + Strategy*
ROB BRINER & ERIC BARENDS
SPRING 2016

Make Better Decisions with Evidence-Based HR
Short article in *SHRM's HR Magazine*
SHONNA WALTERS
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Evidence-Based Management: How to Use Evidence to Make Better Organizational Decisions
Book
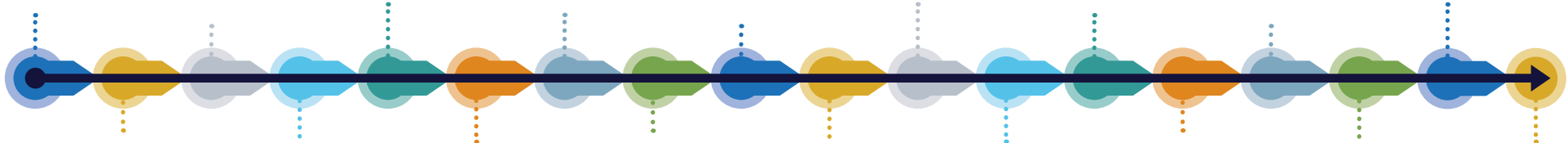**ERIC BARENDS & DENISE ROUSSEAU**
SEP. 2018

Evidence-Based HRM at Birkbeck
Launch of first ever Professional Doctorate
BIRKBECK
JAN. 2022

Strong Foundations: Evidence-Based HR
CRF Report
ROB BRINER, NIGEL GUENOLE, WENDY HIRSH & GILLIAN PILLANS
MAY 2023

FEB. 2007
Is HRM Evidence-Based and Does It Matter?
Institute for Employment Studies Opinion Paper
ROB BRINER

NOV. 2007
Tried and Attested
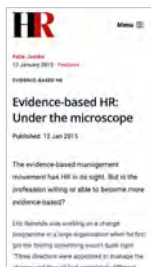Article in CIPD's *People Management*
JANE PICKARD

AUG. 2011
Evidence-Based HR: From Fads to Facts?
CRF Report
WENDY HIRSH & ROB BRINER

JAN. 2015
Evidence-Based HR: Under the Microscope
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KATIE JACOBS

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In Search of the Best Available Evidence
CIPD Positioning Paper
CIPD

2018
Map Updated to Include 'Evidence-Based' as One of the Three Core Values of the Profession
CIPD Profession
CIPD

WINTER 2019
Embracing Evidence-Based Management – The Basics of Evidence-Based Practice
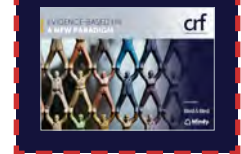Article in Special Issue of *SHRM's People + Strategy*
ROB BRINER

APR. 2023
Building an Evidence-Based People Profession
CIPD relaunches and extends its online EBHR resources
CIPD

JAN. 2024
Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm
CRF Report
ROB BRINER

1.2
WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED HR?

We define EBHR as:

A process which delivers more-informed and hence more accurate answers to two fundamental questions: first, which are the most important problems (or opportunities) facing the organisation which are relevant to HR activities? And second, which solutions (or interventions) are most likely to help? In other words, what's going on and what can we do about it? These questions are answered through a combination of using the best available evidence and critical thinking.

The nature of this process will be described and explained in detail later. But, throughout this report, *it's helpful to bear in mind the general and sole purpose of EBHR which is simply to increase the effectiveness of HR.* In other words, EBHR is not an end in itself but a way of doing HR which maximises our value to the organisation.

It is also helpful to note that EBHR is underpinned by a **set of principles**. These principles are those we tend to apply when making important decisions across a range of situations including in everyday life.

PRINCIPLE 1   Incorporate multiple sources and types of evidence and information

PRINCIPLE 2   Adopt a structured and explicit process of gathering and using evidence

PRINCIPLE 3   Focus on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

Using multiple sources and types of evidence allows us to triangulate different data points and create a richer and fuller picture of the situation. Adopting a structured and explicit approach helps us to more effectively gather evidence and to clearly distinguish between diagnosing an issue and identifying an intervention which is likely to help deal with that issue. Some evidence may be unreliable so rather than incorporating all the evidence we need to pay most attention to the most reliable.

Consider an everyday example: booking a family holiday. There are multiple stakeholders who want different things. There are usually plenty of different types of information – not all reliable – about locations, accommodation and activities. And, there are budget, time and scheduling constraints. When decisions are personally significant we tend to make them according to these three principles: we consult multiple data sources and types of information, we follow a structured process for gathering evidence, and we pay more attention to the most trustworthy information sources.

In HR, as in everyday life, it takes time and other resources to make well-informed decisions. But if an issue is very important and resolving it effectively really matters it makes sense to take time to make well-informed decisions.
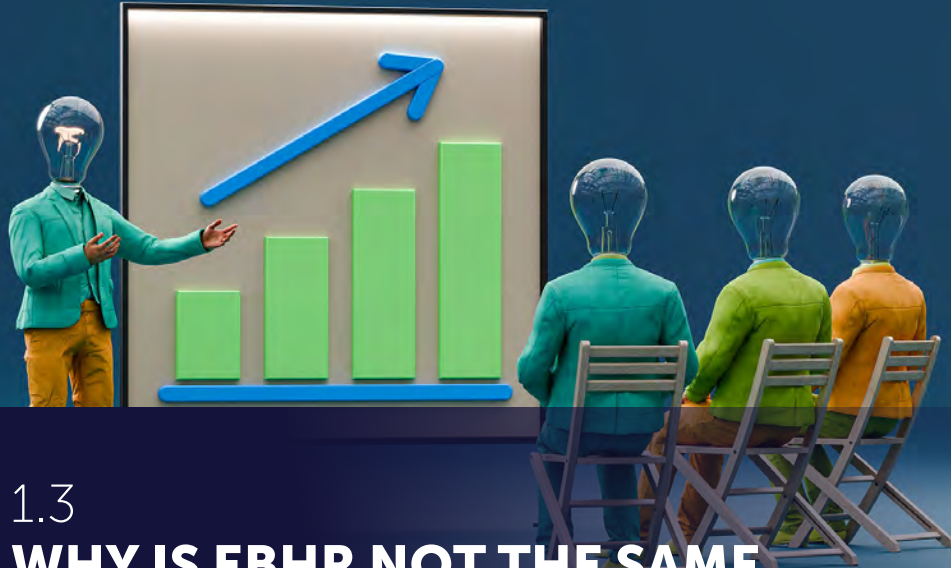
1.3
WHY IS EBHR NOT THE SAME AS PEOPLE ANALYTICS?

It appears that many HR professionals believe that people analytics is the same as EBHR. They therefore make the assumption that if they are already doing people analytics they don't also need EBHR. However, this assumption is misplaced because people analytics, as usually defined and practised, is certainly not the same as EBHR (though we have found a few HR functions doing EBHR and calling it people analytics).

Typically, people analytics tends to focus on one source of evidence and mostly evidence of one type. This is quite different from EBHR. And there are many other important differences.

People analytics is a very important *part of EBHR* but not the same as EBHR. These differences help illustrate how and why EBHR can help us make even better-informed HR decisions and why we should not stop with people analytics but go further in using evidence.

FEATURE	PEOPLE ANALYTICS	EVIDENCE-BASED HR
Origins	Emerged from *within HR.* Part of an evolution of the function facilitated by technology and the shift to strategic HR.	A framework which originated *outside HR* in medicine but has since been applied to dozens of professions including HR.
Sources of evidence	Mostly *single source* – data from inside the organisation.	Always *multiple sources* – data from inside the organisation just one of several sources.
Type of evidence	Mostly *quantitative.*	*Any type of evidence* counts as long as it's trustworthy and relevant.
Structure and process	*No particular process* specified but in practice there is likely to be some structure.	*Explicit structure and process* separating problem identification from solution identification, and also guiding the collection of evidence.
Focus on most trustworthy and relevant	*No explicit intent to assess the quality and relevance of data* though likely to happen to some extent.	One of its core and explicit principles is *to focus only on the best (trustworthy and relevant) evidence.*

1.4
THE MANY BENEFITS OF EBHR

What are the benefits of doing EBHR and what are the processes through which EBHR delivers these benefits?

Thus far, we have described the EBHR timeline, its definition and how it differs from people analytics, key principles and main benefits. In the rest of the report, we next consider the results of a new survey of HR professionals examining current perceptions and understanding of EBHR to identify gaps and barriers. Then, we provide a range of advice about how to do EBHR consisting of advice from HR practitioners and three case studies. Last, is the EBHR Toolkit which provides a set of practical models, checklists and frameworks which can be applied directly to business issues you are working on right now.

THE BENEFITS OF EBHR	HOW DOES IT WORK?
The overarching benefit is increasing the ability of HR to be *more effective in helping the business*	EBHR delivers more-informed and hence more accurate answers to two fundamental questions: First, which are the most important problems (or opportunities) facing the organisation which are relevant to HR activities? Second, which solutions (or interventions) are most likely to help?
Better HR focus on *business issues*	This is always our starting point in EBHR. What exactly is the business issue? How is it relevant to HR? How can HR help?
Helps HR mitigate *risks*	Using EBHR means we have much more evidence about what's happening, what's likely to happen and the consequence or risks of not intervening to tackle important issues.
Allows HR to *prioritise* more effectively	HR cannot and should not deal with every issue. Addressing the two fundamental questions to which EBHR provides more-informed answers (Which are the most important problems facing the organisation? Which solutions are most likely to help?) also helps us prioritise. As part of the EBHR process we also consider questions such as: which issues are truly business critical? What are the relative costs and benefits of potential interventions? Where will we get most bang for our buck, greatest leverage or return on investment?
Increases the *value* and hence *credibility* of the HR function	Using EBHR means that the function is much more likely to be focusing on the most important business issues and responding with interventions that are most likely to help the business. By adding greater value we also achieve greater credibility.
Reduces the *waste* of resources (financial, effort, goodwill)	Making poorly-informed decisions means it is much more likely that we will waste resources on relatively unimportant issues and invest in practices which are less likely to have the desired outcome.
Enhances *ethical standards* around HR practice	EBHR explicitly incorporates stakeholder perspectives and values into the decision-making process. This means we are much more likely to identify issues and implement interventions that are congruent with the ethical values of the organisation, employees and other stakeholders. In addition, HR interventions have the potential to harm as well as help employees: making more-informed decisions about issues and interventions means we will be better able to identify and manage any possible harms.
Helps the *learning and development* of the HR function	The EBHR process entails gathering evidence and data to more precisely identify the issues faced by the business and what can be done to help resolve them. Through repetition and reflection, this structured process plays a key role in developing the skills of individuals and the capacity of the HR function to use evidence effectively. In addition, this process enables the function to design and develop the infrastructure and technology it needs to gather and use multiple sources of evidence to gain crucial insights.

2.0
WHERE ARE WE NOW WITH EBHR?
RESULTS OF A NEW SURVEY

There is now widespread acceptance within the profession that HR needs to make much better use of evidence and data in order to improve its effectiveness, as well as for the many other reasons discussed in the introduction. It is also clear there is increasing awareness and use of EBHR in HR practice.

However, we know very little about HR professionals' understanding of EBHR, the extent to which they currently use it in their work, what makes it difficult to do and what might help. These perceptions provide important context for the practical advice and EBHR Toolkit we set out in the next part of the report.

2.1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SURVEY

The survey asked a range of questions relating to four topics:

1. Perceptions and understanding of EBHR
2. Current use of EBHR
3. Barriers to EBHR
4. Potential facilitators and support

A link to the survey was sent to CRF members and also posted on social media. We received a total of 237 responses though not all respondents responded to every question.

A number of **demographic and background questions** were asked at the start of the survey.

The **seniority level** of respondents was varied but most were relatively senior and quite experienced. Nearly **50%** described themselves as a **Head of an HR specialist function, a Group HR Director, a CHRO** or **a Divisional / Regional Director**. **40%** described themselves as an **HR Business Partner / Manager, a functional specialist** or **an HR Generalist**.

Over **40%** of respondents had at least **20 years of experience** as an HR professional, and over **75% had at least 10 years of experience**. Organisational **sectors were spread relatively evenly** across a range of sectors including retail, life sciences, professional services, financial services and technology.

30% of respondents worked at organisations with **at least 10,000 employees**, and **33%** worked at organisations with **fewer than 1,000**. **33%** of respondents worked at organisations with **at least 100 employees in their HR function**, and over **60%** had at **least 20**.

50% of respondents worked at organisations **based in the UK, 10% based in the US**, **7% based in Australia** and **4% based in Germany**. Other countries mentioned by multiple organisations included Zimbabwe, UAE, South Africa, Italy and Canada. **28%** of respondents were **CRF members**.

Regarding their experience of EBHR, **10% had never heard of the concept**, **18% had heard of it** but were not too sure what it was, **53% had read or heard presentations** about it and **19% had done some form of training** or courses on the topic.

2.2
PERCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF EBHR

Given that the formal definition of EBHR is not well-known, a definition (which included a list of the four sources of evidence used in EBHR) was provided on every page of the survey to clarify (or remind) respondents what EBHR means. The purpose of this was to help them more accurately answer the survey questions.

However, the definition was *not* provided on the very first page, allowing us to compare the scores on questions *before* and *after* the definition was provided. We anticipated that respondents' perceptions and understanding was likely to change after they were provided with a definition.

FIGURE 1

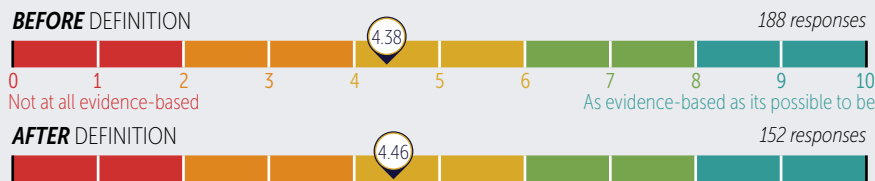**To what extent… is the HR profession in general evidence-based?**

BEFORE DEFINITION — 188 responses — 4.38

0 Not at all evidence-based — 10 As evidence-based as its possible to be

AFTER DEFINITION — 152 responses — 4.46

FIGURE 2

…is evidence-based HR the same as people analytics?

BEFORE DEFINITION — 184 responses — 4.52

0 Not at all the same as people analytics — 10 Exactly the same as people analytics

AFTER DEFINITION — 149 responses — 4.03
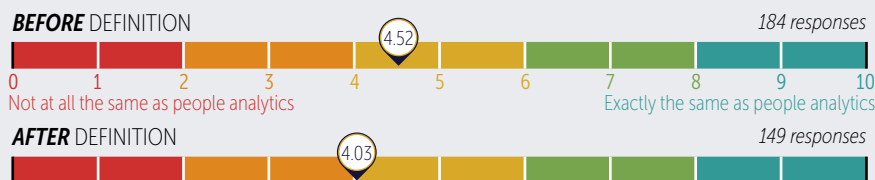
FIGURE 3

…is EBHR about adopting the HR practices most strongly supported by scientific evidence?

BEFORE DEFINITION — 184 responses — 6.91

0 Not at all — 10 All about adopting practices strongly supported by scientific evidence

AFTER DEFINITION — 153 responses — 5.90
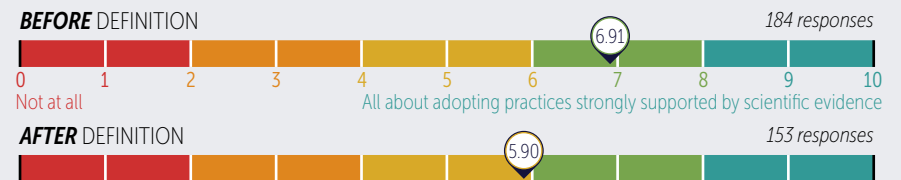
FIGURE 4

…is evidence-based practice about adopting what the profession regards as 'best practice?

BEFORE DEFINITION — 178 responses — 4.82

0 Not at all about best practice — 10 All about adopting best practice

AFTER DEFINITION — 148 responses — 4.43
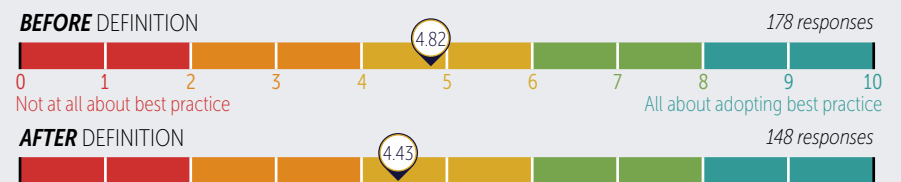
FIGURE 5

…would you say EBHR is about gathering evidence to diagnose problems or identify solutions?

BEFORE DEFINITION — 184 responses — 3.27

0 Gathering evidence to diagnose problems — Equal — 5 Gathering evidence to identify solutions

AFTER DEFINITION — 152 responses — 3.22
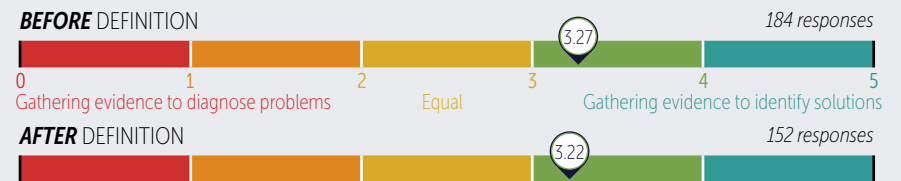
FIGURE 6

How well has any training provided the knowledge and skills required to practice EBHR?

BEFORE DEFINITION — 182 responses — 5.09

0 Not at all — 10 Training has provided all the knowledge and skills required

AFTER DEFINITION — 152 responses — 5.38
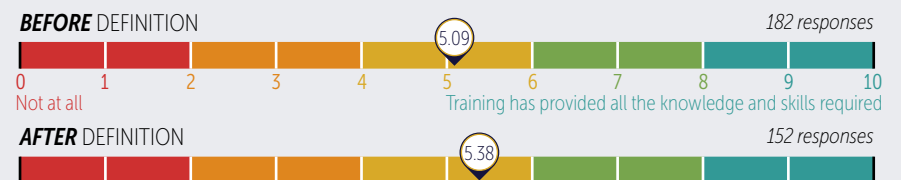
While some responses to the questions remained more or less unchanged, there was some shift in perception for most questions when a definition was provided. With a definition respondents were:

- **Less likely to say EBHR is the same as people analytics.**
- **Less likely to say EBHR is about adopting practices supported by scientific evidence.**
- **Less likely to say EBHR is about adopting 'best practice'.**
- **Slightly more likely to say their training has provided EBHR skills.**

This suggests that these respondents had some understanding of EBHR but, when presented with a definition, they were likely to change their perceptions. This likely reflects the profession as a whole. Therefore, clearly defining EBHR at the outset will help the profession engage more fully with the idea and its purpose.

2.3
CURRENT USE OF EBHR

FIGURE 7

Given the description of EBHR, to what extent is your HR function evidence-based?

135 responses

0 — Not at all
1 2 3 4 5 (4.95) 6 7 8 9 10 — As evidence-based as it's possible for any HR function

Respondents judged their HR functions to be around the midpoint of the response scale, suggesting there is still some way to go before they would describe their functions as very strongly evidence-based. Recognising that there is still work to be done is an important starting point in the adoption of EBHR.

The EBHR Toolkit in this report contains a model which can be used to more precisely identify the extent to which an HR function is evidence-based and where there are gaps.

FIGURE 8

In your HR function, do you spend more time and effort using evidence to carefully diagnose problems (or opportunities) or to identify solutions (or interventions)?

135 responses

0 — More time diagnosing problems
1 2 — Equal 3 (3.07) 4 5 — More time identifying solutions
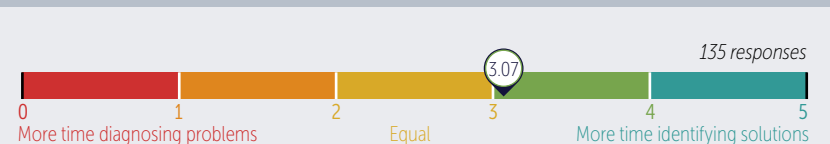
Ideally, the same effort should be put into using evidence to understanding the issue as understanding what might resolve this. However, it is not unusual for HR professionals to report that they typically spend insufficient time diagnosing the problem and so do not get the balance right. Our respondents clearly felt differently and this is therefore an encouraging response..

FIGURE 9

In your HR function, how often do you implement solutions or interventions with only a *limited* understanding of the problem (or opportunities)?

137 responses

6.15

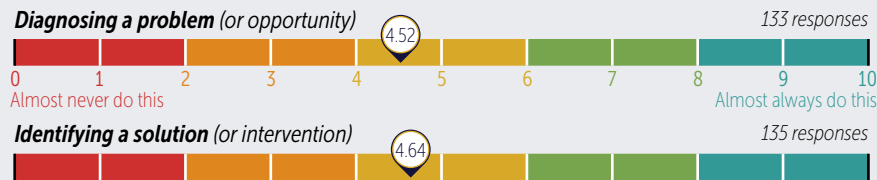| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

This almost never happens   This happens often
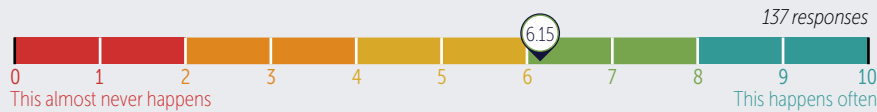
From an EBHR perspective, it is less effective if the HR function implements solutions without first having a detailed and well-evidenced understanding of the problem. The response to our survey suggests that our respondents felt that this happens more than is ideal. The two-stage model presented in the EBHR Toolkit helps ensure that we first understand the issue before we explore possible solutions.

FIGURE 10

How often do you gather evidence from each of the four sources when it comes to:

***Diagnosing a problem* (or opportunity)**

133 responses

4.52

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Almost never do this   Almost always do this

***Identifying a solution* (or intervention)**
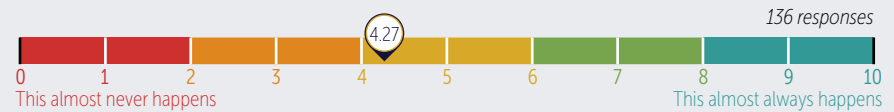
135 responses

4.64

Using multiple sources of evidence is a fundamental principle of EBHR. The four sources of evidence *(described in more detail in the EBHR Toolkit)* are:

1. Stakeholder views and perspectives (e.g. Executive Committee, employees, customers)

2. Professional expertise (e.g. expertise from within the team)

3. Evidence from inside the organisation (e.g. HR metrics, surveys)

4. Scientific and other external evidence (e.g. scientific studies, cases)

Here too, our respondents felt that this was something that only sometimes happened when diagnosing a problem or identifying a solution. Using checklists and following the model described later can help ensure we do consider as many evidence sources as possible.
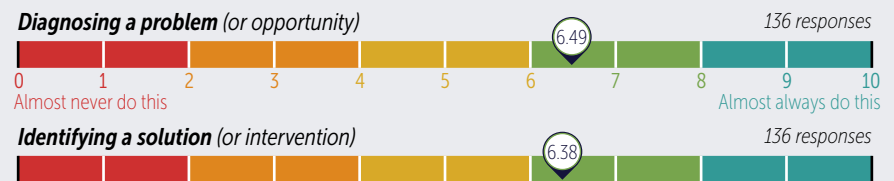
FIGURE 11

In your HR function, how often do you explicitly evaluate the quality of evidence and focus on the best available evidence?

136 responses

4.27

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

This almost never happens   This almost always happens

A key aspect of EBHR is focusing only on the best quality evidence because using poor quality or untrustworthy evidence will not help us to make better informed decisions. The response to this question suggests that these respondents feel that evaluating the quality of evidence is something that happens relatively rarely. Some techniques for doing this are outlined in the EBHR Toolkit.

FIGURE 12

How often do you focus first on what the business needs, given its objectives and what the business is trying to achieve, when it comes to:

***Diagnosing a problem* (or opportunity)**

136 responses

6.49

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Almost never do this   Almost always do this

***Identifying a solution* (or intervention)**

136 responses

6.38

For any practitioner, an important place to start is the needs of the client. For HR professionals, this means the goals or objective of the business should drive the function. Our respondents' answers to these two questions suggest that in their experience there are many instances where at both stages of the process – diagnosis and intervention – the needs of the business were not paramount.
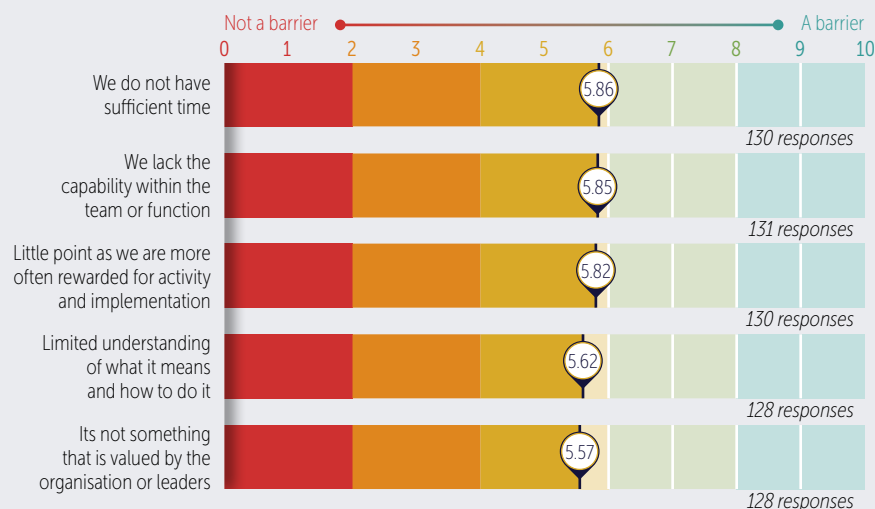
2.4
BARRIERS TO EBHR

A persistent finding of our research on EBHR conducted over many years is that while the profession accepts the need to make better use of evidence and has a good understanding of the benefits of doing so it is also aware that doing this is not necessarily easy.

In order to discover more about what HR professionals see as barriers to EBHR, the survey listed five potential barriers and asked respondents to rate the extent to which they viewed them as a barrier from 0 (not a barrier to EBHR) to 10 (very much a barrier to doing more EBHR).

Respondents gave each barrier a similar score – somewhere between 5 and 6 – suggesting that none were perceived as more important and none as particularly strong. Given that respondents did not rate their own HR function as particularly evidence-based it is perhaps surprising that they did not perceive these barriers as having a stronger impact on their ability to do more EBHR.

Possible explanations include:

- there may be other much more important barriers we did not ask about in the survey.
- respondents don't feel there are many strong barriers while at the same time acknowledging that they could do more EBHR.
- reducing barriers is perceived as less important in making a difference to doing EBHR than increasing potential facilitators. These are discussed in the next section.

The survey also asked if difficulties accessing each of the four sources of evidence used in EBHR presented a barrier. This used the same scale ranging from 0 (not a barrier to EBHR) to 10 (very much a barrier to doing more EBHR).

FIGURE 13

How would you rate the following as potential barriers to doing more EBHR?

Source: CRF Member Survey, Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm 2023

FIGURE 14

Are difficulties accessing the four sources of evidence a barrier to doing more EBHR?
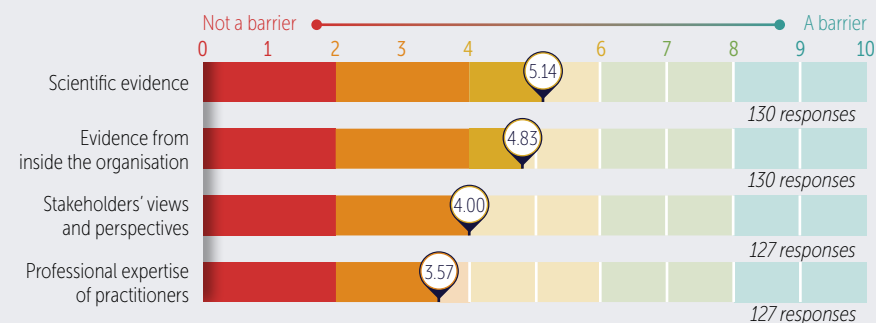
Source: CRF Member Survey, Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm 2023

Accessing evidence from stakeholders and professional expertise was not viewed as much of a barrier. Scores for accessing internal evidence and, in particular, scientific evidence were higher.

2.5
POTENTIAL FACILITATORS AND SUPPORT

As well as asking about barriers that might get in the way of EBHR we also asked about the extent to which eight different potential EBHR facilitators might help.

Respondents were asked to rate them on a scale from 0 (would probably not help much) to 10 (would greatly help us to be more evidence-based). It is worth noting that scores on items assessing facilitators were considerably higher than scores on barrier items. This suggests that respondents thought that focusing on strategies for enabling or facilitating EBHR were more important.

The first type of facilitator involves leadership and incentives around EBHR:

- The organisation and senior leaders placing greater value on taking an evidence-based approach.
- Rewarding HR colleagues for the way in which they diagnose problems and identify solutions, rather than mostly rewarding for activity.

The facilitator which had the highest score and was therefore viewed as most helpful was senior leaders placing more value on an EBHR-driven approach. This could include explicitly asking the function to do more to adopt EBHR and also to role-model EBHR behaviours. The EBHR Toolkit contains a checklist of EBHR role-modelling behaviours.

Rewarding people for the way they go about using evidence to better understand which activities should be undertaken (rather than just rewarding activity or doing 'stuff') was also seen as an important facilitator.

Other potential facilitators related to the training and support that organisations could provide for the function:

- Providing practical training and support in how to do evidence-based HR.
- Having easy-to-use EBHR resources such as toolkits, checklists and templates to follow.
- Ensuring that evidence from all four sources was more accessible and easier to interpret.
- Ensuring that more time is built into project planning for collecting and using evidence.

FIGURE **15**

How would you rate the following as potential facilitators for doing more EBHR?
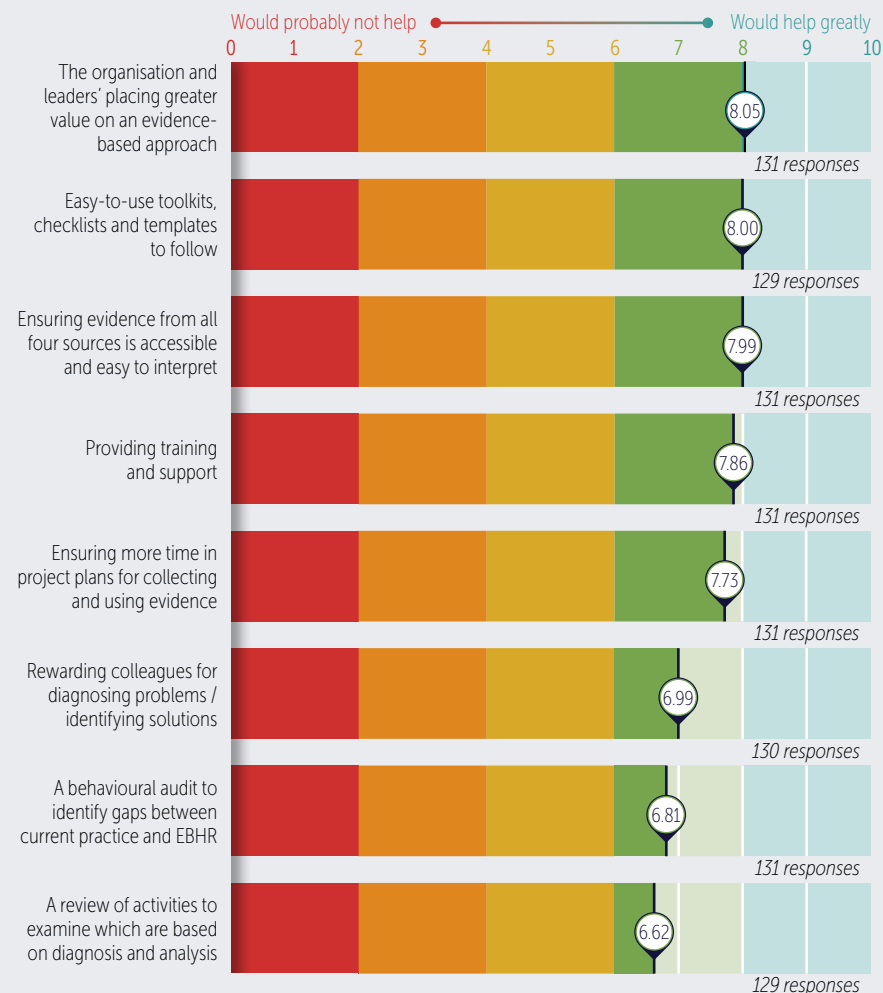
Source: CRF Member Survey, Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm 2023

Every facilitator was rated quite highly. This suggests that respondents felt that much more could be done to upskill HR professionals in the function through training, providing resources (such as the EBHR Toolkit in this report), and ensuring that evidence is available, provides insights and is incorporated into planning.

Two other facilitators which scored moderately highly concern the use of specific evaluation techniques:

- Conducting a behavioural audit of the way you typically go about identifying problems and solutions in order to identify gaps between what you typically do and what you would do from an evidence-based HR approach.

- Conduct a review of all your major activities to examine the extent to which each is based on a careful diagnosis (including of the business needs) and a careful analysis of the evidence about why that activity is likely to help.

The first of these is an audit of EBHR behaviours. Such an audit would enable a HR function or team to assess the way it typically uses evidence to identify important business issues and potential solutions and compare its typical behaviours with EBHR behaviours. Through this process it would be possible to identify which EBHR behaviours were already routine and which could be improved or enhanced. CRF is in the process of developing such a EBHR Behavioural Audit.

The EBHR framework can also be used to evaluate current HR activities and practices. Each of the function's major activities can be assessed in terms of evidence for the extent to which it is addressing an important business issue and evidence for why that activity is likely to help. This technique enables functions to identify which activities are important to the business and add value and which seem relatively unimportant or ineffective and should therefore be discontinued. Stopping activity that is not helping is just as important as initiating activity that does. The EBHR Toolkit contains a simple checklist for helping functions decide which activities they should probably stop.

2.6
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest that survey respondents had some understanding of EBHR though did not tend to routinely use it in their work. They also had some sense of the barriers to doing more EBHR but a much stronger feeling for what can be done to facilitate EBHR.

The remainder of this report considers in detail the steps we can take to become more evidence-based through the advice of HR professionals, case studies from organisations, and the detailed guidance provided in the EBHR Toolkit.

In the previous section we explored the findings from our survey of HR professionals. Respondents had some understanding of EBHR but did not routinely use it in their work.

One important reason why EBHR is not yet widely used within the profession is the limited availability of practical examples and advice from those experienced in EBHR and more generally making better use of evidence in their functions to make HR more effective.

Here, we first describe three cases of how EBHR approaches have been used to improve the use of evidence in decision-making. Next, we report the results of interviews with experienced professionals who offer tips and advice about how HR practitioners and the leaders of HR functions can become more evidence-based.

3.1
CASE NOTES

Each of these cases comes from different sectors and uses EBHR in different ways to improve HR decision-making. The first is from Thales – a French multinational which designs and makes electrical systems. The second is from the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) – a financial regulator. And the third is from Uber, headquartered in the US.

In each case, the HR function as a whole or individuals within it have explicitly used the EBHR principles and process to help resolve specific business issues (in the first two cases) or to design the way in which their analytics team provides support to internal customers (in the third case).

At the end of each case some commentary is provided.

3.0
DOING EBHR:
CASE STUDIES
AND ADVICE FROM
PRACTITIONERS

CASE NOTE 1 **THALES**
RETAINING TALENT ON LONG-TERM PROJECTS
Dave Hodges, Strategic HR Business Partner

Thales manages very large and long-term projects which they describe as mega-programmes. Given the length of these mega-programmes which may span well over a decade, a fundamental challenge is retaining key employees.

The traditional approach had been to offer financial incentives. However, the effectiveness of this particular approach to retention was not clear and, in addition, the effectiveness of other interventions was unknown.

In this case, the problem was already reasonably well-understood and therefore the focus was on using an EBHR approach to identify likely solutions.

A team was assembled consisting of stakeholders, internal customers, individuals from business centres of excellence and others with particular interests in the overall approach and/or interests and expertise in particular areas of evidence. The team met across four sessions – some face to face and some virtual – to work through each of the key stages with agreed deadlines:

- Agreeing the main questions: what was known about the effects of financial incentives on the retention of key staff? Which other interventions might be effective?

- Acquiring the evidence from multiple sources (internal evidence, stakeholder perspectives, professional expertise and scientific evidence).

- Critically appraising the quality and relevance of the evidence.

- Aggregating or pulling together all the evidence.

- Applying it to answer the questions.

The evidence suggested that financial incentives were probably only effective for a small minority. Therefore, their overall effect was probably quite small and likely only short-term, suggesting a poor return on investment. The evidence further indicated that other interventions focusing on intrinsic motivation (using self-determination theory) may be more effective and also more cost-effective.

Rather than offering financial incentives, a tool was developed which allowed programme managers to explore with key employees whether they perceived their work was providing an environment which facilitated intrinsic motivation (autonomy, competence and relatedness). Programme managers used the tool to discuss the extent to which these three aspects of intrinsic motivation were present and, if not, what steps could be taken to enhance them.

Where deficits were discovered, the tool offered methods of improving their work experience in ways that would enhance their intrinsic motivation and increase retention.

CASE NOTE COMMENTARY
THALES

Some points to note about this case in relation to the EBHR process:

1 The EBHR process (see EBHR Toolkit) has two parts. In the first part of the model the nature of the problem or business issue is identified. In the second part, possible solutions are identified. *Here, there was less need for Part 1 as the problem was already quite well-understood.* However, this is likely quite an unusual scenario. Therefore, when you apply EBHR to your own practice you will likely find that whilst a few issues are already quite well-defined, you will also need to collect data and evidence to establish the precise nature of the issues.

2 *A diverse team was created to work on the EBHR process* which crucially involved stakeholders, internal customers and others with interests and appropriate expertise. In general, the EBHR process is best done with a dedicated group who are assigned clear roles.

3 In this case, *the EBHR process was organised around a project plan* which involved a set number of meetings, each with clear objectives and sufficient time between them for team members to work on their parts of the EBHR project.

4 The team *gathered evidence across all four sources of evidence* (see EBHR Toolkit): internal evidence, stakeholder perspectives, professional expertise and scientific evidence. While it is not always possible to draw on all four sources equally, one of the key principles of EBHR is that it is always more effective to use multiple sources.

5 *The evidence examined suggested that the existing intervention (financial incentives) was not particularly effective.* EBHR can also be used to help understand what isn't working as well as what might work better.

6 The team drew on scientific evidence around *theories of motivation and identified a new intervention* which seemed likely to be more effective than financial incentives.

CASE NOTE 2 **FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY**
ENHANCING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION DATA TO INFORM STRATEGY AND ACTION
Irene Uwejeyah, Programme Manager and Sara Nursaw, Head of Corporate Responsibility

The FCA aims to be a more effective regulator by ensuring that its staff are representative of broader society. They also believe that ensuring their people fulfil their potential results in better decision-making in the public interest.

As such, as is common with many organisations, the FCA has stretching DEI targets and objectives. Progress had been made over recent years, and much good work was underway, but the FCA was keen to accelerate the pace of change. As a data-led regulator and aligned with the regulatory approach to D&I, the FCA decided to take an evidence-based approach to conduct a major review of its internal DEI work. This review was critical to the FCA identifying and understanding the most important DEI issues and challenges for the organisation and what interventions should be developed to address them.

As part of the research phase, the FCA gathered and analysed the following evidence:

- *Internal evidence* relevant to DEI from within the organisation, including quantitative data on remuneration, pay gaps, awards, recruitment, performance management and employee survey results.
- Qualitative data from *stakeholders* was gathered through speaking to their DEI networks, senior leadership across the FCA and colleagues across HR centres of excellence (HRBPs, resourcing, early careers, HR Analytics, HR policy, workforce planning and organisational capability).
- *Professional expertise* on DEI issues and actions was gathered from engaging with internal professionals, external professional bodies specialising in DEI, other regulators in financial services and companies inside and outside of financial services with well-established DEI programmes. In addition, they attended several sector events focused on DEI.
- *Scientific findings* on a range of academic and consultancy research reports were also scrutinised for insights into analysing DEI issues and the effectiveness of different interventions.

In addition, the FCA had previously conducted and published a literature review examining the evidence for the effects of diversity and inclusion in the workplace as part of its regulatory work.

Multiple team members rated the quality and relevance of the evidence to provide peer review. Team members' appraisals of quality and relevance were compared and discussed using a RAG rating scale (Red/Amber/Amber-Green/Green). This ensured focus on the best available evidence.

The team also designed an evidence tracker, which allowed them to record and rate each piece of evidence and thus consider different data points simultaneously to build a more complete picture and develop more nuanced insights.

This process also enabled the team to prioritise those areas and actions where more work was required. The FCA was then able to group evidence into different themes and further categorise it into sub-themes. For example, inclusion was a theme that was identified, and from then, they categorised evidence under the banners of 'Fairness and belonging', 'Accessibility and reasonable adjustments' and 'Inclusion and learning culture'.

Decisions about interventions were not based on finding 'The Right Answer'. Instead, the available evidence was used to design and select interventions most likely to make specific and significant impacts. This also allowed more precise testing of the effectiveness of interventions.

The team presented their evidence-based methodology, the evidence review and the decisions based on the evidence to their Executive Committee (ExCo). As the most senior stakeholders, they wanted ExCo's approval of the identified priorities and for ExCo to understand the approach the team adopted to identify key DEI issues. This ensured that the new DEI programme was developed with ExCo rather than being an HR strategy simply presented to ExCo.

CASE NOTE COMMENTARY
FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

Some points to note about this case in relation to the EBHR process:

1 The context of the FCA as a regulator played an important role in facilitating the use of EBHR. Apart from improving the effectiveness of HR, *adopting EBHR also helps with transparency, accountability and governance* – all crucial for a regulator but also potentially important for any organisation. If any HR function wants the ability to explain its decisions to senior stakeholders, *EBHR provides a sound audit trail,* setting out exactly which decisions were made, why they were made and the evidence-base used to shape those decisions.

2 DEI is a good example of an area of HR activity where there are always multiple rather than single issues or problems. In this case, *the evidence was used to identify these multiple issues and, crucially, to prioritise them.* EBHR helps differentiate specific issues and identify which are most important and require most attention.

3 Like Case 1, *this project also used all four sources of evidence* (see EBHR Toolkit) used in EBHR: internal evidence, stakeholder perspectives, professional expertise and scientific findings.

4 In another action aligned with one of the principles of EBHR, the team used an explicit *rating scale to judge the quality of evidence,* enabling them to focus on the most trustworthy.

5 After diagnosing and prioritising the issues *the focus was on finding interventions most likely to make the desired impacts rather than searching for 'The Right Answer'.* The problem with searching for a single 'right' answer is that complex issues rarely have a right answer; instead there will be several potential answers each of which comes with its own costs and benefits. Evaluating the costs and benefits of each will help make a more-informed decision about which intervention to choose.

6 In this case, *ExCo were involved from the beginning of the process* and both the evidence and subsequent decisions were presented to them to sense check and ensure ExCo were partners in the process. Engaging senior stakeholders in this way is likely to provide a better EBHR process and outcome.

CASE NOTE 3 **UBER**
ESTABLISHING A PEOPLE DECISION SCIENCE TEAM TO APPLY EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE PRINCIPLES
Nicholas Bremner, Head of Organisational Analysis

For many years Uber has conducted various forms of research within its People Science team – using insights from internal data (people analytics) and external scientific studies – to inform HR practice. It was observed that clients both from within HR and leaders and stakeholders in the business more broadly had several issues with the available data and evidence. First, while they did trust the analysis of internal data they were not convinced of the relevance of the external scientific literature. Second, the internal research was trusted but not well-used as it was difficult to translate it into insights to guide action.

Over several decades, evidence-based practice has evolved specifically as a way of incorporating different types of evidence in practitioner decision-making. It was therefore seen as an ideal framework for helping to provide clients with more of what they were asking for and enable them to make rounder and better-informed decisions.

A People Decision Science team of four was established to provide stakeholder-facing consulting roles to supplement and make better use of the research being conducted by the larger People Analytics team. They used an evidence-based management model to guide the way they worked with clients. This focused on key elements of evidence-based practice:

- Incorporating multiple sources of evidence – including but not limited to internal quantitative data.
- Following a structured process which starts with asking a question, gathering evidence, reviewing its quality, pulling it together and then applying it.

In order to develop capability in evidence-based HR, a book club was created to enable members to systematically read and process a key evidence-based management textbook. This enabled the team to collectively understand evidence-based practice, how it applies to HR in general and to their work within Uber in particular.

The team developed several areas of work:

- Measuring for impact: for example, which KPIs really matter and have the most impact on the business?
- Data interpretation and storytelling: going beyond providing data and evidence to help realise the practical insights data and evidence provide.
- Data fluency and enablement: working with clients, sometimes in a coaching style, to help them interpret and better understand data and evidence.
- Creating a repository or library of the research conducted over many years by the People Science team which could be drawn on when consulting with clients.

Data requests from clients are developed and focused through conversations to increase the clarity of the clients' questions about a perceived problem or possible solutions. This also establishes a shared understanding of the data and evidence that will, in principle, help answer those questions. The idea that the evidence may, or may not, support what the client would prefer to be the case is discussed up-front in order to manage expectations.

The ultimate goal of the team is to help the business deploy HR practices and activities that help the business and also refine certain programmes and activities that are not making a useful contribution in their current form. For example, on the basis of the team's analyses some types of training and employee development opportunities have been retired or refined in order to improve their impact.

CASE NOTE COMMENTARY
UBER

Some points to note about this case in relation to the EBHR process:

1 In this case, EBHR was not used to deal with a particular business issue; rather it was *used as framework* to design an internal consultancy service (the People Decision Science Team) to improve their work with clients. EBHR can provide a useful set of processes and content guidelines (see EBHR Toolkit) to shape the support provided by HR to customers.

2 The Team taught themselves the principles of evidence-based practice and explicitly adopted its *key principles including using multiple sources and following a structured process.*

3 EBHR helped the People Decision Science Team *create products and services* including adopting a coaching approach to working with clients.

4 As with Case 1, the EBHR process was also used to *help identify which current practices were not particularly effective* so that a decision could be made about whether to withdraw, improve or replace such practices.

3.2
ADVICE FROM HR PROFESSIONALS

For this report we interviewed over 20 experienced HR professionals about EBHR in particular and the use of data and evidence in HR more generally. Some have considerable experience of actually doing EBHR (or something very close to it) and leading HR functions who operate in this way. Others have experience of learning how to make better use of evidence and supporting others to do the same.

What all of our participants have in common is a strong desire and commitment to improving the use of evidence in order to increase the effectiveness of HR.

Participants were asked a range of questions including: *how have you developed yourself and others in making better use of evidence? What advice would you give to a HR function or team who were trying to get better at EBHR?*

The findings were organised under 10 themes:

1. **Start with the business issue**
2. **Make sure you're asking and answering good questions**
3. **Be prepared for the evidence to challenge your own and other's thinking and practice**
4. **Build the EBHR process into project planning**
5. **Contract with key stakeholders**
6. **Leadership plays a key role in developing EBHR**
7. **Role modelling EBHR behaviours**
8. **Take stock and start from where you are now**
9. **Different sources and types of evidence build a clearer evidence picture**
10. **Involve the whole team — don't leave it to specialists**

Each advice theme is described and then illustrated with some examples from our participants.

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 1
START WITH THE BUSINESS ISSUE

The main purpose of HR is to help the organisation achieve its objectives. This means we need to start with understanding the business issues facing the organisation. By doing so we can make sure that HR activities are focused on the most important business issues and so improve the effectiveness of the function in supporting the organisation.

"The journey we've been on started by saying, 'well, what's the problem we're trying to solve?' I think that's a really easy conversation that you can have with CEOs, boards, executive teams. So let's not get on and fix something without understanding the problem but let's start by scoping. Actually, what's the problem? What's the issue? And then saying, let's go and get the quantitative and qualitative data and evidence that helps us to understand what the solutions might be to that."

NEIL MORRISON, GROUP HR DIRECTOR, SEVERN TRENT

"It's identifying within the business what the biggest opportunities for impact are. And then within those, where the easiest wins are to be had because wins tend to propel more wins."

JEFF LINDEMAN, CHIEF PEOPLE, CULTURE AND CAPABILITY OFFICER, WD-40 COMPANY

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 2
MAKE SURE YOU'RE ASKING AND ANSWERING GOOD QUESTIONS

A critical skill within EBHR is to ask and then answer good questions. Too often it seems we ask unfocused or insufficiently relevant questions which, even if we can answer them, provide little useful insight. Spending time refining and making the question more precise in the early stages of the process means we are likely to get much more useful and relevant answers.

"There is significant effort required on the very first step of evidence-based HR, the asking component, and reframing conversations with stakeholders so that you have a very good understanding of what their problem is – real or assumed."

NICHOLAS BREMNER, HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL ANALYTICS, UBER

"You have to start with the exam question you're being asked to answer. If it's a growth in capability in a particular location, for example, we need to know how much and in what timeframe. Then you've got to get together as a multifunctional team to say, 'Okay, there's an analytics portion of this, but there's also a strategic HR part and there's an OD piece and a compensation piece', and you've got to come at it from an interdisciplinary approach to say 'this is the exam question, let's keep a focus on that, rather than all split off into our siloed activities, which don't stitch together'."

STEVE BRIGHT, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES, NORTHROP GRUMMAN

"Focus on that question up front and make it as small and as packageable as possible. Don't try and eat the entire elephant. How do you shorten the cycle as much as possible, especially early on? The smaller you frame it upfront, the quicker you can get to the later stages of apply and assess."

DAVID HODGES, STRATEGIC HR BUSINESS PARTNER, THALES

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 3
BE PREPARED FOR THE EVIDENCE TO CHALLENGE YOUR OWN AND OTHER'S THINKING AND PRACTICE

If we were always right about everything then we wouldn't need EBHR. Similarly, we don't need EBHR if we're not prepared to change our minds on the basis of new evidence. Hence, it's important to accept that we and others get things wrong and that challenges to existing beliefs from contradictory evidence are uncomfortable but important.

"I think it's important to show people in HR evidence about the impact of their actions. When they make decisions to take certain actions, what are the consequences? Are they having the effects they want? Is it working? And if not, why not, and how can they do better next time?"

THOMAS DESARANNO, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO, MINDTHRIVEN

"I want the business to win. And the most effective way that I think I can do that is to help leaders be successful. That means that I'm going to be a contrarian from time to time and tell them things perhaps they don't want to hear but I think they need to hear in order to make better-informed decisions."

JEFF LINDEMAN, CHIEF PEOPLE, CULTURE AND CAPABILITY OFFICER, WD-40 COMPANY

"Eventually through this process you get to identify the things we do in HR that don't add value. Occasionally you find things where we're doing this because we've always done it, but it's actually not adding value. And that's why you have real opportunities to also change HR practice."

THOMAS RASMUSSEN, VICE PRESIDENT, ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING, SHELL

"Offer a bit of an amnesty for people to say, 'oh, that means this stuff that I was doing before was not very evidence-based'. Allow people to feel it's okay to acknowledge and admit that maybe some of what we were doing before could have been even better."

SIOBHAN SHERIDAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

"The first challenge when you're applying EBHR is to expect to feel really uncomfortable and have your thinking challenged, particularly in a topic that you thought you were an expert in. It's crucial to develop the ability to be quite neutral and accept new evidence even if it challenges your existing views. If you don't, you'll just find more evidence to convince yourself that what you've done previously is right. Which isn't really evidence-based thinking. It's evidence-based justification for sticking with what you've already been doing."

JACKIE WESTERMAN, HEAD OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, CONTENT DIVISION, BBC

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 4
BUILD THE EBHR PROCESS INTO PROJECT PLANNING

Rather than adding the EBHR process as an afterthought to our projects, it makes much more sense to build it into the design of projects right from the start. Indeed, given EBHR is a highly structured approach (see EBHR Process in the Toolkit) the process can itself be used as a way of structuring projects so we first focus on understanding the issue and once reasonably well-understood focus on identifying the likely solutions.

"I think that what really helps is the simplicity of the evidence-based approach which means we can map out in advance exactly what we need to achieve in each meeting at each stage of the project.. And being able to say 'by the end of this day, we will deliver something which we will all agree on even if it's not perfect and it's going to be better than what we've got now' which I think engaged people with the EBHR process."

DAVE HODGES, STRATEGIC HR BUSINESS PARTNER, THALES

"Dedicating the right level of time and resource to do this at the outset is critical. You need to ring-fence resource and apply proper project management methodology (as you would with any other business critical project) if you want to deliver effectively and avoid the business-as-usual day-today distractions pulling you off in different directions."

SARA NURSAW, HEAD OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

"A lot of what we do now is on a project management basis so we specify in advance in the project scope what evidence will be gathered and how it will be used in a critical way following the evidence-based HR process to identify a solution."

SIOBHAN SHERIDAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 5
CONTRACT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

By sharing the EBHR approach with stakeholders and explaining that this is the way we are going to approach a particular issue, you will likely come up with a more effective solution which will already have stakeholder buy-in. In effect, stakeholders become partners in the process: by presenting the evidence we are using and the decisions we are proposing to make on the basis of that evidence, stakeholders can participate by being asked to challenge the evidence and decisions and sharing their views and perspectives.

"In order to make better use of evidence and data we first need to educate not only HR but also all your stakeholders including the C-Suite. They need to understand why it's important to have these practices around using evidence."

THOMAS DESARANNO, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO, MINDTHRIVEN

"So I put it out to the function saying this is what we're going to do. I would like representation from these different areas of the centers of excellence. Who would like to do it? That ensured that those that were interested joined in. There were also individuals who I've worked with in the past, who are more naturally evidence-based and interested in understanding problems."

KATE MATHIAS, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, CLYDE & CO

"Contracting with your key stakeholders in the business at the outset about their role and what is needed from them and getting their buy-in upfront to use their time during the process. We had a great base of senior stakeholders for example, almost like a working group, who understood this work from start to finish."

SARA NURSAW, HEAD OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

"Educate your executive team and other business stakeholders. Explain EBHR and tell them that this is the way HR is going to work so that they understand what you need from them and how it's going to benefit the organisation."

"When you genuinely come at this from the standpoint of evidence-based decision-making it means that right at the start of a piece of work you have a conversation with the client to say, 'Okay, what evidence do we want to look at together at the point that you're going to make this decision?' Executive or senior leadership teams will say we want you to bring a paper to a meeting in, say, December, and at that meeting, we're going to make a decision on X. So, well before that meeting, ask them 'what's all the evidence that you want in front of you to enable you to make that decision?' Having that conversation upfront makes things quicker."

SIOBHAN SHERIDAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 6
LEADERSHIP PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN DEVELOPING EBHR

We know that EBHR is not yet widely-practised within the profession and may seem strange and difficult for many practitioners as it represents a different and more challenging way of working. To make EBHR seem both desirable and do-able HR leaders have an important role to play in explaining what it means, demonstrating the benefits, and helping it become the norm rather than the exception.

"I think leadership from the top is really important and creating an appetite and an excitement around it in the senior leadership team, rather than people thinking you know, it's just another thing we have to do."

PHILIPPA BONAY, DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

"Leadership really matters and how the leaders behave and set the tone around analytics really matters. Some people are comfortable with data and some not so much. However, the tone that's been set by the entire leadership team is one where there is no discussion at an executive team level that is evidence-free. We are constantly asking 'what does the data say?' We've probably been doing that for several years. And when you do that, there's an expectation of the teams that work to you, that data-driven HR decision-making is the norm, not the exception. And the more you do that, the more it becomes part of the fabric of the way you do your HR business even if you personally are uncomfortable and want to go on gut instinct or whatever."

STEVE BRIGHT, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES, NORTHROP GRUMMAN

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 7
ROLE MODELLING EBHR BEHAVIOURS

Another way in which leadership can play a role is specifically through role-modelling essential EBHR behaviours. Such behaviours include: asking lots of questions; routinely looking for and using evidence; encouraging colleagues to slow down before taking action to give time to develop understanding; admitting previous mistakes and flawed thinking; building cases for intervention based on a detailed analysis of the evidence. The more leaders engage in these behaviours the more others will realise not only which behaviours are required but come to understand why it helps the function.

"It's very much role modelling. You have to say 'what is the data telling us? What's the hypothesis we've got? What is the data we've got? Do we have it? Don't we have it? Let's go and get it if we haven't got it. Let's figure out what it's actually telling us before we do anything else.' Now it's just integrated into the conversation. It's second nature and it's become muscle memory."

STEVE BRIGHT, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES, NORTHROP GRUMMAN

"Some of it's about role modelling and the way HR professionals conduct themselves in either an executive team or a HR leadership team. The questions they ask and the standards they set. So if you're going to present a recommendation for action, or if you're going to assess how well something's going, be really clear and base it around data, evidence and reasoning."

IAIN MCKENDRICK, VP HR STRATEGY PLANNING AND ANALYTICS, VOLVO GROUP

"I think some of it is role modelling, when people have seen that those conversations [about evidence] work well both as a practitioner and for someone else within the business. They learn to value that process of understanding the data and evidence that you have available and how to get greater insight through that evidence."

"I am very data driven, both quantitative and qualitative, and I talk about it and role model it a lot. Using evidence, taking action from it, then using evidence to see if that action is effective. That's what I always say: use the data to determine your actions then use the data to determine whether those actions have been effective or not. It's just about encouraging people to do it all the time and to not be scared. It's not some big thing. It is absolutely what we do every day."

NEIL MORRISON, GROUP HR DIRECTOR, SEVERN TRENT

"I think it's really important to talk about when you've realised your own thinking was flawed. I try and do this with my teams early on now."

SIOBHAN SHERIDAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 8
TAKE STOCK AND START FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOW

If we feel we don't have enough of the right types of evidence it can seem difficult or even impossible to gather and then use evidence. However, from an EBHR perspective it's important just to start with where you are now – with what you've got – and build from there.

"Just start from where you are. Try to think about the quality of the data that you're using and don't be overly ambitious. It's possible to produce a lot of analytics output which has no insight in it. So rather, start with what are your major business problems this year that you think you're trying to solve? What are the two or three data points that you think might show that? Can you get hold of them and then what's the insight on them? And keep having the conversation. Once you reach the limit of the insight you're going to get into the problem, then you can say, Okay, well, how do we solve that?"

KATE MATHIAS, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, CLYDE & CO

"One of the most important things is taking stock of what data we have. Gain a very clear picture of all your data points from quantitative and qualitative data and really understand them because many different initiatives will happen across an organisation. So bring that all together before embarking on anything to get a sense of that landscape and know where you're starting from."

IRENE UWEJEYAH, PROGRAMME MANAGER, DEI STRATEGY, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

"Take the opportunities when they present themselves to introduce aspects of EBHR thinking rather than seeing it only as an end-to-end beautifully designed process. Start from wherever you are and with what you've got and apply some EBHR thinking by breaking down the EBHR process into bite-size chunks, whether that's ways of thinking about how you're solving problems, how you're getting data, and how you're currently consuming evidence and becoming influenced by what you find."

JACKIE WESTERMAN, HEAD OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, CONTENT DIVISION, BBC

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 9
DIFFERENT SOURCES AND TYPES OF EVIDENCE BUILD A CLEARER EVIDENCE PICTURE

One of the key principles of EBHR is that we use evidence of different types from different sources. When we do this, it helps us triangulate the data and get a better understanding of what might be happening. It also helps us to gain a deeper understanding of what the evidence from one source is telling us by placing it in the context of the evidence from other sources, including legal advice.

"I always encourage people to listen to what people are saying – so the quantitative and qualitative. Use that quantitative data to have good conversations: 'gosh, the data looks like it's telling us something, is that true? Let's go and ask'."

PHILIPPA BONAY, DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

"There's a tendency to try and be almost too analytical and too data driven. But understanding people's opinion and sentiment and experience of the world in the context of work is valuable. My advice would be lean into that which is more subjective because often that's where the nuggets are. And then your other data can help you validate that or maybe even disprove it. But don't ignore one. Don't go too analytical or equally, don't go too sentiment driven. Try and find a balance because I think there's richness in both."

GRAEME CLARKE, GROUP HEAD OF PEOPLE, MOTT MACDONALD

"Using a lot of evidence of different types, the qualitative and the quantitative and the external together, it's possible to do something that initially people would think is not possible or sensible for the organisation to do."

KATE MATHIAS, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, CLYDE & CO

"A lot of our advice incorporates different types of information. We might be asked a question and our starting point would be to spell out the legal risks of different options. But we would also answer the question in relation to the commercial and organisational context of the client's business and draw on our experience of what other companies are doing in relation to the issue."

ROB BRIGGS, EMPLOYMENT SENIOR ASSOCIATE, BIRD & BIRD

PRACTICAL ADVICE THEME 10
INVOLVE THE WHOLE TEAM – DON'T LEAVE IT TO SPECIALISTS

There is sometimes a temptation to leave tasks that seem technical to a few specialists within the team or function. In the case of EBHR this is a mistake as it's an approach that works best when it's integrated into the work of the whole function. This doesn't mean that everyone can or should do every aspect of EBHR but, rather, that we develop a widespread and shared understanding of its basic principles, the process it entails and the benefits it brings.

"Everybody needs to be included in this process. For example, by running a workshop with different departments, such as payroll and recruitment, you can see how different parts of the function view the data and what kinds of data and evidence are useful for them."

THOMAS DESARANNO, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO, MINDTHRIVEN

"Increase the impact at lower cost. Don't make it about the two or three people in analytics, make it about the whole HR function, how we show up, how we drive interventions and how we add value. For that I think you need 80% of the function on-board. Then it becomes a team sport, rather than something that the small technical team does in isolation."

THOMAS RASMUSSEN, VICE PRESIDENT, ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING, SHELL

"Educate your whole team. Evidence-based practice is something that the whole of the HR function needs to understand, not just a part of the HR function. So I'd say make sure you've educated everybody in the basics."

"Try to avoid making EBHR only about two or three people. Quite often we try to make things specialisms. But I think EBHR is a capability you need to build right across your function. And capabilities require not just skills in particular individuals, they require an environment, tools, processes and systems in order to build organisational capability. So I think I'd avoid creating an EBHR unit within the function."

SIOBHAN SHERIDAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY

3.3
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This section has presented and discussed three practical cases involving EBHR and presented advice from professionals about how to get better at doing EBHR. The cases demonstrate that EBHR is certainly doable and the advice from experienced practitioners shows there are many things we can do to improve our use of EBHR.

In the next section we present a range of practical tools and frameworks – the EBHR Toolkit – designed for you to use to help build EBHR capacity and capability in your function.

4.0
THE EBHR TOOLKIT

4.1
THE EBHR TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION

Our discussions with HR professionals revealed a strong and widespread desire to make better-informed decisions in order to improve the effectiveness of the function and add greater value to the business. While some progress has been made towards implementing some parts of EBHR there was also a recognition that more could be done.

We also asked what would help HR get better at doing EBHR. The most common suggestion was the provision of simple and practical guidance which HR teams can pick up and immediately use.

This is exactly what the EBHR Toolkit sets out to do.

As a reminder, the logic of EBHR is that the effectiveness of the HR function is increased by using the best available evidence to more precisely identify the most important business problems (or opportunities) and then doing the same to identify a solutions (or interventions) that are most likely to be effective. This process allows us to get much better answers to two key questions:

1 What's going on?

2 And, what can we do about it?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

? Do we need to apply EBHR to everything we do?

No. Sometimes it's not appropriate or just not possible. A checklist *for helping you decide when to apply it is in this Toolkit.*

? Is it necessary to follow every single part of the process?

No. There may be practical constraints which mean you cannot follow the whole process and also good reasons why you should not follow the whole process. This is about making a better-informed decision, so even following parts of the process will help.

? Is it necessary to gather evidence from all four sources?

No. There may be practical constraints which mean you cannot get evidence from all the sources and good reasons why you do not need evidence from all four. This is about making a better-informed decision so even if you do not use evidence from all sources, using evidence from some will still help.

? What about things like experiments, innovation, trying new or 'cutting-edge' ideas? Where do they fit with EBHR?

Each of these approaches can be useful but only when the EBHR process has been completed and there is a clear need for an experiment or to innovate or to try new ideas. The EBHR process provides a good understanding of the problem or opportunity and a good understanding of possible solutions or interventions. An experiment may be useful to compare two or more possible solutions when it remains unclear which is likely to be more effective based on the evidence we have. We may choose to innovate when the evidence suggests that all the possible solutions identified are likely to be ineffective. We may try new or 'cutting edge' ideas when all the available approaches or ways of thinking about tackling the problem appear, based on the available evidence, to be unhelpful. However, we should still choose a new idea based on evidence. Also, most new or 'cutting edge' ideas turn out to be fads. A checklist *to help you identify likely fads is available in this Toolkit.*

? What about evaluation of interventions and calculating ROI?

These are both important HR activities which are only useful when the EBHR process has been completed. The choice of intervention or practice should be based on evidence which provides a good understanding of the problem and a good understanding of the likely most effective solution. It is simply not possible to evaluate an intervention without first specifying the goal of the intervention or the exact problem it aims to fix. Similarly, with ROI we need to be precise about what returns we are expecting the investment to bring. In other words, both evaluation and ROI depend on well-informed decisions about the problem and the solution.

? Should we integrate it with our team project planning?

Yes. Particularly when the project is large and important to the goals of the business. By integrating EBHR with the project plan it's possible to make sure enough of the right resources are available at each stage of the project and different members of the team are allocated particular tasks. This Toolkit contains an EBHR Process Model *and a* Sources of Evidence Framework *which can be integrated with or used to shape the project planning.*
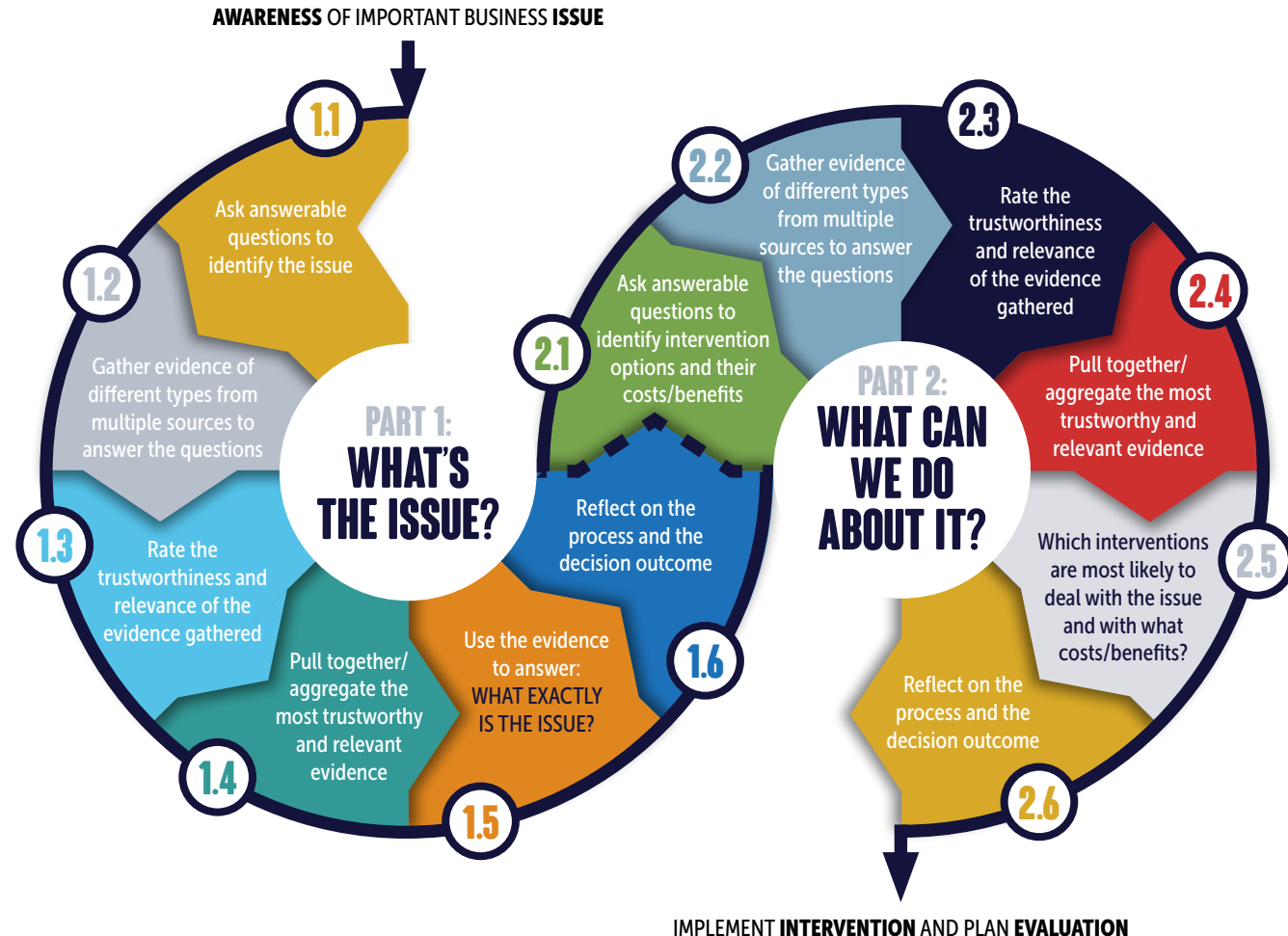
4.2
THE EBHR PROCESS

EBHR is a two-part process. The first part helps us make better-informed decisions about what are important problems/opportunities for the business. The second, if the problems are clearly identified, helps us to make better-informed decisions about solutions/interventions.
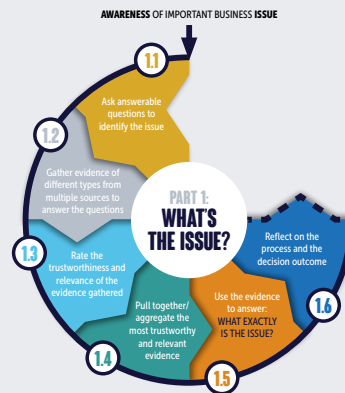
Adopting a structured and explicit process is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

The goals of the business will most strongly determine the importance of the problem/opportunity. These are best thought of as, presenting problems, in that they require further investigation and more precise definition. This is the purpose of Part 1 of the Model. Part 2 deals with how we can go about identifying the most likely solutions.

AWARENESS OF IMPORTANT BUSINESS ISSUE

PART 1:
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

1.1 Ask answerable questions to identify the issue

1.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources to answer the questions

1.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered

1.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

1.5 Use the evidence to answer: WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISSUE?

1.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

PART 2:
WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

2.1 Ask answerable questions to identify intervention options and their costs/benefits

2.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources to answer the questions

2.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered

2.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

2.5 Which interventions are most likely to deal with the issue and with what costs/benefits?

2.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

IMPLEMENT INTERVENTION AND PLAN EVALUATION

4.3
QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR EACH STAGE OF THE PROCESS

Here, using the example of a presenting business problem of **high employee turnover**, we provide some examples of the questions and activities that help you move through the process to make better-informed judgements about both the problem and potential solutions.

EBHR PROCESS PART 1:
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

AWARENESS OF IMPORTANT BUSINESS **ISSUE**

PART 1: WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

1.1 Ask answerable questions to identify the issue
1.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources to answer the questions
1.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered
1.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence
1.5 Use the evidence to answer: WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISSUE?
1.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

1.1 Ask answerable questions to identify the issue

- What exactly is the presenting problem of 'high employee turnover'? Why is it a problem?
- Where in the business is turnover happening?
- Who is leaving?
- What is the turnover rate?
- Are there any identifiable trends?
- How does the turnover rate compare to similar organisations?
- Why in general is turnover a problem? Why is it a problem for us here? What are the consequences?
- What explains our turnover?

1.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources *(see* Evidence Sources Framework*)* to answer the questions

- Look across the four sources to collect evidence that will help you to answer the questions and so more precisely understand the nature of the problem of 'high turnover'.
- Start by gathering evidence to answer your questions from stakeholders – particularly the senior management team, line managers and employees – then move on to the other three sources.
- Devise a method for recording and storing the evidence you collect that's accessible to the whole team.

1.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered *(see* Evidence Quality and Relevance Framework*)*

- Do we understand the evidence we have gathered?
- How was it gathered?
- Is it likely to be biased or incomplete and in which ways?
- How credible is each source and how do we know?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most trustworthy?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most relevant to our particular context?
- Which evidence should we definitely use, possibly use, and definitely not use?

1.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

- Go back to the questions asked to help identify the presenting problem of 'high turnover':
  - Where is the business is turnover happening?
  - Who is leaving?
  - What is the turnover rate?
  - How does the turnover rate compare to similar organisations?
  - Why in general is turnover a problem? Why is it a problem for us here? What are the consequences?
  - What explains our turnover?
- Pull together the most trustworthy and relevant evidence from each of the sources that answers each question.
- Display or summarise the evidence that answers each of the questions about 'high turnover'.

1.5 Use the evidence to answer: WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISSUE?

- Given the available evidence what is the most accurate answer to each question?
- Returning to the starting point, what exactly is the presenting problem of 'high employee turnover'? Why is it a problem?
- Is there one discrete problem or several?
- How serious are the turnover problems for the business? Do we need to intervene?

1.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

- How easy or difficult was the process?
- Which parts were completed more or less fully and why?
- How do you feel about gaps?
- How did following the process change your initial perceptions of the problem(s)?
- How confident are you that you have an accurate picture the turnover problem(s)?
- How would you do it differently next time?

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EBHR PROCESS PART 2:
WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

PART 2: **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?**

IMPLEMENT **INTERVENTION** AND PLAN **EVALUATION**

2.1 Ask answerable questions to identify intervention options and their costs/benefits

- Given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what techniques are most likely to be effective and will they be effective here?
- What are the goals of our solutions? What exactly are we trying to achieve in relation to reducing turnover?
- What are the benefits and costs/risks? What is the likely return on investment of potential solutions?
- Are there possible unintended negative consequences of potential solutions?
- How will we evaluate to find out if our goals have been achieved?

2.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources (see Evidence Sources Framework) to answer the questions

- Look across the four sources to collect evidence that will help you to more precisely identify a range of possible solutions and understand which are more likely to work.
- Start by gathering evidence to answer your questions from stakeholders – particularly the senior management team, line managers and employees – then move on to the other three sources.
- Devise a method for recording and storing the evidence you collect that's accessible to the whole team.

2.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered
(see Evidence Quality and Relevance Framework)

- Do we understand the evidence we have gathered?
- How was it gathered?
- Is it likely to be biased or incomplete and in which ways?
- How credible is each source and how do we know?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most trustworthy?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most relevant to our particular context?
- Which evidence should we definitely use, possibly use, and definitely not use?

2.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

- Go back to the questions asked to help identify solutions to the problem of 'high turnover':
  - Given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what solutions are most likely to be effective?
  - What are the goals of our solutions? What exactly are we trying to achieve in relation to reducing turnover?
  - What are the benefits and costs? What is the likely return on investment of potential solutions?
  - Are there possible unintended negative consequences or risks?
  - What techniques can be used to reduce turnover, how effective are they and will they be effective here?
  - How can the intervention be implemented here?
  - What is likely to happen to the turnover if we do nothing?
- Pull together the most trustworthy and relevant evidence from each of the sources that answers each question.
- Display or summarise the evidence that answers each of the questions about potential solutions.

2.5 Which interventions are most likely to deal with the issue and with what costs/benefits?

- Given the available evidence, what is the most accurate answer to each question?
- Returning to the starting point and given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what techniques are most likely to be effective and will they be effective here?
- Is there one discrete goal for our interventions or several? How can we evaluate whether goals are met?
- Which solutions are most effective and cost effective?
- Is a single or multiple solutions required?
- What about unintended consequences or risks and how can they be managed?

2.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

- How easy or difficult was the process?
- Which parts were completed more or less fully and why?
- How do you feel about gaps?
- How did following the process change your initial perceptions of potential solutions?
- How confident are you that you have an accurate picture of which solutions to use?
- How would you do it differently next time?

4.4
WHEN SHOULD WE USE *(AND NOT USE)* EBHR?

EBHR serves a vital role in increasing the effectiveness of the HR function to help the business achieve its goals. However, this does not mean we should *always* adopt this approach to every problem and in every situation.

WHEN SHOULD WE USE EBHR?

These are the situational factors we should take into account when deciding to use EBHR. If the answer to most of these questions is *'yes'* then it makes sense to adopt EBHR for this particular issue. If the answers to most of these questions is *'no'* then EBHR is probably not necessary.

Importance: Is this issue crucial to the objectives of the business?

Resources: Will dealing with this issue be costly in relation to time, people, money, other resources?

Risk: If we get this wrong could it have serious legal or other types of consequences for the business?

Accountability: Will we be asked at some point in the future to provide an audit trail showing the evidence we used to identify the issue and the way we chose to deal with it?

Ethics: Do we have an ethical responsibility to make careful, well-informed decisions about the exact nature of this issue and what we can do about it? Do we have a duty of care?

WHEN SHOULD WE NOT USE EBHR?

In general, we should not use EBHR if we have no or little opportunity to make well-informed decisions about the issue and possible solutions. In other words, when we can't really choose what to do. This can happen for two main reasons:

1. The first is **compliance**. For a variety of reasons, we may simply have to implement a policy or practice because we are required to do so.

2. The second involves **timing**. When it's just too late to start the EBHR process because decisions have already been made which can't be changed regarding the nature of the issue and/or which solution should be implemented.

4.5
STARTING THE EBHR PROCESS: WHAT EXACTLY IS A BUSINESS ISSUE?

The EBHR process always starts with a business issue. Why? Because it's only by focusing on what's important to the business that HR can become more effective in helping the business achieve its objectives.

But what exactly is (and is not) a business issue? And how can we know?

WHAT IS A BUSINESS ISSUE?

A business issue is any challenge or opportunity faced by the business which has direct and significant implications for crucial outcomes for the business such as:

- Performance (financial, ESG)
- Size (growth, size stability, size reduction)
- Survival

In other words, **a business issue is something that is likely to affect the goals or objectives of the business.**

Business issues may also **be linked to the current strategic imperatives of the business** such as:

- Innovation
- Cost reduction
- Quality enhancement
- Customer service
- Flexibility

Another way of identifying a business issue is to ask and gather evidence to answer the following question:

If we choose to ignore this how likely is it to have negative consequences for the objectives of our business?

If the answer is *'quite or very likely'* then it is probably a business issue that deserves our attention.

WHAT IS NOT A BUSINESS ISSUE?

As noted earlier, there are many HR activities that are required but not directly connected to business goals or outcomes. Examples of such activities include those that are necessary to meet legal obligations or for operational reasons, for example:

- Payroll
- Processing job applicants

These are important activities but not business issues.

There are *other* issues that are not business issues that **may attract HR's attention and sometimes shape HR activity** such as:

- Identifying then simply copying the HR practices of other organisations.
- Reading then implementing the advice of business gurus and thought leaders.
- Adopting HR fads and fashions (see Fad Detector).
- Complying with insistent demands from senior stakeholders to implement a particular practice or policy.

Another way of identifying a *non*-business issue is to ask and gather evidence to answer the following question:

If we choose to ignore this how likely is it to have negative consequences for the objectives of our business?

If the answer is *'quite or very unlikely'* or *'we have no way of knowing'* then it is probably not a business issue which deserves our attention.
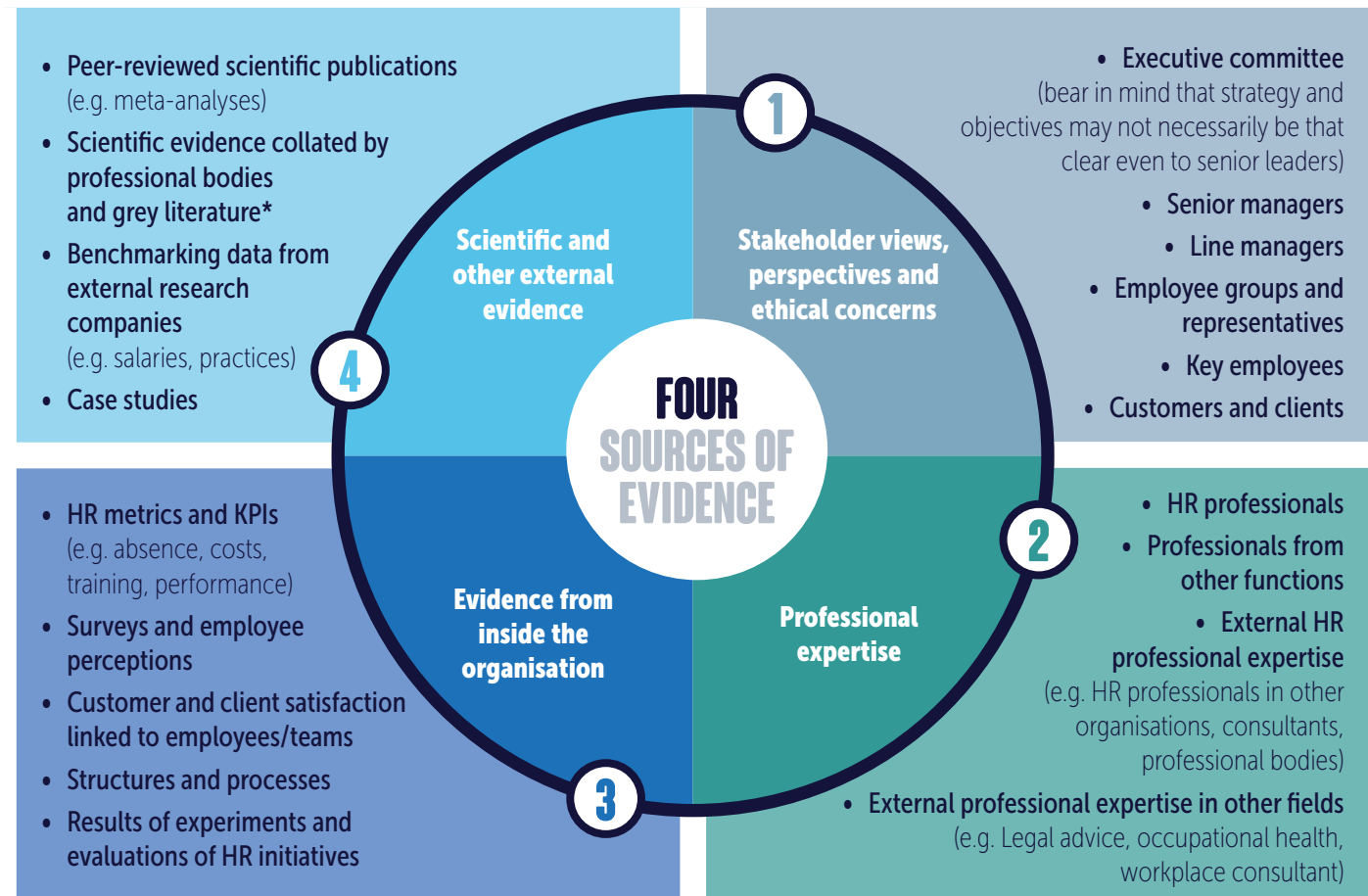
4.6
SOURCES OF EVIDENCE FRAMEWORK

EBHR draws on four main sources of evidence. Examples of the types of evidence and information found in each source are provided in the Framework.

Incorporating multiple sources and types of evidence and information is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

EBHR is about answering questions to make better-informed decisions. Therefore, we need to search for evidence that best answers our questions. Some sources or types of evidence will be more or less relevant depending on the question we are asking.

*Grey literature refers to information produced by a range of organisations which is not part of commercial publishing in that publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body. For example, white papers produced by consultancies.

FOUR SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

① Scientific and other external evidence
- Peer-reviewed scientific publications (e.g. meta-analyses)
- Scientific evidence collated by professional bodies and grey literature*
- Benchmarking data from external research companies (e.g. salaries, practices)
- Case studies

① Stakeholder views, perspectives and ethical concerns
- Executive committee (bear in mind that strategy and objectives may not necessarily be that clear even to senior leaders)
- Senior managers
- Line managers
- Employee groups and representatives
- Key employees
- Customers and clients

② Professional expertise
- HR professionals
- Professionals from other functions
- External HR professional expertise (e.g. HR professionals in other organisations, consultants, professional bodies)
- External professional expertise in other fields (e.g. Legal advice, occupational health, workplace consultant)

③ Evidence from inside the organisation
- HR metrics and KPIs (e.g. absence, costs, training, performance)
- Surveys and employee perceptions
- Customer and client satisfaction linked to employees/teams
- Structures and processes
- Results of experiments and evaluations of HR initiatives

4.7
CHECKLIST FOR RATING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELEVANCE OF EVIDENCE

EBHR is not about using *all* the available evidence, but rather focusing on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence. This helps to avoid the *garbage in, garbage out* problem. Trustworthy means that we have good reasons to believe the evidence is reasonably accurate. Relevant means the evidence actually answers the questions we are asking and applies to our organisation and context.

Focusing on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT...	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	VERY CONFIDENT
You understand *how* the evidence was collected?	1	2	3
You understand *what* the evidence is telling you in relation to your question?	1	2	3
The evidence can in principle provide an answer to your question?	1	2	3
The evidence is largely *unbiased* (e.g. not under- or over-estimating)?	1	2	3
The evidence is largely *error-free*?	1	2	3

SCORING KEY	RED ZONE	AMBER ZONE	GREEN ZONE
The lowest possible score for relevance and trustworthiness is 5 and the maximum possible score is 15.	**Between 5-7** probably not relevant and trustworthy **do not use**	**Between 8-11** probably relevant and trustworthy **do use but with caution**	**Between 12-15** likely relevant and trustworthy **do use**

4.8
BIAS CHECKER

We all have biases that can strongly shape the way we see things. Although it's very difficult to remove bias completely it is possible to reflect on whether we are likely to be biased and to take steps, such as asking other people or looking for more evidence, to help reduce the impact of biases.

It is worth reflecting both individually and as a team how you scored on this Bias Checker and why. It may also be useful to ask members of the team to rate each other on these questions as well as self-rate.

Some ways of managing bias in the EBHR process with the team include:

- Discussing with project team members about what each feels the problem and solution may be *before* you start collecting evidence.
- Specifying and agreeing in *advance* what evidence will be collect to answer the questions.
- Team members can ask each other if they can see any potential biases in the way they are going about the EBHR process. In general, we are much better at spotting other people's biases than we are at spotting our own.
- Actively seeking disconfirming evidence.
- Monitoring the feelings of team members as the questions start to be answered by the evidence. For example, are people rather disappointed or particularly pleased by the answers? Such feelings *may* indicate pre-existing bias.

THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU WENT ABOUT THE EBHR PROCESS... ANSWER:	I WAS DOING THIS	I WAS POSSIBLY DOING THIS	I WAS NOT DOING THIS
Were you confident you *already knew* what the problem (or opportunity) was *before* you started collecting evidence?	2	1	0
Were you confident you *already knew* which solution (or intervention) was likely to work *before* you started collecting evidence?	2	1	0
While gathering evidence, were you at any point aware that you were trying to find evidence that supported views you already held?	2	1	0
While gathering evidence, were you at any point trying to ignore evidence which contradicted views you already held?	2	1	0
Do you feel you had a vested interest in finding a particular answer to your question? Did you hope that the evidence would provide the answer you wanted to find?	2	1	0
Were you prepared to change your mind about the problem or solution depending on the evidence obtained?	0	1	2

SCORING KEY
The lowest possible score is zero (indicating that you feel you were relatively unbiased) and the maximum possible score is 10 (indicating you feel you were relatively biased).

BIAS ZONE
If you scored two or more
it indicates you may have been somewhat biased in the way you collected and evaluated evidence on this particular occasion.

4.9
FAD DETECTOR CHECKLIST

HR fads are new (or presented as such) 'cutting edge' ideas and techniques. Typically, they are quickly and widely-adopted and often dropped just as quickly when it's realised they are not having the desired effect and are then replaced by the next latest idea.

Quite reasonably, HR professionals often wonder if 'the latest thing' they've just read or heard about is just a fad or something more valuable.

Drawing on Miller and Hartwick (2002) here is a list of red flags for fads. If most of these apply to a new idea or technique it means that idea is most likely a fad and should be avoided.

RED FLAGS FOR FADS

Fads are a very important barrier to EBHR in two key ways.

1 First, they **distract** HR's attention and energy away from its core task: adding value by making well-informed decisions about the most important business issues HR needs to tackle, and implementing solutions that are most likely to work.

2 Second, because fads are by definition new, they are the practices for which there is currently the **least evidence**. While some fads stand the test of time, most do not, hence following fads is bad for the HR function and the business.

☐ 🚩 **Attractive** – they are appealing, people like them and really want to apply them.

☐ 🚩 **Simple** – quickly understood.

☐ 🚩 **Prescriptive** – tell you what you should do.

☐ 🚩 **Falsely encouraging** – promise to have strong panacea-like effects on a very wide range of HR and business outcomes.

☐ 🚩 **One-size-fits-all** – they work everywhere in any context.

☐ 🚩 **Easy to cut-and-paste** – can be quickly partially implemented.

☐ 🚩 **In tune with the zeitgeist** – fit with current ideas.

☐ 🚩 **Novel, not radical** – they *sound* new but usually only superficially different to what's gone before.

☐ 🚩 **Legitimised by gurus, disciples and 'cool' organisations** – their credibility comes from the opinions of influencers, their followers and unscientific examples from current superstar businesses rather than a reasonable quantity of good quality evidence.

☐ 🚩 **FOMO-inducing** – the idea of *not* following the fad creates a Fear of Missing Out or somehow falling behind others.

☐ 🚩 **Without focused purpose** – the question *'for which problem is this practice the answer?'* can be difficult to answer if the practice is a fad.

4.10
IN A NUTSHELL:
AN EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

EVIDENCE-BASED HR?

1 The two-part EBHR process is detailed and takes time and, as discussed in the When should we use (and not use) EBHR? section of the EBHR Toolkit, it makes sense to follow the process as much as possible if you answer *'yes'* to most of these questions:

Importance: Is this issue crucial to the objectives of the business?

Resources: Will dealing with this issue be costly in relation to time, people, money, other resources?

Risk: If we get this wrong could it have serious legal or other types of consequences for the business?

Accountability: Will we be asked at some point in the future to provide an audit trail showing the evidence we used to identify the issue and the way we chose to deal with it?

Ethics: Do we have an ethical responsibility to make careful, well-informed decisions about the exact nature of this issue and what we can do about it? Do we have a duty of care?

But what about a situation in which it seems somewhat appropriate to use EBHR but it is not quite clear whether we can or need to follow the whole process?

Is there a way of following some parts of the process but not in as much depth or detail? Can we quickly check the extent to which we are following (or not) the basics of EBHR in a current project?

The answer is *'yes'* – so long as we remember the three principles of EBHR.

2 The three principles of EBHR:

PRINCIPLE 1 Incorporate multiple sources and types of evidence and information

PRINCIPLE 2 Adopt a structured and explicit process of gathering and using evidence

PRINCIPLE 3 Focus on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

Here are five questions based on these principles designed to help you follow some aspects of the EBHR process. This is useful if you don't have much time or are unsure whether it's necessary to follow the full process.

EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

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CORPORATE RESEARCH FORUM

EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

The purpose of this Cheat Sheet Checklist is to ask you to rate a number of questions. Your answers will help you identify the extent which to you are adopting something like an EBHR approach in your current project or activity and help you reflect on whether you can and should do more.

Thinking about your current project, consider your answers to each of these questions.

A

Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We started with a clear and important business issue.

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Not at all accurate   Completely accurate

B

Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We asked and then answered focused questions to *first* identify the *problem*.

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Not at all accurate   Completely accurate

C

Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We asked and then answered focused questions to identify possible solutions.

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Not at all accurate   Completely accurate

D

Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We answered all our questions by gathering evidence from a *range of sources* (at least 3-4) and of different types.

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Not at all accurate   Completely accurate

E

Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We explicitly considered the relevance and trustworthiness of the evidence.

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Not at all accurate   Completely accurate

SCORING KEY

Add up the percentages you rated your behaviour for each of the five questions. The maximum possible total score is 500.

If your score is less than 350 (equating to an average of less than **30%** on each question) then it's possible to conclude that *your behaviours are NOT strongly reflecting those we would expect to see in an EBHR project.*

If your score is 350 or over (equating to an average of more than **70%** on each question) then it's possible to conclude that *your behaviours ARE strongly reflecting those we would expect to see in an EBHR project.*

How to improve your score on each question.

How to improve your score on each question.

If you want to improve your overall score for this project, look at the scores for each question and consider changing your behaviours in the way suggested to improve the score on that item.

A **We started with a clear and important business issue.**

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit to develop your understanding of what *is* and *is not* a business issue: Starting the EBHR Process: What Exactly is a Business Issue?
- Looking at the issue you started with and unpacking it by asking more questions such as: what exactly is this issue? Is it one or many issues? Do senior stakeholders (e.g. leaders) believe this to be an issue?
- Identifying whether it is a business issue or another type of issue (e.g. compliance) which is not really appropriate for an EBHR project.

B **We asked and then answered focused questions to *first* identify the *problem*.**

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: The EBHR Process.
- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: Questions and Activities for Each Stage of the Process Part 1: What's the Issue?
- Reviewing the questions and answers you already have to identify key gaps.
- Designing and answering more probing questions to identify the problem.

C **We asked and then answered focused questions to identify possible solutions.**

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: The EBHR Process.
- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: Questions and Activities for Each Stage of the Process Part 2: What Can we Do About It?
- Reviewing the questions and answers you already have to identify key gaps.
- Designing and answering more probing questions to identify the problem.

D **We answered all our questions by gathering evidence from a *range of sources* (at least 3-4) and of different types.**

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: Sources of Evidence Framework.
- Identify which sources you did not use so much and go back and try to answer your questions from 2 and 3 by drawing on the underused sources.
- Identify which types of evidence you did not use so much and go back and try to answer your questions from 2 and 3 by drawing on the underused types.

E **We explicitly considered the relevance and trustworthiness of the evidence.**

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: Checklist for Rating the Trustworthiness and Relevance of Evidence.
- Going back to the evidence you have already collected and rating the most important parts of evidence for their trustworthiness or relevance.
- Focusing more on evidence which seems trustworthy and using it to help inform your decisions.
- Focusing less on or ignoring evidence which seems less trustworthy and relevant and avoid using it to help inform your decisions.
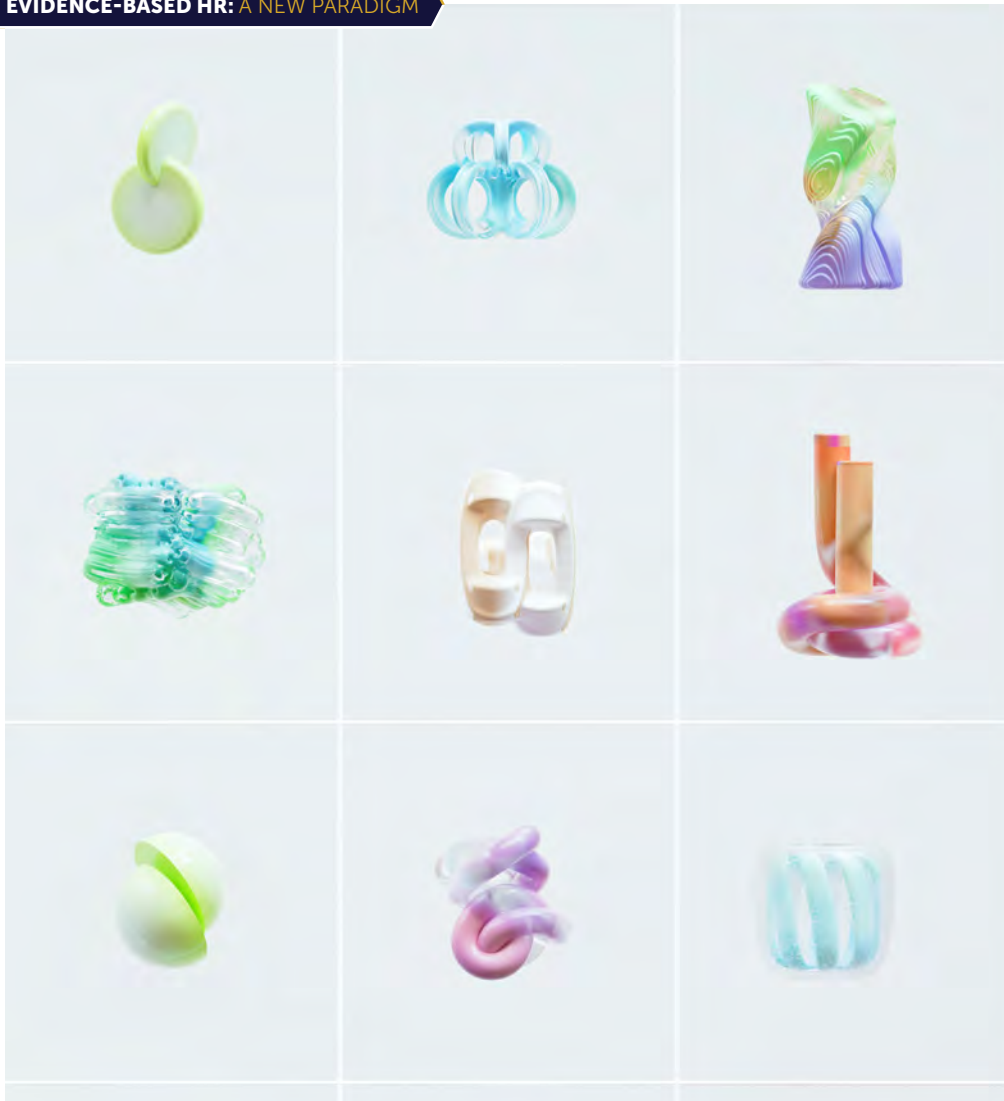
EVIDENCE-BASED HR:
A NEW PARADIGM

Throughout this report we have repeated a simple argument:

HR needs to significantly improve its effectiveness.

The solution is straightforward though not necessarily easy – we must get better at making well-informed decisions to guide our actions. This means making decisions where we first identify the most important problems faced by the business and then doing the same for identifying the most likely solutions.

In other words, we must improve our ability to answer two fundamental questions:

1 **What's going on?**

2 **And, what can we do about it?**

Evidence-based practice has evolved to help professionals in a range of contexts get better at doing precisely this. EBHR serves the same purpose for HR.

The fundamental benefit of EBHR is that it means that **our activity, practices, policies and interventions are much more likely to help the business.** There are also a wide range of more specific benefits as discussed in <u>Section 1</u> of this report:

> **Better HR focus on business issues.**

Helps HR mitigate risks.

Allows HR to prioritise more effectively.

Increases the value and hence credibility of the HR function.

Reduces the waste of resources (financial, effort, goodwill).

Enhances ethical standards around HR practice.

Helps the learning and development of the HR function.

5.0
EPILOGUE:
WHY EBHR?

There are also significant costs if HR does not adopt EBHR – or something very much like it. The major and most general cost to the profession and to the businesses we serve is:

we will NOT become significantly more effective and in supporting the business.

The more specific costs of not adopting EBHR are readily identified by considering what happens if we fail to realise the benefits listed above. *We will, for example, continue to focus insufficiently on business issues and continue to waste resources on misdirected and ineffective practices.*

There is another way of thinking about the costs of NOT adopting EBHR.
If you're not doing Evidence-Based HR, what type of HR are you doing? There are alternatives >>

Why EBHR?

The argument for adopting it is a reasonably sound one. But, if you need any more convincing, just consider how you feel about these alternatives to EBHR. This probably tells you all you need to know.

ALTERNATIVE	*WHAT IS BEING USED INSTEAD OF EVIDENCE?*
Eminence-based HR	The views of the most senior and experienced members of the function. HiPPO (Highest Paid Person's Opinion) decision-making rules.
Vehemence-based HR	Activity is driven by those opinions expressed with the greatest volume, force and confidence.
Eloquence-based HR	It's whatever the smooth-talkers and those with the gift of the gab say that takes precedence.
Obedience-based HR	Simply doing whatever you're told to do. When HR colleagues and business partners become order-takers.
Resemblance-based HR	Copying what other organisations are doing without thinking about it much. Unthinking benchmarking.
Defence-based HR	Whatever is the safest option. Doing the thing that is least likely to get us into trouble.
Indolence-based HR	Determine the level of effort required and then choose whichever course of action is easiest.
Haste-based HR	Time is the most important factor. Whatever can be done most quickly determines what happens.
Indulgence-based HR	Choosing to do whatever we think we are likely to enjoy doing the most.
Reverence-based HR	Looking around for whatever you feel is the coolest or most amazing or truly awesome thing and then doing it.

6.0
APPENDIX

6.1
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6.2
INTERVIEWEE LIST

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