

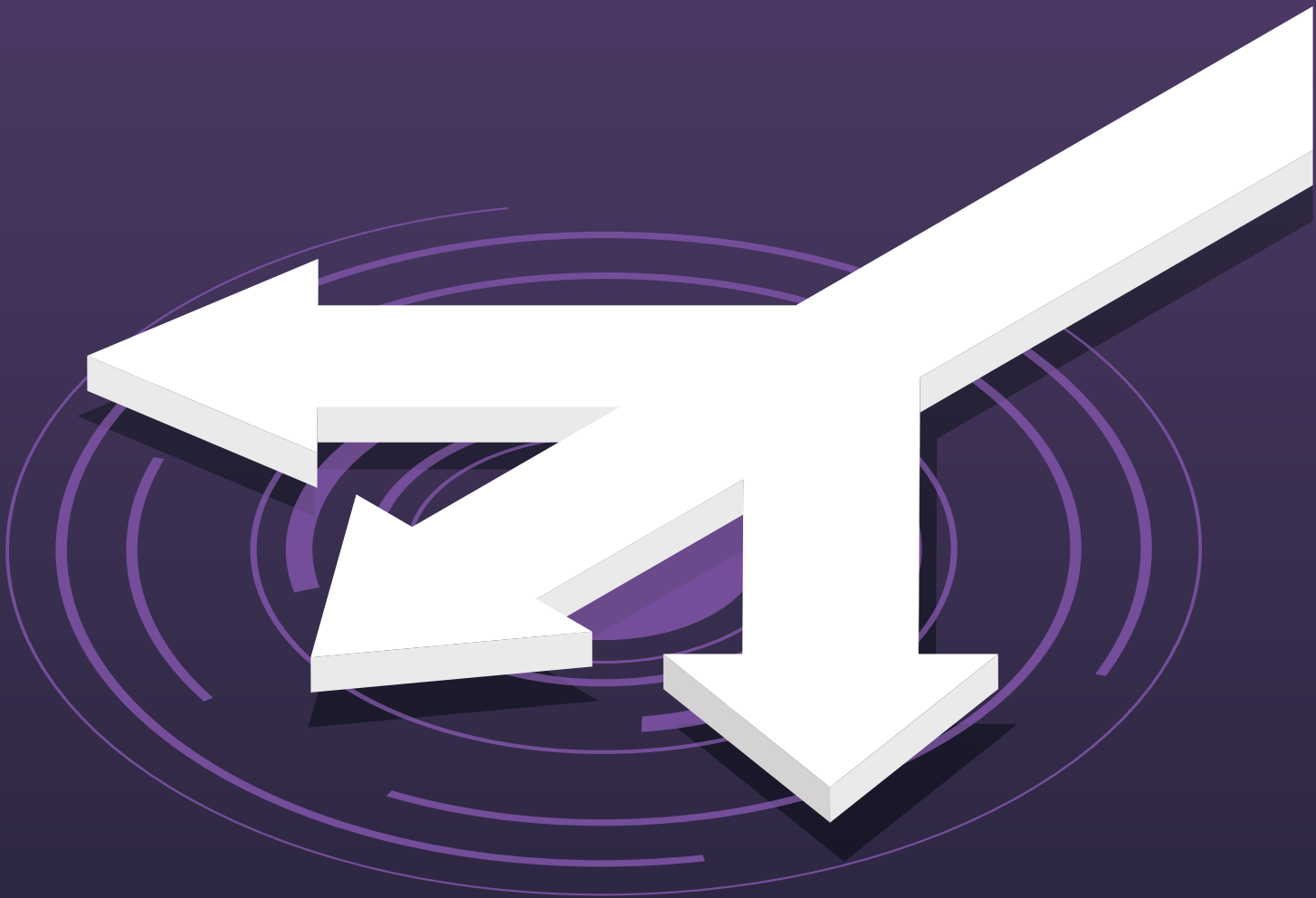


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How to Develop Evidence-based Decision-Making in Government

Innovations in Government
Capacity-Building



Executive Summary

Decision-makers are present at every level of government, spanning pay grades, roles, experience, and expertise. Whatever their responsibility, large or small, their professional judgment increasingly relies on evidence and data. Agencies have rolled out strategies and policies to promote evidence-based decision-making, tailoring the inputs to their contexts.

**Yet how well are
these strategies
taking root on
the ground**

?





This manual will explore the following questions:

1

What evidence-based decision-making is and why it matters?

2

How to examine the current state of data-driven decision-making?

3

How to evaluate and cultivate an evidence-oriented culture in government?

4

How to design an evidence strategy?

5

How to establish an evidence support system to break the silos?

6

How to enhance data literacy in government?

7

How to build capacity for evidence-driven decision making?

8

How to frame conversations to gather relevant evidence?

9

Misconceptions and pitfalls of evidence-driven decision making?

Afterwards, four case studies are considered, allowing readers to see the impact of evidence-based decision-making in the field.

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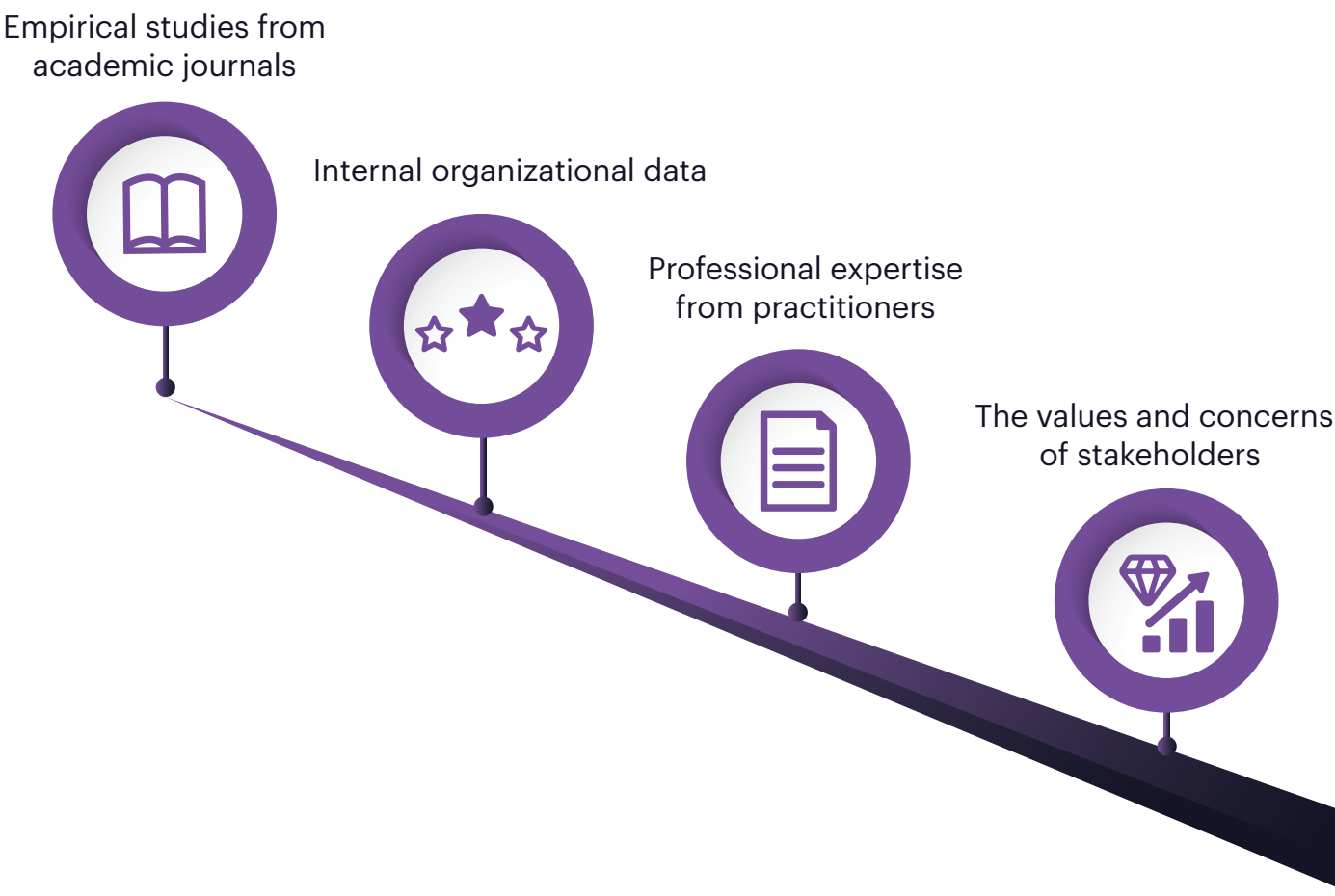
What is Evidence-Based Decision Making, and Why is it Important?

Policymakers often find themselves presented with ready-made solutions and asked to implement them. Yet these solutions do not always align with the actual needs of the people who will use the policy or service. Typically, the ideas have not been tested by end-users before implementation, leaving policymakers uncertain whether the intended outcomes will materialize.

Leaders, whose decisions can impact entire agencies or local communities, need a clear, reliable process for making such critical choices.

"Evidence-based decision-making (EBDM), sometimes referred to as evidence-based management, is a framework used by governments to ensure that all relevant facts are taken into account when making decisions."

Evidence-based decision-making (EBDM), also known as evidence-based management, is an approach that encourages professionals to use both quantitative and qualitative inputs to develop well-informed plans. When governments apply EBDM, they draw on four key sources of input:



These diverse forms of evidence—academic, internal, and experiential—must be assessed for quality to ensure decisions are based on the best available information.

While many decisions naturally involve some use of facts and data, what sets EBDM apart is its deliberate reliance on historical evidence as a foundation for action. The four evidence sources used in government decision-making will be explored in Section D.

Why is Evidence-Based Decision-Making Important?



It increases the chances of success

EBDM encourages careful planning based on solid data, reducing the risk of rushed decisions. Using proven methods supported by evidence helps professionals choose approaches more likely to succeed and reduces risks, especially in large-scale decisions.

It challenges assumptions

EBDM pushes agencies to consider new perspectives by bringing in a wide range of data, expert insights, and stakeholder feedback. This broader view can help overcome personal biases and lead to more thoughtful conclusions.

It promotes unbiased decisions

By relying on factual data and diverse input rather than individual opinions or emotions, EBDM supports objective, balanced, and justifiable decisions. This process can also democratize decision-making, giving weight to expert and stakeholder perspectives rather than just leadership's preferences.

It can boost employee engagement

EBDM involves listening to employees and considering their concerns before implementing changes. This inclusive approach can improve morale and satisfaction, as staff feel their voices are heard and valued. Thoughtful decisions based on real input can also improve organizational culture and outcomes.

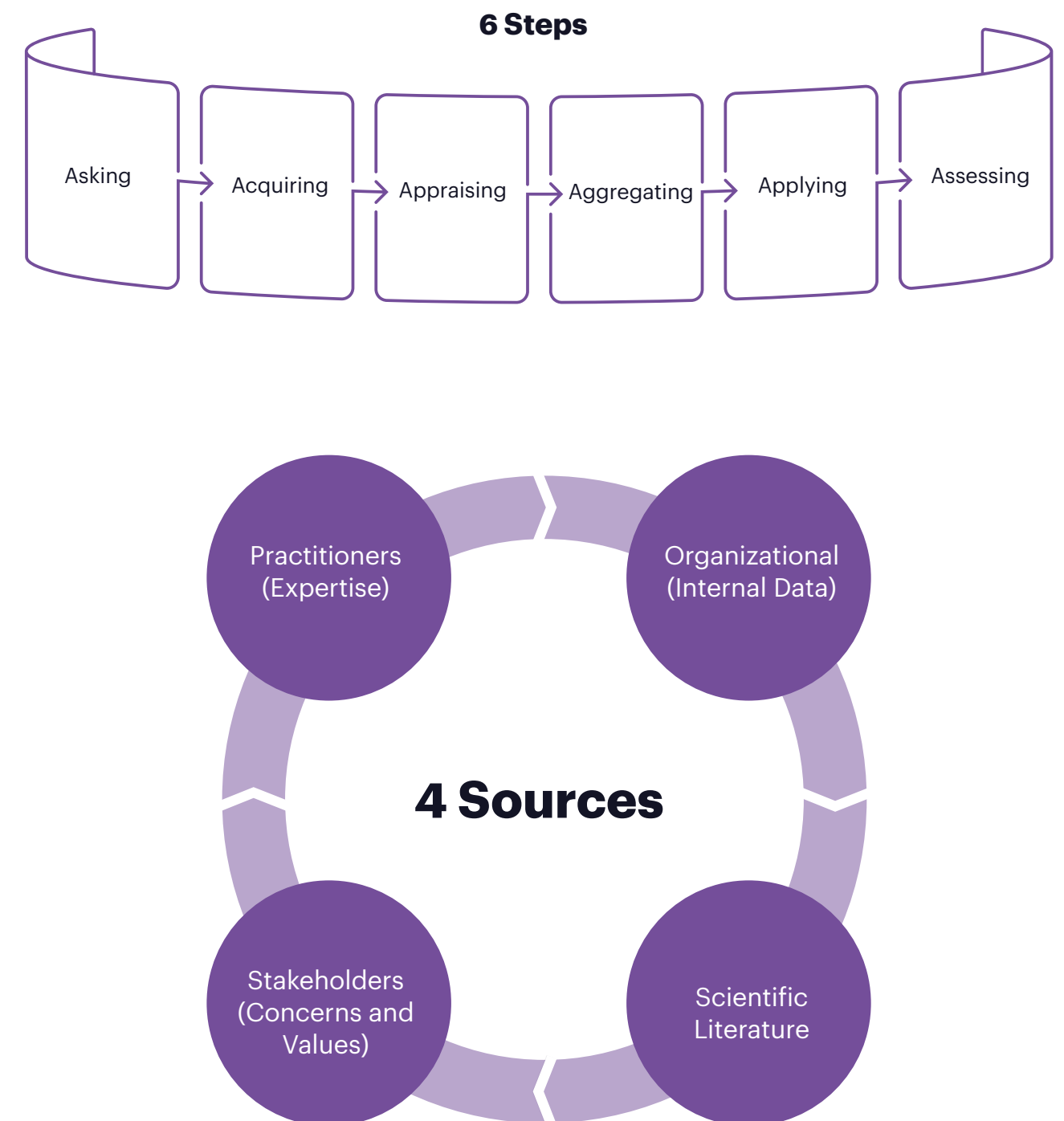
It saves time and money

EBDM helps avoid the cost of trial-and-error approaches by relying on existing research, case studies, and lessons from other organizations. This reduces unnecessary experimentation, increasing the likelihood of getting decisions right the first time and saving both time and resources.

Research shows that an evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) approach tends to be more effective than less structured methods that often rely heavily on personal experience rather than solid research. Risk assessments drawn from the combined experience of many people are typically more accurate than those based on the perspective of just one individual, as forecasts are developed independently and then aggregated. Similarly, decisions grounded in hard data and statistical analysis are generally more reliable than those based solely on personal experience. Knowledge drawn from scientific research tends to be more accurate than individual expert opinions.

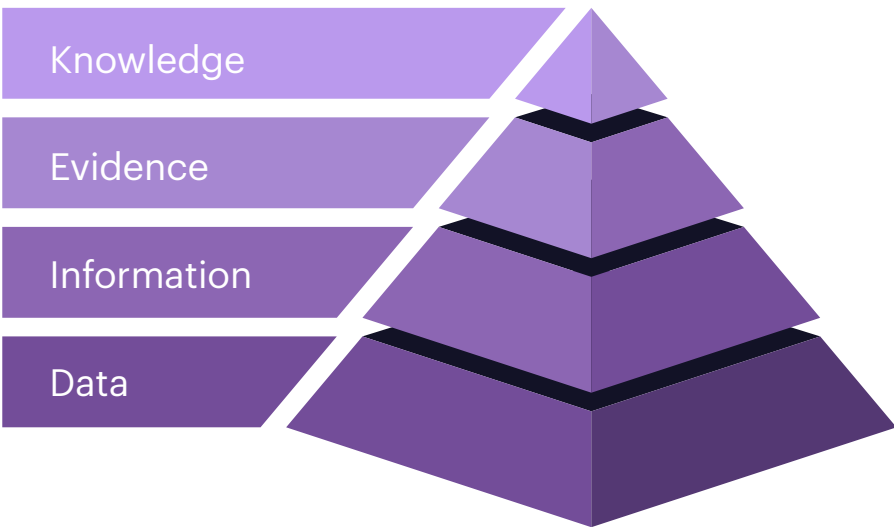
Decisions that integrate critically evaluated evidence from multiple sources tend to produce stronger outcomes compared to those based on just one type of input. These findings highlight the importance of adopting a critical mindset – questioning assumptions and the reliability of information – with the guiding question always being: ‘Is this the best available evidence?’

Evidence-Based Practice



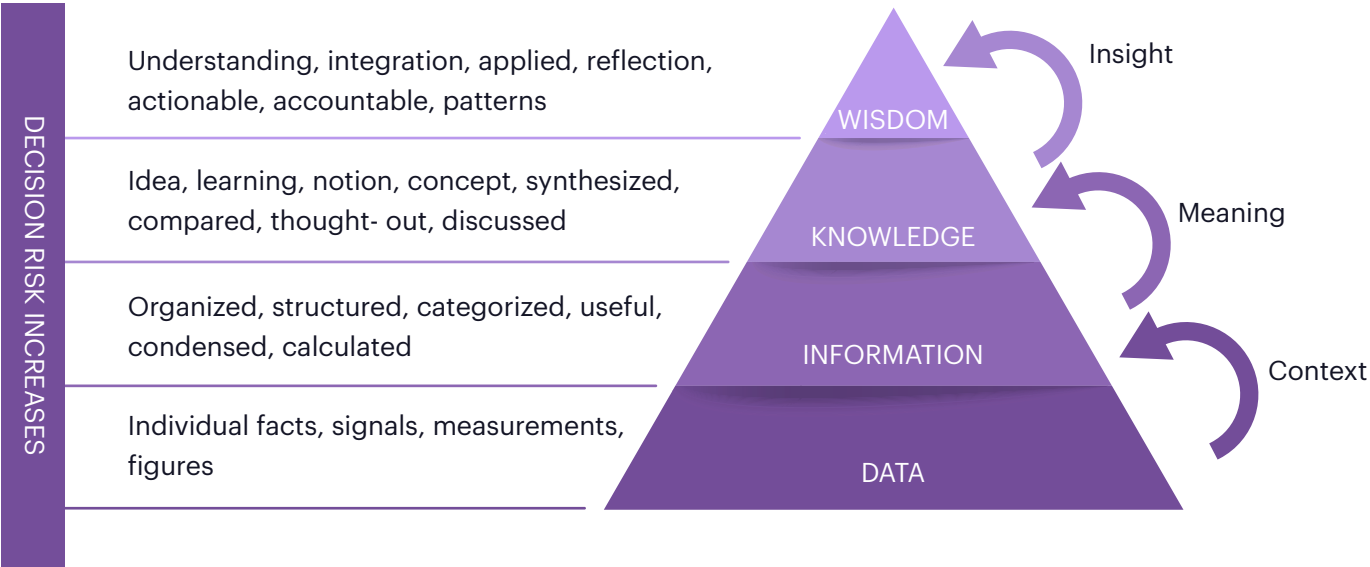
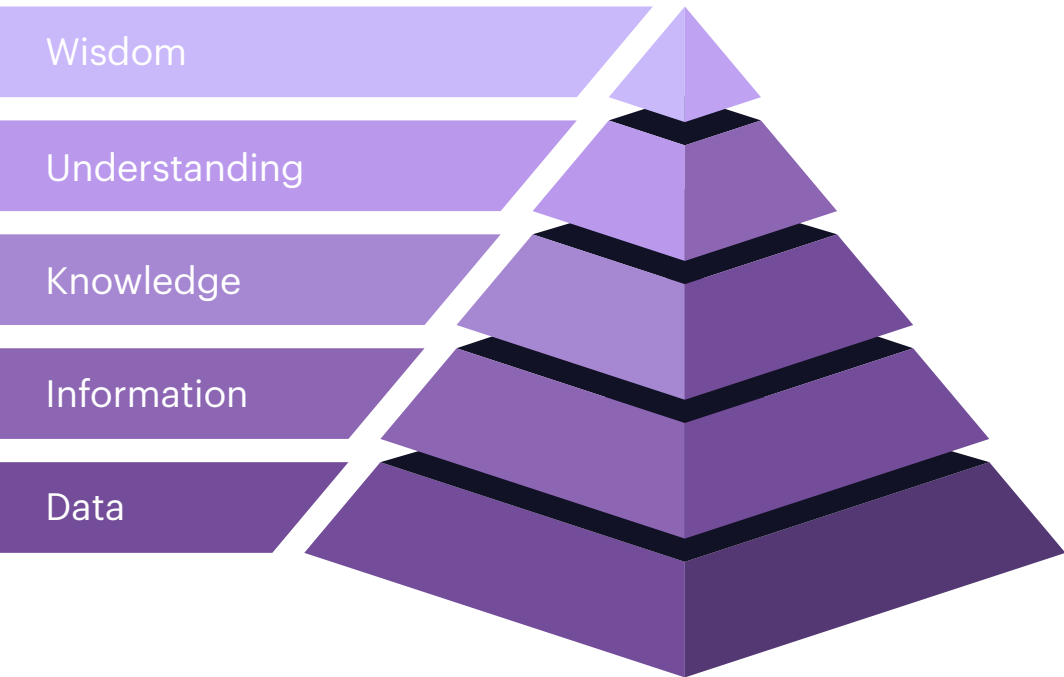
What is the Difference Between Data and Evidence?

It is useful to pause here and clarify the difference between these two closely related terms. When people within an organization understand the distinction between data and evidence, it helps them make clearer decisions and more accurate judgments. Interestingly, it can also make teams more adaptable and open to change.



Data refers to facts and statistics collected for reference or analysis. Data can be a single number or an isolated observation – it exists without context and carries little real meaning on its own. Importantly, data does not automatically come with validity (whether it measures what it claims to measure) or reliability (whether it does so consistently). In reality, no data set is ever 100% valid or reliable. There is always some degree of variation in any measurement, and these variations can accumulate. For example, two aircrafts built side by side using the same design can differ in weight by as much as 10 – 20%, simply due to minor variations in their components adding up.

While data can stand alone – albeit without inherent meaning—evidence cannot. Evidence must be evidence of or for something. Evidence exists within the context of an opinion, argument, or viewpoint. It is what academics often call a hypothesis. The evidence selected depends on the argument being made, and as new or different evidence becomes available, that argument might shift.



As illustrated in the visual above, when data is combined with information, it becomes evidence – and that evidence contributes to forming wisdom.

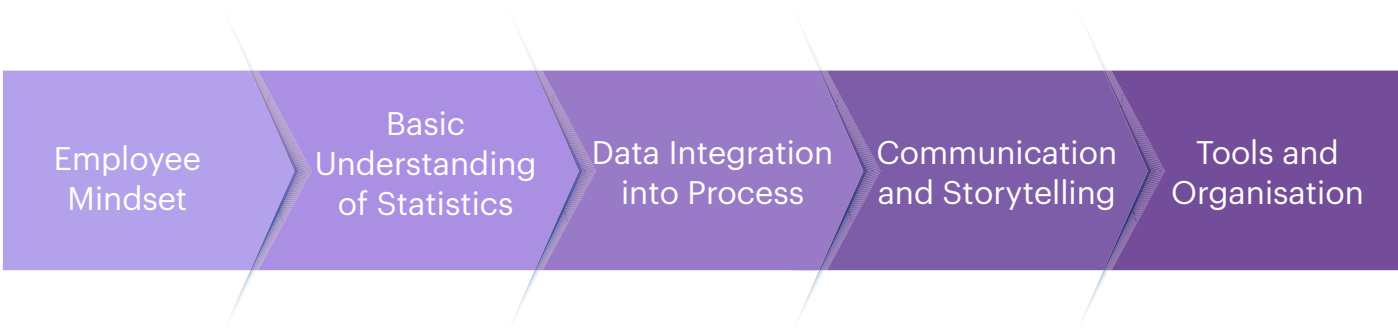
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How to Analyse the Baseline Viz-a-Vis Data-Driven Decision-Making?

The first step in any analysis is to clearly define your objective—knowing what you are aiming for and what you need to find. For policy teams, this means first establishing overall goals and objectives: what long-term outcomes they want to achieve and what policy or procedural changes will be necessary to get there.

Once these objectives are clear, the next step is to gather baseline data or information to better understand the potential changes needed.

To assess how well the organization can apply evidence-based decision-making (EBDM), teams can reflect on five key areas:



A simple and effective way to gather input on these areas is through internal surveys. One survey should be directed at employees and managers, while a second can assess overall organizational awareness of EBDM.

Topics for the first survey might include:

Employee Mindset

- a Is there a shared understanding across the organization regarding how employees should approach their tasks, considering the challenges they face?
- b In an evidence-driven organization, this mindset should be embedded at all levels. Are employees framing problems using key performance indicators (KPIs) that can help develop data-driven solutions?

Basic Understanding of Statistics

- a Do employees have a basic understanding of fundamental statistical concepts?
- b Are they familiar with current statistical trends and ratios relevant to their work?

If the answers to these initial questions are “no,” it’s important to focus first on educating employees about these foundational concepts and embedding them into the organization’s culture before moving forward with evidence-based or data-driven approaches. Employees don’t need to be experts in quantitative analysis to succeed. Nevertheless, having a basic level of data and evidence proficiency is becoming essential across all industries.

Questions for the second survey might focus on the following areas:

Integration of Data-Driven Decision-Making into Processes

- a** Does your team include any data scientists or business intelligence analysts?
- b** Are there formal data analytics processes in place that collect, analyze, and share trends from the data you gather?
- c** Does the organization collect evidence from internal or external sources that are relevant to its work?

Communication, tools, and storytelling

- a** How advanced are your data visualizations and presentations?
- b** Are dashboards being used within the organization?
- c** Are appropriate charts and visuals chosen to convey insights
- d** Are employees familiar with – or have they used – tools such as Tableau, Power BI, Qlik, Alteryx, Python, or SQL?



If your organization is relying solely on basic Excel tables with simple line or bar charts, it is likely that your data and evidence insights are being significantly underused. Employees may not even be aware of modern tools that can create more advanced visualizations, automate data cleaning and preparation, and provide a stronger foundation for analytics work.

Once the surveys are designed, they should be distributed to a sample of employees and leaders. To encourage honest feedback and reduce bias, it's best for responses to be collected anonymously and randomly.

After gathering the survey responses, leadership will have a clearer understanding of current capabilities and will be better positioned to strengthen evidence-based decision-making within the organization – regardless of the starting point.

3

How to Assess and Create an Evidence Culture in Government?

In executive environments, it is not uncommon for non-evidence-based decisions to slip into important discussions. How can leaders push back against this status quo, where decisions are often driven by hunches, intuition, or simply the way things have always been done?

Popular management ideas and personal experience – which are both prone to errors and bias – are sometimes given more weight than carefully evaluated, credible evidence. The aim of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) is to minimize the influence of these subjective factors and protect the quality of decision-making across the organization.

1- Build a Culture of Evidence from Both the Top and Bottom.

An evidence-based, data-driven culture must involve both leadership and frontline staff. While change can't be imposed solely from the top, visionary leadership is essential. A two-pronged approach is recommended:

- a** Bottom-up: Program teams and evidence specialists work together to find innovative ways to apply existing research and generate new inputs.
- b** Top-down: Leaders set expectations that decisions must be rooted in data, treating this as standard practice rather than a special case. They reinforce

Ideally, both approaches work in tandem, supporting and strengthening each other. However, some organizations may start with one strand and add the other later. For example, leaders might first emphasize the importance of data, prompting staff to align their work accordingly. Over time, this culture spreads downward, as staff recognize the need to speak the leadership's language – data and evidence.

2- Choose Metrics Carefully

Leaders can shape behaviours by deciding what to measure and what metrics their teams should focus on. Predicting future behaviour becomes easier when a team routinely makes and tracks specific forecasts regarding the size and direction of changes. Monitoring the accuracy of these predictions over time will also help teams improve.

3- Invest in Expanding Evidence and Data

Sufficient resources should be allocated to both new and ongoing programs to support evidence-building and evaluation efforts that feed into decision-making.

4- Leverage Existing Administrative Data

A common obstacle to fostering an evidence-based culture is the difficulty departments face in accessing basic data. Without data, analysis can't happen. Linking administrative data across departments and agencies can help overcome this. For example, combining datasets from different government bodies can produce valuable insights that would otherwise require costly surveys.

5- Quantify Uncertainty

Absolute certainty is unattainable, yet many leaders push forward without acknowledging uncertainty. Encouraging teams to quantify and openly discuss uncertainty has three key benefits:

- a** It pushes decision-makers to examine potential weaknesses in their data and models directly.
- b** It leads analysts to assess uncertainty more carefully, improving the accuracy of their models.
- c** It encourages experimentation, prompting agencies to test new ideas and foster innovation.

6- Create incentives to use Evidence

In addition to building technical capacity, governments should establish incentives that encourage agencies to apply evidence in their program and funding decisions. Options include:

- a** Offering administrative mandate exemptions in exchange for commitments to collect data and conduct evaluations.
- b** Using existing grant funds to create performance-based incentives for states and municipalities to adopt evidence-based practices.
- c** Providing matching grants to intermediaries based on data that shows the effectiveness of the programs they fund.

4

How to Design an Evidence-Based Strategy?

Implementing evidence-based decision-making within a government organization can help address gaps in research knowledge and support more informed decisions that advance the agency's goals. The process typically involves three key stages of action:



Gathering Evidence

Government staff must actively seek out the best available evidence, collect relevant contextual information, engage diverse stakeholders, and ensure that all data gathered is credible, observable, replicable, and verifiable. Being impartial and thorough at this stage is critical, as incomplete or selectively chosen data can distort outcomes. To build a balanced dataset, it is important to draw from both external and internal sources.

Externally, valuable insights can come from scholarly research, professional conferences, peer discussions, mentoring conversations, and case studies from other organizations. Internally, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data should be considered to create a well-rounded understanding of how decisions will impact the agency. Internal data can be sourced from program reports, consultations with managers, staff surveys, or one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders

Interpreting Evidence

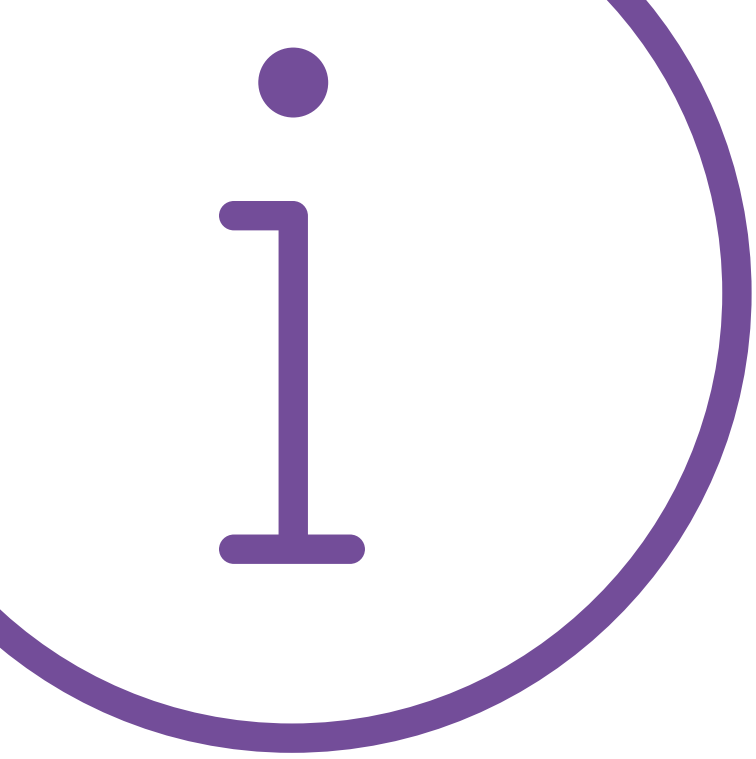
Once evidence is collected, it must be assessed critically. Staff should examine the strengths and limitations of the information to draw meaningful insights. This involves considering the perspectives, preferences, and experiences of stakeholders, as well as understanding the socioeconomic and geographic factors that may affect outcomes. Organizing the evidence into categories or themes, identifying trends, and spotting outliers can help make sense of the data. Analytical techniques that may support this stage include:



Applying What you Have Learned

After gathering and interpreting the evidence, the next step is to apply those insights to make the best possible decision for moving forward. It's important during this stage to monitor outcomes objectively so leaders can evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions honestly.

Internal data (such as key performance indicators (KPIs) and financial metrics) can help determine whether the decisions are driving positive results for the organization. At the same time, feedback tools like surveys, one-on-one meetings, and direct observations of employee behaviour can provide valuable insights into how decisions are being received and how they're impacting staff across the organization.



For example, consider an HR manager who resists introducing an employee recognition system, believing it will make employees **“complacent.”** This viewpoint is not based on evidence or data – it is simply a personal assumption. In doing so, the manager is missing an opportunity to apply evidence-based decision-making (EBDM).

Using an EBDM approach, the manager would actively seek additional information from various sources to support or challenge this belief. In this case, actions might

- Consulting with other HR managers who have implemented employee recognition systems to understand the impact these programs had on their own employees.
- Reviewing experiments, case studies, or academic research that examine the effectiveness of employee recognition systems.
- Speaking directly with employees in the manager’s department to gauge their likely response to introducing such a system.

If, after conducting this due diligence, the evidence strongly indicated that an employee recognition system would not be effective, the manager could reasonably justify maintaining their current approach. However, if the evidence suggested a high likelihood of increased employee engagement and morale, the HR manager would have a responsibility to implement the recognition system for the benefit of the team.

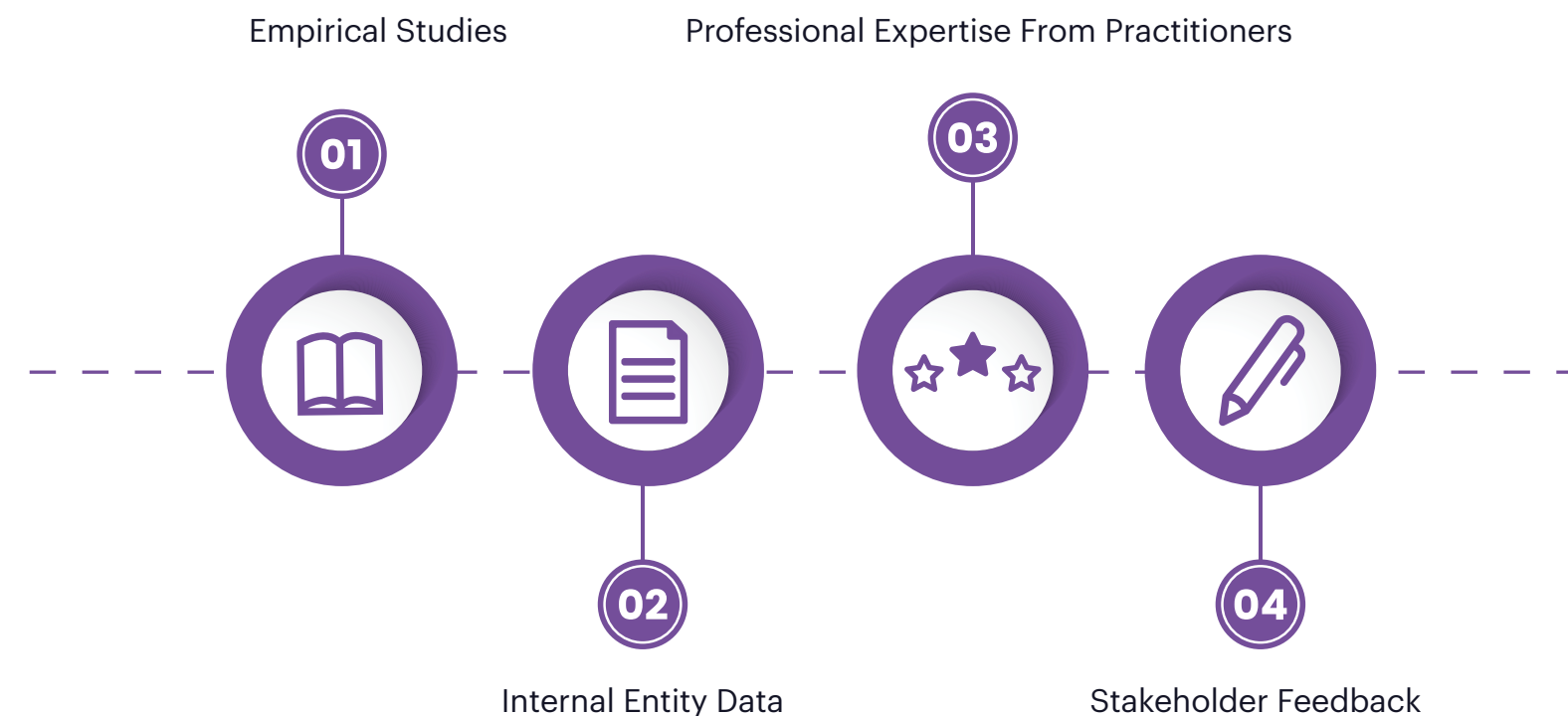
At its core, evidence-based decision-making requires employees to ask:

What does the research say?

What is the evidence base?

What information can we gather to assess whether this will work in our specific context?

The four sources of information that feed into an evidence-based approach are each distinct but equally important in shaping sound decisions.

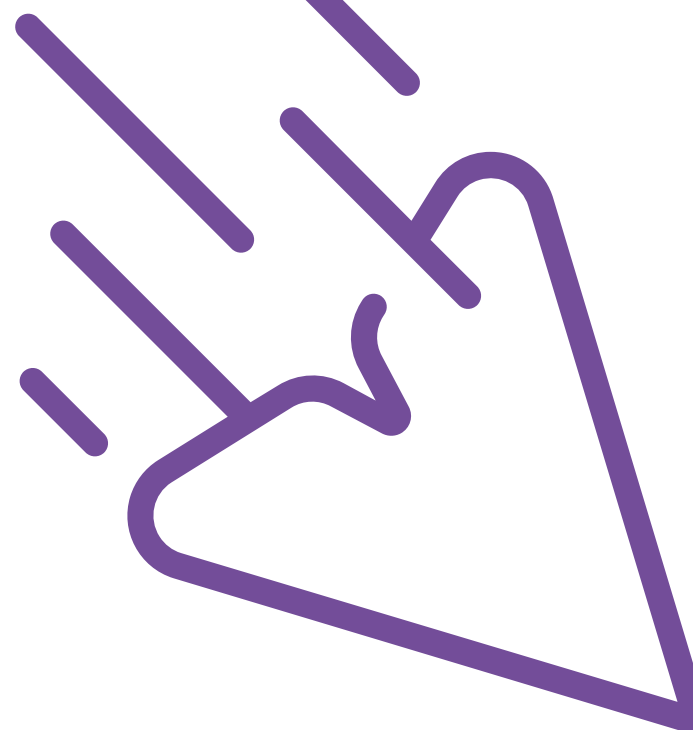
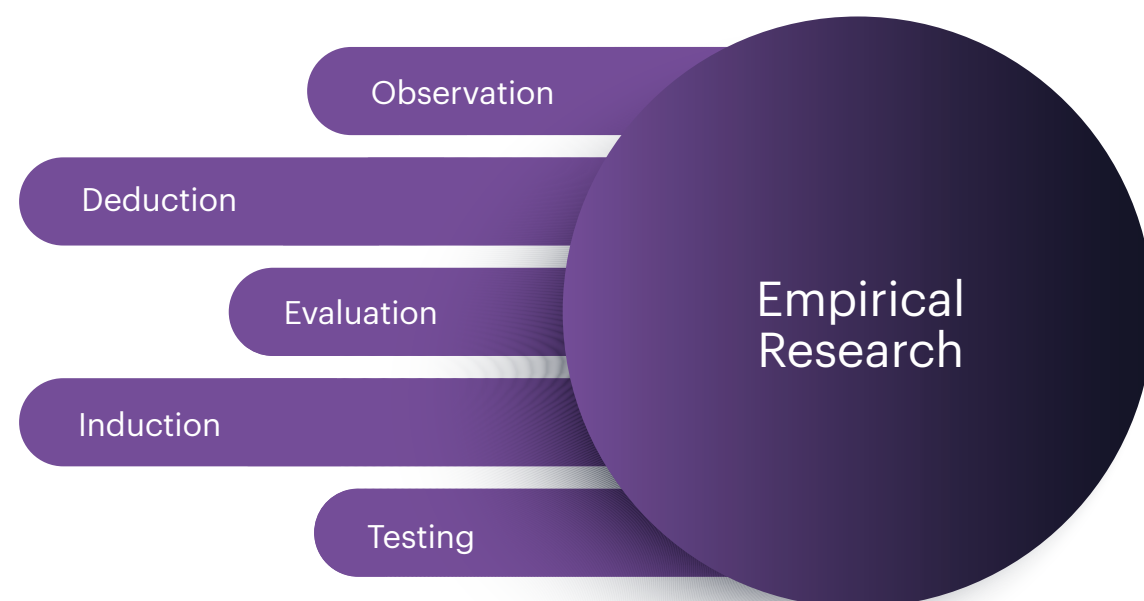


1 Empirical Studies

The first key source of evidence for decision-making is empirical or academic studies. Academic research is typically conducted with the primary goal of generating new knowledge, rather than serving the interests of any specific organization. It is designed to offer an authoritative perspective and can significantly influence how a subject is understood. For this reason, academic research is held to rigorous standards.

Academic studies follow the scientific method, a structured process that ensures objectivity throughout the research. This involves developing a hypothesis – a prediction of the outcome – then testing it through systematic investigation to arrive at a logical conclusion.

A critical feature of credible academic research is peer review. This process involves experts in the field reviewing the research methodology and findings to verify their validity before the work is published in an academic journal. While the specifics of peer review may vary across disciplines, this quality check remains fundamental to maintaining research integrity.



Academic research acts as a catalyst for further discovery. New findings often lead to additional studies, fresh perspectives, innovations, or entirely new fields of inquiry. When research findings are published, they give professionals greater confidence in their understanding of a subject. If a theory is confirmed, practitioners can move forward with greater certainty. If disproven, they know adjustments are needed.

For government organizations, accessing this body of research – whether through academic journals, expert analyses, or industry conferences – is essential. Fields such as management, psychology, and sociology offer valuable insights that are often directly relevant to public sector challenges. Developing the skills to find, assess, and apply academic research is vital for ensuring decisions are based on relevant, trustworthy evidence.

Internal Entity Data

Another critical source of information is internal data from government agencies. Practitioners of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) who are skilled in using and analysing data can help align their departments with other government functions that are leveraging data to improve efficiency – and potentially gain a competitive edge as well.

Internal organizational data offers valuable insights into areas requiring managerial attention. This data can come from external sources, such as clients or citizens (e.g., customer satisfaction, repeat service usage), or internal sources, such as employee metrics (e.g., job satisfaction, retention rates). It's also helpful to distinguish between 'hard' data, like turnover rates and productivity levels, and 'soft' data, such as perceptions of organizational culture and attitudes toward leadership. Access to both types of data is essential for diagnosing problems, identifying solutions, and implementing changes

Here are **five ways internal entity data can help strengthen organizational outcomes**:

Get the culture right

While organizational culture often feels intangible, data can provide concrete insights. Analyzing HR data such as retention rates, performance metrics, demographics, promotion patterns, benefits usage, leave data, and employee survey results can reveal patterns that influence culture. Bringing these metrics together can help map out different workforce segments and how they are impacted by various factors. For example, data might show that employees aged 25–30 have the shortest average tenure compared to peers in similar industries. With this insight, targeted strategies can be implemented to better support younger employees and improve retention.

Tell a story

Modern government organizations are expected to engage in strategic storytelling to communicate their identity and values. Internal data can support this by helping tell meaningful stories. For instance, customer interaction data can highlight how citizens engage with services, demonstrating value and impact. Operational data can also be shared to promote transparency, build public trust, and address issues like pay gaps.



Personalise your offering

Citizens now expect personalized services – much like they experience with platforms like Spotify and Netflix. These companies use internal customer data to customize their offerings for millions of users. Similarly, government agencies can use internal data to better understand citizen needs and deliver more tailored services.

Sharpen your marketing

Internal data can provide unique insights that strengthen marketing efforts. Since internal data is original and exclusive, it can help agencies craft standout campaigns. For example, customer surveys can reveal sentiment across different groups, enabling more targeted communication. Surveys can also invite participants to opt-in for personalized follow-ups. Additionally, data-heavy documents like annual reports can be repurposed creatively – turning key statistics into infographics for social media, helping drive engagement and traffic to core content.

3 Professional Expertise From Practitioners

Evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) also depends on leaders staying informed about the latest developments from other practitioners and experts in their field. Conferences offer valuable opportunities to gain new insights, as they bring together professionals who share their experiences and lessons learned. In addition, online discussions focused on current trends and emerging issues can provide fresh ideas and diverse perspectives to inform decision-making.

This kind of **professional knowledge** differs from simple opinion. It is built over time through reflection on the outcomes of similar actions in comparable contexts. In essence, it represents specialized knowledge gained through repeated, hands-on experience.



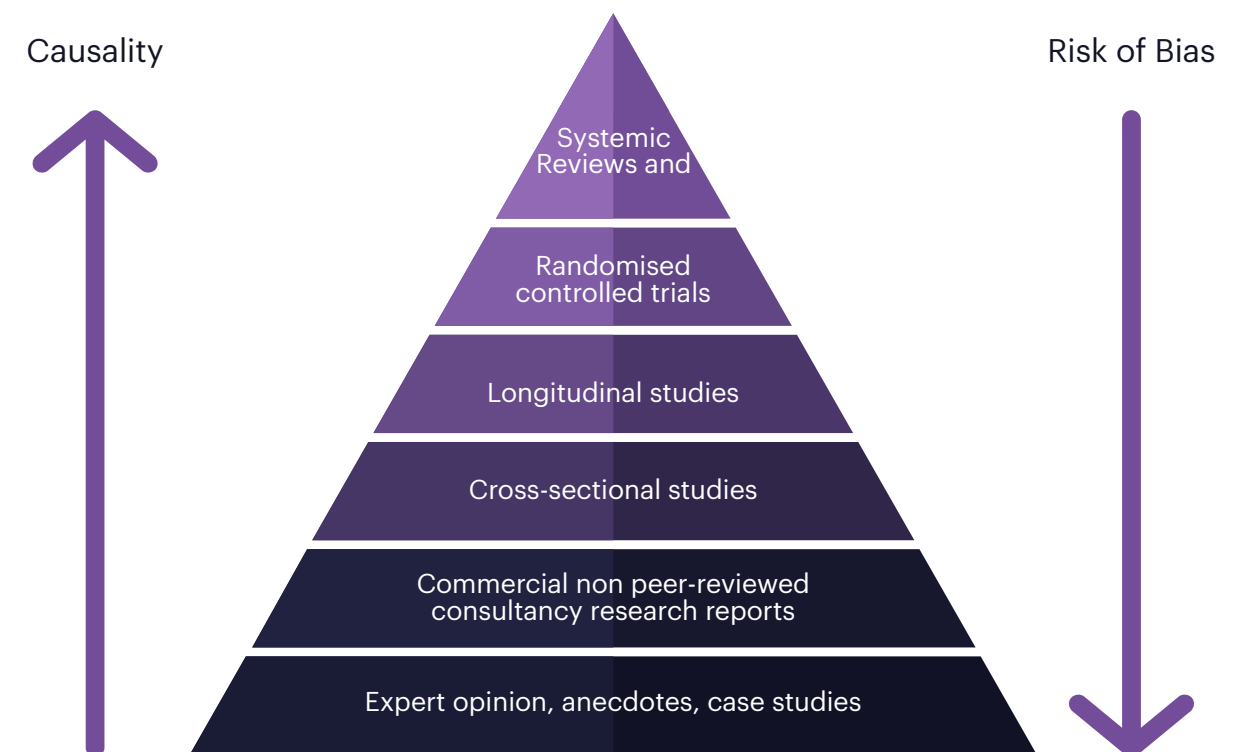
Practitioner expertise helps streamline the evidence-based decision-making process by enabling the following key steps:

- Converting an information need into a clear, answerable question
- Efficiently tracking down the best available evidence to address that question
- Critically evaluating the evidence for both validity and practical relevance
- Integrating the evidence with professional expertise, as well as client or stakeholder values, preferences, and specific circumstances
- Assessing the outcomes to refine future practice

4 Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholders – whether internal (such as employees, managers, and board members) or external (like suppliers, investors, and shareholders) – are directly affected by an organization's decisions and their outcomes. Their values reflect what they consider important, which in turn shapes how they perceive and respond to the organization's actions. Understanding stakeholder concerns provides a useful framework for analyzing evidence.

Tools such as employee satisfaction surveys and exit interviews can help reveal employee perspectives. Human resources platforms can also provide real-time insights into workforce sentiment, helping to boost engagement and productivity. Gathering input from key stakeholders on proposed decisions is a crucial part of evaluating the best available information to support sound decision-making.



The image above illustrates the **evidence hierarchy**. As you move up the pyramid, the likelihood of higher reliability, validity, generalisability, and confidence increases. Conversely, as you move down the hierarchy, the risk of bias rises, and the levels of reliability, validity, and generalisability typically decrease.

However, this doesn't mean that lower-tier evidence, such as case studies, lacks value. Rather, it indicates that such evidence is more context-specific and may not apply universally.

An evidence-based practitioner must be able to assess and understand the type of evidence they're working with – always considering the specific context in which the evidence will be applied – before using it to inform decisions.

5

How to Establish an Evidence Support System to Break Down Silos?

Employees involved in evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) are often aware that they are operating within an insulated environment. They might be working in just one department of a larger organization, focused on a project relevant only to their immediate context. They may also be unaware of similar past projects or EBDM initiatives happening in other parts of the same organization.

Why is this? Often, it's simply because tracking down someone knowledgeable about a previous project and its outcomes takes time and effort. Due to staff turnover and inconsistent sharing of information, teams frequently find it easier – and faster – to rebuild capacity from scratch rather than seek out existing knowledge.

Silos form when departments become isolated from one another. Many managers assume this can be solved through increased information sharing and collaboration. But that's only a partial fix, as information itself is fluid – contact lists change, people shift roles or leave, and today's prospects may become tomorrow's partners or providers.

Fortunately, there are practical ways to break down these silos:

Create a more collaborative entity culture

Creating a collaborative culture starts with leadership. The executive team must prioritize continuous quality improvement as a core value – this is key to gaining stakeholder support and driving change. Change management relies on consistent communication, education, monitoring, and follow-up. If leadership doesn't champion change, the organization's culture will reflect that, and silos will persist. Hosting organization-wide events, developing a clear Culture Code, and embracing the unique qualities of every employee can help build a more inclusive and collaborative environment. This, in turn, encourages staff to share data and evidence beyond their immediate teams.

Adopt integration software

Modern integration software gives quality improvement teams access to historical data, up-to-date research, and collaborative tools that were once out of reach. Cloud-based applications in particular make it easy to connect systems across the agency, automating tasks that employees previously handled manually. This reduces duplication of work and enhances efficiency across the organization. Integrating systems is one of the most effective ways to break down silos.

Choose an all-in-one solution to unify your data management

Using a single, unified platform helps prevent data silos. When sales, marketing, and customer service teams operate within the same platform, sharing data becomes seamless. Using software from the same vendor also helps unify language and processes, making communication smoother across departments. A centralized platform for coordinating EBDM activities allows everyone in the organization to track past initiatives, current projects, and future plans. Templates and shared resources encourage consistency, while a knowledge graph that links internal and external customer data can offer a comprehensive view of relationships and trends – providing richer insights for decision-making.

Implement workforce innovation

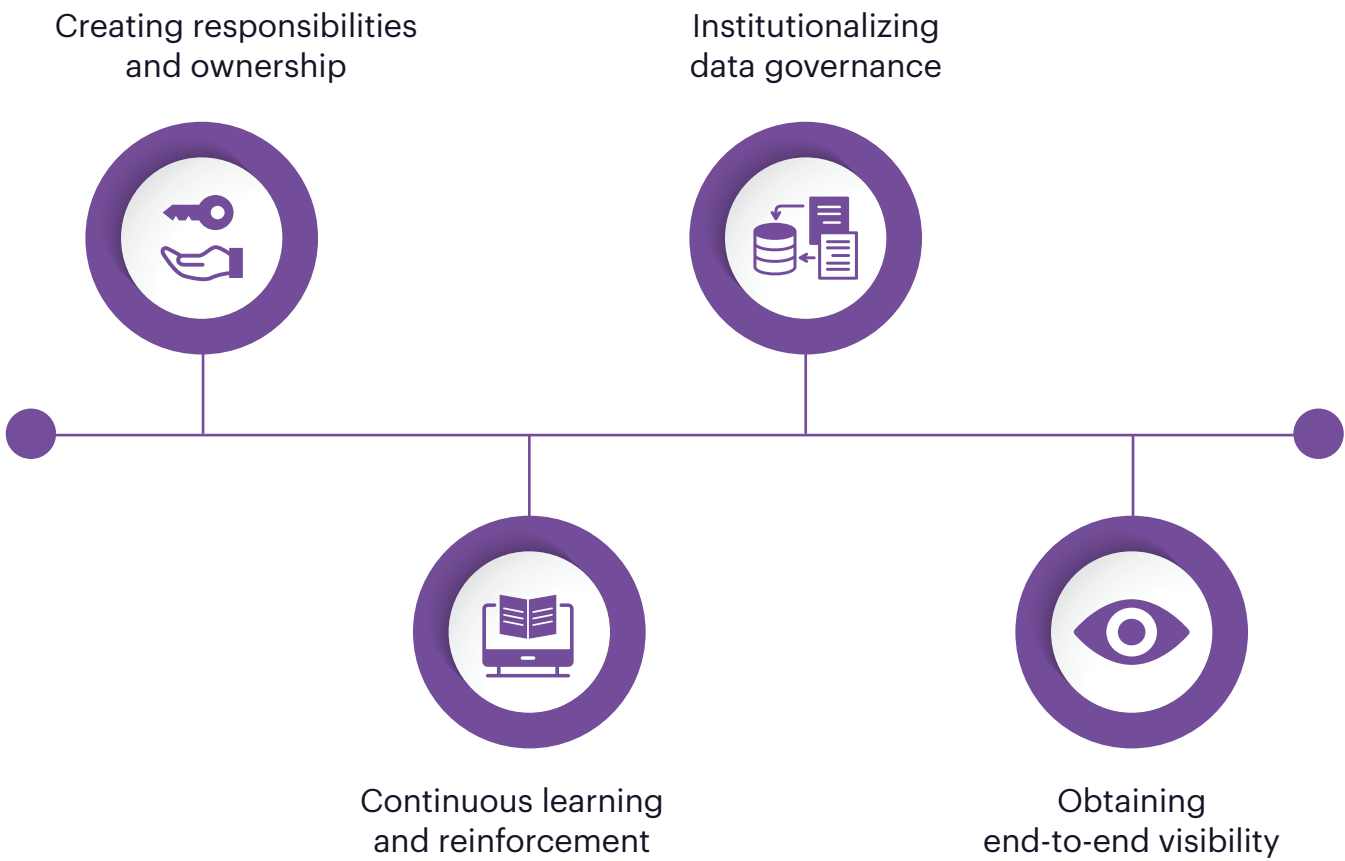
Task-sharing is an effective approach when resources are limited. Supported by low-cost technology, this model allows responsibilities to be shared across roles, increasing access to resources and improving operational integration. Tailoring a task-sharing approach to the government agency's structure and workforce, while leveraging affordable technology, can help bridge gaps and improve collaboration across the organization.

6

How to Enhance Data Literacy in Government?

As highlighted throughout this manual, data-driven insights are a core element of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM). Many primary EBDM resources like academic research or expert insights only become fully useful to public sector organizations when they are translated into actionable data. This makes **data literacy** an essential skill across all levels of the organization.

Since data science is a rapidly evolving and relatively new discipline, it hasn't yet fully spread across all government agencies. To enhance data literacy within your organization, consider adopting the following **four-step model**:



Creating responsibilities and ownership:

The first and most critical step is introducing data stewardship – the practice of ensuring that an organization's data is accessible, usable, secure, and trustworthy. This involves managing the entire data lifecycle, from creation to maintaining quality and integrity. Government agencies can appoint a dedicated executive leader or expert to design and lead a **data literacy program**. The responsibilities of these designated leaders include:

- a** Building organizational support for the data literacy initiative, such as establishing an integrated data-focused unit.
- b** Effectively promoting the initiative to internal stakeholders to gain their buy-in and participation.
- c** Assessing current skills and identifying capability gaps through interviews
- d** Developing, implementing, and regularly reviewing the program in collaboration with an assigned team.



Institutionalising data governance:

As agencies evolve, data governance policies and practices should be refined alongside broader organizational growth – and vice versa. The way data is collected and managed directly influences its usefulness in evidence-based decision-making (EBDM). Strengthening the public sector’s institutional capacity to strategically gather, define, analyze, and share data with both internal teams and external stakeholders is essential. The goal is to foster a culture that treats data as a valuable government asset requiring consistent care and stewardship. Here are a few key steps to help institutionalize data governance within your agency:

- a** **Cultivate a common, shared Language.** Establishing a clear, consistent way of discussing data across the organization helps drive the practical application of data skills and knowledge.
- b** **Create Data Reference Standards.** Develop and maintain accessible reference standards that can be used by the entire agency and its stakeholders to ensure consistency in how data is handled and understood.
- c** **Introduce Key Data Governance Tools.** Implement essential data governance resources such as a data catalogue, glossary, and data dictionaries. These tools serve as critical foundations for any successful data literacy and governance initiative.
- d** **Use Data to Assess and Improve Capabilities.** Leverage data to evaluate existing competencies, roles, capacity, and skills across the organization. Use these insights to identify strategic areas for investment and improvement, aligned with the agency’s broader priorities.

Continuous learning and reinforcement:

Once data catalogues, glossaries, and data dictionaries are in place, the next step is to educate all agency employees on how to apply data effectively to enhance both their individual roles and overall organizational performance. Employees must understand the importance of data literacy to the agency’s success. When staff recognize why data matters and how it informs decision-making, they are less likely to resist learning how to interpret and use it. Developing critical thinking and basic data skills should be viewed as essential for everyone.

Ongoing training is key to improving outcomes and increasing employee engagement. Below are several steps for building an effective training program:

- a** Identify and prioritize the groups that need training most urgently, then refine your approach for subsequent groups.
- b** Collect feedback throughout the process to understand what works and where adjustments are needed.
- c** Encourage open dialogue, providing a platform where employees can ask questions to deepen their understanding.
- d** Design training materials to be as clear and user-friendly as possible.
- e** Use real-world examples and storytelling during sessions to make learning relatable and inspire better data practices.

Obtain end-to-end visibility:

To promote the use of data in decision-making, senior leaders must lead by example, being transparent and open about how they use data in their own decision-making processes. By openly discussing the role data plays in their decisions, leaders help set the tone for cultural change and encourage individual employees to engage in data literacy initiatives. This transparency also allows stakeholders to visualize how data flows from its source to its final use.

Once transparency is established, the **final step is ensuring data accessibility**. Even with a skilled and data-literate workforce, progress will be limited if data access is restricted – whether intentionally or unintentionally. For a data-informed culture to truly take hold across a government agency, data must be made readily available for practical use at all levels.

7

How to Build Capacity for Evidence-Based Decision-Making?

Ensuring consistent demand for relevant and high-quality evidence has become increasingly difficult in today's world of **information overload** and complex political environments. Policymakers face an overwhelming volume of data, much of it layered and competing, while both individual and organizational capacity to process this information remains limited – and often influenced by biases. Consequently, advancing evidence, policy, and public collaboration towards joint solutions involves difficult trade-offs at precisely the time when evidence-informed policies are most needed.

Addressing this challenge requires **developing new skills within the public sector**. To foster informed judgment and support evidence-based decision-making (EBDM), agencies must build the right capabilities. Emerging technologies, advanced data analytics, expanding policy research, and diverse citizen perspectives all demand a fresh skillset to enable effective and timely policymaking.

Public sector professionals need the ability to **commission, understand, and integrate evidence effectively**. Strengthening agency capacity should include a broad set of interventions – from cultivating individual skills, values, and norms that encourage EBDM, to implementing organizational procedures, incentives, and allocating financial and human resources that promote the use of evidence.

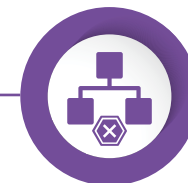
Civil servants, in particular, need **critical appraisal skills** – the ability to assess where evidence comes from, evaluate its robustness, understand its relevance to the policy question, consider its potential impact, and ensure it meets ethical standards. All of this must occur within institutional systems that also recognize broader political realities.

Before expanding EBDM capacity, it is critical to identify the obstacles that might be holding your team back. The following points outline key **barriers and enablers** for building capacity in evidence-based decision-making:



Barriers Related to the Policy-Making Process:

- Lack of a culture of open dialogue
- Political priorities taking precedence over evidence
- Unclear or ambiguous mandate for evidence-informed policy-making (EIPM)
- Weak capacity for long-term policy planning
- Inflexible and non-transparent policy processes



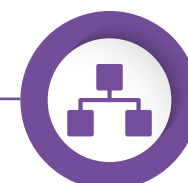
Barriers Related to the Institutional Set-Up:

- Limited financial and human resources
- Weak or absent incentives to encourage EBDM
- Lack of skills and capability to engage effectively in EBDM



Facilitators Related to the Policy-Making Process:

- Strong political commitment to adopting EBDM
- Active dialogue and engagement between stakeholders
- Strengthening the demand for evidence across departments
- Support and guidance from international organizations
- Ensuring that evidence used is of high quality



Facilitators Related to the Institutional Set-Up:

- Adequate financial and human resources
- Strong leadership and retention of institutional knowledge
- Leveraging positive disruption to encourage innovation
- Flexibility in job roles and performance expectations to support EBDM practices

Once your organization identifies the most relevant barriers, the next question is clear: **What can be done to address them?** The following key institutional features can help foster evidence-based decision-making (EBDM):

- Developing a **strategic, long-term approach** to EBDM
- Clearly assigning **responsibilities and mandates** to apply EBDM practices
- Establishing **organizational incentives** that encourage engagement with evidence-informed processes
- Creating **mechanisms for institutional memory and knowledge transfer**
- Promoting **strong collaboration between researchers and policymakers**
- Aligning **government priorities with research agendas**
- Facilitating **structured dialogue** among all relevant stakeholders
- Ensuring both the **availability and accessibility of evidence**, along with the **skills and capacity** required to understand and apply it

Additionally, **transparency and open government approaches** play an important role in building EBDM capacity:

- Maintaining a **credible administration**, where discussions about evidence-informed decisions are backed by visible actions
- Fostering a **shared identity** among civil servants to strengthen collective commitment
- Providing **incentives for critical thinking skills** among policymakers
- Ensuring organizations have **adequate capacity and resources** to maintain transparency
- Leveraging **digital tools** to improve communication with citizens
- Utilizing **shared collaborative platforms** and agendas to enhance cross-departmental cooperation

Achieving the full benefits of an evidence-informed policy-making agenda depends on building a broad and capable skill set within the civil service. This will likely require targeted investments in capacity building for both policy makers and evidence producers. While many initiatives exist to help evidence producers understand policy-making processes and increase their impact, there is a noticeable lack of programs focused on enhancing the skills, motivation, and capacity of policy makers to actively use evidence.

Though valuable efforts are underway in specific countries and sectors, significant gaps remain in understanding which strategies most effectively build capacity for evidence use. This highlights the potential value of developing a standardized, evidence-informed framework – a reference approach that could be adapted by different countries based on their specific needs and contexts.

What Works to Increase Evidence Use by Decision-Makers? Promising Approaches Include:

- **Interventions Focused on Better Regulation and Oversight:** These interventions prioritize improving regulatory practices, including impact assessments, regulatory scrutiny, and stakeholder engagement to ensure evidence is systematically considered in policy development.
- **Interventions Improving Access to Evidence:** Strategies that enhance access to evidence, such as developing communication strategies and creating evidence repositories, help decision-makers easily locate and retrieve relevant information when needed.
- **Interventions to Build Decision-Makers' Skills:** These initiatives focus on training and capacity-building to equip decision-makers with the skills needed to find, interpret, and apply evidence effectively in their work.
- **Interventions Changing Structures and Processes:** This approach seeks to embed evidence use directly within decision-making structures and processes by formalizing its role. Mechanisms such as evidence brokerage – including evidence-on-demand services that blend push, pull, and co-creation approaches – help ensure evidence is systematically integrated into everyday policy and operational activities.

Every agency operates within its own unique context and will require tailored solutions to build its evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) capacity. However, looking at what peer organizations and countries are implementing can offer valuable insights. **Below are a few illustrative examples from leading countries:**

Finland's Developer Network: Regular meetings for actors who are active in developing the knowledge-policy interface, based on a dialogic approach to sharing and learning.

Australia's Evidence Ecosystem Blueprint: Australia actively participates in international initiatives to improve collaboration on generating and using evidence for policy. Recent government blueprints identify critical gaps in publicly accessible data, encourage cross-agency learning, and invest in joint evidence products with peer countries, such as Canada and the US, to streamline evidence use across governments.

India's Government-Evidence Partnerships: Through collaborations like J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative, India has institutionalized the requirement for large public programs to undergo rigorous impact evaluations. For example, the state of Tamil Nadu set guidelines mandating that all strategically significant programs with budgets over a certain threshold must be independently evaluated, supported by dedicated public funds for capacity-building and analytics.

The UK's Cross-Government Trial Advice Panel: A free to use service for civil servants bringing together top trialling and experimentation experts from across Government and academia to provide advice on all aspects of experimental and quasi-experimental design.

New Zealand has created Chief Advisor roles: Including a Chief Science Advisor and Chief Economist, to bring in external capacity for evidence use into the heart of government.

EBDM competencies

At the end of the day, how can you determine whether your staff have sufficient capacity and skills in evidence-based decision-making (EBDM)? Research has identified 24 core competencies that define a proficient practitioner. These are divided into two categories: 13 Basic-Level Competencies and 11 Advanced-Level Competencies

Basic competencies include:

- Questions current operational practices with the aim of improving quality.
- Describes problems using internal evidence.
- Contributes to formulating critical questions using the PICOT format (Population; Intervention or area of interest; Comparison intervention or group; Outcome; Time).
- Searches for external evidence to answer specific, focused questions.
- Participates in critically appraising pre-appraised evidence, such as guidelines, policies, procedures, and evidence syntheses.
- Takes part in critically appraising published research to assess its strength and relevance to operational practice.
- Assists in evaluating and synthesizing bodies of evidence to assess applicability and strength for practice use.
- Systematically collects internal practice data (e.g., customer data, quality improvement data) to inform decision-making for individuals, groups, or populations.
- Combines internal and external evidence to plan evidence-based practice improvements.
- Implements practice changes based on evidence, professional expertise, and customer preferences to improve service delivery and outcomes.
- Evaluates the outcomes of evidence-based decisions and changes to determine best practices for individuals, groups, or populations.
- Shares best practices backed by evidence to enhance service quality and customer outcomes.
- Engages in activities that help sustain a culture of evidence-based practice.

Advanced competencies include:

- Conducts comprehensive, systematic searches for external evidence to address critical questions.
- Critically appraises both pre-appraised evidence (such as guidelines, summaries, syntheses) and primary research studies, including their evaluation and synthesis.
- Integrates external evidence from research and related fields with internal data to inform decision-making.
- Leads transdisciplinary teams in applying synthesized evidence to guide clinical decisions and implement practice changes.
- Generates internal evidence through outcomes management and evidence-based practice (EBP) projects to support the adoption of best practices.
- Measures both the processes and outcomes of evidence-based decisions to assess impact.
- Develops evidence-based policies and procedures.
- Collaborates with other professionals to contribute to the generation of external evidence.
- Mentors colleagues and teams in evidence-based decision-making and the EBP process.
- Implements long-term strategies to sustain a culture of evidence-based practice.
- Communicates best evidence effectively to individuals, teams, colleagues, and policymakers.

8

How to Frame Conversations to Gather Relevant Evidence?

A core aspect of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) is the ability to **collate evidence from diverse sources**. Six key steps support this process:



By following these six steps, practitioners help ensure that the quality and trustworthiness of evidence are not overlooked. While the approach to appraisal may differ depending on the source, key questions generally include:

Where and how was the evidence collected?

Is it the best available evidence?

Is the evidence sufficient to support a conclusion?

Could the evidence be biased? If so, why?



9

Misconceptions and Pitfalls of Evidence-Driven Decision Making?

There are several misconceptions and barriers that often prevent the adoption of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM). However, each can be effectively addressed:

“EBDM ignores professional experience.”

EBDM does not favor one source of evidence over another. Professional expertise is a vital part of the process, combined with evidence from academic research, internal data, and stakeholder input.

“EBDM is all about numbers and statistics.”

While statistical thinking is important, EBDM is not limited to quantitative data. Qualitative insights, professional judgment, and stakeholder values are equally important components.

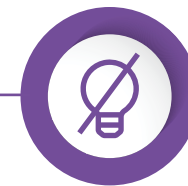
“Managers don’t have time for EBDM.”

Even when decisions must be made quickly, relying on the best available evidence – no matter how concise – helps improve outcomes. EBDM can be scaled to fit different timeframes.

“Our organization is unique, so external evidence doesn’t apply.”

While every organization has its own context, many challenges and responses are shared across sectors. Evidence from similar settings can still provide valuable guidance.

Pitfalls for Organisations to Consider Including



Hampering innovation

Requiring extensive evidence before implementing new interventions can delay innovation significantly. Often, early trials of an intervention show positive results, while subsequent studies temper initial optimism. This is especially true for new management methods or emerging technologies where scientific evidence, or sufficient organizational data may not yet exist. Waiting for conclusive proof in such cases can slow decision-making and reduce the chance of timely, effective outcomes.



Investigating the question thoroughly before beginning

Take time to fully understand the situation before formulating solutions. For example, if seeking to improve employee attendance, first investigate absence patterns and causes. Understanding the full context helps ensure you don’t overlook important factors, leading to more targeted and effective solutions.



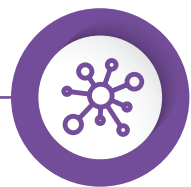
Prioritising proven facts

When confronted with conflicting data, prioritize reliable sources such as numerical data and peer-reviewed research. While qualitative insights have value, hard facts and statistics generally offer a firmer foundation for decision-making.



Compromised objectivity

Data interpretation can be subjective. People with different backgrounds may draw different conclusions from the same data. Without proper skills in sourcing and evaluating evidence, practitioners risk falling into confirmation bias – favouring evidence that supports their existing beliefs. Developing these skills takes time and dedicated effort.



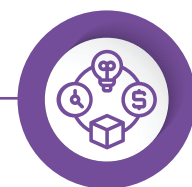
Data Sprawl

Government agencies often face a complex, fragmented data environment, with massive volumes of data scattered across disconnected systems – data lakes, warehouses, databases, legacy platforms, and more. This data sprawl makes it difficult for employees to locate and use the data they need in a timely manner.



Poor-Quality Data

Issues like outdated, incomplete, duplicate, or erroneous data are widespread. Poor-quality data causes inefficiencies and mistakes – ranging from delayed reimbursements and duplicated services to lost tax revenue. These problems disrupt processes both within and across agencies.



Access to resources

Accessing professional resources needed for EBDM can be challenging. While basic resources like textbooks and websites are accessible, specialized fields may require subscription-based databases or journals. In such cases, organizations may need to invest in resource access and staff training to translate findings into actionable insights. However, making better use of free online resources can often accelerate the development of EBDM capabilities



Time constraints

Professionals across sectors report limited time to source, evaluate, and apply evidence, especially in demanding work environments where they juggle multiple roles. Studies consistently highlight time pressure as the top barrier to adopting and sustaining evidence-based practices.

In conclusion

While evidence-based decision-making is a powerful approach, being forewarned about these pitfalls helps practitioners implement it wisely. By dispelling myths (“it doesn’t ignore experience; it’s not just numbers; we can use it even under time pressure; outside evidence can often apply here”) and proactively managing challenges (ensuring innovation isn’t stifled, defining problems well, maintaining objectivity, tackling data issues, providing access, and allowing time), a government organisation can fully realize the benefits of EBDM. The experience of those who have gone down this path shows that it’s not always easy – it requires cultural change, capacity building, and sometimes system overhaul. But the payoff is decisions that are better justified, more likely to succeed, and more transparent to stakeholders.

Case Studies

To cement these ideas, we will now turn to case studies that showcase evidence-based decision-making in action, highlighting both the achievements and the lessons learned in real governmental contexts. These concrete examples will illustrate how the concepts discussed throughout this manual come together in practice.

**But how are
agencies using
EBDM in practice
to bring these
strategies to life ?**



Australia’s AIHW empowers data-driven decision-making for Closing the Gap initiative

Summary

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has leveraged its long-standing data capabilities to support the national “Closing the Gap” initiative, which aims to improve health and welfare outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Since the National Agreement on Closing the Gap was launched in 2020, AIHW’s data collections have been pivotal in identifying key target outcomes and tracking progress on those targets. A cornerstone effort is the Community Data Project, which provides local communities with secure access to relevant data through regional data portals.

This empowers First Nations communities to analyze regional data, engage with government on development priorities, and make evidence-based decisions to advance Closing the Gap goals. By building local data capacity and sharing best practices in Indigenous data governance, the initiative has begun to foster a culture of data-driven decision-making at the community level, helping to bring national policy strategies to life on the ground.



Details of the case study

AIHW is Australia’s national agency for health and welfare statistics and has over 30 years of experience reporting on First Nations health priorities. Recognizing that robust evidence is essential to Closing the Gap, AIHW contributed several specialized data collections (e.g. perinatal health, youth justice, child protection datasets) to monitor improvements on the initiative’s targets. A major innovation was the launch of the Community Data Project as part of the 2020 Closing the Gap reforms. This project creates secure data portals for participating communities, through which local organizations can access up-to-date, locally relevant data on health, education, and social indicators. Two pilot working groups – one in New South Wales and one in Western Australia – were established to co-design and test the portal prototypes in 2022–23. The portals allow communities to **track their progress** on Closing the Gap targets and prioritize efforts based on evidence. For example, community members and leaders can review regional data on outcomes such as infant health or school attendance, identify gaps, and plan targeted interventions in collaboration with government partners. AIHW also provides training to local organizations in data analysis and interpretation, building the workforce’s capacity to use evidence in decision-making.

Early results have been promising: by tailoring data access to local needs and emphasizing First Nations data governance principles, the project has helped empower communities to take ownership of their development goals. This data-driven approach ensures that policy commitments under Closing the Gap translate into **deliberate, informed actions**. AIHW’s role in systematically collecting and sharing evidence has thus been crucial – not only for tracking national progress, but for enabling on-the-ground decision-makers to make better-informed choices that improve outcomes. The lesson from this case is that investing in data infrastructure and community-focused evidence tools can create a bridge between high-level strategy and local implementation, fostering more effective and confident evidence-based decision-making at every level.

Sources:

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Annual Report 2022–23 (Case Study on Closing the Gap) aihw.gov.au aihw.gov.au.

Singapore’s NEA uses AI forecasting to combat dengue outbreaks

Summary

Singapore’s National Environment Agency (NEA) has leveraged artificial intelligence to strengthen its national dengue prevention efforts. Through a machine learning-based forecasting system developed by NEA’s Environmental Health Institute, the agency can now predict dengue outbreaks up to three months in advance. The model integrates diverse data sources, including meteorological patterns, mosquito surveillance, and population data, to anticipate weekly dengue case trends with high accuracy. These forecasts enable the government to initiate early interventions, allocate resources more effectively, and mount targeted public awareness campaigns. The forecasting model supports a more proactive and evidence-based approach to vector control and disease management, shifting the national strategy from reactive outbreak response to anticipatory planning.



Details of the case study

Singapore’s dengue forecasting efforts are spearheaded by NEA’s Environmental Health Institute (EHI), which began developing predictive models in response to recurring annual outbreaks. EHI adopted a LASSO-based regression machine learning model trained on more than a decade of historical data, including rainfall, temperature, mosquito trap counts, and previous dengue case locations. The forecasting tool provides weekly projections up to 12 weeks ahead, enabling officials to spot emerging hotspots and anticipate outbreak intensity. In 2013, the model predicted a mid-year outbreak with remarkable precision: it forecast a peak of 863 cases in a single week, and the actual peak reached 842 cases in week 25. This forecast prompted early vector control campaigns, targeted public education, and pre-positioning of healthcare resources. NEA’s use of AI has since been institutionalized, with forecasts now integrated into weekly planning and public advisories. The model’s predictive performance has been consistently strong, with one-month-ahead forecasts achieving AUC scores above 0.75. Importantly, NEA shares these forecasts with inter-agency partners, local town councils, and the public, promoting shared accountability for outbreak prevention.

The Singapore experience demonstrates how a government agency can operationalize AI forecasting to enable timely, data-driven decisions that mitigate public health risks. By embedding AI and evidence-based predictive analytics into routine operations and empowering stakeholders with actionable evidence, NEA has strengthened its nationwide dengue response and set a global example of applied predictive analytics in urban disease control.

Sources:

Ng, L. C. et al. (2018). “Forecasting dengue epidemics using a hybrid climate model in Singapore.” BMC Medicine, 16(1), 129. <https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-5-1108-018>

GovInsider. “How Singapore is fighting dengue with AI.” <https://govinsider.asia/intl-en/article/dr-ng-lee-ching-nea-singapore-dengue-machine-learning>



Dallas's RIGHT Care program – Data-driven crisis response for 911 mental health calls

Summary

In Dallas, Texas, city officials have implemented an evidence-based program called **RIGHT Care** (Rapid Integrated Group Healthcare Team) to improve responses to 911 calls involving mental health crises. This multidisciplinary program pairs a police officer with a paramedic and a mental health clinician to form specialized response units. Launched as a pilot in 2018, RIGHT Care was driven by data showing a sharp rise in mental-health-related 911 calls and the shortcomings of traditional law enforcement responses (which often led to jail or emergency room visits rather than treatment). The impact of the program has been significant: over its first two and a half years, the teams responded to 6,679 calls, **connecting 40% of individuals** to community services and resolving 29% of incidents on the scene without need for further action.

Only 14% of encounters resulted in an involuntary detention for treatment, and just 8% required transport to a hospital – outcomes that mark a substantial improvement over the previous approach. Notably, fewer than 2% of RIGHT Care responses led to arrests, and the areas served by the teams saw a 20% decrease in mental-health-related emergency hospital admissions even as citywide psychiatric ER visits were rising. Buoyed by this evidence of success, Dallas expanded the program citywide in 2021, increasing the number of response teams and aiming to have RIGHT Care units handle 40% of all mental health 911 calls. The Dallas case study illustrates how data and evidence can drive policy innovation in public safety and health, leading to more effective and humane outcomes.

Details of the case study

The inception of RIGHT Care came as Dallas faced an 85% spike in mental health 911 calls in certain districts over a few years, with first responders often cycling individuals through jails or hospitals without addressing underlying needs. City leaders, in partnership with a local nonprofit (Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute), analysed emergency call data and identified a concentration of high-need cases in South Central Dallas. In early 2018, they piloted a new approach: dispatching Multi-Disciplinary Response Teams to behavioural health crises instead of standard police-only units. Each RIGHT Care unit consists of a law enforcement officer trained in crisis intervention, a licensed behavioural health clinician, and a firefighter-paramedic, ensuring that medical and mental health expertise are on hand from the start. This composition allows the team to assess and de-escalate situations on-site, provide immediate counselling or medical care, and connect individuals with community resources (such as mental health clinics, housing services, or substance abuse programs) rather than defaulting to arrest or ER transport. Data collected during the pilot phase demonstrated clear benefits: a large share of crises could be resolved or mitigated without using involuntary measures. Specifically, in 40% of calls the person in crisis was guided to appropriate community services, and in 29% of cases the issue was handled on the spot with no further action needed.

These outcomes represented a major shift toward preventive and health-centered interventions, reducing strain on emergency rooms and the criminal justice system. Additionally, only 2% of incidents led to an arrest for a new offense, indicating that the presence of health professionals helped avoid criminalizing mental illness. Encouraged by these results, city officials expanded RIGHT Care citywide in 2021, growing from 9 to 15 three-person teams to cover more territory. The program's expansion was itself an evidence-driven decision: city leaders cited the data on reduced hospital admissions and low arrest rates as proof that scaling up would improve outcomes and public safety. By 2022, the expanded teams were moving Dallas closer to the goal of handling nearly half of all mental health emergency calls through this model.

The Dallas experience underscores several lessons for EBDM in government: cross-sector collaboration (police, health, EMS) can be crucial for complex social problems; continuous data monitoring (on call outcomes, dispositions, etc.) enables agencies to refine programs; and visible success metrics (like reduced arrests and hospitalizations) can build the case for sustaining and scaling innovative approaches. Overall, the RIGHT Care case demonstrates how a local government used evidence and data not only to design a new policy (a health-first emergency response) but also to adapt resource allocation and institutional practice in response to what the evidence showed, resulting in better outcomes for individuals and the community.

Sources:

Pew Charitable Trusts – Dallas Program Shows Signs of Effectively Navigating Behavioral Health Emergencies; Results for America – Case Study: Dallas RIGHT Care Program

US Veterans Health Administration institutionalizes evidence use in policy decisions

Summary

The US Veterans Health Administration (VHA) – the nation’s largest integrated healthcare system – has taken significant steps to embed evidence-based decision-making into its policy and budget processes. In response to the federal Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (known as the Evidence Act), VHA leadership recognized a need to systematically evaluate the evidence supporting any major legislative or budget proposal affecting veterans’ care. VHA researchers and policy officials collaborated through the Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) to develop a “strength-of-evidence” checklist for proposals. This checklist assesses how well a proposal is backed by research, data, and evaluation findings, and it was incorporated into VHA’s formal review process by 2020. As a result, every significant policy or funding request in VHA is now vetted not only for alignment with strategic priorities and cost, but also for the robustness of its supporting evidence. The new process has quickly become institutionalized: the evidence checklist is now a standard part of VHA’s review of legislative and budget submissions, and it is being adopted in other parts of the Department of Veterans Affairs. This ensures that decision-makers are routinely presented with the best available evidence when setting policies or allocating resources, advancing a culture of evidence in the organization.



Details of the case study

When the Evidence Act was passed, it mandated US agencies to justify policy and budget decisions with evidence and to develop multi-year learning agendas and evaluation plans. VHA was well-positioned to respond, given its background in evidence-based clinical practice, but it still faced a practical gap: traditionally, internal reviews of proposals did not include a formal assessment of the supporting evidence base. In 2020, VHA’s QUERI analysts engaged stakeholders across the agency to design a solution. They identified key dimensions along which evidence contributes to good policy (such as demonstrating a need for the initiative, comparing alternative solutions, and feasibility) and created a checklist to rate each proposal on these criteria. This evidence assessment checklist was pilot-tested during VHA’s 2020–2021 budget cycle and then fully implemented in the review process for FY2022 proposals onward. Now, when a program office within VHA proposes a new program or a change in policy – for example, expanding a telehealth service or requesting funding for a mental health initiative – the proposal must include a review of existing studies, data, or pilot results that support its likely effectiveness. A panel or designated reviewers use the checklist to grade the strength of that evidence. Proposals backed by strong evidence (such as multiple rigorous studies or positive trial outcomes) are more likely to advance through the approval process, whereas those with weak or no evidence may be sent back for further development or evaluation.

The introduction of this mechanism has had immediate effects. According to VHA reports, the checklist and its accompanying training have heightened awareness among managers and policymakers about what constitutes good evidence and how to incorporate research into decision-making. It also provided a common framework and language for discussing evidence quality during high-level meetings on policy and budget choices. By 2023, the evidence checklist approach was being adapted beyond VHA’s healthcare arm to other parts of the VA, such as the Veterans Benefits Administration, indicating a broader cultural shift toward evidence-based policy within the agency.

An important lesson from this case is the value of formalizing evidence use through process changes: by making evidence review an official step in vetting proposals, VHA moved from ad-hoc use of data to a consistent, repeatable practice. Over time, this not only improves the quality of decisions (since strategies are more rigorously vetted), but also builds internal capacity and demand for good evidence. VHA’s initiative exemplifies how an agency can bring a high-level EBDM mandate to life by creating tools and checkpoints that integrate evidence into everyday governance. Early indications suggest that this approach is helping to create “buy-in” for evidence across different departments and is contributing to a stronger culture of continuous learning and accountability in veteran services.

Sources:

Garrido, M. M. et al. (2023). “Grading evidence to support legislative and budget proposals – VHA’s key to implementing the Evidence Act.”
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