

Why and How RealKM Magazine is Supporting Evidence-Based Knowledge Management

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In recent weeks, the Australian public has been hit with headlines like “NSW’s \$2 billion new trains are too wide to get through tunnels” and “Queensland Rail facing legal action because its new \$4.4bn trains are basically illegal”.

Revelations like these are nothing new. Every single day we hear about or have to deal with organisations that have wasted millions or even billions of dollars due to missing knowledge, bad knowledge, communications breakdowns, or failures in quality control. And these knowledge management (KM) failures not only cause the mega-blunders we see in the news, they also impact on every aspect of our lives. We grit our teeth at the organisations that somehow fail to grasp the basics of customer service. We shake our heads in disbelief at the bureaucracies that bury us in layers of red tape in pursuit of some obscure process that no-one seems to understand.

Clearly, we need better KM. But is that all we need? How do we know what works? What doesn’t? Why it works? Why not? Can we generalise the results we see across organisational sizes and structures, across cultures, across time? Or are they relevant only in their original context?

Being able to answer these questions in a sound way is what motivated Australian information executive Stephen Bounds to establish RealKM Magazine www.realkm.com in mid-2015.

Moving from opinion-based to evidence-based decisions

All too often we make our life and work decisions based solely on our opinions. But we and the people in our families, workplaces, and communities can pay a high price for this approach to decision-making. In an article in The Oxford Review, David Wilkinson gives a heartbreaking example of the devastating effects of opinion-based decisions :

“LuAnn was a 13 year old student in North Carolina who was displaying extreme learned helplessness ... When the researchers investigated her background and home-life [they] found a number of issue which appeared to lead to this state. The first of which was that from an early age, if she wet the bed her mother would punish her by spanking her. Her mother believed that the bed wetting behaviour was actually attention seeking behaviour and needed to be punished in order to stop it.

From the mother’s point of view this all made sense and led to the decision to spank LuAnn for wetting the bed from an early age. In fact this decision only made the situation worse.

This is how a world view or set of beliefs lead to actions which appear to be very logical from that system of thinking. This is an example of opinion-based decision-making.”

He goes on to discuss the role of confirmation bias in opinion-based decision-making: “Once we have a belief about something our brains starts to actively filter for evidence that our belief is correct ... This is the issue with opinion-based decisions. The moment we make up our mind that something is a certain way our brains start to look for the evidence to confirm it. The problem is at the same time it also neatly discards any evidence to the contrary. In effect, a belief quickly becomes reality as we gather more and more evidence that the belief is true.”

Wilkinson then advises that the counter to opinion-based decision-making is evidence-based decision-making: “Evidence-based decisions ... are of an entirely different nature. They are based on a research foundation. This is to say that they are based on testing not confirming evidence.”

However, decision-making that is based on little or no evidence is unfortunately widespread in organisations and government agencies. We've discussed a number of examples in RealKM Magazine articles, including Net Promoter Score , nudge management , predictive algorithms , team building events , and the use of social network sites in the workplace .

Is KM any better? As Stephen Bounds alerts , as do others , the KM discipline has a mixed track record in regard to evidence-based decision-making. This means that KM is now falling behind the overall field of management and also other management disciplines such as HR .

Clearly, to have better KM, we need to make better evidence-based decisions in KM.

How RealKM Magazine can help you with evidence-based KM

Since its establishment, **RealKM Magazine** has cemented a vital role in the international KM landscape, becoming a key go-to evidence resource for people working in the KM discipline and the managers and leaders of organisations.

RealKM Magazine can help you to:

- understand the what, why, and how of evidence-based KM
- access the evidence you need to make better evidence-based decisions in KM.

The RealKM Magazine article titled "*The disastrous effects of opinion-based decisions, and how knowledge management can be better evidence-based*" provides a good grounding in the fundamentals of evidence-based KM.

Once you've gained an understanding of the essentials of evidence-based KM, you can visit **www.realkm.com** to access a wide range of evidence-based articles to use in your work. These include:

- Special series on key topics from notable authors
- Feature articles synthesising a range of research and information on thought-provoking topics
- Articles discussing the findings of recent KM research.

The articles are published across six categories:

1. Brain power. Articles backed by sound research on individual and collective thinking and behaviour (both of the human and artificially intelligent kind), or that describe a real and specific case scenario.
2. Systems thinking. Articles backed by sound research on organisations and social systems (including complexity theory, organisational change, and culture), or that describe a real and specific case scenario.
3. ABCs of KM. Introductory/explainer articles on accepted knowledge management practice.
4. In the News. Articles relaying factual current affairs information that does not directly or indirectly endorse a particular conclusion.
5. Opinion. Editorial pieces and articles endorsing a particular conclusion or course of action without evidence of sound research being supplied.
6. Tools and techniques. Descriptions and/or reviews of tools and techniques that support knowledge management outcomes.

Access to RealKM Magazine articles is free, and you can subscribe to the RealKM Weekly Wrap email newsletter, or follow us on Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook.

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