

Chiara Amati: My background is psychology, so the question of how OB theory and evidence has influenced HR practice, for me, is a question of how psychology theory and evidence has influenced HR practice.

And within psychology I feel there has been a continuous conversation between practice and evidence, and this is partly, possibly, due to psychology's closeness to the medical profession. It's not to say that all psychology is evidence based but maybe to say that researchers and practitioners within psychology have had a more continuous dialogue. And this is particularly true of the clinical areas of applied psychology or the areas related to adult mental health.

This also might explain why, in other areas of applied psychology, such as organisational psychology or OB, the call to be more evidence based has, in fact, been interpreted as a call to follow a more medical model of evidence based practice where practice is, in essence, influenced only by that which has been proven or tested within a rigorous scientific framework.

There have been a number of clear successes of applying OB theory or evidence to HR practice. In the last few decades, for example, there has been a clear change in the way organisations select their staff, partly due to the increasing evidence and the theories related to biases in social perception or our perception of people.

Evidence about the predictive validity, the greater predictive validity of assessment methods, such as structured interviews or psychometrics or assessment centres, have greatly influenced practice, and, arguably, made selection in organisations both fairer and more effective.

Also, more recently, the increasing evidence, to do with the impact of exposure to various sources of stress at work and their impact on people's physical and mental health, have influenced government regulatory policy, and also, therefore, had a clear influence in practice in organisations.

There are, however, also many other areas of OB where the conversation between evidence or theory and practice has been possibly more stilted. Let's take, as an example, coaching; there are many organisations who adopt coaching as an approach to the development of their managers and leaders, and many individuals, themselves, who have been coached who would say that coaching has had a very positive influence on their performance [where] it can also, possibly, on their wider well-being.

However, if we look at the evidence for the impact and the effectiveness of coaching in organisations this is mixed and, at times, also absent.

So, if we were to think rigorously about evidence based practice what does that mean? Does it mean that we need to abandon the idea of coaching in organisations until we have more evidence? Well, to me, really, this is a good example of how evidence based practice or applying theory in HR practice really needs to be a more two-way conversation. So, yes, practitioners need to be informed by the evidence but also researchers or theorists need to be informed by practitioners.

And I would argue that we need to caution against more narrow interpretations of the need for evidence based practice that do not allow for a more critical discussion of the application and the applicability of the scientific method within an organisational context, and also that do not allow for a greater understanding of the value of practitioner experience.

So in my mind, really, when we're talking about evidence based practice we're talking about a two-way conversation and about, in a sense, a meeting of equals.