

Facts are sacred: the power of information

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Thursday 4 December 2014



Do we know the power of information?

- We think we know the power of data; it has become a truism of our age.
- Data is now spoken about as an article of faith, in almost a religious way.
- “I’m a bit of a freak for evidence-based analysis. I strongly believe in data.”
 - Sir Gus O’Donnell, former Cabinet Secretary and economist
- But in the age of “Big Data” we can’t just collect and store data.
- It’s not how much you’ve got, but how good is it and how do you use it.

The challenges of data

There are four questions we must ask ourselves if we are to use our data well:

- Have we got the right data?
- How good is what we've got?
- How well are we using that information?
- Is what we doing with that data actually helping us perform our jobs better?

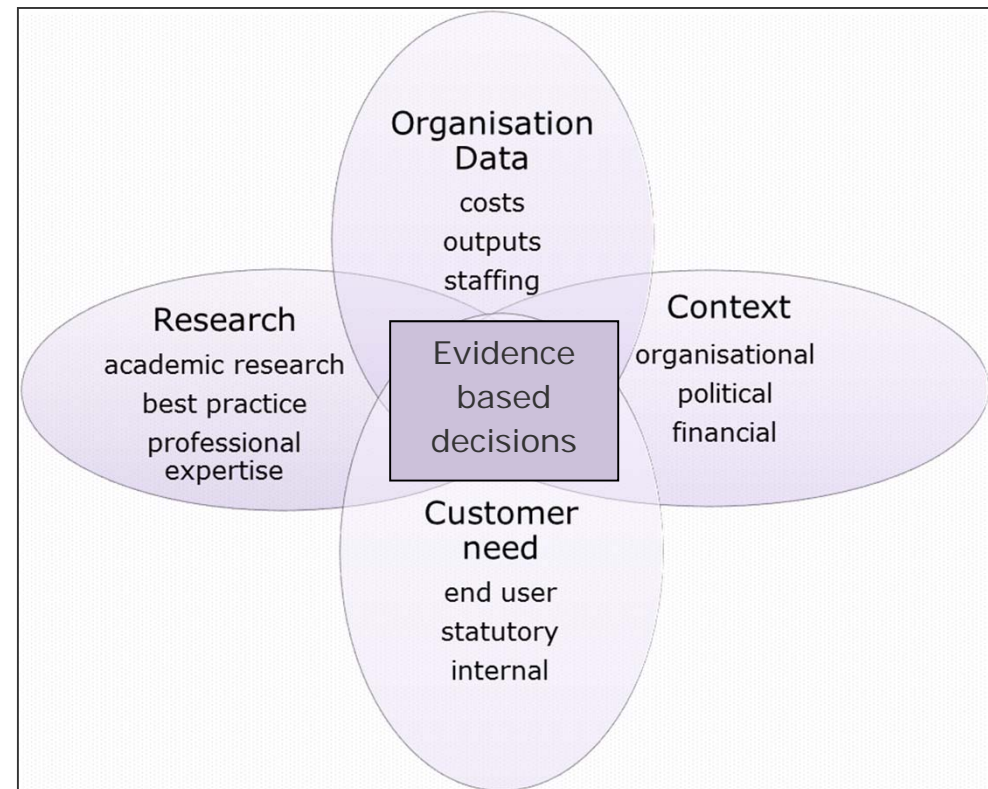
The problems with data

Of course no matter how good your data is it's never perfect.

- Data doesn't act, it must be used.
- "Dirty" or incorrect data can lead to the wrong decisions
- We must strive for consistency and uniformity in the way we collect and use data.
- We know that our information should be verified before we use it.
- Publish and be damned! If we only ever just publish data, we're not using it effectively.

Verified information supports good decisions

- Not only should the information we use be verified but it should be framed within the organisational, political and financial context.
- It should also reflect genuine customer need.
- Good evidence supports good decisions.
- Unverified information is gossip – we shouldn't be making decisions on the basis of gossip.



We need to use the information we have

“The goal is to turn data into information, and information into insight.”

-Carly Fiorina, former executive, president, and chair of Hewlett-Packard Co.

- We need to use the information we have in the most useful way possible for the organisations we work for.
- It must provide insight which leads to action.
- This is where CIPFA can help you.
- We have decades of experience and insight into using data to improve and increase performance.

How CIPFA uses information

Benchmarking:

- Benchmarking provides authorities with a way to compare their performance against others.
- Gives league tables against other similar councils.
- Allows authorities to identifying both areas of concern or of good practice.
- Provides objective tools to communicate internally and with stakeholders on performance.

How CIPFA uses information

How not to use benchmarking

- Can often be used merely as a process of publishing comparative data.
- Once way process with no drive to use to inform and improve.



How to use benchmarking

- Benchmarking must always be used as part of a cycle of improvement.
- Each step of the process leads through to the next in a closed circle of continuous service improvement.

How CIPFA uses information

Management Information

- Faced with information we can either use it for box ticking or organisational knowledge.
- Management Information must be used for more than to demonstrate that managers are overseeing performance.
- Instead it must be used to learn about how the organisation is working.
- Once equipped with this insight managers can then lead their organisation.

Effective benchmarking: an example

North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC):

Recently undertook review of Children & Families work.
Used CIPFA's benchmarking as a large part of review.

The context: NYCC

- Largest geographical county in England
- 465 Looked After Children (LAC)
- 377 Children In Need (CIN)
- 470 Child Protection cases
- 132,000 0-19 children
- 318 Primary Schools
- 44 Secondary Schools
- 10 Special Schools
- £37.1M Gross Budget – Children's Social Care (CSC)

Effective benchmarking: an example

NYCC review:

Children's Social Care transformation using benchmarking as significant contributor to the review:

- Total service staffing review and restructure
- Used section C on social worker structure and efficiencies to find out about other LA initiatives
- Used contact list for very specific queries – good network (e.g. LSCB chair costs, Head of Safeguarding costs)
- Benefits: no agency staff; good retention and recruitment; reduction in LAC; good platform for future reductions
- Challenge: exploiting the informal network for additional information; reciprocating other people's requests for information

Effective benchmarking: an example

North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC):

Lessons learnt by NYCC:

- Benchmarking a good discipline.
- Important to reach out beyond your own “bubble” and search out best practice.
- Need to invest time to get value out of it – need to commit to reciprocating even if not your priority.
- One of several tools to review performance – we’re slaves to the figures but we value the insights.
- Oversight of LAC budget requires constant vigilance. The benchmarking club collects information for a fraction of the cost that it would take an individual authority – therefore, regarded as good VFM.

Conclusions

- In an age of big data all of us are expected to use what we gather effectively.
- In an age of austerity and ongoing cuts and savings, data can offer the insight we need to improve performance and save money.
- But data doesn't act on its own, it needs to be used and used well.
- CIPFA has decades of experience of this and are happy to help your organisation to improve the way it uses data and improve delivery for citizens.