# Don't Sit on the **Science**

In a data-rich world, the discipline to **turn information into insight** is what separates a good decision from a lucky one.

By Jean-Marc Laouchez






At a human-resources gathering recently, a top executive told me that his firm employed several thousand scientists. That wouldn't be surprising if the firm were a pharmaceutical giant or a manufacturer of sophisticated aerospace parts. But his is a leading consumer-facing company—not an industry we usually picture filled with researchers in lab coats. More striking still, a sizable group of those scientists were devoted exclusively to HR. This executive was adamant: Science-based research and analytics—whether focused on technology, strategy, or people—was central to his company's success.

I understand his perspective. Every organization is inundated with data these days, especially when it comes to managing people. We track employee demographics, hiring rates, quality of work, performance, and internal mobility, to name just a few categories—and each of those broad groups can contain dozens of metrics of its own. All that data is meant to help us make better decisions: to hire the right people and help them do great work. Yet many companies sit on enormous reserves of data and still struggle to turn it into better decisions. The data is an asset; left unexamined, it's an asset that never earns a return.

That's the gap science is built to close. Data can tell you that you have a problem; science helps you understand what's actually causing it. At its core, the scientific method is a disciplined way of converting raw observations into reliable, repeatable insights—observing carefully, defining the problem precisely, forming a hypothesis, testing it, and analyzing the results. It walks you through the why. Yes, it takes more time than simply reading off a dashboard. But that rigor is what tells a leader which levers to pull—and which to leave alone—to fix a problem or capture an opportunity.

This matters most when the subject is people. Human beings are complex—as individuals and more so still as social animals. Separating the signal from the noise is difficult, even for gifted leaders. Pairing raw data with a rigorous research process gives leaders confidence their choices will hold up. It also makes business sense. Your investment in your people is often larger than any factory you build or product you launch—initiatives where you wouldn't think twice about applying scientific rigor to get the decision right.

The case only grows stronger as we move further into the era of artificial intelligence. AI will generate an enormous volume of data and analysis, and with it a pressing question: How much of it can you trust? Running AI output through the scientific method is one of the best safeguards against acting on conclusions that sound confident, but turn out to be wrong. And with the right safeguards, AI will allow you to be both agile and scientifically robust.

For now, using science in people decisions is a genuine competitive advantage. Even today, many organizations still lean heavily on intuition. Experience and instinct are valuable; they're just not sufficient on their own. The point of science isn't to replace that judgment but to test it—so the organization builds on insight rather than assumption. The room to improve is real: In a Workday survey this year, more than 60 percent of leaders said their people, processes, and technology don't work together as effectively as they should.

Which brings me back to the executive with all those scientists. I asked whether it had been hard to convince his own leadership to fund an HR department staffed with researchers. He said no. The scientific method had already driven so many breakthroughs across the business—how the firm served customers, ran its operations, and managed its money—that extending the same approach to people felt obvious. "We should treat our people the same way," he told me.