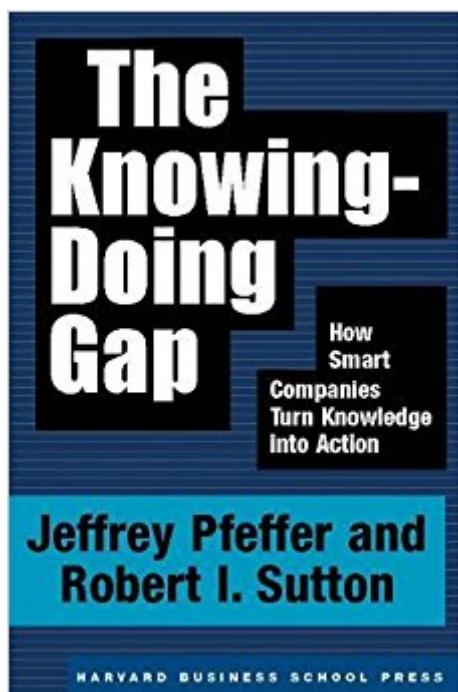


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# The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge Into Action



## **Synopsis**

Why are there so many gaps between what firms know they should do and what they actually do? Why do so many companies fail to implement the experience and insight they've worked so hard to acquire? The Knowing-Doing Gap is the first book to confront the challenge of turning knowledge about how to improve performance into actions that produce measurable results. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton, well-known authors and teachers, identify the causes of the knowing-doing gap and explain how to close it. The message is clear--firms that turn knowledge into action avoid the "smart talk trap." Executives must use plans, analysis, meetings, and presentations to inspire deeds, not as substitutes for action. Companies that act on their knowledge also eliminate fear, abolish destructive internal competition, measure what matters, and promote leaders who understand the work people do in their firms. The authors use examples from dozens of firms that show how some overcome the knowing-doing gap, why others try but fail, and how still others avoid the gap in the first place. The Knowing-Doing Gap is sure to resonate with executives everywhere who struggle daily to make their firms both know and do what they know. It is a refreshingly candid, useful, and realistic guide for improving performance in today's business.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Every year, companies spend billions of dollars on training programs and management consultants, searching for ways to improve. But it's mostly all talk and no action, according to Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton, authors of The Knowing-Doing Gap. "Did you ever wonder why so much education

and training, management consultation, organizational research and so many books and articles produce so few changes in actual management practice?" ask Stanford University professors Pfeffer and Sutton. "We wondered, too, and so we embarked on a quest to explore one of the great mysteries in organizational management: why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge." The authors describe the most common obstacles to action--such as fear and inertia--and profile successful companies that overcome them. Among the companies that Pfeffer and Sutton say do it right: General Electric, the Men's Wearhouse, SAS Institute, Southwest Airlines, Toyota, and British Petroleum. The book, based on four years of research, is broken into chapters with titles such as "When Talk Substitutes for Action," "When Fear Prevents Acting on Knowledge," "When Internal Competition Turns Friends into Enemies," and "Turning Knowledge into Action." Each chapter contains tips on what to do and what to avoid, and provides examples of how a lethargic company culture can be transformed. The Knowing-Doing Gap is a useful how-to guide for managers looking to make changes. Yet, as Pfeffer and Sutton point out, it takes more than reading their book or discussing their recommendations. It takes action. --Dan Ring

"...brash, fiery in its opinions...Pfeffer and Sutton close the knowing-doing gap; open their book and you can too!" -- Management General, December 2000"Every once in a while a great book starts to fall below the radar screen. This is one of those books:go out of your way to find a copy and read it!" -- Management General, Spring, 2000"The authors never leave a topic without prescribing seven or eight steps that companies can take." -- The New York Times, June 25th, 2000"This volume will quickly assume a place among the classic, frequently cited management books." -- National Productivity Review, Winter 1999"Why can't we get anything done? Pfeffer and Sutton [answer this question]in their useful book." -- Fast Company, June 2000, Story by Alan Webber

The Knowing-Doing Gap is an insightful book for anyone that works as a management professional. As many of us have experienced in our careers, the knowing-doing gap can be a gargantuan issue for management to overcome. The main purpose of the book is to explain the dilemma of knowing what should be done, sharing it, and putting it into action. It presents real world examples of companies experiencing the knowing-doing gap and provides analysis on why companies find themselves in these situations, how they get there, and what they should be doing to eliminate the gap. There are eight issues discussed and analyzed in detail, which are:Knowing  
ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  Å“What toÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  Å• Do is Not EnoughThe beginning of the book explains how

knowing what to do just isn't enough, and yet, most business books we read cover just that topic. When Talk Substitutes for action The authors point out how often upper level management will hold meetings to discuss new ideas and make decisions without discussing how to implement these changes. How to avoid using talk as a substitute for action is also discussed. When Memory is a Substitute for Thinking The authors explain how companies continue using old practices and ways of thinking simply because "that's the way things have always been done." This chapter also presents ways to overcome this "trap", including to create a new organizational division or sub-unit, which the authors claim may be the most reliable way to ensure that people will use active thinking rather than precedent as a basis for action. When Fear Prevents Acting on Knowledge This section of the book discusses the topic of fear as a barrier to translating knowledge into action. It provides evidence that distrust and fear of management are problems today in many organizations. When Measurement Obstructs Good Judgment Some examples from the book are firms focusing on short-term financial performance and overly complex measurement philosophies. The book also goes on to explain how companies like The Men's Wearhouse and SAS Institute have used measures for positive results. When Internal Competition Turns Friends into enemies This section uses examples from real companies to explain the importance of teamwork in successful companies, and also how some organizations continue to foster dysfunctional internal competition. Additionally, information on how to overcome destructive internal competition is abundant, such as implementing measures to assess cooperation in various business units. Firms That Surmount the Knowing-Doing Gap Pfeffer and Sutton provide specifics on how many well known companies have successfully surmounted the Knowing-Doing Gap. British Petroleum and its Virtual Teamwork Program, and Barclays Global Investors overcoming its challenges of global expansion and growth in personnel are two examples. Turning Knowledge into Action The final chapter details how to turn knowledge into action with through eight guidelines for action such as the importance of philosophy, overcoming fear, and proper measurement. The book was a noble effort to critically explain a prevalent problem in today's business world. The authors were successful in dissecting a complex issue. Despite this, a better subtitle for the book would be, "Why Companies Don't Turn Knowledge into Action." The authors spent a great deal of effort explaining the reasons why companies are unable to turn knowledge into action. What was lacking was a clear roadmap on how to overcome obstacles that prevent us from making real changes. The authors provided solid examples of successes some companies have found. It was clear that these strategies would work,

except when they wouldn't. As with most things in life, everything is situational and this book seemed to have its own "knowing-doing gap."

The main premise of this book as the authors best summarize it is: "Why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge. We came to call this the knowing-doing problem - the challenge of turning knowledge about how to enhance organizational performance into actions consistent with that knowledge. This book presents what we learned about the factors that contribute to the knowledge doing gap and why and how some organizations are more successful than others in implementing their knowledge." The book then analyzes the reasons and causes of this gap through numerous examples and presents eight main recommendations: "Eight Guidelines for Action: 1) Why before How: Philosophy Is Important 2) Knowing Comes from Doing and Teaching Others How. 3) Action Counts More Than Elegant Plans and Concepts. 4) There Is No Doing without Mistakes. What Is the Company's Response? 5) Fear Fosters Knowing-Doing Gaps, So Drive Out Fear. 6) Beware of False Analogies: Fight the Competition, Not Each Other. 7) Measure What Matters and What Can Help Turn Knowledge into Action. 8) What Leaders Do, How They Spend Their Time and How They Allocate Resources, Matters." A very applicable, educational and action oriented book. One that echoes the fundamentals of execution and its importance as the ultimate benchmark of success. A must read in the area of management! Below are key excerpts from the book: 1- "...although knowledge creation, benchmarking, and knowledge management may be important, transforming knowledge into organization action is at least as important to organizational success." 2- "Attempting to copy just what is done - the explicit practices and policies - without holding the underlying philosophies at once a more difficult task and an approach that is less likely to be successful." 3- "Talk is also valued because, as noted earlier, the quantity and "quality" of talk can be assessed immediately, but the quality of leadership or management capability, the ability to get things done, can be assessed only with greater time lag." 4- "It is possible, albeit difficult, to build strong cultures founded on principles and philosophy that can also innovate and change. But doing so requires much thought and attention. Otherwise, firms are readily trapped by their history, even if, or particularly if, that history has many positive elements in it, as Saturn's does." 5- "Conversely, fear is an enemy of the ability to question the past or break free from precedent." 6- "It is clear to us that merely knowing what measurement practices should be used does not, by itself, cause leaders to implement measures that produce intelligent, mindful, learning behavior rather than the reverse." 7- "In each of the instances in which effective measurement practices were used, knowing what to do, why it needed

to be done, and having the persistence and courage to do it helped leaders turn knowledge about how to enhance performance into organizational action."<sup>8</sup>- "As Dean Tjosvold, a researcher and writer on the subject of competition and cooperation, noted, "Competition stimulates, excites, and is useful in some circumstance, but those situations do not occur frequently in organizations, and the widespread use of competition cannot be justified."<sup>9</sup>- "Harlow Cohen, the president of a Cleveland, Ohio, consulting firm, has called this gap between knowing and doing the performance paradox: "Managers know what to do to improve performance, but actually ignore or act in contradiction to either their strongest instincts or to the data available to them."<sup>10</sup>- "Knowing about the knowing-doing gap is different from doing something about it. Understanding causes is helpful because such understanding can guide action. But by itself, this knowing is insufficient - action must occur."

This is a fantastic book that demonstrates with real-world examples of how individuals or teams can help transform their organizations from an organization that simply knows information to organization that can do information.

Understanding the underlying why makes you feel you are no more the crazy one in the room.  
There is a way or take the highway.

In "The Knowing-Doing Gap", Robert Sutton and Jeffrey Pfeffer show us the power of taking action -- just doing it -- within the corporate setting, whether it be defining capital structures around a boardroom table or debugging a welding robot on the assembly line floor. They convincingly show how effective individuals and firms can improve their effectiveness by replacing the inert state of "knowing" with the active state of "doing". Pfeffer and Sutton's case studies and anecdotes are fascinating, and are set within a well-organized framework of concepts and ideas. A compelling read.

Used book came in good shape. Made the online class much better and has useful information that may be applied to the business world.

I didn't realize that this was a summary. it's only 3 pages long and pretty pointless. Maybe the book is as well, but it was still disappointing.

In plain language Pfeffer explains the obstacles that organizations face when they try to institute change. I loved the companies that he described and the chapter on measurement is a must-read for those involved in human performance. I have recommended it to the consultants that we are currently employing to help us implement a new process and tool system.

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