



*Feature Commentary*

**Being a Solo EBLIP Practitioner**

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One of the issues that emerged at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference (EBLIP8) held in Brisbane, Australia in July 2015 is the challenge of being a solo practitioner of evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP). This matter was raised in response to several papers and also during the 'Evidently Practical' panel discussion. This commentary explores the barriers encountered by solo EBLIP practitioners and also offers some possible solutions.

Who are solo EBLIP practitioners? They are librarians who wish to make their professional practice evidence based but who work in

isolation, without the immediate support of colleagues. The most obvious sub-group are librarians working in one-person libraries, but librarians who work in larger libraries, surrounded by colleagues, may also consider themselves to be solo EBLIP practitioners if evidence based practice is not encouraged, supported, or even recognized by peers and managers. In some environments EBLIP may receive token recognition or formal acknowledgment but may not be underpinned by practical, day-to-day cultural implementation. A number of EBLIP8 conference delegates identified themselves as

working in either one-person libraries or libraries where EBLIP was not supported. There are recognized barriers or challenges that arise with the practice of EBLIP and these are evident amongst solo practitioners as well as those working in a larger community. Booth, in a thematic synthesis of 55 papers that reported at least one barrier to EBLIP, found that potential obstacles include the following:

- Lack of time
  - Lack of financial resources
  - Lack of infrastructure
  - Lack of organizational support
  - Lack of evidence base and/or poor access to evidence base
  - Lack of confidence
  - Real or perceived lack of research skills
  - Lack of research culture
- (Booth, 2011, adapted from p. 1 of 15)

While lack of time, finances, confidence, or skills are common themes across the EBLIP community, a significant insufficiency for solo EBLIP practitioners is lack of support, organizational or otherwise. Having someone to brainstorm with, collaborate with, and commiserate with helps to generate momentum and makes EBLIP more doable, especially in the early stages. But where can a solo practitioner find that support?

A solo EBLIP practitioner needs to find a tribe. As Seth Godin states, “[a] group needs only two things to be a tribe: a shared interest and a way to communicate” (2008, p. 21\_\_). Finding your “tribe”, a network of likeminded colleagues who can support you in your EBLIP endeavours, is essential. In these days of online interconnectedness this is easier than it has been in the past. Your local, state/provincial, or national professional association is a good place to start. Membership in a Library and Information Science (LIS) professional association has many benefits including putting you in touch with other professionals in your area who share your interests. Professional associations also help keep you up to date with

the latest news and trends, often provide access to LIS journals, give members discounted registration for events, conferences, and training, and may operate professional development schemes leading to formal accreditation.

Your network will also be found at specific EBLIP events such as the biennial International EBLIP conference. For many LIS practitioners face to face conference attendance is difficult due to financial, personal, or workplace barriers. However virtual attendance is possible. For example, at the recent EBLIP8 conference in Brisbane, Australia there was a very active Twitter feed (#EBLIP8), now available via Storify (<https://storify.com/EBLIP8/>). Audio of the panel discussion on day two of the conference was available live, with listeners able to submit questions remotely via Twitter, and a recording of the discussion is also available on YouTube (<http://eblip8.info/2015/07/14/panel-session-recording-available/>). It’s not the same as being there but it’s a great way to participate remotely.

Members of your EBLIP group are reading, or even contributing to, the *EBLIP Journal* (<https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP>). This open access peer-reviewed journal is published quarterly and offers a range of content to support the EBLIP practitioner including original research articles, commentaries, and approximately ten evidence summaries per issue which critically appraise and synthesize previously published research and include practical applications for the research. You can register with the Open Journal System on the main page of the EBLIP journal to receive tables of contents of the latest issues via email. There are also opportunities to become involved with the journal as an evidence summary writer or peer reviewer.

If you would like to participate in reading and discussing the LIS literature in a more informal setting an online journal club may be right for you. For example the Health Libraries Australia group of ALIA, the Australian Library and

Information Association, runs an online journal club using a wiki platform (<http://hlajournalclub.pbworks.com/>). Members choose an article to discuss and the discussion remains open for a month. Members can log into the wiki at any time to follow the discussion and/or post comments. At the end of the month the moderator calls for a volunteer to write up the discussion in the form of an evidence summary which is published in the open access *HLA News: National Bulletin of Health Libraries Australia* (<https://www.alia.org.au/enewsletters/alia-health-libraries-australia-news>). Membership of the journal club is open to any interested LIS professionals.

If you can't find a journal club that suits you, give some thought to starting one yourself. Colleagues from other libraries or institutions may be interested in some continuing professional development. The Centre for Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (C-EBLIP) runs an in-house journal club at the University Library, University of Saskatchewan for the librarians there. Every six weeks, rotating convenors choose an article and lead the discussion. Convenors are responsible for writing up the journal club discussion for [Brain-Work, the C-EBLIP blog](#). A list of articles and blog post links can be found here: <http://library.usask.ca/ceblip/activities/c-eblip-journal-club.php>

Like-minded EBLIP others are definitely active on social media and e-lists. Signing up to follow the EBLIP Journal on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/eblip>) is a good place to start. Other twitter accounts that would be helpful to get to know folks and to keep you in the loop are @CEBLIP, @EBLIP8, or @ciliplirg. Useful hashtags to follow include #LARK, #EBLIP, #ebliprg, and #ceblipblog. In addition to following accounts and hashtags, consider becoming more active yourself on Twitter. Posting links to helpful articles, asking questions, and sharing your experiences can help to create a community around you.

Communities on Facebook support the practicing EBLIPper, such as LARK – Library Applied Research Kollektive – (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/LARK-Library-Applied-Research-Kollektive/236960273098176?fref=ts>) LARK is open to librarians and professionals from all types of libraries who are interested in applied research.

Once you start making connections through professional associations, e-lists, journal clubs, social media, and other avenues, you may be able to identify an EBLIP practitioner to approach to be your mentor. This could be someone geographically close to you, which would allow face to face meetings, or it may be someone you only ever meet online, via Skype or even by telephone. Regardless of the medium, a professional mentor can provide the support that EBLIP practitioners may feel is missing in their immediate workplace. Professional associations are often a good place to start to find a mentor. For example, the Medical Library Association runs a mentoring program including providing mentoring resources (<https://www.mlanet.org/mentor/index.html>).

So far we have discussed a range of practical strategies that solo EBLIP practitioners may find useful to put them in touch with the wider EBLIP community. Finding your tribe is essential, but so is developing inner resources of attitude and resilience. Much of the discussion about solo EBLIP practitioners at the EBLIP8 conference focused on the issue of individuals not being able to break through management or colleagues' resistance to EBLIP, and the subsequent frustration they felt. Resilience and resourcefulness were identified as critical to dealing with such situations. Solo EBLIP practitioners were encouraged to develop boldness, to take risks, and to nurture resilience to cope with the inevitable knockbacks. Diane Coutu has identified one of the defining characteristics of resilient people as "ritualized

ingenuity” also labeled by French psychologists as “bricolage”. She writes that “Bricolage in the modern sense can be defined as a kind of inventiveness, an ability to improvise a solution to a problem without proper or obvious tools or materials” (Coutu, 2002, pp.54-55). This is a useful concept for solo EBLIP practitioners who may find themselves piecing together a support network outside their workplace, creating possibilities for evidence-based practice where none are obvious, or even ‘flying under the radar’ to identify a project where they could apply EBLIP principles. Mental toughness and emotional resilience are also attributes cultivated by resilient people. Part of mental toughness is the ability to withstand setbacks and find ways to identify opportunities, learning, or personal growth in negative experiences (McEwen, 2011, p.37). Of course this is easier said than done, but resilience is, at least in part, a learned skill.

So whether you are delving into EBLIP as a solo practitioner or you are working in a larger organization and want to get EBLIP off the ground, EBLIP8 panel member Denise Koufogiannakis offered useful advice: pick one thing that is important to you and work on that. Whether it’s a small workplace project, an information-gathering exercise to take to management, or some other piece of work, start small, keep it local and grounded and, of course, evidence based. Remember the three pieces of EBLIP that are crucial in order to work in this way: professional expertise, user preference, and the best available research evidence. Set goals and make sure you stick to them; find what

EBLIP8 keynote speaker Virginia Wilson referred to as an *accountability buddy*, someone who will help to keep you on time, on track, and on target.

Even if you never break through organizational barriers to EBLIP, no one can stop you from being evidence based in your own professional practice. Read widely and think critically. Engage in active reflection on your actions and experiences as an information professional. Keeping a journal or portfolio in which to record activities and events, not just what you did but how you responded and what you learned, will develop your reflective writing skills. Finally, have confidence in yourself. You’ll never know what you can accomplish until you take that first step. And then once you do, the possibilities are endless.

## References

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