

Announcing and Advocating: The Missing Step in the EBLIP Model

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Commentary

Announcing and Advocating: The Missing Step in the EBLIP Model

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Introduction

The Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) model “has been described as a structured approach to decision making” (Hallam, 2018, p. 456) and a method for problem solving (Howard & Davis, 2011). It consists of five sequential stages that step a Library and Information Science (LIS) professional or team through the EBLIP process. The five stages are *Articulate*, *Assemble*, *Assess*, *Agree* and *Adapt*, colloquially known as “The 5As” (Koufogiannakis, 2013). The model has iteratively evolved over the past 17 years. Yet it fails to include one of the most important characteristics of evidence based practice. This article argues that the model needs to evolve again to explicitly highlight the importance and

relevance of communicating EBLIP outcomes and process to the local community and the professional evidence base. A sixth “A” of *Announcing* or *Advocating* is proposed.

Evolution of the EBLIP Model

The first version of the model by Booth (2004) proposed five steps and established the foundational principles of EBLIP. It emphasized a reliance on research literature as the only source of evidence and focused on an individual practitioner’s approach to a research task. The steps included:

1. Defining the problem (*Ask*)
2. Finding the best evidence in the research literature (*Acquire*)

3. Appraising the evidence (*Appraise*)
4. Applying the evidence to practice (*Apply*)
5. Evaluating the change, performance, or impact (*Assess*)

Booth (2009) subsequently reflected on the five stages and proposed an amended version whereby an evidence based practitioner would:

1. *Articulate* the problem
2. *Assemble* the evidence base
3. *Assess* the evidence
4. *Agree* the actions
5. *Adapt* the implementation

In the evolved model Booth suggested that a feedback loop existed between the *Agree-Adapt*

steps and identified that decisions in libraries are often made by teams, rather than individual practitioners. The revised model began to acknowledge research literature and locally collected data as equally valid sources of evidence.

Koufogiannakis (2013) validated Booth's model in her doctoral thesis, in which she argued for a broader definition of evidence that included professional knowledge and local evidence alongside published research. The final iteration of the five-step model was published in Koufogiannakis and Brettle's 2016 book, *Being Evidence Based in Library and Information Practice*, in which they stated that the five steps were cyclical in nature and could be applied to both individual and group decisions (p. 14).

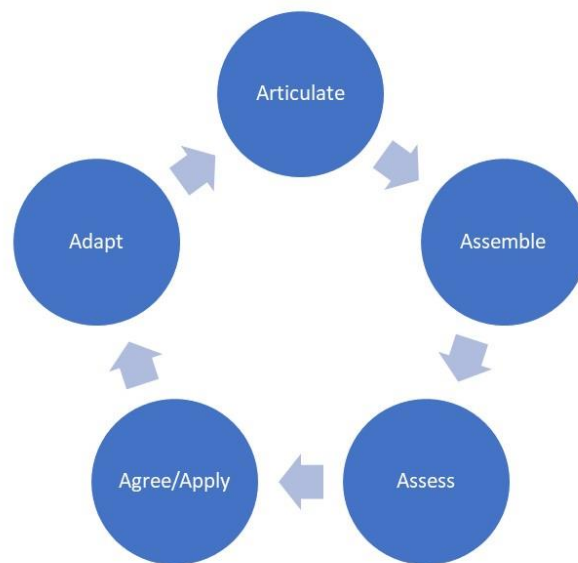


Figure 1
The EBLIP model (Koufogiannakis & Brettle, 2016, p. 14).

This version of the model drew on a range of different evidence sources and was described as a holistic and realistic depiction of the EBLIP process. The model has been widely adopted and applied by individuals and teams, with Hallam (2018) noting that the Koufogiannakis and Brettle version allows practitioners to take ownership of the process, and fosters critical reflective practice among LIS professionals.

Alternative Frameworks

Alongside the evolution of the EBLIP model, a small number of related frameworks were proposed and documented in the literature. Howard and Davis (2011) melded design thinking with Booth's original 2004 version of the model. Their approach combined the philosophies of the two frameworks to produce a hybrid model of evidence based practice (EBP) and design thinking. The model proposed six stages:

1. Define the problem
2. Undertake and appraise research
3. Prototype and test
4. Implement the solution
5. Evaluate the outcomes
6. Engage in storytelling

Howard and Davis's (2011) hybrid EBP and design thinking model was the first to include a step that explicitly identified the role of communication as a characteristic of EBLIP. The sixth step—engage in storytelling—is described as “a process to close the loop and contribute to the evidence base” (p. 19). Howard and Davis argued that when solutions to complex workplace problems have been implemented and evaluated, it is important to tell the story through informal and formal channels. They suggested there are benefits to the individual, organization, and the broader profession in documenting the process, the inputs (or evidence), and the learnings of the EBLIP process in order to add to the evidence base that can be drawn on by other LIS practitioners in the future.

Howlett (2018) proposed a four-phase framework to describe how EBLIP may be undertaken by academic libraries as a strategic engagement activity. Howlett challenged the unidirectional nature of the EBLIP model, arguing that various stages of the model are multi-directional, iterative in nature, and interconnected in practice when applied to complex organizations. The proposed “lens” reduced the steps or phases of EBLIP to four:

1. *Interpret* the organizational context and strategic priorities
2. *Apply* the library's strategy
3. *Measure* the outcomes
4. *Communicate* the impact of the library's strategic contribution

This model emphasized the application of evidence based practice through which academic libraries “[tell] the story of how the library contributes to student and institutional success” (Howlett, 2018, p. 76). Howlett argued that the communication step empowers library leaders to generate influence and advocate for what the library is and what it achieves within their university.

In Thorpe and Howlett's (2020) *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Capability Maturity Model*, the way in which a library reported or communicated evidence was identified as an indicator of maturity. More mature organizations focused on communicating for influence and making evidence easily understood by the target audience (p. 97). Interview respondents demonstrated varying degrees of appreciating and applying the power of communication to demonstrate value and impact to local stakeholders. Staff from libraries that showed a high level of EBLIP maturity could also articulate the benefits of contributing to the LIS evidence base.

The alternative frameworks view evidence based practice from different perspectives. However, all explicitly feature a stage in which

LIS practitioners communicate their findings, processes, and outcomes. Communication is emphasized as a key step that informs future research, documents methodologies and processes, articulates the role of the library and its staff, demonstrates value and impact, and builds the profession's evidence base.

Implicit or Explicit

Neither Booth's original models nor Koufogiannakis and Brettle's widely adopted version explicitly identified a step in which the LIS practitioner communicates their evidence based practice to their stakeholders, clients, or peers. While Koufogiannakis and Brettle did not include mention of communicating (or advocating or announcing) as a step in their model, they have written about the importance of communication within EBLIP. As early as 2004, Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2004) argued that:

Dissemination of research results is vital to the progress of the profession as well as helping to improve practice. It involves not only making your research available, but also ensuring that it is accessible to others and presented in a manner that is easy to understand. (p. 127)

They promoted communication within the library, to its parent organization, and externally to the profession via informal and formal methods of dissemination, such as conference presentations, journal clubs, scholarly publication, reports to management, and personal networking (Crumley & Koufogiannakis, 2004).

Koufogiannakis and Brettle (2016, pp. 165–166) recommended that LIS professionals engaging in EBLIP should:

- Share their “learn[ing] with others in order to improve the knowledge of the profession.”

- “Use ... new knowledge or evidence to convince or influence others of the best way forward or to prove the value of their services.”

They suggested that the importance of communication was implied throughout the contributed chapters of their book and acknowledged that it was an aspect of EBLIP which, at the time of publication, had not been well considered in the literature (Koufogiannakis & Brettle, 2016, p. 166).

One way to consider how to explicitly embed communication as a stage in the EBLIP model is to consider the relationship between EBLIP and research processes. Hallam (2018) drew parallels between the EBLIP model and research processes, stating that one of the goals of evidence based practice is to inspire librarians to conduct research. Nguyen and Hider (2018) also linked EBLIP with the benefits of undertaking research as a librarian. They surmised that research is a key tool for EBLIP, particularly in the academic library sector, where practice-oriented research can be “harnessed by [library] management to implement improvements and innovation” (p. 16). Writing, publishing, disseminating and sharing the completed work is the final step in the research process (Hallam, 2018, p. 457). Communicating research findings is a critical and often required stage of the research process, particularly when publishing research findings is mandated by funding bodies. If EBLIP is accepted as a form of practitioner research, then it follows that communicating findings and results should be a logical and explicit requirement of being evidence based LIS practitioners.

The omission of a communication step as an endorsed and prioritized part of EBLIP could be why scholarship and practitioner research are not widely accepted as a part of LIS professionals' work. Lamond and Fields's (2020) review of 20 years of EBLIP in New Zealand reported that it was difficult to find examples of EBLIP application and development in the

literature. Lamond and Fields (2020) assumed that the published outputs were not representative of the EBLIP work undertaken across the country. They purported that EBLIP in New Zealand was primarily undertaken as an information gathering activity to solve workplace problems, with little or no consultation of published literature or theory, and subsequently not reported in the published literature as research outcomes (p. 31). Less formal examples were found in presentations, blog posts, product reviews for vendors and were observed anecdotally at meetings and in conversations. The failure of LIS practitioners to announce, report, and publish their work makes it challenging to determine how widespread EBLIP adoption is by individuals, teams, and organizations. Todd (2015) highlighted the perceived invisibility of school librarians' impact on student learning due to a lack of research and an evidence base to support advocacy efforts in Australia. For LIS

practitioners committed to being evidence based, it should be concerning that the impact of libraries engaging in EBLIP continues quietly and remains mostly invisible to libraries' funding organizations, clients, and the profession. Figure 2 shows how the sixth step could be added to the EBLIP model.

Announce and Advocate—The Missing As

Why should announcing, advocating, and communicating be made an explicit part in the EBLIP model? I propose four benefits that may apply to individuals, libraries, and the profession:

- To advocate and influence
- To contribute to the profession's evidence base
- To demonstrate professional expertise
- To build organizational capacity and maturity

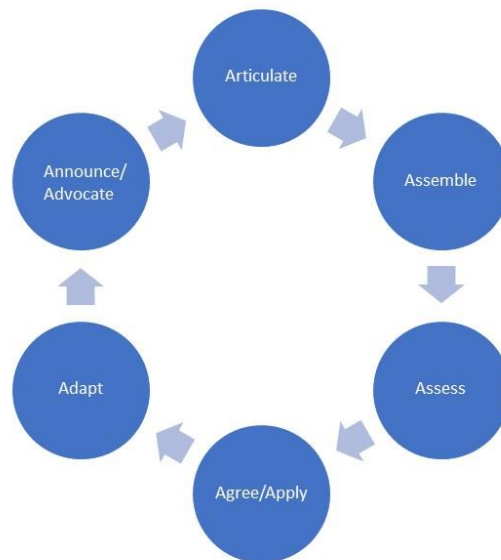


Figure 2
The proposed evolution of the EBLIP model.

To Advocate and Influence

Libraries are commonly reliant on funding from the organization they serve, be it a university, government, or for purpose or for profit corporations. Using evidence to influence decisions and decision makers is a key reason that librarians adopt evidence based approaches in their work (Partridge et al., 2010, p. 285). Howlett's (2018) organizational lens model argued that one purpose of EBLIP is to effectively communicate the library's contribution and value to its parent organization or funding body. Lamond and Fields (2020) stated that evidence based reports have an increased chance of getting funding for projects. Being able to articulate clearly the evidence supporting a project, initiative, or business case is more likely to influence stakeholders. In reporting evidence for advocacy and influence, it pays to strategically consider the target audience. Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2004) argued that EBLIP needs to be user-friendly and understandable by those to whom library staff report, as well as to colleagues. While the message and the method of communication should have a clear purpose and be easy to follow, evidence should be communicated in ways that might influence the decision made by those in power. The EBLIP model can be strengthened by emphasizing this activity in order to empower LIS practitioners using evidence based practices to achieve success.

To Contribute to the Evidence Base

Issues with the quality and quantity of the LIS evidence base have acted as a barrier to adopting and implementing EBLIP from the beginning of the movement (Haddow, 1997; Koufogiannakis & Crumley, 2006). This reason alone should be enough to explicitly add a communication focused step to the EBLIP model. Howard and Davis (2011) included storytelling in their model, stating that sharing what has been learned adds to the evidence base locally within a library, at its parent institution,

and in the broader LIS profession.

Koufogiannakis and Crumley (2006) argued that

every librarian has a part to play in building up an evidence base that is directly relevant to our decision-making needs. ... Librarians need to start filling the gaps and mending the seams of our professional body of knowledge in order for our profession to advance. (p. 338)

Increasing the quality, quantity, and diversity of work contributed to the evidence base should also foster inclusion and diversity of opinion, inviting more voices and alternative perspectives into the profession. Like the Critical Librarianship movement, EBLIP is contextualized to local, social, political, and economic environments (Drabinski, 2019). A model that endorses and promotes the communication of EBLIP empowers the development of critical librarianship in which evidence can challenge and be challenged. When librarians use evidence to advocate, they bring an awareness to organisational behaviour that can be named and professionally discussed in order to expose bias in decision making (Koufogiannakis, 2013, p. 197). The critical nature of questioning that starts with the *Articulate* stage should reach a logical conclusion with *Advocacy*. In doing so, evidence based practice is well aligned with the Critical Librarianship movement to document, uncover, and challenge assumptions in library structures, systems, and services. For EBLIP to fully support the development of a community of practice that "changes the profession for the better" (Koufogiannakis & Brett, 2016, p. 166), the model must promote the importance of contributing to the profession's evidence base.

To Demonstrate Professional Expertise

At its heart, EBLIP promotes and develops "the mind-set of a critically reflective practitioner" (Hallam, 2018, p. 457). In order for EBLIP to be an embedded and valued part of everyday professional practice, it must be visible.

Communicating research findings promotes the benefits of being evidence based. It encourages and supports practitioners who wish to develop their skills and expertise in this space (Hallam, 2018). Appleton (2021) argued that the LIS professionals should exhibit pride in their work, and should actively and deliberately promote their research based achievements. One strategy suggested by Appleton (2021) is to engage in scholarly writing and presenting as a way to build the reputation of both individual contributors and the library service. Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2004) stated that disseminating evidence based practice contributes to how librarians understand and define their role. By announcing outcomes and achievements to the community, evidence based practitioners can document their expertise in reaching milestones and developing innovations, time-stamping projects for future reference. If LIS professionals want to be evidence based, then the communication and sharing of their achievements and enthusiasm should be a defining feature of their professional expertise and identity.

To Build Organizational Capacity and Maturity

Library services are human centred and human mediated. A culture of evidence based practice within an organization requires a shared approach and participation from all staff. Booth's revision of the original model was partly influenced by his observations of EBLIP applied within teams. Booth (2009) noted that "a significant contributor to the success of any service change is the motivation, involvement and commitment of the team" (p. 343). Lamond and Fields (2020) viewed EBLIP as a way of developing staff. They described how EBLIP benefits the library producing evidence based outcomes and also develops the potential and performance of staff through the process. The way in which evidence was communicated to influence organizational decision making and to demonstrate value and impact was a key indicator of EBLIP maturity in Thorpe and

Howlett's (2020) model. Staff who communicated EBLIP within their libraries and to external audiences contributed to growing the maturity of the library as an evidence based organization. The ability to effectively communicate to different audiences via different channels is a core professional skill for all LIS workers. Nguyen and Hider (2018) identified many benefits for libraries in fostering a culture of research communication. The benefits included "more efficient ways of working, better informed staff, the production of evidence that can be used for advocacy, and professional kudos for the library and individuals" (Nguyen & Hider, 2018, p. 16). Hallam (2018) argued that employers should "provide opportunities and resources for their staff to engage in EBP, including the dissemination of research findings to the wider profession" (p. 460). In the COVID pandemic environment where libraries have benefited from sharing knowledge, evidence, and experiences with each other, it makes sense for the EBLIP model to demonstrate a commitment to communication in order to build organizational capacity, resilience, and maturity.

Conclusion

Koufogiannakis and Brett (2016) stated that their EBLIP model was "more about approaching practice with a particular mindset, rather than about checking off steps in a process" (p. 165). Regardless of the authors' intent, it is easy to default to using the model as a step-by-step guide, especially for professionals beginning to engage with EBLIP as a way of working and being. This makes the absence of a step that promotes the communication of EBLIP activities a challenge for the future of the profession. If a generation of LIS professionals learn to engage in EBLIP without announcing, advocating, and communicating their work, then criticisms of the validity of the profession's evidence base will endure. Communicating in an evidence based way should be an explicit part of the EBLIP professional identity. By adding *Advocate and Announce* to the model as the "6th A," LIS professionals who are doing

and being evidence based in their practice will be well placed and valued for their expertise. They will be well equipped to influence decision makers, grow in maturity, and contribute to the evidence base of the profession. The EBLIP model must be strengthened with an explicit step that promotes actively contributing to the evidence base for the betterment of libraries and the profession.

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