SHOW NOTES

How to Use Research in Practice

Presenter
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In this webinar, we are joined by Virginia Wilson, Director of the Center for Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) at the University of Saskatchewan. She has worked in public libraries, special academic libraries, and now at the University of Saskatchewan.

Her presentation covers the EBLIP organization, as well as how individuals and organizations can leverage the power of relevant information and research when working towards a goal. EBLIP is described as the best available evidence, moderated by user needs and preferences, being applied to improve the quality of professional judgments (12:55). EBLIP is taking a holistic look at information before making informed decisions.

There are several reasons to use EBLIP, as it:

- Aids in decision-making, by ensuring all angles are covered and given the attention they deserve. Instead of making things up as you go, have a clear reason for your actions.
- Increases confidence, by helping individuals make decisions that are backed up by fact. Better work decisions result in self-assurance and the knowledge that the job is being done well.
- Proves due diligence, if you're in a position where you have to justify a decision that was made. Having data to support a choice adds authority.

NIC
National Institute of Corrections

- Convinces higher-ups, if you're seeking to make changes. Having reasons and evidence to support those changes make them more likely to be applied.

There are 6 steps that individuals can take to make EBLIP work for them, as they work towards their project's completion:

1. Articulate the question - Explain what data are you looking for, and how you're hoping to answer your question. Identify the reason you're researching, and ask yourself what you are hoping to change. Think about any assumptions you might be facing, as well as financial constraints and the urgency of the situation.
2. Find the evidence – After asking your question, think about what research might be relevant to your project. Consider the most applicable evidence. Is it going to be found in published books, journal articles, open access databases and archives, social media, or local news? Ensure that what you're citing is actually relevant to your question.
3. Assess the evidence – Determine what evidence is trustworthy and valid. Ensure the articles or resources you're using will work in the context you're using them.
4. Apply the evidence – The applicability of research is subjective. What will work in one context may not be useful in another. Determine if the research holds true for your situation. Is it replicable (is it current, does the sample group compare to yours, does it fit in your budget, etc.)?
5. Evaluation – Determine the results of your actions. Are there still gaps? Did your research work as expected? How did the process work for you and how effectively did you use EBLIP?
6. Dissemination – Share your research and work (via social media, personal/professional websites, webinars, published articles, etc.). Contribute to the body of literature and knowledge in your field. Your work is important and someone else may benefit greatly from it.

Using EBLIP to guide research isn't exclusive to written information – it can help with many types of questions. EBLIP can help a researcher conduct first-hand studies by directing their questions and assessing the resulting information. Even though the steps are listed in a linear fashion, there is often backtracking and reassessment involved. Throughout the process, you may find that you need to research a topic further, or that a solution doesn't function as intended, prompting reassessment. This is one of the strengths of EBLIP, as it consistently encourages researchers to look at their data and evaluate it.

Wilson went through the steps of EBLIP with an example scenario, using the question "Among prison libraries in the United States, how does adequate funding, versus no or little funding, affect the inmate population?" The following describes the steps she took in the EBLIP process.

1. Articulating the question, particularly by ensuring that vocabulary is understood, minimizes any confusion. This was done by defining what "adequate" means in this subjective context. Here, Wilson asked "how does funding in prison libraries affect the inmate population," and started looking for research and information pertaining to her question.

2. Finding the evidence specifically focused on how to search for relevant information. Wilson mentioned Google Scholar, simple Google searches, EBSCO databases, open access databases, library and information science (LIS) literature, and special library literature. She suggests looking at dates, and seeing what the best available evidence is – because some fields change quickly, and new evidence is uncovered, old research can be rendered obsolete. If something is inaccessible for some reason, copy the article title and search for similar publications. Use social media and reach out to professionals in the field. Searches for keywords are one of the most versatile tools in a researcher's arsenal.

3. Assessing the evidence is a simpler procedure; look at the information and check whether the source is valid. Is there any obvious bias or conflict of interest? Wilson developed several checklists that help determine how usable research might be (see list of resources).

4. Applying the evidence is where you work to make the data collected clearly support your project. Some questions need to be asked: Does the user group correlate to your user group, how current is the information, how much money would this take, will leadership be receptive, and how important is it? Does this project deserve the effort, or could it be better utilized in a different area?

5. Evaluating serves as an after-action report. You're asking yourself how well EBLIP worked in your situation, how it was appraised, how it was applied, and how it was received. Look back at your project and determine how using EBLIP helped you focus your research and how it guided your effort.

6. Disseminating your findings may not always be possible. If something is confidential or has sensitive information, share only what you can. Survey results and collected data may be able to be published or made available, even if full reports aren't.

It does take practice and repetition for the EBLIP mindset to take root. It's OK to take small steps and try out the different facets of EBLIP to see how it works and how you can work

with it. By following this schema, organizations can work towards ensuring their actions are thoughtfully backed up by relevant information. Any risks are far outweighed by the methodical, factual way that data can drive policy and decision-making.

Resources
The following resources were referenced:

Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Journal
Open access-research studies, evidence summaries,
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP

e-LIS – repository
http://eprints.rclis.org/

DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals
https://doaj.org

Peer Reviewed LIS Journals
https://library.usask.ca/ceblip/research/peer-reviewed-lis-journals.php

Evidence-Based Toolkit for Public Libraries
http://ebltoolkit.pbworks.com/w/page/9671460/Frontpage

Centre for Evidence Based Library and Information Practice
https://library.usask.ca/ceblip

Webinar Handout
(see webinar webpage)