

Contemplating an age of computational rationalisation

A personal reflection on Libraries Rewired 2023.

IN November 2023 CILIP hosted its inaugural digital transformation event ‘Libraries Rewired’ – rebranded as Rewired for 2024, in London. ‘Tech-curious’ library, information and knowledge professionals converged on the capital for a day that embraced everything from AI and data to advocacy and value proposition.

The predominating theme was that the LIS community is not at the forefront of fundamental paradigm changing developments and needs proactively to set the agenda for the future, not respond to it.

Here are just a few personal takeaways.

Suffering AI

We were not prepared for AI and are still grappling with the implications of generative tools. AI continues to be a topic of interest, but also anxiety. In an inspiring keynote presentation – *Suffering an AI change* – Bill Thompson, technology writer and Head of Public Value Research at BBC R&D argued that “artificial intelligence” would be better defined as “computational rationalisation”, and that “intelligence” is a nebulous concept.

AI, he argued, sits in a much wider IT and information landscape. “AI is not a separate thing, but another layer added to the computational infrastructure that runs the modern world. Not just generative AI but a whole range of software-defined capabilities that will approach or surpass human-level skills in a wide range of cognitive tasks.”

He compared the current situation to 15 years or so ago, when “Dr Google” threatened to dethrone GPs. We’re just entering another stage of technological development, the next chapter in the liberation of access to information. We can either embrace or resent it. Our role is to explain it, demystify it and make it understandable.

Library Tech – future directions

Ken Chad, Ken Chad Consulting, presented on the rapidly developing technical infrastructure in libraries

driven by advancements in digital technology, changing user needs and evolving library missions. Aside from specific Library Tech morphing into ED Tech, generic resources like Microsoft Copilot will have a profound impact on working practices and user behaviour.

Data conundrums

The LIS community needs to do more to manage, interpret and communicate data. It is crucial to be “data informed” in so many areas, including metrics (good and bad), advocacy, evidencing performance, value, impact and statistics. Keep an eye open for UKieG’s popular data visualisation course that will help get you started.

Kate Lomax argued that qualitative data was equally important. Impact stories, collecting and sharing case studies from library users, user research/ user experience (UX) and creating a culture of ‘good data’ sharing best practice, knowledge and skills.

Open source solutions

Collaboration with other sectors, developing networks and resource sharing are fundamental. Open systems could embrace resource sharing, shared collections and shared software development.

Agility and professional development The LIS profession needs to build agile professional development programmes that can adapt to this rapidly changing environment. AI, data management and the utilising open source technology are key training requirements, for example.

Digital rights

Ben White, Knowledge Rights 21, focused his attention on e-books, e-lending and e-licensing, a permanent challenge (and headache) across the LIS community. Prohibitive pricing, bundling reducing choice and unstable access are making it difficult to undertake flexible collection development.

The demise of X?

The potential demise of Twitter/X is seeing the rise of multiple alternatives including Threads, Mastodon and



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Bluesky. If your organisation hasn’t done so already, it needs to consider migration options and appropriate platforms and establish a presence to ensure you lay claim to an appropriate corporate identity even while you contemplate how best to use it. UKieG offers an excellent course on social media and post-Twitter strategies.

Gamification

Ash Green, Library Systems Technician at Goldsmiths University Library, presented on the immense benefits of ‘Gaming the Library’ – using game-making tools like Inklewriter, Squiffy, Bitsy, Twine and Pocketcode. Many are no-coding or programming required, web-based and free to use. CILIP members can read Ash’s feature on gaming in the library at <https://tinyurl.com/5erwywbp>.

Create the future

Ken Chad quoted the science-fiction writer William Gibson, saying: “The future is already here – it’s just unevenly distributed.” A key challenge will be to ensure consistency in all these areas across all LIS sectors.

Librarians are not great at articulating value. We need to build our advocacy capability and value proposition; engaging, collaborating, Integrating.

Digital scholarship, training and professional development are fundamental to the future of the profession. Bill Thompson declared that the best way to predict the future is to create it. ‘Let’s seize the means of computational rationality.’ **IP**

● **Book for Rewired 2024** at <https://librariesrewired.org.uk/>