

Accessibility, sharing, language and truth decay

A personal reflection on the CILIP 2024 Conference

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My name is Megane Quelvennec, I'm Evidence & Knowledge Librarian at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust. I was fortunate enough to receive a UKeiG bursary to attend the CILIP Conference 2024 in Birmingham.

As a new professional in the library, knowledge and information world, it was an educational experience hearing from speakers from diverse sectors, not just healthcare. The headlining theme of the 2024 conference was intellectual freedom which was quoted by Louis Coiffait-Gunn (CEO of CILIP) as "the bedrock of our professional practice, wherever we work". This was echoed throughout the event with keynote talks on "Truth Decay in Europe," "Creatively Linguaging the value of KM in your Organisation" and "AI and KM: Learning from Practical Experience in AI Pilot Projects."

I first attended a panel discussion entitled "Libraries, Health and Digital Literacy." We heard from Debbie Hicks from [The Reading Agency](#) who spoke about how in this information age the internet has changed the way that we communicate but increased the volume of misinformation. Debbie talked about some shocking statistics - how one in six adults have a reading age of under nine years and one in five can't find or don't have access to the right resources or information. In a world where health and digital literacy are constantly evolving, these statistics make you realise just how important libraries can be. Ruth Carlyle from [NHS England](#) spoke on the challenges and solutions that we face in this area where 43% of patients are struggling with words and 61% with words and numbers. Ruth mentioned how the medical evidence base doubles every seventy-seven days and highlighted the challenge of making sure that patient information is evidence-based in a way that most people will be able to read and understand. Both health libraries and public libraries play a significant role in the distribution and availability of health and digital information, with librarians being the third most trusted profession.

Vishaal Virani from YouTube touched on this topic by mentioning there is a growing demand for health-related content. YouTube has developed a "health shelf" which is an authoritative tag for trusted resources so that viewers can be assured that they are watching resources posted by credible sources. As well as this trusted tag, YouTube has created a health creator community to help increase the accessibility of credible resources for the public. Sophie Randall, from [Patient Information Forum](#) (PIF), spoke on the importance of co-production of

evidence as it cannot be done alone. Having expert sources from a wide array of backgrounds, nationalities and communities ensures that everyone's voice has a chance to be heard. PIF publishes information in an array of resources, making sure that health information can be widely accessible by the public.

On Day 1, we had the pleasure of hearing from Stijn Hoorens from [RAND Europe](#) on his keynote speech "Truth Decay in Europe". He started his speech relating to the four main trends of truth decay: increasing disagreements of facts and data; a blurring line between fact and opinion; the increasing relative volume and resulting influence of opinion over fact and a declining trust in formally respected sources of factual information. In the ever-expanding world of social media and interpretive journalism, anyone can post their own opinion. Trust in governmental and academic sources has been declining in the last decade. Coupled with the difficulty of differentiating between fact, opinion and speculation, this has created what Stijn called "a threat to democracy," including political paralysis, erosion of civil discourse and higher levels of disengagement. He finished his speech by mentioning that libraries play a vital role in helping to dispel truth decay by offering trusted content, skills and a safe space for people to learn.

The last session I attended on Day 1 was "Libraries Change Lives", in which Rabeea Arif presented a case study presenting the value and impact that libraries can have on the community - especially for youngsters! With a focus on literacy, there were several free creative events offered to those aged between ten and sixteen years old, aimed at low-income households but with anyone welcome to join. The workshops included: filmmaking, bronze-casting, creative writing and nature journalism as a small example. Over the course of 2023, one hundred and eighty-two library cards were issued to teens and some teens even become volunteers. 97% of teens said that they would like to return, with 84% of parents noting an increase in the confidence of their children. These sessions also helped to build confidence in the library staff and establish trust between the teens and the library. Rabeea talked about developing the programme expanding to future mentorship and curated training for teens, as well as expanding to other libraries in the local area.

Day 2 brought about another round of interesting discussions, starting with "AI and KM: Learning from Practical Experience in AI Pilot Projects", in which Susan Smith from Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, spoke on how AI can be used within a healthcare framework. The health wellbeing chatbot was a project that was worked on by Microsoft and students as a project during their time at university. Its base function worked on trigger words, helping to form questions and respond depending on the preprogrammed responses. One crucial point that was brought up during the presentation was that no matter how exciting and new AI can be, projects should be created to fix a problem you are trying to solve. One example Susan cited revolved around repositories and how robotics can process information. The key questions asked during the initial stages of the project were:

- What do they want this to add?
- Can we make this possible?
- And how can we create this with the tech available?

Susan highlighted the challenges of the project. As students had led it, it created concerns over its long-term viability post-graduation.

“Creatively Languageing the value of KM in your Organisation” was a session organised by Janine Weightman from [Knovolution](#) LTD. It showcased using non-knowledge management language to make and share information in our organisations. Janine mentioned that her biggest obstacles were that some people don’t know or care about knowledge management; that how we present information needs to be in a way that people will listen and understand. The language we use can have a direct impact on the interest in and learnability of the information that we share, and that knowing your target audience is important; their hopes, concerns, objections, behaviours and attitudes can play a direct role in how you “language” the information. By tailoring the language we use, not only for knowledge management but for any information, we have a better chance of engaging our target audience and enabling them to understand the message being conveyed.

The sharing and accessibility of knowledge took centre stage in most of the sessions I attended, and I found it fascinating. Learning from diverse experts from across different areas of the library, knowledge and information sector offered insights that I might not have considered otherwise. The networking time led me to meeting some lovely people (including taking home a cool caricature created by *Femi Adetunji Caricatures*, who was hosted by one of the sponsors - Crown Records Management), and getting to see librarians hit the dancefloor with some live music at the end of the night. Overall, the opportunity to attend this conference was an experience that I deeply appreciated, and I thank UKeiG for funding this great professional development opportunity.

