

Leadership, shifting digital landscapes and the impact of AI

A personal reflection on the 2023 CILIP Conference

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The key theme of the 2023 CILIP Conference was leadership, providing a platform for voices across the sector to share their knowledge and skills with delegates eager to learn more about the constantly shifting landscape of information. I was lucky enough to be one of the recipients of a UKiG conference bursary and am incredibly thankful that I had the opportunity to add my own voice to the mix of discussions that were held over two days.

I would like to use this article to share my thoughts and reflections about the presentations that had the biggest impact on me. I'll also delve further into how, as an early career professional, I plan to put into practice when I return to the office.

Personal learning objectives

My primary objective was to learn more about the changing face of technology and the role that it plays in the information and library sector. As we all know, Generative AI has been the big talking point when considering how Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT will change the way we work in the future. Generative AI will deliver many benefits to the work we do in the library and information sector: improvements to resource discovery, predictive acquisition models, and enhanced research assistance, for example. I was keen to learn more about the issues with and consequences of Generative AI, such as the ethical issues related to the datasets that LLMs are trained on.

Opening keynote

The first keynote session was the one that I found the most inspirational and impactful. Rebecca Isaksson is an expert in knowledge management and is currently the Director of Content & Collaboration AI for [AI Lab Sweden](#), the national centre for applied AI in Sweden.

Rebecca's presentation was entitled [Driving Business Value Through AI-Powered Knowledge](#), and she explained the guiding principles of utilising AI in knowledge management. A fantastic takeaway from the session was that artificial intelligence should not be the standalone tool that

is used for knowledge management in the future, and that it is in fact best complimented by human intelligence. Humans can judge information through a lifetime of applying reasoning, ethics and values that artificial intelligence does not have. Artificial intelligence is only trained on the specific datasets that it is fed, therefore it does not hold the full breadth of knowledge and understanding that is necessary to be able to make well-reasoned decisions by itself.

In a knowledge management-specific example, artificial intelligence can only aggregate data based on this training model. Human intelligence is still required to ensure that the data it provides is from a valid source. This can be highlighted by the [AI hallucinations](#) that are present in ChatGPT, wherein AI will output a resource that does not exist as the reference point for its information. This again shows that human oversight is necessary to determine whether the information is valid or not.

This point led on to Rebecca's explanation of the importance of *responsible AI*, where any application or software can become harmful if it is not managed with the care it deserves. [Responsible AI](#) comprises legal and moral obligations. This issue doesn't just concern the creators and technicians that work behind the scenes developing LLMs. We also have a responsibility to assist in their development through the questions that we feed in and the corrections to answers that we make.

When considering the impact that this technology will have, digital literacy skills will be a priority to ensure the responsible use of AI applications. There is significant debate on how we can support students to utilise this technology effectively in a way that does not perpetuate plagiarism and copyright infringement.

Data and AI

[A Data and AI panel](#) provided a brilliant opportunity to gain further insight into the world of AI. As a developing source of technology, it's important to hear as many opinions and points of view as possible so that a clear picture can be gained on the possibilities of what lies ahead.

Dr Andrew Cox opened the discussion by delving into his research report '[The impact of AI, machine learning, automation and robotics on the information profession](#)' in which he discussed the analysis necessary for considering the range of challenges that arise from the implementation of new technology. The main consideration is that AI is not a new concept to anyone that is familiar with a smartphone, or the internet. Machine learning is used in [filtering spam emails](#) in email inboxes, and it is used through a natural language model for [autocorrect](#) on smartphones, to give a few examples.

AI has evolved to include [deep learning](#) through natural language processing and reinforcement learning to lower the level of systematic errors, essentially looking to replicate the ways in which

humans gain and absorb knowledge. Rule-based AI that was more prevalent before the 2000s did not learn from datasets, meaning that new machine learning and generative AI processes can be considered more reliable.

Digital exclusion

A further consideration that Dr Cox articulated was the issue surrounding bias and social inequality that arises from modern technology when society cannot catch up with it as quickly.

It is important to remember that the use of AI may increase access to knowledge, but on the other hand, social inequality has resulted in around [22% of the public, or 11.9 million people](#), not possessing the digital literacy skills required for day-to-day living. The issue of inequality is one that those who work in the library and information sector are familiar with. From an education perspective, for example, students are from all manner of backgrounds with varying levels of experience. It can't be assumed that the average student will always be proficient with technology. They may not have a smart phone or WIFI access. They may also be mature students returning to education after being away from it for a period.

These issues have profoundly impacted on how I intend to work with AI technology in the future. The disruptive ascendance of modern technology requires more than adequate levels of support to be available for students and staff. I would like to see a higher number of introductory technology sessions offered to all to provide a foundation level of skills, and librarians are in a great position to be able to offer these.

Digital content: the way ahead

I found one session '[Digital Content: The Way Ahead](#)' really useful. Caroline Bell spoke of the initiative she is part of known as [#ebookSOS](#). The issue with eBook pricing is one that has a huge effect on the academic library sector. An example of this was during the COVID-19 pandemic where electronic copies of a book cost up to 500% more than its print counterpart. Many academic libraries have an electronic first policy to increase user engagement and accessibility, however this can be difficult to implement with inflated costs for essential resources. This is a major issue causing difficulty in provisioning student access to the information that they need for their studies. In a year where academic publishers have announced [record-breaking profits](#), I admire the work that the #ebookSOS team are doing to try and turn the tide. It is important that we continue to prioritise electronic books as they will continue to provide accessible information to students no matter where they are, but this is only possible when user licenses are at an affordable price for a library to purchase. We also need to remember that not everybody is equally proficient in their knowledge of how to use technology, so as a profession we need to continue to ensure that no one is left behind.

Open access will be a great solution to the issues of digital resource costs as it ensures that information published through this route is available to everyone. As a sector, we need to encourage more OA publishing, which can be hard to do in academia due to the strategic impetus to publish with bigger academic publishers and high impact scholarly journal titles. I would like to see more emphasis on the benefits of open access, with an increase in the promotion of these OA resources to the students.

Changemakers of the future: what is next?

The final discussion session of the conference was 'Changemakers of the Future: What is Next?' delivered by Nick Poole, the CEO of CILIP. This was an opportunity for conference delegates to consider topics that will impact on the library and information community over the next few years. A personal takeaway was that no matter what we confront next, it is important that we advocate for ourselves and our skills as a profession. Our expertise and knowledge have a significant role to play in the new AI information age. We are a reliable source of truth, information, and technological awareness. It is crucial that we evidence our value and impact.

Conclusions

The CILIP 2023 Conference was thought-provoking and a fantastic opportunity to learn from other professionals in the library and information sector facing similar challenges. The [CILIP 125 List](#) showcased early career information professionals destined to take the sector into a new digital age. It's a list which I am proud to be included in. My confidence in my work has improved through attending this conference, and it has given me the drive to learn and explore more. I am looking forward to continuing these conversations beyond the conference through the connections I made with colleagues representing different subjects and disciplines across the sector. Collaboration is the key to success.

I conclude with a point made by Nick Poole. He noted that you never know when a conversation you are having will spark inspiration for a new idea. The conversations I had during the conference sparked passion in me, and I am incredibly thankful to UKeiG for the opportunity to attend.