



Levelling up in Florence



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Concurrent with the easing of travel restrictions, I was recently invited to Firenze to give a keynote address to a gathering of Italian Library & Information professionals at the British Institute.

My topic, *“Shift happens: the future office / library in a connected world”* drew on a Presidential Debate and article I hosted during my CILIP Presidency.

Levelling up....

I began by pointing out that the corporate world had been experimenting with forms of hybrid working for decades. “Hot desking” appeared in the 1990’s as organisations equipped staff with the tools and systems to work from anywhere at any time.

People re-evaluated their work / life balance during the pandemic. Organisations realised they needed a new social contract to manage and motivate. The Public Sector found itself running to catch up as governments, especially in the UK, sought to capitalise on a new surge of community.

I noted the spotlight British Member of Parliament Danny Kruger’s “Levelling Up Our Communities” 2020 report had shone on the importance of trusted social community spaces and the need for faster connectivity to meet the growing band of nomad workers.

In “Government Response to Danny Kruger MP’s Report: ‘Levelling Up Our Communities: Proposals for a New Social Covenant’ published in February 2022, the UK Government stated that “the government recognises that libraries are vibrant community hubs providing digital access and business support.” (Response to Recommendation 14)

While applauding the British Library’s Business and IP Center network support for local libraries to assist people in starting their businesses, I questioned whether the sums allocated for delivery of the whole program (£13mm) will be enough to achieve its aspirations of operating over 110 regional and local centers, offering high quality business support to local communities.

I also questioned the readiness of organisational leaders to adapt to a world of work where performance is not about being online when they are. Microsoft recently wrote about “The rise of the triple peak day” suggesting a third peak in keyboard activity once domestic chores have been done. How many senior executives will be online then?

And Finally

My takeaway from the visit (and the debate).

#DistributedWorking is here to stay but there is much to do to change the 'presenteeism' culture that is rapidly transferring from physical to virtual working. To accommodate the social needs of an increasingly transient workforce, town centers need to provide more cultural hubs that used to be synonymous with libraries.

Paul J Corney is an author, award winning business owner / advisor, lecturer, and former international banker. During a career spanning 5 decades, Paul has helped numerous international institutions to capitalise on knowledge & information.

The Immediate Past President of CILIP he is a member of the British Standards Institute Committee that participated in the creation of the first ISO standard for KM.