



## **How to strengthen the Social Capital of your library - Case Study of Kallio Library**

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### **I. Introduction**

This presentation will be a very practical one. I will describe the way in which we have been working at Kallio library in order to strengthen the social capital of our library. We have employed two different tasks in towards this end. The first one was to create working teams among the library staff. The second was to create, strengthen and foster the cooperation with our user groups. The processes and methods we used, in addition to the difficulties we faced will all be detailed. Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak's *In Good Company: How social capital makes organizations work.* (2001).

There are many definitions for social capital. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam defines it accordingly, "Social capital refers to features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits." (Putnam 1995, cit. Cohen and Prusak, p. 3). Cohen and Prusak themselves define social capital as "[consisting] of stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible." (Ibid. p. 4).

### **II. Helsinki City Library and Kallio Area**

#### **Facts and figures**

The Helsinki City Library is the largest public library in Finland. It is the home library for the 560 000 residents of Helsinki and serves as the Central Library for all of Finland's public libraries.

The library is open to everyone. The Helsinki City Library consists of 37 libraries, two mobile library units, 11 institutional libraries, a home delivery library service, meetingpoint@lasipalatsi and its virtual library at helmet.fi/en. The library has a staff of 500 people. Kallio library is one of the five large libraries in the Helsinki City Library system. In 2011 it was the fourth busiest according to the number of loans and third according to visits. Kallio library is known among the other libraries of the city as a place with a good working environment where the staff feels at home. It is also renowned for having a laidback yet productive atmosphere. The number of daily visitors at Kallio library ranges from 1500 to 2000. In 2011 the number of loans was 678 500. The staff is 25 strong.

### ***The Mission Statement and the vision of Helsinki City Library***

#### ***The Mission Statement***

Everyone is welcome at the library. You can find culture, knowledge and opportunities to learn, both at the library and online. We provide uncomplicated specialist service. The library is dedicated to the causes of equal access to knowledge and freedom of speech. Our approachable staff offers specialist service. The library promotes sustainable development. We also develop library services at national and international levels.

#### ***The vision 2017***

The library is an enricher of ideas and thoughts, whereby sharing knowledge, skills and stories we together create a new civic society. The values of Helsinki City Library are customer-oriented, reliable, pluralist, multi-dimensional, economical and equal.

### ***Kallio as a city district***

Kallio is an evolving district of the city. Originally a working class neighborhood, students and young families are becoming more numerous today. It is known as a very lively and bohemian area, and its residents are a colorful mix of styles. Kallio is one of Helsinki's most densely constructed areas and the dwellings are relatively small. The number of inhabitants is 26 000 and the average size of apartments is 44 m<sup>2</sup>. There are lots of young students living in the area but also older working class inhabitants too. The biggest age group is 25 to 39-year-olds, which make up approximately 40 percent of the total. Nowadays more families with small children live in Kallio, though the amount of children under six years of age is 3 percent. Unlike the eastern parts of Helsinki there are not many foreigners living in Kallio. About 90 percent of Kallio's inhabitants have Finnish as their native language.

### **III. The Kallio Library Model**

#### **The uniqueness of Kallio Library and the work atmosphere**

Cohen and Prusak write that the longer people stay in the organization, the more they will know and understand one another and the deeper and more extensive their networks of relationship will tend to be. (Ibid., p. 141). It appears that what Cohen and Prusak are emphasizing here applies to Kallio library, "close ties to others in the organization and identification with organizational values and aims are more reliable bases for longevity than the promises of a lot of money." (Ibid., p. 140). In the library field, "promises of a lot of money" are not the case. However there is always the possibility to change one's post, to apply for a new vacancy.

After my arrival as the new chief librarian at Kallio library, I interviewed the entire staff. I quickly discovered how much the staff likes their own library. Many of them repeated similar sentiments: 'This has been like a solid base in my life while other things have changed during the

years; I have always liked this place so much that I just enjoy being here; This building, the staff and the users are so unique that I have never thought to change to another library'. "People learn ground truth in their daily work and in the actual decisions made in organizations about solving problems, talking to customers, and handing out promotions... Some of the ground truths are about working practices; some are about values and norms." (Ibid., p. 62)

### **Kallio Library management**

I arrived at the beginning of February 2011 as the new chief librarian of Kallio library. My predecessor who retired at the end of October 2010 worked at her post for twenty years. The staff liked her very much and there is much for which to thank her. The subsequent change for the staff was made even more challenging as other managers changed also. Three different managerial positions all experienced a turnover within a period of 18 months. A new Service Administrator started at the beginning of January 2011 and a new Service Manager arrived in May 2012. Kallio library was the first branch where this new structure of managers was implemented. Prior to this there was a chief librarian, head of the adult's department, and head of the music and children's department. After the change there is now a chief librarian, a service manager and a service administrator. This change is connected to the organizational change from department organization to team organization.

### **How we built the working teams**

As mentioned above the executive board of the city library had made the decision that the five big libraries should move from departments to team organization. At Kallio it was quite convenient to make the change after the new management staff arrived. We started working on the team building in the spring 2011. The new team organization was mostly completed by the end of the

year. Because I was new at Kallio library and also to the Helsinki City Library, I did not tell the staff how to form the best and most effective teams. The whole staff worked together to find the best solutions. The planning period took time and there were moments when staff members wished I would just decide for them. We eventually got our four “basic teams” formed by November 2011. Each team also selected its own team leader, who is in charge for one year. In addition we will have two or three other teams, which will consist of members from the basic teams (These teams will be formed during 2012.) The idea behind the working teams is to help the staff with the following:

- *to see “the big picture” not only their own specific tasks*
- *to foster cooperation between the entire staff*
- *to make it easier to create and implement new ideas*

The first step to foster the change was a meeting with each of the old departments. At these meetings the staff worked with so called Dynamic-Method (described later in this presentation). The idea was to name the most important elements for ideal teamwork: “how would it be like when a team works like a dream”. After holding three meetings regarding this, we then had the first of two yearly Staff Development Days. Held at the historic Suomenlinna Fortress, we worked with different methods in order to list the most important teams needed for the Kallio library. We also tried to describe how we would like them to function. I as a new chief librarian organized the whole day. It could have been possible to arrange an outside consultant but by leading the work, I was able to foster a conducive working environment and suitable time schedule. The result of the day was a long list of all details, which consisted of almost everything from collections, fixing old books to working with stakeholders.

The Staff Development Day was in May 2011 after which came the summer holidays. I discussed the new teams a lot with our service manager and service administrator. In the autumn we returned to the task of forming the teams. It was in October however when we all worked another full day at resolving the team formations. The teams decided by the end of the year were:

1. Children and music team – this corresponded to the old music and children’s department
2. Fiction and non-fiction team – corresponded roughly to the former reference department
3. Service area team - corresponded roughly to the former lending department
4. Tech team – the team responsible for PCs, audio/visual equipment, and setting up the technical aspects for events and performances at the library. This was also the team which was most difficult to start to form.

### **Creating cooperation with users**

For the cooperation with users groups we applied and received extra funding from the Central Library Project of the Helsinki City Library. With the funding we arranged internal method training for the staff. This included the training of so-called Dynamic Method which makes it easy to handle and create ideas and proposals. The Dynamic Method training was partly for the staff of Kallio library but also for members of other libraries. The total number of trainees was thirteen: six were from Kallio, five from two other branches and two from the administrators of the City Library. The training consisted of three five hours sessions, where we also made plans for the coming user group meetings. The application for the funding was approved specifically for the task of learning how to work with user groups.

We planned the arrangement of four meetings with different user groups. After the meetings the sessions would be evaluated and decisions made on how to continue. In practice two were open sessions where anyone could contribute. The first being an open session where customers could offer direct feedback, while the other was an event for families of young children. In the latter we collected ideas and proposals for the planned new central library. The other two meetings were directed at creating partnerships with specific groups.

The first open session took place in the Dome, an open area of the library where our users like to frequent. For four hours any customer could come and offer feedback of any kind. We had three manned flip charts set up. The staff wrote down all feedback onto the charts and during the spring we will present how we have continued with the ideas that our customers gave us.

Our family afternoon was organized on a Sunday afternoon in the library. It was intended for families to create and offer ideas as to what type of activities they wished the library could provide them. The session was arranged in conjunction with the larger planning of the new Central Library's possible activities. The theme revolved around what special content, services or happenings could the Central Library offer children and families. As workshops act as tools for creating new services, they also functioned as exciting and nice activities for those that participated. There were even some elderly ladies who came to give their input on what the library could offer young people in the future.

### **Strengthening cooperation with our partners**

The first session that was aimed at creating partnerships was an evening focused on our music services. The background idea that led to this was the declining number of loans of music CDs and other music material. We wanted to find out what our users would want in a situation where most people download music from the Internet. Rather than trying to fight against this phenomenon, we thought that there must be something users would like for the library to do that we could not find out by ourselves. The staff of the music department told their heavy users about the "User Group Evening" that we were organizing and asked if she or he would like to join. For those who liked the idea we sent an invitation by email. People were very enthusiastic, but of course for some the date was not suitable. Thirteen people attended who were from different ages and

backgrounds. Some of them were students from upper secondary school specializing in music. For example one was a music teacher, one was a retired architect playing in a brass band, and yet another was a well known rock musician, who even brought his guitar with him.

The other partnership evening was for active societies working in the Kallio district of Helsinki. This evening was arranged to inform them about our one hundred year anniversary. We wanted to strengthen the cooperation with them in general, but in this instance we approached by asking what kind of events, activities, and ideas they would like to offer towards the celebrations. Both of the evenings were arranged at the library on Friday after closing hours. To make people more comfortable we offered them tea, coffee, sandwiches and cakes. Each of them also received a voucher entitling them to pick up their reservations free for two months. They did not receive any economical benefit of significance, which clearly showed that they really wanted to come and take part in the planning process. The outcomes will be discussed later in this paper.

### **The method we used**

As mentioned earlier we studied the so-called Dynamic Method for our partnership building. We also used the same method in our team and user group making processes. The creator of the Dynamic Projects is facilitator and consultant Mr. Torfinn Slåen. In the manual of the Dynamic Projects he writes:

Involvement is the crucial point when working with groups. How can you activate all participants to participate in the work? How can you avoid the doughnut constellation? The final results will depend first and foremost on the degree of genuine involvement. A simple procedure for processing contents in a group consists of three basic steps: Produce (P), Rank (R) and Organize (O). The acronym PRO could also symbolize that this is the way real PROs are working together. Although the PRO steps look very simple and normally takes less than an hour to perform, there is a lot of experience and psychology built into them. They are the extract of years of development work and practical experience from a diversity of settings. The PRO steps represent the basic “technology” for activating a group to process contents together. They make up a kind of Alphabet that can be used to write any collaboration stories. (How to get the best out Groups: Working together in Dynamic Projects. An In-Depth Manual, p. 18). More



information on the method can be found at <http://www.tuloskunnossa.fi/>

#### **IV. Where We Are Now: Difficulties and New Challenges**

##### **Teams of the library in practice**

Our four teams have now been working since the beginning of this year. The three which are based on the old departments are functioning quite well. The new Tech team has yet to coalesce as a group. It seems that their customary individualistic way of working, as opposed to a team, will require more time and effort. The three other teams, those which are based on the old departments, have a better working climate and have found it easier to reorganize their work as a team.

A good example of how the team works is the way in which they found a solution for scheduling summer vacations. This summer is especially challenging as the full-time staff needs to be present during the week of the IFLA conference. Naturally the Helsinki City Library wants the full-time staff to welcome visitors, not the temporary summer assistants. It was not easy for the staff to decide upon the vacation schedules and some even wanted us directors to make the decision. I urged them to try and find their own solution and said that if it they could not agree, only then would we managers get involved. All the teams negotiated and came up with agreements by themselves. Now we have a good working plan for the summer with which the staff can also be content.

One difficulty that has arisen is now that teams are focused more on their own team's work, they sometimes lose sight of the library work as a whole. This is the new challenge we are facing. However, I believe it to be a very normal phenomenon which is in a way built into the process of transforming from department orientation to team working. In time as the teams meet with each other, this focus will broaden and the initial challenge will recede. We as managers need to facilitate an environment where the transition process can be accelerated.

## **Results of the partnership meetings**

We have now a small group of users who are willing to arrange music events with the library staff and to take part in our acquisition process. Many of the new things which were planned during our Music service evening are already taking place at the Kallio library.

In February we invited the participants to another planning occasion. From the library's staff the Music and children's team leader and I were present. At the meeting we continued and finalized plans made earlier. Though there were only two customer participants at this meeting we had a very good conversation and the results have been excellent.

A very concrete example of the results is our music events which we have hosted this spring. We have had a set of music performances arranged according to each decade of the last century. The first performance was held in February when we had a brass band playing music from the 1910s. After that we have had other types of smaller concerts. The idea of the performances arose at our Music service evening, when the participants expressed the desire to have more music events and performances at the library. Another result was also a series of evenings where customers could share their favorite CD. One evening each month, a customer plays his or her favorite CD and explains to others what makes it significant for them.

Another example of the fruitfulness of the Music service evening was the proposal of having a choir perform at our hundred year anniversary. It will not be a mere singing performance but the choir will be arranged in the library hall such that that the official visitors will walk through the choir to our Dome to hear other parts of the ceremony.

The other partnership evening was for active societies working in the Kallio district of Helsinki. We wanted to inform the societies about our willingness to continue working with them and to tell them about the celebrations of our hundred year anniversary. We wanted their input as to what they could offer for our jubilee year. By the end of the spring there were already some fine examples resulting from that meeting. One is a lecture about local history, while another one is a

coffee day for all the library users arranged by one of the societies.

Perhaps the most prominent result was the preliminary promise of the former President of Finland, Ms. Tarja Halonen, to be the guest of honor at Kallio library's hundred year jubilee celebration. President Halonen had lived in the Kallio district before she was elected president. Since she has always emphasized how important her connection to the Kallio is for her, we wished to have her as the honored guest at our ceremony. The official invitation was sent to the President's office, but because it was during the time of new elections it was not easy to receive a definitive answer from the office. One of the participants at our evening meeting knew her personally, and through this contact we have now secured an affirmation that former President will participate in the celebration and give a short speech.

## **V. Conclusions**

We started two demanding projects during my first year as the chief librarian of Kallio library. Both team building and cooperating with partners in new ways are processes which will affect the working climate of the library. One advantage that the Kallio library had going for it was the already existing strong working climate. The staff had known each other for a long time and they were open and prepared to handle difficulties.

Team building was part of a broader process that took place among all the larger units of the Helsinki City Library. These libraries changed their internal organizational structure from departments to teams. This was a task that we did not choose, but it was relatively easy to tackle this as many of the managers were either new or about to change, all within a period of eighteen months. The change also seemed to give some of the staff possibilities to find a new status or new ways in which to work. Of course these changes affected the working climate of the Kallio library as a whole. In team building one must remember that the goal is to reveal the "big picture". The aim

was not to build a working climate where there is no room for criticism or where everyone must become good friends. “Social capital is not about everyone in an organization liking and accepting one another; it is not about being ‘nice’.” (Ibid., p. 13-14).

Strengthening the cooperation between Kallio library and its partners was also fairly painless as Kallio already had good connections to societies, schools and other actors in the area. Also customers hold strong emotions towards the library. They feel that Kallio library is “their own” and they are willing to donate time and effort towards it. That is why it was so easy to ask them to join the cooperation evenings. We will continue the partnership evenings in the future. It will be a simple task since we know the process works. Partners such as societies, schools and others bring their knowledge of the neighborhood. In fact they may better know the needs of the customers than we in library have noticed. I believe that strong cooperation with the different entities of the Kallio district is very important and will give much to the library. Cohen and Prusak have quoted Robert Putnam with a similar view, “Stock of social capital, such as trust, norms and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Successful collaboration in one endeavor builds connections and trust – social assets that facilitate future collaboration in other, unrelated tasks.” (Ibid., p. 9). It is my hope that both of these efforts will continue to strengthen the knowledge sharing, innovation, and high productivity at Kallio library.

## **References**

Cohen, Don and Prusak, Laurence (2001) *In Good Company. How Social Capital Makes Organizations Work.*

Slåen, Torfinn (2003) *How to get the best out Groups: Working together in Dynamic Projects. An In-Depth Manual.*