



Innovative public library services - staff-less or staff-intensive?

Johannsen, Carl Gustav Viggo

Published in:
Library Management

DOI:
[10.1108/LM-01-2014-0006](https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-01-2014-0006)

Publication date:
2014

Document version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):
Johannsen, C. G. V. (2014). Innovative public library services - staff-less or staff-intensive? *Library Management*, 35(6/7), 469-480. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-01-2014-0006>

Accepted 18.jan. 2014

Innovative public library services – staff-less or staff-intensive?

Carl Gustav Johannsen

The author

Carl Gustav Johannsen is associate professor at the Royal School of Library and Information Science, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract

Keywords:

Denmark; public libraries; staff-less services; host-liness ; leadership; staff-intensive services; guest-host-relationships; mystery shopping

Type:

Research paper

Purpose:

Several recent library innovations seem to make professional and clerical staff superfluous such as automated loan and delivery equipment, staff-less libraries open in 80 hours a week, and virtual services, enabling users to search the library catalogue and make reservations of library materials from their home address. The purpose of this article is to examine whether such developments will necessarily lead to a situation where public libraries become self-service institutions or to what extent self-service and innovative staff-intensive library services can develop and co-exist.

Furthermore, the article will examine what challenges library leaders face and what they can do, and actually have done, to handle staff resistance and other related problems to the benefit of both the users, the local communities, and also, the staff, in particular, when introducing new and innovative services.

Methodology:

The article is based on the author's evaluations of two – both successful - recent Danish library development projects. Although the two projects were different and therefore evaluated through different procedures, they can both be described as successful in terms of user satisfaction. The host project has been positively evaluated through a before-and-after-survey and data concerning the user's reception of the staff-less library idea also indicates the presence of positive user attitudes. The aim of this article is to identify why both library innovation projects were so positively received by their customers, and to what extent they can co-exist as elements of one future public library development strategy.

Findings:

The comparisons reveal that both staff-intensive (host-project) and staff-less public library services produce positive feedback from their users; however comparisons also indicate that the two kind of library offerings are appreciated for different – but not mutually exclusive -reasons.

The findings, furthermore, reveal that staff attitudes towards staff-less libraries, and - more surprising – also towards more staff-intensive host-liness practices have been somewhat reluctant and skeptical. The article, here, presents leadership initiatives which have showed up to be adequate to handle such resistances constructively.

Originality:

The article contains a first-hand report on the results of a recent (2011-2012) unique, full-scale, Danish public library development project, investigating the experiences with pro-active and guest-customer relationships within a public library setting. The comparison between staff-intensive and staff-extensive services based on empirical evidence is also quite original.

Introduction

This article resumes the results of two studies on two innovative public library services in Denmark during 2011-2012. Besides, being both innovative, the two projects were also very different at least in one important respect. The one project, concerned a national survey of staff-less public libraries in Denmark. The experiences from this project have already been reported in details internationally (Johannsen 2012a). The presentation here, therefore, will be more summarily. The other project deals with an experiment with new roles for staff and users. The roles as hosts and guests have here, inspired by experiences from the tourist industry, been tested in a public library context and environment at the county library in Aalborg in Jutland from 2011 to 2012 (Johannsen 2012).

The main difference between the host project and the staff-less project is that the second concerns a self-service concept, and the host project operates within a staff-intensive framework. However, there were also a, somewhat surprising, similarities between the two projects. Both were – for different reasons – initially met by skeptical staff attitudes.

Research questions

- For what reasons can both projects be considered successful in terms of customer satisfaction?
- What characteristics have made the 2011-2012 Danish library host project innovative and relevant?
- Did the project results work, in terms of user or guest satisfaction?
- How did the library leadership handle skeptical staff attitudes?
- What long term effects are likely to affect the public library after the guest-host-project has ended?
- To what extent is it possible, in practice, to combine both staff-intensive and staff-less services in public library development strategies?

Literature review

Regarding the staff-less project, I refer to Johannsen (2012a) for a more detailed account.

As to the host-projects, the library literature presently, contains only few articles on considerations or practical experiences with guest - or similar - roles in public libraries. An article (Reed 2008) discusses the pros and cons of the most common terms used by libraries to describe the people they serve, including patron, customer, client, visitor, and user. Reed criticizes the word "customer" for having commercial overtones whereas words like "visitor" or "guest" better seems to fit the casual or anonymous relationship between librarians and most of the people they serve. However, terms like visitors or guests are believed to "relegate" the librarian's role to that of an "overeducated greeter". Therefore, the term "user" is considered to be the best description of people who come to the library. However, these points of views seem to be based on mere subjective opinions rather than experiences and evidence. On the other hand, the points of views expressed could, certainly, be found also among the Aalborg library staff, especially, at the start of the project.

Johnson (2011), in many respects, deals with the same issues as the Aalborg case. Although, the term guest is not used – instead "patron" is suggested "in absence of a generally preferred term" - many of the same considerations and values are emphasized such as "approachability, friendliness, open-mindedness, and an interest in each user". Neither, the term "hostliness" is applied; instead, and, maybe, even more appropriate, Johnson uses the term "hospitality". Hospitality is defined as "the provision of library resources by a genuinely motivated employee to fulfill the library need of a patron in an environment conducive to the provision of those resources". According to Johnson, librarians are urged to look outside the library field for inspiration, for example, in Disneyland, Marriot Hotels and Trotter's exclusive Chicago restaurant. Also, the initial staff resistance is mentioned by Johnson, referring to a relatively recent OCLC report, according to which 23 percent of 3,300 respondents recorded negative associations with library customer / user services. Finally, Johnson (2011) includes an interesting historical perspective, demonstrating among others that "the librarian as a host" was described already in the late nineteenth century by Maude Henderson (1896). Johnson, furthermore, describes and emphasizes the important role the staff has in creating a positive library experience. Hospitality is valued as having equal weight as information in the eyes of the customer experience. Whether a librarian is required to answer technical questions or not, they are always required to be as welcoming and helpful as possible. Here, there is also consensus in proportion to the Aalborg experiences; professional competences, in fact, for example, during the mystery shopping sessions, professional experiences, were valued to be at least as important as smiling and positive attitudes.

There are two other journal articles - in Japanese and Polish – which deal with similar problems. The Polish text (Przastek-Samokowa, 2004), however, does not refer to practical library experiences whereas the Japanese (Fukui, 2008), gives examples of locations in Japan such as Chiyoda-ku & the city of Niigata which have established "conciierge" desks in public libraries. Here, the conciierge greets patrons, responds to all kinds of questions, offers guided tours, and introduces patrons to local facilities. The article recommends that libraries draw on the warmth and hospitality of the conciierge concept to provide high levels of service. Apart from the terminological differences, the Japanese experiences from 2008 seem to be the nearest to documented cases to be found.

The two Danish surveys

Both surveys were financially supported by the Danish Center for Library and Media. The data for the staff-less library survey were collected through an electronic questionnaire during the autumn of

2011. The questionnaire was sent to all 97 of Denmark's municipalities. The response rate was above 90 percent. Based on the evidence from the quantitative survey, 15 libraries were selected, representing both high-end and low-end performance concerning visits and loans, for further examinations. Furthermore, supplementary data were collected from several sources, such as a library software company, interviews, etc.

The data on the Host-and-guest project, on the other hand, stems from only one single project of the Aalborg main library in Jutland although, on the side line, two other public libraries, Herning and Silkeborg, participated. The city of Aalborg has about 110.000 inhabitants. The survey is based on data collected locally on the different activities in 2011 and 2012. Besides, a user survey was conducted both before and after the project was implemented to measure to what extent the project activities made any differences to the library users. More than 400 questionnaires were distributed randomly and returned to the users or the "guests" as they were called during – and after – the project was finished. Besides, 23 qualitative interviews of 20 to 45 minutes length were made with representatives of both leaders and staff. Furthermore, data from the conducted "mystery shopping" session formed a part of the evaluation data. The project is, obviously, among the first public library examples of a full scale implementation of host-guest-relationships.

Customer satisfactionAs to the first research question, whether it makes sense to categorize the two library service concepts or approaches as documented customer successes – at least in Denmark? the task would have been easier if there had not been some differences as to the applied evaluation procedures. The evaluation of the staff-intensive host project was primarily based on a representative before-and-after user survey in one library system; in contrast, the staff-less concept was evaluated through a less straightforward procedure since more than one library system was involved. Here, an assessment of success must be based on other – often more indirect – measures. An important indirect indicator is the continuing growth of staff-less libraries in Denmark. In 2012 there were 104 units and counts from the Danish Center for Library and media from April 2013 refer to 174 units . Furthermore, 78 percent of the local communities report on increasing visits and 65 percent on growing number of loans. Besides increased demand, user surveys prove increases in user satisfaction too (Jørgensen 2013). Thus, in spite of somewhat different assessment procedures, it makes sense to claim that both staff-less and staff-intensive public library services seem to be appreciated by the users.

However, the user values created through the two different types of services are obviously different. Indeed, staff-less libraries have not become so popular because of the lack of staff; rather , it seems to be the multiplication of the weekly opening hours from sometimes 20 to 80 hours that lies behind the achieved success. However, evaluations of staff-less library project also show that staff interventions to make the staff-less library a safe, user-friendly and attractive place are essential (Johannsen 2012a). As to staff-intensive, guest-services, the user values seem to be different, related to appreciation of personalized services, individual attention, and more pro-active services. Theoretically, it is therefore probable that both staff-less and staff-intensive services can co-exist in the library landscape, and even at the same library site. An important force behind staff-less libraries is, however, interests of local community politicians who demand both economically cost-effective solutions and interventions which protect local communities against depopulation. Also

demographic developments such as the emergence of Richard Florida's "creative class" working long hours who favor "more casual, open, inclusive, and participative activities" and emphasizing to be able to "access amenities almost instantly on demand", are likely to influence the popularity of open, staff-less libraries (Florida 2005: 84-85). Among the users, commuters, in particular, would welcome libraries open all 7 weekdays about 12 hours daily. Although the staff-less library concept has not been implemented fully outside Denmark, an expansion of self-directed services such as item-hold request forms and self-checkout stations is considered a way of meeting more users' needs, at least, as long as they still have the option to be helped by a person (Zeihner 2006; Johnson 2011).

Compared to staff-less libraries, the host concept only involved minimal technological support. In fact, none of the five key services which will be described below (Extra sales, Floor-walking, Mystery shopping, Uniforms and Welcome efforts) involved significant technological support; in contrast, they all represented human driven interventions. Rather than being inspired by technology or budget reductions they were legitimized by experience economy models and soft human resource management considerations.

The Host- project

The idea of introducing "hostliness" in libraries was inspired by initiatives within the tourist industry. Also, ideas inspired by "experience economy" frameworks (Pine 1999; Jantzen 2001) have influenced the concept. Indeed, the intention to provide the guest with memorable experiences lay behind the decision of the Aalborg libraries to engage in the 2011-2012 guest-host-project (Johannsen 2012).

A consultant from the company, Danish Hosts, were hired; she played a significant role during the whole process and afterwards also. Actually, after the project was finished in July 2012, the Aalborg libraries started a partnership with Danish Hosts in order to spread the experiences achieved among Danish public libraries. Today (October 2013) more than 25 Danish libraries have participated in courses and other organizational development activities organized by the Aalborg libraries and their partners.

The project, clearly inspired by New-public-management ideas of testing private sector models in public sector environments, initially, aroused traditional skeptical attitudes among the staff. Critical voices emphasized, that the host-guest framework contained nothing new or that the concept were more or less superfluous or inadequate in public libraries. Besides, many members of the staff thought that they already were enough friendly and service-minded.

Special resistance concerned certain aspects of the package. The idea of mystery shoppers, or hidden tests, as was the proper library sector term, raised all kinds of objections. Some found that the hidden tests were unethical and likely to cast doubt on the competences of the staff while others regarded it as waste of time to handle artificial questions. Also the idea of uniforms raised resistance. Finally, the concept of "extra sales" met opposition. It was not because of the apparently

commercial aspect since no money was actually included in the “selling” efforts, but rather because many librarians found the task of directly recommending certain titles too offensive and aggressive. Their dislike was obviously rooted in more unobtrusive and re-active traditions of delivering service on demand. Thus, three of the five key host-likeness services were met by resistance. The remaining two, floor-walking and welcome efforts, were not received particularly enthusiastically. We’ll now, more detailed, in alphabetic order, consider the processes of the five different project activities.

Extra sales

To prepare the staff, they were offered a one-day sales course. In practice, two librarians were posted in the entrance of the library in two hours. Their job was to offer and suggest particular titles of books and films to incoming guests. As mentioned, this somewhat aggressive communication style was felt quite inconvenient by the participating staff although most of them participated voluntarily. However, after having tried the exercise in practice, their attitudes were often fundamentally changed in a much more positive direction. They noticed, for example, that the guests, apparently, appreciated the new style and they also found that their professional competences were utilized in a meaningful way.

Floorwalking

The term refers to a specific, more mobile and reaching-out type of duty. The floor-walker is not stationed at a particular desk; instead, they move around in the library. It’s especially important that the floor-walker masters the classical virtues of being a host such as the ability to kindly recognize the presence and needs of the guest. As being placed in a protruded position, it is important that he or she is easily recognizable by the guest which means that some kind of uniform is necessary. An important element in the floorwalking experiences was the introduction of systematic briefing and de-briefing sessions to ensure optimal experience sharing processes. Also floorwalking was positively evaluated by the staff who especially appreciated the briefing and de-briefing functions as effective knowledge sharing features.

Mystery shopping

Mystery Shopping which means that a number of trained mystery shoppers unobtrusively test the performance and quality of services has a long history - not only in commercial environments - but also in libraries. A literature review, however, revealed that although unobtrusive studies have been conducted in libraries since the late 1960s, only a small number have used mystery shopping (Kocevar-Weidinger et al. 2010; Calvert 2005; Tesdell 2000; Czopak 1998). Inspired by American and English tests, the hidden test method was used in Denmark for the first time in 1982 (Larsen & Moerch 1982). Later, it was used in a student’s thesis at the Royal School of Library and Information Science (Elkaer, Haag Jespersen & Gade Svendsen 1987) and in Norway in 1994 (Johannsen 1998). However, earlier experiences with hidden tests have focused primarily on the correctness of the answer. Research has, however, shown that library patrons consider the behavior of the librarian to be a crucial factor in perceived success or failure (Kocevar-Weidinger et al. 2010). Indeed, for several reasons, the method has never been used in real practice in Danish libraries. It means that no libraries had hitherto used the hidden tests or mystery shopping principles to achieve organizational goals such as improved quality or service development, although most of the published tests in

public library environments revealed mediocre percentages – 45 percent or less – of correct answers to the test questions.

In spite of initial resistance and skeptical attitudes the experiment with mystery shopping turned out to be quite successful both in terms of staff acceptance and in terms of integration in the strategic and operational overall purposes and goals of the library. Below, in the section on leadership, I'll focus on the particular leadership related challenges. Here, some specific characteristics of the application of mystery shopping will be presented.

First, it is important that the testing procedure was implemented by a professional company with experiences in mystery shopping. Since many libraries cannot afford to hire professional mystery shoppers, different alternatives have been tested. However, the level of training of the shoppers might influence the evaluation results (Kocevar-Weidinger *et al.* 2010). As the task of evaluating the quality - not of impersonal computer systems and different library materials - but on mostly individual and personal performances, is highly sensitive, it is probably an advantage to let an external, professional unit conduct the evaluation (Calvert 2005).

Second, it is extremely important that the staff members exactly know on what criteria they will be evaluated (Calvert 2005). Here, confidence is essential. Whereas quality in the earlier, above mentioned library quality tests were defined through a few criteria such as degree of correctness and time spent, the Host-guest project applied a multi-dimensional, nuanced quality concept with more than 20 different dimensions. Furthermore, it was specified that the test would deal with three types of situations: 1) registering, 2) questions concerning a specific topic and 3) guidance. What was even more important was that the staff not only got a detailed presentation of the set up and criteria; they were also invited to comment on the framework, and the individual questions and to suggest alternatives. They actually did; their suggestions, too, influenced how the test was conducted. Then, during 9 weeks the Aalborg main library was visited by 53 mystery shoppers. The company which performed the tests had experiences from testing department stores and the like. However, it was their first encounter with a public library context.

Also the feedback processes were carefully planned to ensure that the test results of the individual staff members were discussed with a leader as a starting point, not only for recognition, but also for a constructive dialog concerning future improvements. Indeed, both transparency and discretion were emphasized during the following feedback processes.

The results revealed a number of interesting details about library service quality.

Table 1 – Results from Mystery shopping test at Aalborg main library 2012 – gender - percentages

Gender	Above average	Below average
Female	70 %	57%
Male	30%	33%
Unspecified (the service included more staff members)	-	10%
Total	100%	100%

The figures in table 1 do not show that female staff members deliver more appropriate service quality than their male colleagues since the 10 percent unspecified expeditions could blur the picture

Table 2 - – Results from Mystery shopping test at Aalborg main library 2012 – age - percentages

Age	Above average	Below average
20-29	12%	28%
30-39	18%	12%
40-49	18%	16%
50-	53%	44%
Total	100%	100%

The counts concerning age distribution are also interesting. They show that neither high or low age prevents staff from delivering above average service. Indeed, top quality service is a possibility both for the newly hired youngster and for the “grey gold”.

Table 3 - – Results from Mystery shopping test at Aalborg main library 2012 – type of request - - percentages

Type of service	Above average	Below average
Registration	14%	38%
Subject search	52%	31%
Guidance	33%	31%
Total	100%	100%

Table 3 is interesting because it reveals a remarkable difference between performance results on traditional, professional tasks and results on more service management oriented. However, both aspects certainly influence the perception of the guest or user.

To give an impression of on what elements the mystery shopping exercise actually focused on, some of the criteria used will be commented on. The mystery shoppers were instructed to, especially, observe how he or she was welcomed by the staff. The high performing staff member here smiles and behaves attentive to the guest. The next phase concerns how the guest was interviewed by the staff and to what extent the interview questions covered the relevant aspects. It is the classical professional virtues of librarianship which here were focused on. Besides, the importance of the staff’s ability to inspire the guest further and to suggest attractive alternatives if the demanded materials were out on loan, were stressed as well. It is also emphasized to what extent the staff member informed the guest about arrangements or other relevant library materials likely to interest the guest. A pro-active style of service was certainly valued highly during the test. However, it should also be underlined that high performance rates are not achieved by smiling and being most obliging. Solid professional skills and familiarity with materials and relevant networks also seemed to be essential to achieve high scores in the test.

Uniforms

In Denmark, uniforms - apart from policemen and hospital staff in coats and the like - are not common in the public services sector and an integrated element in the organizational culture of Danish public sector institutions. However, certain traits of the more pro-active style of service, including e.g., extra sales, make some kind of uniforms a relevant challenge. For the guests, it is an advantage to know whether he or she is being addressed by another user or by a member of the staff. Two apparently different strategies were here chosen. On the one hand, safe and visible identification of the staff was considered to be essential and therefore mandatory. On the other hand, a flexibility was allowed as to which kind of characteristic was necessary, dependent on the particular situation and context. Sometimes a key-hanger was enough while in other contexts a specific T-shirt was considered adequate. Initially, the question of uniforms was expected to create resistance; however, the gradual and consistent approach seemed to make the implementation less controversial than expected.

Welcome efforts

Among the issues, where it was a widespread assumption among the staff that the present efforts were adequate with no particular room for improvements, counted the welcome procedures of the library. About 11.000 new library users were yearly registered in Aalborg. During the project the procedures were both made more systematic and intensified. One of the significant changes was that a briefcase with relevant materials was delivered to the newcomer and a guided tour offered .

We've now been through the principal activities of the Danish library host-liness project. Among others, we've observed that quantitative methods and measures (mystery shopping) and more qualitative oriented methods have been combined. Also, alternations between more aggressive communication modes concerning extra sales and welcome efforts and increased flexibility in connection with floorwalking, was a characteristic feature of the project. Indeed, the whole philosophy of host-liness, reflected a passion for uniting apparently different forces like brain and heart, attitudes and actions, and the like.

Another characteristic feature was that many of the initiatives were met with reservation and even hostility by at least some of the staff members and that the negative attitudes, in general, changed to more positive during the project. Not seldom the opposite dynamic can be observed in projects, starting with enthusiasm and ending in frustrations and disappointment. We've now dealt with the staff; but what about the users? Did they notice the effects of the project on the services delivered? That will be the topic of the following section.

Guest satisfaction

The measure the effect of the project on the user a before-and-after test was conducted. A sample of about 400 respondents were considered necessary for representative survey results; in June 2011, before the project activities started, short (one page) questionnaires with ten questions were distributed; 432 questionnaires were returned. Besides, questions concerning project variables, two background variables – age and gender – appeared. Men made up 41 percent and women 59 percent of the respondents. 48 percent were below 30 years and 29 percent above 50. Table 4 below presents the main results of the survey.

Table 4 – Results from the two before-and-after user surveys (%)(n= 432 (before) and n=591(after))

	Question	Before June 2011	After May 2012	Before June 2011	After May 2012	Before June 2011	After May 2012	Before June 2011	After May 2012
		Disagree totally	Disagree totally	neutral	neutral	Agree totally	Agree totally	No answer	No answer
1	The staff is good at interviewing and uncovering information needs	2%	2%	27%	23%	67%	70%	4%	5%
2	The period of waiting with personal service is OK	3%	3%	25%	31%	70%	65%	3%	2%
3	The image of the library is very traditional and not particularly service-minded	26 %	28 %	49 %	45 %	21 %	18 %	4 %	8 %
4	It is easy to recognize the staff	6 %	6 %	41 %	28 %	52 %	63 %	1 %	3 %
5	The service often surprises me positively	4 %	3 %	34 %	30 %	59 %	62 %	3 %	5 %
6	My expectations of the service are high	4 %	3 %	35 %	37 %	59 %	58 %	2 %	2 %
7	The staff make me feel like a guest rather than a client	4 %	4 %	32 %	30 %	60 %	61 %	4 %	5 %
8	The staff is able to suggest alternative titles if a demanded book is loaned	2 %	4 %	41 %	32 %	51 %	57 %	6 %	7 %
9	The staff emphasizes to deliver personalized and tailored service instead of a uniform, standardized service	3 %	2 %	37 %	34 %	54 %	57 %	6 %	6 %
10	The staff is obliging, helpful and smiling	2 %	3 %	17 %	11 %	81 %	85 %	1 %	2 %

For a service oriented organization the primary goal might have changed a little. Before 2000, many institutions aimed at reducing the number of errors and of dissatisfied users as much as possible; today, most companies are likely to focus more on maximizing the proportion of satisfied and very satisfied users. To many public libraries, 80 percent satisfied and very satisfied users would be a reasonable and cost-effective goal to aim at. We see that such an ambitious goal has already been achieved as to one out of ten service quality parameters (10 -The staff is obliging, helpful and smiling). However, as an evaluator, I had strong doubts whether the project activities would result in better scores since the users / guest already were quite content about the library service. Indeed, already 60 percent of the guests agreed or agreed totally that the staff “make me feel like a guest rather than like a client”. The answers also reveal some differences between men and women. For example, it seems as if the male respondents were even more excited by the helpful and smiling staff than the female respondents. The same pattern appears, for example, concerning the sensitivity of the staff (question no 1) where men to a higher degree than women agreed with the statement. Concerning age, it is maybe interesting to note that respondents below 30 years to a higher degree than other age groups disagree with the statement no 3 that the image of the library is very traditional and not very service-minded.

The after-survey was conducted May 2012, after the staff competence development activities had taken place. The questions were the same but the number of respondents was even higher – 591 chose to return the questionnaire. The results showed, that the guest/user satisfaction was increased, more or less, in eight out of ten quality parameters. It is possible to explain all the improvements by referring to the varying project activities. Even the decline from 70 to 65 percent

concerning satisfaction with waiting time, seemed to be a both expected and accepted effect of host-liness; according to its basic philosophy, the importance of fully completing the service tasks, is emphasized, also at the expense of increased waiting time for other guests.

To summarize, we've now seen that the introduction of host-liness has had positive consequences for both staff and - not at least - guests/customers at the Aalborg Public Library in Denmark. From a leadership perspective it is interesting to investigate to what extent and how their behavior, the organizational set-up and similar aspects of the leadership have contributed to the success of the host-liness-project. Indeed, the demonstration of a significant correlation between conscious and targeted host-liness efforts by a public library and positive effects on guest/users experiences and level of satisfaction is, certainly, one of the project's most visible results.

Leadership critical success factors

Although, leadership was not among the central topics of the evaluation which primarily dealt with the effects of the project on staff/ hosts and guests, it is obvious to focus also on leadership because of the initially skeptical attitudes among the staff. Four factors should be emphasized.

In general, the director and other leaders at the library all demonstrated enthusiasm and a high level of commitment in the project. Second, the staff was allowed to influence the project processes and activities. An illustrative example, showing that staff participation worked, was seen during the mystery shopping planning and implementation where staff obtained influence on the designing of the test criteria. This participation certainly explains the success of that, in many respects, somewhat controversial arrangement. Third, organizational innovative features like the ambassador system where a number of common staff members were placed as intermediaries or project ambassadors had certainly contributed to the success. It is likely, that this special project feature, had ensured a more widespread feeling of ownership towards the staff of the project. Finally, competent and devoted external partners seemed to be among the critical success factors. A subtle balance between the application of hard and soft leadership styles was also important. Consistency, for example, that wearing key-hanger identification was mandatory for all staff whereas participation in other project activities such as extra sales was more voluntary.

Long term effects and integration with other activities¹

It is often seen that the effects of a development project disappear gradually after the external funding and consultancies have stopped. Sometimes the results and achievements of the projects are not integrated in the daily processes of the library. Here, the Aalborg libraries provide an interesting case because they, in a goal-oriented way, have combined two apparently very different library service concepts, host-liness and staff-less libraries.

Among project elements which have become permanent service elements, a mystery shopping session were organized in 2013. Also features to make it easier for the guests to recognize their hosts like key-hangers and alike T-shirts have become permanent. Also, important, is to mention that the Aalborg libraries have started to offer courses in host-liness and guest-host-relations for other Danish public libraries. Today (October 2013) more than 25 Danish libraries have participated.

However, to what extent has the Aalborg libraries succeeded to relate experiences from the guest-host-project with its activities on the staff-less libraries field? Indeed, the Aalborg libraries were

among the earliest adopters of the staff-less library idea; so the two concepts obviously co-exist at the same library. The key question, however, is whether the two concepts also interact and create synergism? Indeed, this is the intention and it also seems that the host-liness values and way of thinking are penetrating the staff-less library concept. As concrete example can be mentioned a 2 meter high poster with a smiling librarian. Another example are more user-friendly and guest oriented signs in the library. So a staff-less or a guest-service oriented library is certainly not a question of either-or but rather a both-and arrangement.

Conclusion

As to the first research question regarding the identification of reasons why both the staff-less and the staff-intensive project could both be considered successful in terms of customer satisfaction, two different types of evidence were presented. Both sources, however, indicated that the Danish library customers appreciated both the staff-less and the staff-intensive services although for different reasons. What characterizes the main features of the Danish library host project? The concept was, originally, developed outside a public library environment within tourism. Furthermore, the key concepts - guest, host and being host or host-liness – are not part of a sophisticated theoretical framework; instead, they are easily translated into daily situations and practices. The host-liness concept also has many sources of inspiration, experience economy in particular, and consists of both soft and hard element such as hearts and brain. Some of principles, more or less, seems to be in conflict with traditional public library traditions and values, applying more offensive/ aggressive communication styles, use of uniforms etc. The host-guest-project also represented a considerable variety. Some traits of the guest-host-philosophy revealed elements of non-standardized flexibility while others – such as hidden tests and mystery shopping – represented more standardized practices.

The key question to what extent the project results worked in terms of user or guest satisfaction were interesting since the results of the before-test were already quite good. However, the after-test which like the before-test was based on a random sample, questionnaire revealed further improvements on 8 of 10 parameters.

As to how the library leadership did handle the initial skeptical staff attitudes, it seemed as if several of the positive project results derived from the lucky choice of adequate styles of leadership – such as visibility, commitment, consistence, and participative styles of leadership.

About the long term effects of the project, it is maybe too early to come up with definitive answers, since less than two years have passed since the project stopped. However, many of the introduced, new elements such as mystery shopping, uniforms and others seem to have had lasting influence; also, the Aalborg libraries involvement in the active spreading of experience to other libraries through many courses similarly suggests long term effects of the guest-host-project.

Finally, there is the question to what extent is it possible, in practice, to combine both staff-intensive and staff-less services in public libraries. Here, two main conclusions pop up. First, the success of the host-project shows that ways to innovate in-house public library service are still available and, important to mention, that certain staff-intensive innovations still seem to be appreciated by the users. Second, recent Danish experiences and cases indicate that an innovative public library strategy could contain both staff-less and staff-intensive elements. The Aalborg case,

here, provided an interesting model example since the library has had a pioneer role concerning both the provision of staff-less and staff-intensive, host-less services .

References

Calvert, P. (2005), "It's a mystery: mystery shopping in New Zealand's public libraries", *Library Review*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 24-35.

Czopak, V. (1998), "Using mystery shoppers to evaluate customer service in the public library", *Public Libraries*, Vol. 37 No. 6, pp. 370-371.

Elkaer, L., Haag Jespersen, B. & Gade Svendsen, L. (1987), *Referencearbejdets kvalitet – en undersøgelse*, Danmarks Biblioteksskole, København.

Florida, Richard. 2005, *Cities and the creative class*, Routledge, New York.

Fukui, K. (2008), "Expectations for Modern Librarians: The Role of Librarian as "Concierge", *Daigaku Toshokan Kenkyu/Bulletin of the Japan Academic Librarians' Association*, Issue31, pp. 17-24.

Henderson, M.R. (1896), "The librarian as a host", *Public Libraries*, Vol. 1, no.5: pp. 187-189.

Jantzen, C., Vetner, M. & Bouchet, J.(2011), *Oplevelsesdesign: Tilrettelæggelse af unikke oplevelseskoncepter*, Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.

Johannsen, C.G. (1998), *Hvordan finder biblioteket svaret: Evaluering*, Tønsberg Bibliotek, Tønsberg.

Johannsen, C.G. (2012), *Projekt Værtensklasse i biblioteket – evalueringsrapport*, Aalborg Bibliotekerne

Johannsen, C.G. (2012a), "Staffless libraries – recent Danish public library experiences", *New Library World*, Vol. 113, No. 7/8, pp. 333-342.

Johnson, E.D.M. & Kazmer, M.M. (2011), "Library Hospitality: some preliminary considerations", *The Library Quarterly*, Vol.81 No.4, pp. 383-403.

Jørgensen, J. (2013), "Selvbetjente biblioteker boomer", *Momentum*, <http://www.kl.dk/Momentum/momentum2013-8-2-id129736/>

Kocevar-Weidinger, E. et al. (2010), "Why and how to mystery shop your reference desk", *Reference Services Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp.28-43.

Larsen, A. & Moerch, F. (1982), *Kvalitet af offentlig service – folkebibliotekernes oplysnings- og informationstjeneste*, AKF, København.

Pine, B.J. & Gilmore, J.H. (1999), *The experience economy : work is theatre & every business a stage*,. Harvard Business School Press, Boston .

Przastek-Samokowa, M. K. M. (2004), "A user or a client - terminological analysis", *Zagadnienia Informacji Naukowej*, Vol. 2. 84 , pp. 63-71.

Reed, V. (2008), "Whom Do We Serve? A Patron by Any Other Name Might Get Sweeter Service", *Reference Librarian*, Vol. 49 Issue 2, pp.183-185.

Teddell, K. (2000), "Evaluating public library service : the mystery shopper approach", *Public Libraries*, Vol. 39 No. 3, p.145

Zeihner, L. 2006. "Self-Check success: Pierce County's new service triangle takes self-serve to new levels." *Library Journal*, available at <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6400918.html> (accessed 24 October 2013).

ⁱ Supplementary data for this section were collected through a telephone interview with a middle manager Gitte Fisker, Aalborg Main Library, September 30, 2013.