

Why Knowledge Cafés can be valuable to organisations.

Peter Sharp

Regent's University London, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4NS, UK.

sharpp@regents.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper discusses research in to the knowledge café technique conducted over the last 10 years. The paper summarises knowledge sharing techniques similar to knowledge cafes and assesses some of the advantages and disadvantages of these techniques. The research builds on some early literature that identifies some of the advantages of the knowledge café approach. Respondents' feedback in this research confirm that the respondents who participated in the knowledge cafes with this researcher valued their experiences for a wide variety of reasons. This paper identifies and categorises these reasons using key verbs (in order of frequency of mention) as *sharing, creating/solving, enjoying, identifying, interest, connecting, learning, and changing*.

Keywords: Sharing; Creating; Solving; Enjoying; Identifying; Interest; Connecting; Learning; Changing.

1. Introduction

In answering the question ‘whether knowledge cafes are useful, and if so, how?’ David Gurteen who had run many knowledge cafes across the world, said:

“There are so many things and it depends what the purpose of your knowledge café is. But personally, I find that the open conversation provides people with insights and changed ways of thinking that are helpful, challenging and stimulating. Also, different people take away different things...” (Gurteen, 2010, p.1 written note)

This response, along with several others from people who had chaired or participated in knowledge cafes before, led to this research about knowledge cafes. This research was conducted by the researcher as he participated in, and chaired, knowledge cafes over more than a period of 10 years in different organisations in London. In these knowledge cafes a myriad of different themes relevant to organisations, technology, business and world affairs were discussed.

The importance of this research is manifold. One aspect of the importance of this research is the need for effective knowledge and learning in organisations (e.g. Alavi et al. 2014; Cherchione and Esposito, 2017; and Dymock and McCarthy, 2006). This can, potentially, build competitive advantage through better use of knowledge, learning and psychology (e.g. Hellstrom and Sujatha, 2001) and help organisations manage well when organisational structures change. For example in recent years, each year there have been trillions of mergers in the world (Lefika and Mearns, 2015) and a good understanding of effective knowledge sharing techniques is vital in such an environment. This paper considers research about one of these techniques: the knowledge café (Sharp, 2013).

This paper considers what a knowledge café is and how the technique compares to the range of different knowledge sharing approaches that can be used; examples of different forums the researcher has used the technique in as part of a cumulative research method for this project; feedback from participants; reasons why the technique is valued by participants; wider implications of knowledge cafes and potential for different approaches /uses of knowledge cafes in the future.

2. What is a Knowledge Café?

For the purposes of this paper a knowledge café is defined as “a frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue in an effort to attain mutual understanding” (Gurteen 2013, p.2). Normally, a knowledge café is conducted face to face in the same building. However, with modern technology (e.g. video conferencing using Zoom technology) there are arguably different versions of knowledge café concept which no longer require participants to be in the same room / geographical space. This paper discusses research relating to knowledge cafes conducted face to face, but also considers implications of other approaches.

‘Knowledge Café’ in this paper refers to face-to-face conversation conducted in groups, not computer systems that have been devised with the name ‘the Knowledge Café’ (Gronau 2002). The idea of a knowledge café is explained by Gurteen (Gurteen 2013). The process of the café is introduced and a question is posed. This should take no more than 20 minutes in total. Participants form groups of 4 or 5 to discuss the question for 30 to 60 minutes. The facilitator calls for change of groups which is normally done three times so groups have three conversations, each about 10-20 minutes long. After this, the whole group reassemble in a circle to continue the conversation until the end of the café. Participants should suspend assumptions and listen to one another (Gurteen 2013). This approach enables participants to address issues related to the overall topic area in a non-linear way. This enables participants to address issues as they arise in conversation rather than a linear way that it is a traditional approach to addressing topics or projects (Griffiths 2013).

Knowledge can be defined in many and various ways (Sharp 2003). However, it is clear that there are various characteristics that most professional employees agree are important to the concept and these are that it:

- “is human-based and particularly refers to the use of skills learnt through experience;
- is bound up with its organisational context and valuable when tailored to it;
- improves the effectiveness, value and/or competitive edge of organisations;

- is particularly valued when it is applied in its organisational context and;
- is also valued when it is possible to share it.” (Sharp 2008, p. 495)

The knowledge café format may or may not include a discussion on the meaning of knowledge, but these aspects of the concept of knowledge inform the terminology of knowledge café, and were used as a reference point in knowledge cafes the researcher facilitated in this research.

3. Different Knowledge Sharing Approaches

The knowledge café is one of many different knowledge sharing approaches. Lefika and Mearns (2015) define and classify different knowledge sharing approaches and they said in 2015:

“...the knowledge café is a fairly new technique for knowledge sharing [and] there is limited scholarly literature about the technique.” (Lefika and Mearns, 2015, p.26)

For a summary of knowledge sharing techniques see Table 1.

	Technique	Definition
1	Peer Assist	Peers get together for feedback /clarification/lessons learnt regarding a problem/issue
2	After Action Review	Review lessons learned to not repeat mistakes in the future
3	Retrospects	Gathering of a specific group at the end of a project to review events and learn
4	Intranets and Extranets	IT platforms for sharing learning internal to an organisation and internal and external to an organisation respectively
5	Knowledge Fairs	Fair to share knowledge on a particular theme using <i>inter alia</i> kiosks, presentations, panels and demonstrations.
6	Knowledge Network	Group of individuals share a common interest using formal methods (e.g. corporate policies)
5	Mentoring	Relationship between two individuals that focuses on guidance and learning
6	Coaching	Coaching focuses on developing specific skills to satisfy goals (Association of Coaching, 2011)
7	Formal Group-Based Knowledge Sharing	Approach of doing this by formal interventions; information sharing; questioning; and managing time to produce knowledge sharing, innovation and solve problems
8	Storytelling	Give accounts of incidents and events
9	Blog (or weblog)	Web pages with no external editing which provides online commentary periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order
10	Chat Show	Informal fun Television style chat show format with one host and three or four guests and an audience of co-workers
11	Community of Practice	Process where a group of people share a common interest, problem or passion for a specific topic and get together and discuss the issue on an ongoing basis
12	Knowledge Cafes	See above and below

Table 1: Knowledge Sharing Techniques (adapted from Lefika and Mearns, 2015).

There is considerable overlap in some of the knowledge sharing techniques that Lefika and Mearns (2015) define. For example, there is little that differentiates techniques 2 and 3, and there is considerable overlap in techniques 5 and 6 (see Table 1). However, this classification gives a useful view of the range of techniques that an organisation may use and the knowledge café is one option it may choose. Lefika and Mearns (2015) also provide a useful classification of techniques similar to knowledge cafes based on their Delphi research (see Table 2).

	Technique	Definition	Differentiators
1	World Cafes	Cultivation of conversations to transfer knowledge and learn)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hosts of tables record conversations -Topics are community related -Multiple questions -Large group intervention -Individuals are encouraged to draw/take notes
2	Technology Cafes	Discussion by group of intervention of a new technology	Technology centred topics
3	Open Space Technology	Groups get together and then break down in to smaller groups and individuals can go to other small groups if they are not contributing to the conversation	Individuals can leave a group at any time
4	Dialogue meeting	Questions are presented for a group to work towards a common understanding	One large group from beginning to end
5	Brainstorming	<p>Encouragement of individuals to generate creative ideas through group discussion. Lefika and Mearns (2015) cite Litchfield (2008) for a four-rule guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) generate a lot of ideas ii) avoid criticising ideas iii) attempt to combine and improve ideas and iv) encourage 'crazy' ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -One individual summarises for the group -Notes taken during brainstorming <p>Sessions often recorded</p>
6	Communities of Practice (CoP)	See above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -CoPs are continuous in nature and longer term (not one-off events) -There is one group from beginning to end
7	Action Learning Groups	Lefika and Mearns (2015) cite Association for Coaching (2011) to define it as people get together to	The catalyst is a problem to be solved whereas knowledge cafes emphasise enquiry

		analyse a work problem and develop a plan of action	
--	--	---	--

Table 2: Summary of Knowledge Sharing Techniques similar to Knowledge Cafes (adapted from Lefika and Mearns, 2015).

There is considerable scope for overlap with these techniques too, and, one technique may be used within another. For example, brainstorming or drawing / taking notes of key ideas may be used within a knowledge café approach, unless the facilitator is very strict in how he/she imposes the knowledge café process (see Section 2).

Lefika and Mearns (2015) provide guidelines for implementing knowledge cafes and various challenges in using the approach. These challenges include not asking appropriate questions and not being authentic (Prewitt, 2011). One of the challenges Lefika and Mearns (2015) comment on is 'disregarding the rules' which could lead to the knowledge café not being 'successful' (Lefika and Mearns, 2015, p. 30). However, one aspect of the approach is that the participants are not closed-minded and unwilling to explore different viewpoints (Gurteen, 2013 and Lefika and Mearns, 2005) so a lot depends on how the facilitator wishes to implement the knowledge café. For example, does the facilitator and/or those hosting the knowledge café want the plenary conversation at the end of the knowledge café to be recorded? And, if so, how? However, although this is the case, knowledge cafes have distinctive features, and have certain advantages over other techniques where people come together (Lefika and Mearns, 2015).

Literature suggests that knowledge cafes are useful in a wide range of organisational environments. Gurteen (2019) has shown that the technique can be used in a wide range of organisations of different sizes and type across the world. These include multi-national companies, charities, research institutes, and government organisations (Gurteen, 2019). Also, Gurteen (2019) integrates his knowledge cafes with his newsletter and website to support a Community of Practice (the Gurteen Knowledge Community). This means that the Gurteen Knowledge Community communicates by using a combination of different means including face to face, social media and Information Technology (Gurteen, 2019). Lefika and Mearns (2015) and Sharp (2013) illustrate that knowledge cafes can be used in higher education and business environments and Singh (2017) suggests that it can be used to conduct research and generate theory.

The example of the Gurteen Knowledge Community generates interesting questions relating to the interaction of knowledge cafes with Communities of Practice and the use of technology to support and complement knowledge sharing. Arguably, Communities of Practice (CoPs) are like knowledge cafés but continue longer with repeated meetings and use of technology where knowledge is shared (Wenger et al., 2002).

The World Café is like a knowledge café that connects people around the world (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). Brown and Isaacs (2005) give stories of the benefits of this approach which encourages listening and working together with people from diverse backgrounds. The World Café approach encourages practical problem solving and removal of hierarchical structures (Brown and Isaacs 2005). There is an appeal in this book to the value of society and face to face meetings in groups that can be lost with the use of technology (Brown and Isaacs 2005). However, technology can support the development of discussions and reinforce the connection with people. Some examples include the use of blogs (Dennen, 2014), the development of virtual CoPs (Ogbamichael and Warden, 2018), the development of Networks of Practice using technology (Primard et al. 2016), continuing CoPs online (Cheung et al. 2013), and video-conferencing (Panteli and Dawson, 2001 and Maul et al. 2018). Also, whether technology is involved or not, an interesting area of discussion is the value of crossing boundaries of CoPs to innovate and create ideas (Leino et al. 2017).

Both CoPs and knowledge cafes usually entail learning about a particular theme or area of concern or interest (Lefika and Mearns, 2015 and May et al. 2016), and, as discussed above, there is overlap of the two (e.g. Gurteen, 2019). This research explores further why knowledge cafes can be useful to

organisations. This research was conducted without reference to Lefika and Mearns (2015) but will add to literature on the theme of the value of knowledge cafes to organisations. Lefika and Mearns (2015) specify eight advantages of knowledge cafes for organisations (see Table 3).

	Advantage	Notes
1	Connecting People	All experts part of the Delphi study saw this as one of the key advantages
2	Knowledge Sharing	Sharing happens once connections are made and this sharing can be used to train and help with mergers.
3	Leadership Training	Leaders can train through sharing experience in knowledge cafes
4	Mergers	Knowledge cafes can help merging organisations can communicate effectively with each other
5	Leaders Share Experiences	Often this is done through leaders sharing tips and tricks and stories
6	Creative Idea Generation	Knowledge cafes help generate ideas and build consensus but were less successful in solving technical problems
7	Change Management	Experts thought it may be helpful for this
8	Learning and Understanding	Knowledge cafes have helped postgraduate students grasp concepts better than in a normal classroom setting

Table 3: Summary of Advantages of Knowledge Cafes for Organisations (adapted from Lefika and Mearns, 2015).

This paper will present further research conducted separately from Lefika and Mearns (2015) and discusses the implications of this research in light of the above literature.

4. Cumulative Research Method: Different Knowledge Cafés and Feedback

The methodology for this research can be viewed as a cumulative approach where one stage of the approach built on another (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Cascade Methodology

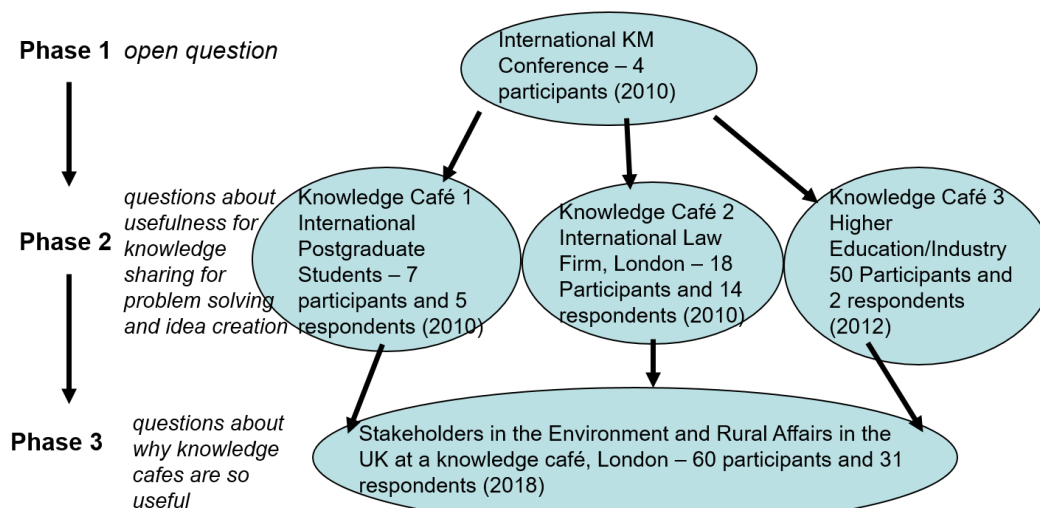


Figure 1: Cascade Methodology.

Phase I - Interview with Four Experts

The researcher interviewed four experts at an international knowledge management conference (European Conference on Knowledge Management) in Autumn 2010. Each person was asked to give a view on their experience of knowledge cafes. Each interviewee said that they valued knowledge cafes for a variety of reasons (see Table 4).

Person	Job / Role / Responsibility	Reasons to Value Knowledge Cafes
1	Business consultant, UK (David Gurteen)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insights / changed ways of thinking / challenging /stimulating Surprising benefits (see Section 1)
2	Senior Lecturer, UK university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesis of ideas Creation of new ideas Useful aide memoire
3	Principal Lecturer, Australian University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sophisticated form of brainstorming that helps build a bigger picture
4	Professor, UK university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity for a wide variety of inputs all at once from different people

Table 4: Phase I - Reasons Given for Valuing Knowledge Cafes.

The reasons given for valuing knowledge cafes include some of the reasons given by experts in the research by Lefika and Mearns (2015) (see Table 3).

Phase 2 - Three Knowledge Cafes: International Postgraduates, Higher Education / Industry and London Law Firm

Phase I led to further exploration of this subject in different settings. The researcher facilitated three knowledge cafes in different environments between 2010 and 2012 and obtained feedback from some of the participants of each knowledge café, via a questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from respondents who were asked four likert-scale questions based on feedback from Phase I. Then, the questionnaire prompted them to give a brief statement of their overall assessment of their knowledge café experience.

The number of participants at the knowledge café always exceeded the number of people who gave feedback. Details of the organisations and numbers of participants and respondents are given above (see Figure 1 Phase 2) and a summary of feedback is given below (see Tables 5 and 6).

Organisation Context	Type of Participants / Respondents	Helpful for Exchanging Ideas on an Issue (average likert score: scale 1-4: top score 1 = 'Strongly Agree')	Prefer IT to exchange views rather than face to face knowledge café (average likert score: scale 1-4: top score 1 = 'Strongly Agree')
Higher Education Institution, (27 th Oct 2010) (Knowledge Café 1)	International Business Students	1.6	2.8
Large Law Firm London (8 th Dec 2010) (Knowledge Café 2)	Knowledge administrators, lawyers and managers	1.9	3

Higher Education Institution (17 th July 2012) (Knowledge Café 3)	Range of Professional workers	2.75	3
---	-------------------------------	------	---

Table 5: Phase 2 - Summary of Likert Feedback from Respondents of Three Knowledge Cafes.

	Summary of Response		
Identity Number	Language Suggesting Generally Positive or Negative?	Issues of Assessment of Knowledge Café experience	Any similarities with Lefika and Mearns (2015) classification of advantages?
Knowledge Café 1			
1	Positive 'very useful'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gives different views on same points can help change your mind 	Not really
2	Positive 'good way of getting people to communicate'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good way of getting people to communicate and exchange ideas, questions and thoughts therefore better understanding of topic 	Yes (2 and 8)
3	Generally positive 'useful'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could not distinguish it from a simple discussion 	Not really
4	Conditional positive 'depends'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on what person learns new perspective take something 	8? Possibly
5	Positive 'fascinating'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> different opinions on topic are fascinating learn from others 	Second bullet [8]
Knowledge Café 2			
1	Positive 'Very valuable'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stilted conversation later flowed Themes from it for business use Valuable conversation with people would not normally talk to 	Third bullet [3]
2	Positive. 'useful'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People can express their issues they have not always related to the specific issue [but still useful] 	2
3	Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexpected common themes arose New issues 	2 and 6

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Couple of solutions to minor problems 	
4	Positive. 'enjoyed it, interesting...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interesting to hear others' views Not sure how to take forward 	First bullet [2]
5	Very positive. 'wonderful' 'I loved this kind of forum'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passion for sharing needs willing participants Motivational Problem-solving 	Third bullet involves 6
6	Neutral / positive. 'Quite interesting' 'Good to...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time to discuss issues with knowledge lawyers 	2
7	Positive. 'Good to ...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get together without specific agenda 	1 [and possibly 2]
8	Positive. 'useful...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss in relaxed way 	Arguably 1 and 2
9	Positive. 'useful...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking to people would not normally talk to No solutions but identified problems 	1 and 2
10	Positive. 'useful...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good forum for sharing ideas Uncertain about practical change 	2
11	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brought up issues and problems he/she did not think to address ready for action 	2
12	Negative. 'not particularly helpful.'		
13	Positive. 'valuable...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable to spend time as a group Interesting potential for brainstorming 	1, 2 and 6
14	Positive. 'useful...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful way of addressing an issue Encourages through provoking discussion 	First bullet [1 and 2 to some degree]
Knowledge Café 3			
1	Neither 'unable to comment'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation at beginning too vague and unstructured and too long Dancers were great 'interlude' Use of technical sound systems 	

2	Positive 'loved the lines..'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling is that more than words needed to make café work • Use of tango and art forms helpful • Metaphors helpful • Wide mix of people excellent • Helpful when people don't think or talk like business textbooks 	Fourth and fifth bullets [1, 2 and 8]
---	------------------------------	--	---------------------------------------

Table 6: Phase 2 - Summary of Assessment of Knowledge Café Experience from Respondents of Three Knowledge Cafes Compared to Lefika and Mearns (2015) classification of Knowledge Café Advantages (see Table 3).

The overall picture from the feedback from respondents in Phase 2 of the research was that the majority of respondents found the face to face knowledge café experience helpful and positive over and above what a participant could experience purely using IT-based communication. The qualitative feedback indicates that there were a lot of reasons why knowledge cafes were a positive experience for most respondents. A number of the reasons given overlap with the advantages classified by Lefika and Mearns (2015) (see Table 6). However, a number of other reasons for the positive experiences of participants in knowledge cafes were given too. These included:

1. listening to/seeing new viewpoints/perspectives on a topic;
2. helping to change a person's mind on a topic;
3. identifying themes for business use;
4. valuable conversation;
5. expressing thoughts on issues that would not be raised /heard otherwise;
6. identifying new issues;
7. improving motivation;
8. enjoying and having time to discuss things;
9. 'getting together without a specific agenda';
10. encouraging people [through discussion];
11. realising new questions /issues that may not have been addressed before and;
12. enjoying new experiences together.

This research led to a final phase of research focused more on why most participants of knowledge cafes value them in the context of their work/organisation(s).

Phase 3 - Knowledge Café of stakeholders in Environment and Rural Affairs in the UK

The researcher chaired the café (see Figure 1) and gave out a questionnaire to the participants at the end of the café. An open question was posed on the experience of participants at the knowledge café. There was deliberately no 'leading question' in the questionnaire so that the feedback from the 31 respondents could be compared with previous feedback and arguably is more powerful evidence to support conclusions against the theme of this paper. For details of the feedback see Table 7.

Respondent	Brief Statement assessing Knowledge Café Experience	Was the experience positive?	Reason(s) for Valuing the Knowledge Café (cross reference(s))	Additional Reasons?
1	"I was a little sceptical at first, but the group discussion did provide a useful brain-storming session with useful output."	Yes	6	

2	"Very useful process. Will take the method/tool back to my organisation. Great for identifying common ground and focusing on the main issues."	Yes	12	
3	"Stimulating and enjoyable. A pleasant change from listening passively to presentation."	Yes	20	{21} Mental stimulation
4	"Positive in that sharing of different views [is] good. However, usefulness determined by implementation by [a government organisation] of views"	Yes	2	
5	"Not sure how constructive it was to repeat the question with the movement of groups, but it was generally a good discussion. With the question on the board, could have been the objective/aim of the exercise."	Yes	12	
6	"Good experience! Enjoyed it! Perhaps one more change of people"	Yes		
7	"Wondered off the point somewhat. Interesting concept will use myself...opened up conversation/other ideas etc"	Yes	6	
8	"20 minutes still seemed quick, but better than last time. Got key points across and learnings from others' views in small table discussions."	Yes	8	
9	"it was a productive way of initiating discussion. It sparks my interest on this way of brainstorming and will take it forward to apply in any job."	Yes	6	
10	"I was initially sceptical, but found it more useful than I suspected, and more focused (compared to other similar events). Need to rearrange furniture lost valuable time, but otherwise valuable."	Yes		
11	"the use of more groups was good, however assembling post it notes onto board answers sometimes misses the nuances or [?] of the debate."	Yes		
12	"It was interesting to engage with people, but can't say there was any difference to a standard brainstorming session or discussion."	Yes	6	
13	"I enjoyed the experience"	Yes		
14	"Valuable + open discussion and beneficial to all involved. Good experience overall."	Yes		

15	"Very helpful unhindered and open exchange of views"	Yes	9	
16	"The process is straightforward, but the aim and value of output against any process that relied on the output was unclear."	Neutral		
17	"7 out of 10. Good!"	Yes		
18	"Potentially useful as a technique. But easy to become trapped in smaller groups with specific details."	Yes		
19	"Very interesting and gave the ability through exchange to obtain different viewpoint/output"	Yes	2 and 9	{22} Interesting
20	"Small groups encourage open discussion"	Yes	2	
21	"Interesting Small groups worked well Larger conversation was good at the end – bi"	Yes		22
22	"Very interesting experiences which I'll bear in mind in the future."	Yes		22
23	"Useful and interesting"	Yes		22
24	"In principle the café works. There are always those in [?] into [?] and steer and dominate conversation+ this makes the Café style flow tough."	Yes		
25	"Valuable way of networking across the group and sharing ideas in an open transparent way."	Yes	1 and 2	
26	"Fruitful discussion. Sharing knowledge is always useful but would like to know what outcomes are used for"	Yes	2	
27	"The experience was useful and constructive."	Yes		20
28	"Good opportunity to share thoughts with stakeholders with different/various views."	Yes	2 and 9	
29	"Enjoyed unexpected differences in points brought across @ the different tables. The big "plenary" discussion was most effective."	Yes	2 and 9	
30	"A great leveller/equaliser ensuring equal voice/participation from all present."	Yes		{23} Leveller /equaliser

				/takes away hierarchy
31	"Went v. well. Constructive discussions + provided a good format to hear different views."	Yes	9	

Table 7: Summary of Feedback from Knowledge Café Experience of Stakeholders in Environment and Rural Affairs in the UK.

Notably 30 of the 31 respondents found the knowledge café experience a positive one. The other respondent was neutral. The reasons given for this positive experience concur with those found in the previous phases of the research. Notably, there is a particular emphasis on the value of knowledge sharing, idea generation and seeing different viewpoints (see Table 7). Also, four other reasons were given (see Table 7).

5. Brief Discussion and Categorisation of Reasons Why Knowledge Cafes are Valued

This research illustrates how participants generally find knowledge cafes a positive experience. Out of a total of a total of 55 respondents, 51 provided positive feedback on their experience without being prompted by the researcher. This research identifies 24 reasons why knowledge cafes were valued by participants. These reasons and the frequency of mention are categorised (by some key verbs). This is illustrated below (see Table 8).

Reason Id Number	Reason	Frequency of Mention (from Respondents)	Category	Total for the Category
3	Leadership Training		Changing	3
7	Change Management		Changing	
10	Helping to change a person's mind on a topic	1	Changing	
15	Improving motivation	1	Changing	
18	Encouraging people [through discussion]	1	Changing	
4	Mergers		Changing/Sharing	
1	Connecting People	6	Connecting	6
6	Creating new ideas	5	Creating/Solving	9
24	Problem solving/brainstorming	4	Creating/Solving	
16	Enjoying having time to discuss things	3	Enjoying	9
20	Enjoying (new) experiences together	6	Enjoying	

11	Identifying themes for business use	3	Identifying	9
14	Identifying new issues	5	Identifying	
19	Realising new questions /issues that may not have been addressed before	1	Identifying	
2	Knowledge Sharing	11	Sharing	32
5	Leaders Share Experiences		Sharing	
9	Listening to/seeing new viewpoints/perspectives on a topic	10	Sharing	
12	Valuable conversation	4	Sharing	
13	Expressing thoughts on issues that would not be raised /heard otherwise	3	Sharing	
17	Getting people together	4	Sharing	
8	Learning and Understanding	4	Learning	6
21	Mental stimulation	2	Learning	
22	Interesting	7	Other – Interest	7
23	Leveller/equaliser/breaks down hierarchy	1	Other - leveller	1

The most frequently valued aspect of knowledge cafes is the *sharing* aspect and the experience of finding experience '*interesting*' but the other categories of value (*changing, connecting, creating/solving, identifying, learning* and *enjoying*) should not be underestimated. With these findings in mind, there are a number of areas in business/organisations where knowledge cafes could be useful, and this set of categories and reasons could be used by an organisation/individuals to justify using the knowledge café technique in different situations.

6. Limitations and Future Areas of Research

The total number of participants in the knowledge cafes facilitated as part of this research exceeded the number of respondents. The total number of participants was 139 and the total number of respondents was 55. At one large Knowledge Café 2 (Phase 2) (see Figure 1) I had to canvas feedback by sending out the questionnaire by e-mail because I forgot to give it out at the end of the café. In the case of the Knowledge Café with 60 participants last year (see Figure 1) some participants were still involved in their conversations and so did not give in a feedback sheet in, and although the questionnaire was short the chair of the day-long event wanted to move things on and get to lunch! This may have led to fewer responses than may have otherwise been achieved. There is always scope for more feedback from participants about why they may value knowledge cafes but the evidence from this research is conclusive that most participants do value them and for a wide range of reasons.

One future area of research is the effectiveness and comparative value of knowledge cafes conducted using Zoom technology (Gurteen, 2019). Video-conferencing/Zoom technology can bring connection bridging geographical barriers whilst retaining richness of communication (Panteli and Dawson, 2001; Maul et al. 2018). However, the dynamics of knowledge cafés conducted using Zoom technology with participants around the world are, to some extent, different, looking at lots of faces on screens and going in to virtual 'rooms' with a few participants (Gurteen 2019). It would be interesting to find out whether participants of international knowledge cafes using Zoom technology value the experience more, less or the same as face to face and whether for the same/similar reasons or not. The implications of this for uses in organisations, CoPs and business would also be valuable areas of research to explore.

7. Conclusion

This paper explores why knowledge cafes can be valuable to organisations. Through a cascade methodology applied over a number of years, virtually all respondents gave feedback that confirmed that they did value knowledge cafes and a wide range of reasons were provided for such a positive response. This paper categorises these reasons with key verbs and these reasons can be used to justify the use of knowledge cafes in different settings in the future. The key verbs/nouns are (in order of frequency of mention) *sharing, creating/solving, enjoying, identifying, interest, connecting, learning and changing*.

References

Alavi, M., Kayworth, T.R., and Leidner, D.E. (2005) An Empirical Examination of the Influence of Organizational Culture on Knowledge Management Practices, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, Volume 22, Part 3: pp 191-224.

Association for Coaching (2011) Top 5 Tips for Running Action Learning Groups, available from : <http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pub/ACHGuides6.pdf> [accessed 12.01.11 by Lefika and Mearns (2005)].

Brown, J. and Isaacs, D. (2005) *The World Café*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650, San Francisco, California. ISBN: 978 1 57675 258 6.

Cherchione, R. and Emilio, E. (2017) Using Knowledge Management Systems: a Taxonomy of SME Strategies, *International Journal of Information Management*, Volume 37, pp 1551-1562.

Cheung, C.M.K., Lee, M.K.O., and Lee, Z.W.Y. (2013) Understanding the Continuance Intention of Knowledge Sharing in Online Communities of Practice Through the Post-Knowledge-Sharing Evaluation Processes, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 64, Issue 7, pp 1357-1374.

Dennen, V.P. (2014) Becoming a Blogger: Trajectories, Norms, and Activities in a Community of Practice, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 36, pp 350-358.

Devriendt, L.; Derudder, B.; Witlox, F. (2010) Conceptualizing Digital and Physical Connectivity: the Position of European Cities in Internet Backbone and Air Traffic Flows, *Telecommunications Policy*, Vol 34, Issue 8, pages 417-429.

Dymock, D. and McCarthy, C. (2006) Towards a Learning Organization? Employee Perceptions, *The Learning Organization*, Vol 13, No. 5, pp 525-536.

Griffiths, D. (2013) Is there a problem with traditional approaches to KM projects? The Knowledgecore's Blog, Complexity and Knowledge Management Navigators <http://theknowledgecore.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/is-there-a-problem-with-traditional-approaches-to-km-projects/?goback=%2Egde_1539_member_205409045> [accessed on 20th February 2013].

- Gronau, N. (2002) The Knowledge Café – a Knowledge Management and its Application to Hospitality and Tourism, *International Journal on Quality Management in Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol 2, Issue 3.
- Gurteen, D. (2010) European Conference on Knowledge Management (ECKM 2010), 11th European Conference on Knowledge Management, Universidade Lusíada de Vila Nova Famalicão, Famalicão, Portugal, 2nd – 3rd September 2010.
- Gurteen, D. (2013) The Gurteen Knowledge Café, Knowledge Café Tipsheet, Personal e-correspondence 13th February 2013.
- Gurteen, D. (2019) www.gurteen.com [accessed on 11th March 2019]
- Hellstrom, T. and Sujatha, R. (2001) The Commodification of Knowledge about Knowledge: Knowledge Management and the Reification of Epistemology, *Social Epistemology*, Vol. 15, Part 3, pp 139-154.
- Lefika, P. T. and Mearns, M. A. (2015) Adding Knowledge Cafes to the Repertoire of Knowledge Sharing Techniques, *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 35, pp 26-32.
- Leino, H., Santaoja, M. and Laine, M. (2018) Researchers as Knowledge Brokers: Translating Knowledge or Co-producing Legitimacy? An Urban Infill Case from Finland, *International Planning Studies*, Vol. 23, Part 2, pp 119-129.
- Litchfield, R.C. (2008) Brainstorming Reconsidered: A Goal-based View, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol 33 (3), pp 649-668.
- Maul, J., Berman, R., and Ames, C. (2018) Exploring the Psychological Benefits of Using an Emerging Video Technology to Coach and Retain Doctoral Learners, *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, Volume 13, pp 49-78.
- May, M., Neutsky-Wulff, C., Rosthoj, S., Harker-Schuch, I., Chuang, V., Bregnhøj, H., Henriksen, C.B. (2016) A Pedagogical Design Pattern Framework – for Sharing Experiences and Enhancing Communities of Practice within Online and Blended Learning, *Learning and Medier (LOM)* – nr. 16 – 2016, ISSN: 1903—248 [accessed from <http://www.lom.dk> on 27th February 2019].
- McDermott, R. (1999) Why Information Technology Inspired but Cannot Deliver Knowledge Management, *California Management Review*, Vol 41, No. 4, Summer 1999, pp 103-117.
- Ogbamichael, H.B. and Warden, S. (2018) Information and Knowledge Sharing within Virtual Communities of Practice, *South African Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, pp 1-11.
- Panteli, N. and Dawson, P. (2001) Video Conferencing Meetings: Changing Patterns of Business Communication, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, Vol. 16, Part 2, pp 88-99.
- Prewitt, V. (2011) Working in the Café: Lessons in Group Dialogue, *The Learning Organization*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp 180-202.
- Primard, K., Guittard, C., and Burger-Helmchen, T. (2016) Knowledge Sharing in Geographically Dispersed Communities, *Management International*.
- Sharp, P. J. (2008) MaKE First Steps – How a Definition of Knowledge can Help Your Organisation, *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol 5, Issue 4, pp 487-496.
- Sharp, P. J. (2013) Are Knowledge Cafes preferable to Information Technology (IT) approaches for exchanging ideas in Business Professions? British Academy of Management (BAM 2013) 27th Annual Conference of the British Academy of Management, 10th -12th September 2013, Liverpool, UK.

Singh, S. (2017) The Knowledge Café as a Research Technique, *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, pp 29-40.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A., and Snyder, W. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, Harvard Business School Press, 60 Harvard Way, Boston, MA 02163: ISBN: 1 57851 330 8.