

An introduction to Zoom Video Meetings as a platform for virtual Knowledge Cafés

I have been running face-to-face Knowledge Cafés for the last 15 years and a question I am asked time and time again goes something like this:

“We are a geographically dispersed organization, and it is impossible to bring everyone together face-to-face. How can we use information technology to run the Café virtually?”

My answer has been simple one *“You can’t. Anything that you try to do falls so far short of a face-to-face conversation that you can no longer call it a Knowledge Café.”*

Until now that is when recently I discovered Zoom and everything changed.

[Zoom](#) is a relatively new (January 2013) cloud-based video meeting system that is perfect for hosting virtual Knowledge Cafés.

You can learn more about the company and its background in this Forbes article [How Zoom CEO Eric Yuan Turned Frustration Into A \\$1B Valuation In Six Years](#).

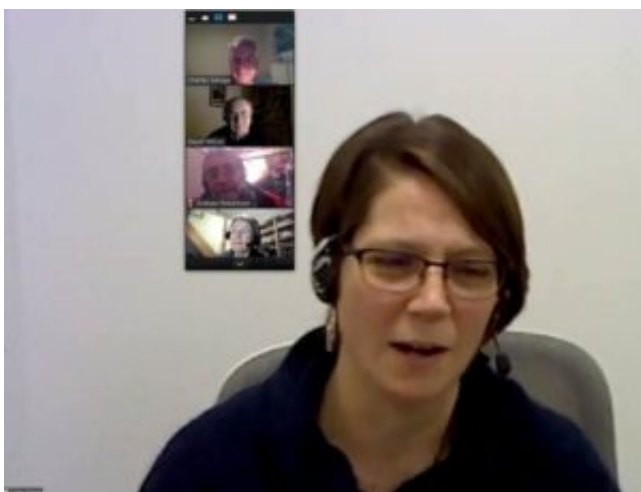
Zoom has many features and functions that go beyond supporting virtual Knowledge Cafés. It supports both text and video Instant Messaging; is an excellent webinar platform and can support interactive workshops.

But here I wish only to describe why to the best of my knowledge it is the first platform to fully provide the functionality to make virtual Knowledge Cafés a reality.



Zoom large group conversation

- Zoom is inexpensive, easy to use and can handle the necessary number of users for a Knowledge Café.
- Users can not only access the meeting platform through Windows or Mac desktops but also through Apple or Android smartphones or tablets.
- The video and audio quality are excellent, and the platform is stable.



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- **Critically is has a break-out room capability where the Café host can randomly**

assign participants to one of several break-out rooms for small group conversations.

- There are a number of pricing options for Zoom, but from a Knowledge Café perspective, there are only two that are relevant. There is a free basic version and a pro version that costs \$15 per month. The free version contains all the key features of the Pro system except meetings are limited to 40 minutes.
- Both versions of Zoom can host up to 50 participants. As the Knowledge Café works best for less than 30 participants, this restriction is not a limitation.
- The Pro version offers some additional non-critical features, but importantly it allows a meeting host to convene meetings of any duration.
- To host a virtual Knowledge Café, only the Café host needs to subscribe to the Pro version of Zoom to get past the 40-minute limitation.
- The Café participants need only subscribe to the free Basic version.
- Zoom has a meeting scheduling function.
- It can share the host's desktop and thus give short PowerPoint presentations to the participants,
- Zoom allows meetings to be recorded and has a text chat facility. These are nice-to-have options rather than essential features to run Knowledge Cafés.

In short, Zoom is a viable low-cost technology platform for convening and hosting virtual Knowledge Cafés.

The video shown below of an early experiment of mine with Zoom gives you a good idea as to how the large group conversation might work.