

# Café-style meetings

The café style of meeting is an approach to group discussions and collaborative problem-solving. In the same way that folk gather in cafés for informal conversations, the café-style of meeting brings a similar atmosphere to our discussions. We create a more relaxed and open environment where everyone's opinions and ideas are valued equally.

A 'Knowledge Café' is a conversational gathering to share knowledge and experiences, learn from one another, build relationships, and make better sense of a rapidly changing, complex, less-predictable world. The aim is to improve personal decision-making, foster innovation, and facilitate collaboration. There are no 'experts', only 'learners'. We try to avoid having a meeting, simply to hold a meeting. Connection before content, yet (personal) productivity to the fore!

Instead of a meeting with a decision as its outcome, we have conversations (one doesn't know the outcome at the beginning!). Instead of the traditional meeting setup, where one person speaks and others listen, café-style meetings encourage free-flowing conversations. We can stay as one, or break into smaller sub-groups using 'break-out rooms', each with a specific topic or question to discuss. Participants can move between, contributing their thoughts and insights to different conversations. This setup promotes dynamic exchanges and allows everyone to engage actively and equally.

The café-style approach is all-about fostering creativity, collaboration, and diverse viewpoints. It breaks down hierarchical barriers and promotes inclusivity, ensuring that each person's voice is heard. There is no "leader", but usually someone takes on the rôle of guiding these discussions effectively, facilitating meaningful interactions, and helping participants arrive at solutions.

As a start, we might use a modified SCRUM or technical 'stand-up' meeting, during which everyone briefly answers three questions:

1. What did I achieve since our last meeting?
2. What do I plan to do before our next meeting?
3. What is a problem, or appears to be in my way; or can you help with this question?

The latter topics are recorded, and saved for later discussion. The group decides which are of widest interest, and therefore should be tackled earlier.

Remember, the café style isn't just about the meeting format; it's about creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable expressing themselves. As we delve into this approach, your

professional insights and personal enthusiasm will undoubtedly play a crucial role in making these sessions productive and enriching.

### Further Reading:

[Hold Conversations, Not Meetings](#), Tony Golsby-Smith, Harvard Business Review, 15 Feb 2011

[World café \(conversation\)](#)

[Learning circle](#)

[The World Cafe: Workshop Facilitation Method, Principles and Etiquette](#), Simon, 30 Apr 2013

[Lean Coffee: How to run an agenda-less meeting that's not boring](#)

Continuous improvement: [Plan, Do, Check, Act \(PDCA\)](#)