



Adding knowledge cafés to the repertoire of knowledge sharing techniques



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ABSTRACT

Knowledge cafés, a fairly new technique used to facilitate knowledge sharing, offer individuals within organisations the opportunity to interact on a face to face level with topics that are relevant to a particular organisation, and enhances knowledge transfer. One of the major impediments of knowledge cafés is that, to date, there is limited literature concerning this knowledge sharing technique. For this reason data was gathered through a Delphi study to investigate and discuss various aspects of knowledge cafés as used for the purpose of knowledge sharing. The results of the study provide guidelines, advantages, disadvantages and similar techniques to knowledge cafés. The core differences between knowledge cafés and world cafés are also highlighted. Essentially it is the aim of this article to add knowledge cafés to the existing repertoire of knowledge sharing techniques by firstly reviewing literature on the existing techniques used for knowledge sharing and then elaborating on the value of knowledge cafés as a knowledge sharing application.

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1. Introduction

“Successful knowledge transfer involves neither computers nor documents, but rather interactions between people” (Davenport, 1995). Knowledge is an abstract concept and its worth lies in the context that it is shared, the manner in which it is shared, and the timeliness of the content (Knowledge@Singapore Management University, 2011). With the shift from the industrial economy to the present knowledge economy, knowledge has become a very important aspect for any organisation and the transfer or sharing of that knowledge, even more so.

According to Sethumadhaven (2007) knowledge sharing, if implemented correctly, is a concept which offers enormous business opportunities for any organisation. Some of the benefits of knowledge sharing are to allow for the cultivation of innovation, simply by motivating employees to share their ideas, to facilitate the process of understanding markets and customers. The contribution that knowledge sharing makes towards innovation occurs when organisational members share tacit knowledge and convert it into explicit knowledge for new products or services (Van Krogh et al., 2000). Furthermore, knowledge sharing helps an organisation to develop better products and services, build core competencies of individuals within an organisation and improve

customer service. This is done by ensuring enhanced response time to customer requests and needs and to boost revenues by getting products and services to the market faster (Sethumadhaven, 2007).

There are numerous methods for sharing knowledge, ranging from technologically assisted to face to face methods. Many organisations employ the use of different methods for sharing knowledge, and often these methods are adapted to meet organisational needs. Over the past decade the corporate world has seen the birth of many techniques for knowledge sharing. One of the more recent techniques that has come about during the knowledge economy is the knowledge café. A technique promoted by David Gurteen (www.gurteen.com), it focuses on conversation as a means for knowledge sharing or transfer.

A knowledge café is a process where a group of individuals with a similar problem or interest come together at a specific venue. Once there, these individuals are divided into small groups of about four or five. Once the groups have been created a guest speaker talks for five to 30 min, at most, on a specific topic ending off his or her presentation with an open-ended question. This open-ended question forms the basis of the discussions to be held by each group.

The small group discussions usually last for 10–15 min each, before the individuals in the group are asked to rotate and form new groups to discuss the same topic (Knowledge@Singapore Management University, 2011).

Because the knowledge café is a fairly new technique for knowledge sharing there is limited scholarly literature about the technique. It is the aim of this article to document the guidelines,

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pre-conditions, advantages, obstacles, successes and alternative uses of knowledge cafés within the broader context of other more established knowledge sharing techniques.

2. Repertoire of knowledge sharing techniques

In order to add knowledge cafés to the current repertoire of knowledge sharing techniques, existing techniques must first be discussed. This list of techniques is not claimed to be exhaustive or detailed, but rather to provide an overview of applications that organisations could consider to apply for knowledge sharing purposes.

2.1. Peer assist

According to the [Canadian International Development Agency \(2003\)](#) peer assist is a form of knowledge sharing that was introduced to industry in 1994 by British Petroleum. [Collison and Parcell \(2001\)](#) define peer assist sharing as a methodology that brings peers together for feedback or clarity on a problem or project to draw “lessons from the participants” knowledge and experience”. It is a method that can be easily adapted to specific user needs and promotes interaction and learning between peers.

2.2. After action review

An after action review is a technique that was developed by the United States (US) armed forces. Its main focus is to review lessons learned rather than to solve inconveniences from scratch. After action review is an approach to knowledge sharing that can be viewed as a technique that ascribes to the notion that “prevention is better than cure”. In the hopes of not repeating mistakes individuals get together and discuss the outcomes of various projects in order to learn, grow and avoid similar mistakes in future. The success of this after action review is largely dependent on the willingness of the participants to contribute their tacit knowledge ([Canadian International Development Agency, 2003](#); Internet).

2.3. Retrospects

A retrospect is the gathering of a specific group of people, within an organisation, at the end of a project. The purpose of this gathering is to review the events that pursued during the course of the project, and to learn from the incidents that were played out. Usually individuals who form part of the project are only thoroughly clued up on aspects of a project that they partook in, therefore implementing a retrospect allows for the collective telling of the entire project journey. According to [Canadian International Development Agency \(2003\)](#) a retrospect does not only identify the problems that were encountered and highlight the lessons learned, but it also aims to solve these problems and possibly fill gaps. For this reason it is more comprehensive than an after action review.

2.4. Intranets and extranets

Intranets and extranets are two platforms of knowledge sharing which have similar features. The major differentiating factor is the fact that extranets allow for controlled access from the outside for specific business or educational motives whereas intranets access is limited to the individuals who work within an organisation. Intranets are computer networks that function on the same technologies and set of rules as the internet, however unlike the internet intranets are limited to certain users, who are usually the internal employees of an organisation.

An extranet offers a virtual space which functions on the same technologies and protocols as an intranet. It facilitates

communication and collaboration amongst employees within an organisation but also allows for various users who are external from the organisation to gain access.

2.5. Knowledge fairs

According to the [Canadian International Development Agency \(2003\)](#) knowledge fairs are used as a means to share information on a particular theme, through a variety of techniques. These techniques can include the use of kiosks, scale models, presentations, panels, showcases and demonstrations. Knowledge fairs can be very costly and in terms of preparation are often very time consuming, therefore attaining senior management buy-in is very important. Possible information overload is another pitfall of pursuing such a technique. Regardless of the pitfalls associated around the use of knowledge fairs, if implemented effectively there are many advantages. These advantages include the ability to present a lot of information simultaneously. It is also a brilliant method to use for the purpose of networking and establishing new contacts for present and future use.

2.6. Knowledge network

A knowledge network is an initiative where a group of individuals who share a common interest or fascination in a particular subject area, get together in order to share and build their knowledge. Knowledge networks and communities of practice are similar in nature, however the major difference is that knowledge networks are largely considered as a formal method of knowledge sharing of which corporate policies have been established around the use of this methodology within an organisation. In addition knowledge networks are usually not time bound, whereas communities of practice only function in response to a specific concern and are often time bound.

2.7. Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between two individuals which focuses on guidance and learning. In order for learning to take place knowledge must be shared and so mentoring forms as a platform for this sharing to occur. The mentor is usually an individual with a lot of experience, who then takes this experience and sows it back into individuals who are less experienced. Mentoring is not limited to an employer–employee relationship, in other words one does not necessarily have to be mentored by one’s manager. Mentoring is future orientated, and can be very advantageous within an organisation as it allows for enhanced internal communication, which in turn makes the working environment more exciting and productive ([Canadian International Development Agency, 2003](#)).

2.8. Coaching

Coaching is a process which aims at developing the abilities, skills and qualifications of employees, in order to satisfy organisational goals. Unlike mentoring which is more focused on guidance, coaching focuses on developing specific skills needed from each employee, while the coach does not convey his or her personal vision to the employee or employees in training.

Some of the benefits and strengths that have been associated with the utilisation of coaching as a knowledge sharing technique refers to the contribution it makes to employee confidence. Coaching serves as a support system for employees to learn from the coach’s know-how, thereby enhancing the employee’s chances of success ([Canadian International Development Agency, 2003](#)).

2.9. Formal group-based knowledge sharing

“Recent perspectives have focused on the role of the firm in the generation and use of knowledge. These perspectives suggest that, while knowledge is “owned” at the individual level, the integration of this knowledge to a collective level is necessary” (Garcia-Lorenzo, Mitleton-Kelly, & Galliers, 2003: 27). Hence it is important for an organisation to employ individuals who can work well with one another, and build healthy relationships as a lot of focus is placed on group efforts.

Based on a study done by Okhuysen and Eisenhardt (2002: 370) it was established that three formal interventions namely, information sharing, questioning others and managing time were three aspects that contributed to the overall success of group-based sharing, in terms of enhancing output. The output in this case would be things such as collective knowledge, innovative ideas and problem solving.

2.10. Storytelling

The word “story” is rooted in both French and Latin, literally meaning an account of incidents or events. According to Shaw (2004) stories are amazingly powerful knowledge sharing tools that can be used in numerous environments.

Based on a study done by Tobin and Snyman (2008), it was found that stories and storytelling do indeed have the potential to enhance the knowledge sharing process in an organisation. In effect, it appears as if storytelling is transforming organisations in the 21st century. This is evident in the revival of storytelling as a mechanism for management (Armstrong, 1992; Smith, 2012).

2.11. Weblog

According to Drezner and Farrell (2008) a weblog is a “web page with no external editing, providing online commentary, which is periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources”. Usually weblogs are published by individuals in an informal capacity. Weblogs are considered as an informal method for sharing knowledge because an individual who chooses to partake in a weblog does so in a voluntary capacity (Jackson, 2006).

The benefits of a weblog include the fact that it serves as a platform for individuals to communicate, and in doing so, to share ideas, opinions and knowledge. It also captures information, meaning that knowledge is codified and ready for organisational use (Wolak, 2012).

2.12. Chat show

A chat show is an informal, fun way of sharing knowledge and is based on the format of a television chat show, with one host and three to four guests, while an audience watches. This audience will usually be made up of co-workers and can be any size. However smaller audiences tend to encourage participants to share more. A chat show usually runs for about 60–90 min with a host inviting questions from the audience, to be answered by the participants (Hewlett, Barnard, & Fisher, 2010).

2.13. Communities of practice

According to Wenger (2006) a community of practice is a process where a group of people share a common interest, set of problems, or a passion for a specific topic. They get together and discuss this issue on an ongoing basis in order to learn and to gain a broader understanding. Wegner (2006) further elaborates that not everything called a community is necessarily a community of

practice. For example, people often refer to a neighbourhood as a community, but this does not necessarily make the neighbourhood a community of practice. In order for the neighbourhood to be justified as a community of practice it would have to have three fundamental characteristics: the domain, the community and the practice.

2.14. Knowledge cafés

A knowledge café can be defined as a process where individuals with a similar interest or problem get together in order to interact with one another, first in small groups and then as one unit in order to resolve a problem or to gain better understanding (Knowledge@Singapore Management University, 2011). Knowledge cafés are characterised by the following components: a guest speaker who speaks for 5–30 min, an open-ended question which serves as the basis for conversation, small groups of four to five that discuss the topic of the café and finally a large feedback session (Gurteen, 2009).

Considering the lack of literature on knowledge cafés, this article aimed to document expert opinions on knowledge cafés and furthermore measured the perceived effectiveness of knowledge cafés as a knowledge sharing approach.

3. Research methods and process followed

This research was designed using the Delphi technique to gather information from a panel of experts on knowledge cafés. The original Delphi method was developed by Norman Dalkey of the Rand Corporation in the 1950s during the Cold War. The objective of the mission was to create consensus of opinion amongst a group of experts, on the ways in which the Soviet military might attack the US industrial system (Amos & Pearce, 2008).

Over the years the use of the Delphi technique has progressed to other areas of research and has been implemented as a means to collect data where there is a lack of literature or information on a specific topic of interest.

In line with the guidelines suggested by Hallowell and Gambatese (2010) for implementing a Delphi study, no more than ten experts were identified. The criteria for the experts were that they should at least have facilitated a knowledge café and also be known as an expert in the knowledge management field. For this specific study eight experts were identified through snowball sampling based on the defined criteria. Of the eight experts that were identified five agreed to participate in the data collection process. Once these experts had been identified prompting questions were developed to minimise bias and ensure objectivity from the panel of experts.

The questions were e-mailed to the expert panel and the first round of responses were analysed using content analyses. The level of consensus was then determined and the target consensus was not yet reached which triggered a second round of the Delphi technique by disseminating the analysed responses to the panel of experts. This round resulted in consensus and the results could then be reported.

4. Findings of expert opinions on knowledge cafes

The responses that were received were summarised according to the following themes: guidelines, advantages, pre-conditions, obstacles and successes of knowledge cafés, as well as equivalent techniques to knowledge cafés. These responses were then sent to each expert to review, and add extra commentary if need be. The results from the expert consensus are subsequently discussed.

4.1. Guidelines for implementing a knowledge café

There are various guidelines that are necessary in order to effectively implement a knowledge café. According to the experts from this study guidelines can be classified in terms of time management, size of group, facilitator, location, atmosphere and name identification of participants.

- (i) *Time should be well managed:* According to all the experts, time is an essential guideline and it should be adhered to. There should be a 15–20 min time span between rotations of small groups and an overall sufficient amount, to allow for at least three rotations per session. The time allocated for the knowledge café to take place should also allow for an introduction by the facilitator, a short talk by the guest speaker and for a review session at the very end.
- (ii) *The size of the group:* Experts made it clear that larger groups do not work effectively. Ideally the number of individuals that should participate within a knowledge café is 30–40. These individuals should then be divided into smaller groups of no less than four and no more than five. There have however been cases where very large groups have resulted in seemingly successful cafés. It would seem that the size of the group can also be influenced by the expertise of the facilitators and what they can handle.
- (iii) *Expert facilitator:* It was clearly stated that an expert facilitator is another important factor that should be taken into account. The facilitator chosen will be in charge of ensuring that the knowledge café run smoothly, in terms of time management and listening in on group conversations. The facilitator and the guest speaker can be one individual; alternatively two separate individuals can be chosen to fulfil the facilitator role and guest speaker role.
- (iv) *Suitable location:* The knowledge café should take place in a suitable location, meaning that the venue should be big enough to allow for rotation of chairs and for a café style setup. If the venue does not allow for rotation and easy movement the process of running the knowledge café could be hindered.
- (v) *Informal atmosphere:* An informal environment with a relaxed atmosphere contributes greatly to the amount of sharing that would take place within a knowledge café. Due to the fact that sharing knowledge is the main purpose of a knowledge café, it is important that the facilitator creates a relaxed atmosphere. The manner in which the venue is set up can contribute to achieving this atmosphere.
- (vi) *Know each others names:* According to the experts all the individuals participating within the knowledge café should know each others names. This can be done by supplying name badges to all participants. The experts also goes on to state that it is vital for individuals to be able to contact each other after the knowledge café has been implemented, perhaps just to verify some of the knowledge that was shared or for further networking purposes.

In accordance to the answers reflected by the experts, if the above mentioned guidelines are adhered to, the likelihood of a knowledge café being successful is greatly increased. Following the mentioned guidelines, a discussion on the advantages that may arise from the correct implementation of knowledge cafés followed.

4.2. Advantages of implementing knowledge cafés for knowledge sharing

For the purpose of effectively summarising the advantages three categories were created, namely implementation, sharing and learning.

- (i) *Implementation perspective:* From an implementation perspective the experts identified the following two advantages namely, knowledge cafés are easy to implement and can be run on a low budget. It is not necessary for vast amounts of money to be spent on the implementation of knowledge cafés, making them a cost effective means to share knowledge.
- (ii) *Sharing perspective:* Another advantage listed, from a sharing perspective, included the fact that knowledge cafés serve as a platform for individuals to verbalise ideas and to share their thoughts, as well as to experience a vast amount of knowledge in a relatively short time. Knowledge cafés can also be advantageous in a sense that they allow individuals the opportunity to validate their own understanding of a specific topic or subject through sharing. Often within an organisation there are difficult topics or issues which may need to be discussed. Knowledge cafés can serve as a tool to help build consensus on difficult issues. Knowledge cafés can also be an effective tool to generate conversation in hierarchical organisations where dialogue would otherwise be stifled.
- (iii) *Learning perspective:* For, an organisation to survive in today's knowledge economy, individuals need to have the ability to learn (Hoskins & Fredriksson, 2008). Learning is a process where information and experience is altered into knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes (Cobb, 2009). According to LearningRx (2011) there are three main types of learning namely auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. Based on the nature of knowledge cafés, the experts were of the opinion that that the two types of learning that take place are of an auditory and visual nature, where listening and seeing is the medium. Often auditory messages are enhanced through visual aspects such as hand gestures or facial expressions.

The experts also identified the reason why a knowledge café allows for easy learning is because of the informal environment to which it adheres. Not only are participants motivated to think differently, to learn from each other, and to understand different perspectives, but are also given a platform to provide visual answers.

Although the panel of experts identified the above mentioned advantages, there were also challenges identified regarding the implementation of knowledge cafés. These challenges are subsequently detailed.

4.3. Challenges that hinder effective implementation of a knowledge café

When challenges can be identified they can be managed or avoided. According to the experts the following challenges need to be carefully managed.

- (i) *Closed-mindedness:* Individuals who are narrow- or close-minded are, not willing to explore different points of view, and by so doing, can hinder the process of implementing a knowledge café. Individuals such as these are often set in their ways, and because of this they will not gain new knowledge, which defeats the purpose of implementing a knowledge café.
- (ii) *Not giving enough context and briefing:* It is important for participants to know what is expected of them, hence prior to launching a knowledge café it is essential that the café is placed into context through relevant initial briefing. This falls in line with the type of question asked. The question should be compelling and evoke a discussion amongst participants.
- (iii) *Size of group:* The size of the group participating in the knowledge café may also pose as a possible challenge. The group cannot be over populated or alternatively too small either. The reason for this is that, with larger groups, not all the

participants get a chance to voice their opinions. Furthermore with smaller groups there may be limited insight due to the fact that knowledge is only being shared amongst a few individuals. An ideal number is usually 30–40 participants.

- (iv) *Language barriers*: The essence of a knowledge café is to share knowledge through conversation. One of the factors that can lead to ineffective communication is language barriers. If individuals that are participating in a knowledge café do not understand each other, or are unable to converse with one another due to different languages spoken, then the knowledge café will be deemed futile. There should always be a common language that is spoken; the language chosen will depend on where the knowledge café is to be implemented.
- (v) *Disregarding the rules*: There are various rules that one needs to adhere to in order for a knowledge café to be successful. Rules such as having a facilitator who can facilitate the process is crucial, in order to guide the knowledge café process. Especially when implementing a process that relies on face to face conversation. If rules are not adhered to it is most likely that the knowledge café will not be successful.
- (vi) *Location is important*: According to the panel of experts it would be difficult to implement a café if participants are geographically dispersed. Location in terms of securing a venue that permits for a café style setup is also important, as this

contributes to the overall process of implementing a knowledge café. The location needs to allow for easy movement and comfortable seating.

- (vii) *Non-vocal individuals*: Participants who do not give any input into discussions, even though they may have a great deal of knowledge to share, can also be seen as a challenge that needs to be overcome. Conversation is key, if one is not willing to converse and share personal insight the knowledge café will not succeed. Alternatively there are individuals who talk non-stop, these individuals usually dominate conversations leaving little room for outside input. It is important to realise that although talking is key, so too is listening, one of the ways in which an individual learns is by listening and understanding.

In light of the above challenges it was also important to discuss the prior successes that experts achieved through the utilisation of knowledge cafés as a technique for knowledge sharing.

4.4. Successes of knowledge cafés as a technique for knowledge sharing

According to the panel of experts the success of implementing knowledge cafés can be viewed as follows.

Table 1
Knowledge sharing techniques similar to knowledge cafés.

Technique	Definition	Key differences
World cafés	A world café focuses on cultivating conversations as a means to initiate the transfer of knowledge and subsequently allow for a learning process to take place (World Café Community et al., 2005).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A table host is responsible for steering and possibly recording the collective and evolving stories of the group conversations at his/her table throughout the duration of the multiple changes of visitors (Prewitt, 2011). • Community focused: deals with topics that are community related. • Multiple questions asked at one World Café proceeding. • Large group intervention. • Individuals encouraged to take note of key ideas, doodle and draw. • All topics of discussion are centred on technology.
Technology cafés	A technology café is where a group of individuals get together to discuss the implementation and the use of new technology.	
Open space technology	Open space technology is a process where individuals get together, initially in one large group and then in smaller groups, in order to discuss various topics of interest. One of the key principles of open space technology is "The Law of Two Feet", which implies that if you as a participant find that you are not contributing to the discussion on a specific topic or are not gaining new insight, you should go to another group (Owen, 2008) (Pereira & Figueredo, 2010).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller group discussions all focus on different topics. • One of the key differences of open space technology to knowledge cafés is that participants can leave the discussion being held in their group at any time if they feel that they are not gaining new insight or alternatively if they are not contributing to the group.
Dialogue meeting	A dialogue meeting is a forum where questions are presented and individuals work as a group towards a common understanding (Wilhelmson, 2006).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no smaller group discussions. One large group from the beginning till the end.
Brainstorming	Although brainstorming is a formal method for knowledge sharing, two of the experts mentioned it as a technique that can be equated to knowledge cafés. Brainstorming is a process that encourages individuals within a group to generate creative ideas and solutions through group discussions (Levi, 2011). According to Litchfield (2008, 2009) there are four rules that guide individuals and groups in creative idea generation: (a) generate a lot of ideas, (b) avoid criticising any of the ideas, (c) attempt to combine and improve on previously articulated ideas, and (d) encourage the generation of "crazy" ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One individual is responsible for summarising the group discussion and reporting back to management. • Notes are taken during the brainstorming session. • Sessions are often recorded.
Communities of practice	A community of practice is a process where a group of individuals who share a common interest, set of problems, or a passion for a specific topic, get together and discuss it on an ongoing basis in order to learn and to gain broader understanding (Hislop, 2009; Monaghan, 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities of practice are continuous in nature. • The focus is on one topic of interest, that is discussed over a period of time (days or months), whereas knowledge cafés are once-off and the topic changes with each new café. • There are no smaller different group discussions. One group from the beginning of the process until the end.
Action learning groups	According to the Association for Coaching (2011), action learning is a process where individuals in an organisation, who have diverse levels of skill and experience, get together in order to analyse a work problem and develop a plan of action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The catalyst for action learning is a problem to be solved, whereas knowledge cafés emphasise inquiry and understanding rather than problem-solving, although problems can be solved as a result of the sharing that has taken place, knowledge cafés are not driven as a problem-solving process.

- (i) *Connecting people*: The experts share the same view, that knowledge cafés can be utilised best for connecting people. When individuals are connected it simply means that conversation and collaboration is taking place. A knowledge café can be linked to team effort, because just like team effort knowledge cafés also require the contribution of all the members who are participating.
- (ii) *Knowledge sharing*: In conjunction with connecting people, knowledge cafés are seen as valuable tools which allow for successful knowledge sharing amongst peers that could include the use of a knowledge café for training purposes, mergers and internal organisational sharing.
- (iii) *Leadership training programmes*: A leadership training programme is a forum where leaders get together to share their experiences, as to how they contributed to empowering and motivating employees. During these sessions various topics such as “outcomes of the training program” and “problems encountered” were discussed. In order to assist the discussion and the knowledge sharing process, it was decided that a knowledge café approach would work best.
- (iv) *Mergers*: The amount of mergers and acquisitions that have occurred world wide, reached a staggering four trillion in 2006 (Braksick, 2007: 8). According to Whitaker (2009) these mergers and acquisition continue to rise. There are many factors to consider in order to achieve a successful merger. One of these factors is ensuring that effective communication between the merging organisations takes place. Knowledge cafés can offer such a platform.
- (v) *Leading advisors sharing experiences*: Utilising a knowledge café in order to encourage leading advisors within a specific organisation to share their experiences when leading communities of practice and professional networks, achieved the ultimate aim to get advisors to share on topics such as what to do, what will work, and tips and tricks for their organisation.
- (vi) *Creative idea generation*: It was found that knowledge cafés were very useful in generating creative ideas or for consensus building challenges. However with regards to solving problems of a technical nature, knowledge cafés were less successful. The experts also found that implementing the outcomes from knowledge cafés can be difficult.
- (vii) *Change management*: Change management is a process which is people focused and centres on utilising knowledge, tools and resources to help people deal with change within an organisation. The experts were of the opinion that in their own experience knowledge cafés have limited success in this regard, however they indicated that they can probably be used as a tool for change management, as well as to get individuals talking about their emotions and fears within a business context.
- (viii) *Learning and understanding*: From an academic perspective the experts reported that after facilitating a knowledge café for postgraduate students, it helped students to grasp concepts and principles, a lot easier, than if they had been taught in a normal classroom setting where the educator presented everything. This was reflected in the answers that were given by the students in the exams. Proof that knowledge cafés can also be implemented successfully in academic settings.

4.5. Techniques that are similar to knowledge cafés

The experts were asked to identify possible knowledge sharing techniques that are deemed similar to knowledge cafés. Table 1 lists techniques that are similar to knowledge cafés.

Although each knowledge sharing technique that was mentioned by the experts comes with its unique differences, there were

core similarities that allowed the techniques to be considered as similar to knowledge cafés. These core similarities are:

- They are group orientated.
- They are driven by goals or interest.
- Conversations are used as a medium for sharing knowledge.
- Participants are involved in the creation of new knowledge.
- Learning occurs in a real-time context.

5. Conclusion

Over the past decade organisations have seen the birth of many techniques for knowledge sharing, allowing individuals to decide in which manner they prefer to share knowledge within their respective organisations. One of the more recent techniques that have come about during this era of knowledge management is the knowledge café, which focuses on conversation as a means for knowledge sharing or transfer.

In the current knowledge economy, knowledge has become the organisation's principal asset therefore, knowing how to enhance, extract, manipulate and share knowledge has become increasingly important for organisations. It is for this reason that it becomes imperative for individuals within organisations to implement the relevant knowledge sharing techniques, for the relevant situation in order for knowledge to be effectively shared.

Understanding the concept of knowledge cafés and the potential benefits of implementing a knowledge sharing technique such as this is important for organisations, regardless of the nature of the organisation. Therefore the focal point of research conducted for this article aimed at enhancing the literature and documenting the potential benefits, challenges, guidelines, uses and pre-conditions regarding knowledge cafés. In doing so, contributing to a better understanding of knowledge cafés as a technique for knowledge sharing.

Although the Delphi study that was implemented, generated a substantial amount of literature on the mentioned aspects of knowledge cafés, it is still clear that more research needs to be conducted in order to further add to the body of knowledge associated with knowledge cafés. The level of knowledge retention is a potential area of future research that can be undertaken. Although it has been established that knowledge cafés can be used as a technique to share knowledge, if implemented correctly, it has not yet been investigated, if or how much knowledge individuals who have previously participated in a knowledge café process are able to retain.

“The old paradigm was ‘knowledge is power’. Today it needs to be explicitly understood that ‘sharing knowledge is power”” (Gurteen (2009)). Therefore developing knowledge sharing tools such as knowledge cafés is an important aspect of the knowledge economy.

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