The Zoom meeting-types Perspective: Moving on from restrictions

As we prepare for reduced Covid-19 restrictions, we can envisage people getting together in small groups for Quaker worship and meetings of many kinds. We have become skilled at running Zoom meetings with generally one person per screen. The possibility of small groups wanting together and join a Zoom session at one screen is appealing. However it brings a new set of Clerking and technical challenges, which must be considered, or participants will have a diminished experience.

In Quaker use of Zoom, we can identify nine types of meeting. These types are described below in the hope they may be helpful to Friends going forward in these uncertain times. They are relevant to many uses and especially to ways of participating in YM2020.

Yearly Meeting 2020 is planned as a virtual event. Many people have worked hard to make this happen. As restrictions ease, albeit with possible physical distancing still in place, we know Friends may wish to be in the same room. This may be a positive experience when watching a presentation together (see Type 8 below) if the technical resources suggested are utilised.
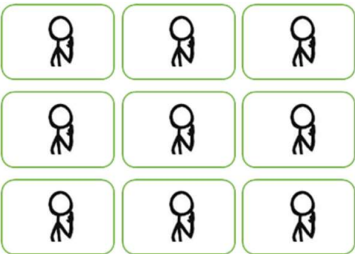
However, when Quaker discernment or discussion is a key feature of the Zoom meeting, such as YM Business Sessions, people meeting in face to face groups would be likely to experience a sense of exclusion and perhaps frustration (Type 9 below). The Clerking and technical teams would have difficulty in identifying individual Friends who wish to speak.

This paper describes nine types of Quaker Zoom meetings. They are presented in order of how challenging they are to run, clerk and manage. Types 4, 5, 8 and 9 become possible with reduced Covid-19 restrictions.

We have worked hard at equipping Friends with Zoom skills, so that Friends will have a positive experience of using Zoom in their Meetings, and especially at YM2020. We are keen that positive experience of using Zoom is not undermined by the shortcomings inherent in Types 4, 5, 8 and 9 through accidental adoption of arrangements that are somewhat unsuitable.

1. Small Meeting for Worship:

A screen for each person, low vocal activity, up to 25 screens, unclerked

|	
	Participants mute & unmute themselves. Preferable to have a Technical Host. A social gathering fits this pattern too.

2. Business/Committee/Discussion meeting:

A screen for each person, up to 25 screens, high vocal activity, clerked

	Clerk nominates who is next to speak; participant unmutes self. Preferable to have a Technical Host assisting.

3. Large Meeting for Worship:

A screen for each person, low vocal activity, more than 25 screens, un-clerked, possibly with Elder on Duty
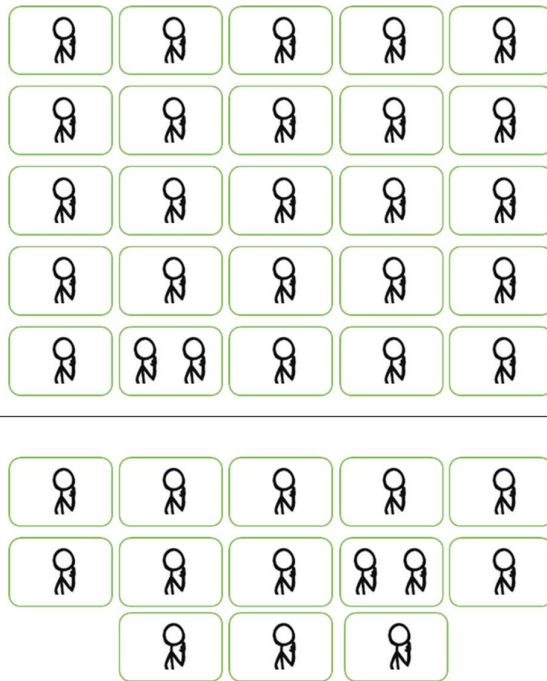
Participants mute & unmute themselves.
Once there are more than 25 participants, it is not possible to see all in one screenful.

Preferable to have a Technical Host, especially if notices re conduct of the meeting need to be used, eg at the start of the meeting, to notify silence has already started.

Technical Host keeps an eye on unmuted microphones.

If Friends of limited Zoom capability are invited, it's good to have a support person whom they can phone if in difficulties, and who can offer assistance, if needed.

4. Committee meeting

Mixed individuals & groups, high vocal activity, clerked
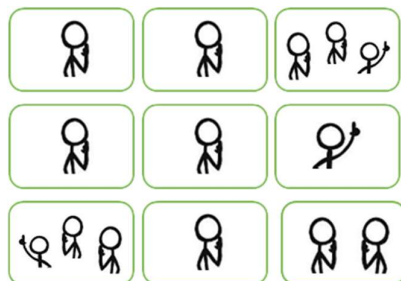
Clerk is needed to call next speaker, and manage the meeting.
This configuration crosses a threshold: A small group it may be hard to see all present (especially if physically distanced). Participants may be hard to hear if distant from microphone.
It's hard for the clerk to call a group, especially if one person has already spoken (multiple times).
Technical Host to watch for waved hands and (Blue) Raised Hands (preferable to use Raise Hands)
Clerking such a meeting can be a challenge, especially if large. Please see Configuration 9, for cautions about this.

5. RM Business Meeting amongst dispersed groups:

Mixture of largest central group in Meeting House, some small group(s) at a screen(s), some individuals

	Assumption of this configuration is that the Clerking Team and the largest group are together (post-lock-down). Clerks concentrate on the local meeting. One Friend is designated to notice if remote participants wish to speak. May be very challenging to call if one remote group do not all fit into the camera-field. **Extra camera and microphone at each location where there are more than two people improves this configuration.** If the number of screens increases about about nine, the use of (blue) Raise Hand becomes very helpful. Please see Configuration 9, for cautions about this.

6. YM Business Meeting, Small:

High participation, up to 25 screens, clerked

	Technical Host assists Clerk(s) by notifying of who wishes to speak. Use of (blue) Raise Hand button helps greatly. If Clerks are in separate locations, they can use a Google Doc to compose minutes. Calls for good team-work, and rehearsals. A Technical Co-Host can watch for unmuted microphones. If Break-out Rooms are to be used, only the Host can set these up, and manage them. Two people at one screen is feasible. Please see Configuration 9, for cautions about this.

7. YM Business Meeting, Large:

A screen for each person, high participation, more than 25 screens

	Technical (Co-)Host assists Clerk(s) by notifying of who wishes to speak. Use of (blue) Raise Hand button is essential. If Clerks are in separate locations, they can use a Google Doc to compose minutes. Calls for good team-work, and rehearsals. A Technical Co-Host can watch for unmuted microphones. If Break-out Rooms are to be used, only the Host can set these up, and manage them. Since some participants are off-screen, the Host uses the **Participants** list to see Raised Hands. Clerks and Tech team must be fully focused in such a meeting (and well rehearsed). Two people at one screen is feasible. Please see Configuration 9, for cautions about this.

8. Broadcast, lecture style event

Non-interactive, passive listening event.

This configuration is for a lecture-style event. It is a broadcast, rather than an interactive session.
For example, the Backhouse Lecture does not expect responses from its audience. So, this configuration would be acceptable for that purpose. The lecturer does not need to see all participants, poorly visible groups are acceptable.

It needs facilitating.
It needs a Technical Host(s): keep microphones muted, possibly assist with screen-sharing.
Small groups proposing to get together to share in the **Backhouse Lecture,** the **State of the Society address** and the **Summary of world epistles** should consider carefully how well their own audience will be able to see and hear their screen and speakers, especially if only a laptop is to be used.
A large extra screen could be useful.

9. YM Business Meeting, Large, Mixed:

A Mixture of a screen for each person, and small group at some screens, high participation, more than 25 screens

This configuration is very challenging to manage!
All the challenges of the configuration 7 apply. Added to them is the challenge of remote small groups, and the reduced visibility and audibility of them to everyone (Clerks and Tech Team especially).
We know that this configuration may enable participation by some Friends who would not join in on their own. We ask that Friends seek ways for people to join YM business meetings with only 1 or 2 people per screen.
Attempting to incorporate a group of larger than two would likely diminish the opportunity for YM2020 to be a worthwhile experience.
In the future, we may be able to incorporate groups bigger than two, but we are not able to offer a satisfactory experience for face to face groups at Yearly Meeting 2020 Business Sessions.

An extension camera

If you have a group larger than four, who probably won't fit into a laptop camera-shot, an extension camera/microphone is good. Only minor technical skill is needed.

Purchase:

•   a Logitech C920 webcam (or equivalent) Officeworks list them for about $140.[1]

•   a camera tripod (eg a Vivitar 62 inch) or you may already have one (Officeworks, $49)

•   a USB extension cable 5 metres. (Comsol COU2AA05, or equivalent). (Officeworks, $30)

These items will remain useful into the future.

If you go down this path, plug in the camera/microphone to a USB socket on your computer ahead of time, all the driver software to load. On the control strip at the bottom of the Zoom window, there is an up-arrow right of the Mute Microphone. Click on it, and select the camera's microphone. Similarly, click the up-arrow right of the camera icon, and select the new camera.

Michael Searle in consultation with YM 2020Hosting Group

---

[1]   Webcams are the new toilet-paper in Covid desirability! Logitech C920s seem to be out of stock with many suppliers. Logitech C615, C270 webcam are slightly down-market, but are entirely suitable. Internet searching reveals apparent availability, from some local suppliers as well as overseas ones. Confirm availability before you go out shopping. You may need to allow time for delivery.