



MINUTES AND GROUP RECORDING

Getting
down to
business

3M Meeting Network

The scene: Your next meeting. The conversation:

“Who was supposed to handle that call?”

“Didn’t we discuss that already?”

“I thought we decided that at the last meeting.”

“Sorry, I forgot.”

“I thought you were doing that.”

“Oh. . .”

Do you hear conversations like this very often? If so, perhaps it’s time to examine the way you keep records of your meetings.

Why keep records?

The most important reason to create a record of meetings is to create a shared group memory. Individuals selectively perceive, retain and recall their own experiences. Therefore, meeting participants will remember a meeting quite differently from one other. If the group keeps an accurate record of the meeting, then you can:

- Decrease the need to revisit decisions that were made.
- Recall open issues and “deferred” items with ease.
- Have increased confidence that action items will be done.

Options for recording.

The conventional method for recording meetings is to have a scribe keep minutes. This practice is certainly better than keeping no records at all. But consider this: How many times have you reviewed the minutes of a meeting and wondered if the scribe attended the same meeting you did?

A more effective and increasingly popular means for recording meetings is to have someone create a visual group memory during the meeting. To do this, one participant uses a flip chart, whiteboard or other shared display to capture a few key items for the group. Benefits of this method are numerous:

- The visual display becomes a shared space that enhances collaboration.
- Everyone sees what is recorded, thus enhancing group responsibility for the group memory.
- Participants know when they have been heard because they get visual confirmation.

What to record.

Whether you choose to use a scribe who keeps traditional minutes or a recorder who creates a visual group memory, certain things should be captured at every meeting.

The basics.

At a minimum, the recorder should keep a summary of the meeting that includes action items, decisions and open issues.

1. *Action items.* Action items are to-do's assigned to attendees at the meeting. Record the task, the person responsible and the date agreed upon to complete the task.

2. *Decisions.* All decisions that may affect future choices of the group should be recorded.
3. *Open issues.* New issues raised at the meeting but not resolved there should be recorded so they can be carried over to a future meeting.

Advanced recording.

If you use a public recorder, he or she can create a space on a shared display for each topic on the agenda and capture participants' comments about that topic. People appreciate having their comments displayed in a way that is visible to everyone. In fact, you may notice the group's attention turn toward the shared display and that participants begin to ask the recorder to link ideas or capture other points that might have been missed. When this happens, you've created a genuine shared space.

What to do with the record.

Conventional minutes are often distributed as is. When you create a visual group memory, you may want to summarize the information for distribution and post it to an intranet site. You may also wish to keep the information in its original form. In this case, you can use a digital whiteboard that stores your notes in a computer file for easy printing, faxing or emailing.

Make the meeting.

Related Reading

How to Make Meetings Work; Michael Doyle & David Straus; Berkley Publishing Group; 1993.

No More Teams!: Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration; Michael Schrage; Currency/Doubleday; 1995.

Helpful Hints

Always remember to listen for and capture the decisions, action items and open issues from a meeting.

When capturing an action item, get the person to whom it is assigned to help you word it and set the due date — that way you know they've accepted the "to-do."

At the end of the meeting recap the decisions, action items and open issues for the group and ask if anything important has been overlooked.

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