

Meeting Minutes as Living Documents

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Meetings without minutes are like shooting a movie that never gets edited and shown to viewers. Here's what I mean. Meetings are held to get work done, to make decisions, and to agree on assignments that indicate whom is going to get what done by when. Without minutes, it is difficult to hold ourselves accountable for the implementation of decisions and the achievement of assignments.

A great minute-taking approach is to create a living document. A living document is the result of a meeting or series of meetings held for the purpose of future work planning. It is an actionable document that includes the decisions made and information shared at a meeting. A list of who attended, who or what they represent and their titles is also included. A living document records what if any further research is required, what actions have been agreed to, and who is going to do what by when and report back to whom.

For multi-day, large scale planning meetings a living document also includes: formal meeting minutes, handouts, white-papers, scenarios, and presentation documents as a part of the meeting event record. Then, as ongoing meetings occur, the living document is added to after each meeting.

However, a living document is NOT an exhaustively detailed document that is bound and put onto a bookshelf where it collects dust. It is not meant to be a static historic document. Rather, a living document is an evolving record that changes to reflect changing conditions, situations, new results, and ongoing decisions. Ultimately a living document is used to produce good ongoing business results.

The table of contents for creating your own living documents of meetings is: a Cover Page, followed by the Statement of Event Purpose. Next include the documentation of Action Items and Assignments agreed to during the meeting. An Executive Summary of Meeting Information and Results is helpful when a multi-day meeting produces more than five pages of minutes. And of course, include the Meeting Participant List so that future readers of the minutes know that the right people were at the meeting.

In the Detailed Meeting Minutes included as a part of the historic record of the meeting, you can include: Pre-work distributed to participants; Presentation handouts; Case-studies and Scenario discussions and documents; Decisions made; and Assignments made; followed by any other requested inclusions.

The key reasons for producing meeting minutes are to remind people what they learned and what they committed to in order to bring about positive business results by the agreed upon deadlines.

Action Item: Document living meeting minutes, that get added to as needed, and that lead to the actions your business needs to be most successful.

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