Tool 7 – Meeting Memo

TOOL: The **Meeting Memo** is the document describing the *outcome* of a meeting. Not to be confused with *Meeting Minutes,* the *recording* of *all* the meeting's proceedings.

WHEN: Often we complain about the time lost attending a meeting. The more serious wrong would be failing to record what was agreed to at the conclusion of a meeting. Therefore, a **Meeting Memo** needs to be prepared after every meeting to justify and substantiate having had the meeting in the first place.

HOW: A **Meeting Memo** is *not* meeting minutes. It is not a running transcript and record of what was said. Its purpose is to document a check point in time, and set the mark for going forward. It consists of three parts: (1) Opening, (2) Meeting Content and (3) Closing.

1. Opening – These are administrative items and are optional depending on the setting. Each organization has to decide if these elements are to be part of their organization's **Meeting Memo standard**:

1.1 To: The meeting attendees and sometimes also higher level manager(s) that are responsible for the activities of the attendees.

1.2 Via: Sometimes there is a position between the author of the memo and the higher manager receiving the memo. This allows the middle manager to imply concurrence. For example, this could be the chairperson of the meeting if someone else is the facilitator.

1.3 From: The name of the group leader, facilitator, or chairperson. This is the author of the memo.

1.4 Date of Memo: The date the memo was released.

1.5 Subject: For reoccurring meetings, like project status meetings, consider numbering the meetings. e.g. "Meeting No.3 – MIS Project Status." For on-time meetings be specific: "Follow-up Meeting on Flood Damage" instead of just "Meeting Notes."

1.6 Date of Meeting: The date of the meeting, which could include the day of the week too. The Date of the Memo (1.3) field could be eliminated when (1.6) the Date of Meeting is used. In this case, this field could just be titled "Date."

1.7 Attendees: List of the names and their organizations/affiliations of those attending the meeting. Sometimes, for reoccurring meetings, those absent (so noted) could also be listed.

2. Meeting Content – This is the heart of the meeting.

2.1 Decisions Reached: List the decisions made. Often decisions are not formally stated. The recorder needs to listen, record, and sometimes restate for the group to confirm the recorder got it right.

2.2 Action Items: List the tasks assigned to specific people. Include the target date if given. The recorder of the notes could ask in the meeting – "When is this due?"

2.3 Progress Items: Entries should be limited to accomplishments since the last meeting. Keep it to milestones. *Resist lengthy discussion*. That's what progress reports are for.

2.4 Discussion Items: These are the 'catch-all' column for items worthy of recording, but are not action items or status messages. This is a good place to spell out "For the Record" items. Again, resist lengthy discussion. These are not meeting minutes.

3. Closing – These are administrative items, the Opening and are optional depending on the setting. Each organization has to decide if these elements belong.
3.1 Notice of Next Meeting: If there is going to be next meeting, list the date, time and location.
3.2 Agenda of Next Meeting: If known, it is a good practice to list the major items to be covered and the next meeting.
3.3 Recipients of Copies of the Meeting Memo: People need to know who else is receiving these meeting notes. "Meeting Attendees", "Department Managers."

NOTE: **#1 -** The source for this tool was an article published in the American Management Associations' ***Supervisory Management*** magazine by Tom Adams, July 1980. The concept has been applied and modified over the years.

TIPS: **1.** If the organization is agreeable (typically), **Meeting Memos** can be prepared and sent as e-mail. When this is done, the 'Opening' is handled by the e-mail processor.
2. Don't be reluctant to eliminate some of these elements. Decide the minimum necessary in your organization to communicate the product of your meeting. The goal is to get the notes of the meeting prepared and distributed.
3. The value of recording the decisions and assignments made in meetings has been demonstrated over and over. Make it your personal goal to see that the practice is institutionalized in your organization.
4. Take copies of the previous meeting notes to the next meeting and use it an agenda.
5. At end of a meeting, the meeting notes recorder can do a quick re-cap of his/her notes for the attendees. Simply read off the **decisions reached** and the agreed upon **next action steps**.

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