

CREATING AN HISTORICAL RECORD

This document aims to describe a strategy members in the South & East Asia/Oceania Circle of CNVC have found helpful in meeting many needs at once.

1. Clarity (between existing members)
2. Transparency (in the S&EA/O Network)
3. Inclusion (note-takers can participate in meetings)
4. Continuity (bringing future members 'up to speed')

We invite awareness in the reader that this strategy took some time to develop, and may not serve effectively in environments with different needs. Also, in order for it to serve our needs, we pay considerable attention to the details laid out in this document. (Omission of one or more of the details can result in one or more of the above needs not getting met.)

Overview

The S&EA/O Circle keeps a record of the collective decisions reached by its members during meetings where a facilitator presides. It aims to make this record available to people in a broader network (via email and/or as an Internet download), and refers back to it in order to support its creation of future agendas.

We want to think of our minutes in terms of their contribution to our Leading, Doing and Measuring functions. In addition to our decisions, our minutes include enough of the reasoning behind the decision that, 6 months or 2 years later, when measurement data stimulates the question, 'Well, why did we do that in the first place,' we can look backward and see.

The Role of 'the Secretary'

George Orwell noted in his novel 1984, 'He who controls history, controls the present'. Meanwhile, the bearers of 'High Office' in hierarchical organisations often seem to forget the possible truth of this statement.

Through his or her production of documentary 'evidence', the Secretary in an organisation effectively 'controls' its history.

Members in the S&EA/O Circle therefore appreciate a note-taker in their meetings they feel confident will represent their shared history as accurately as seems humanly possible.

Documenting the progress of our meetings

The S&EA/O Circle elects a note-taker who, in addition to participating in its Sociocratic process, serves the Circle through his or her performance of two specific tasks.

1. During the meeting, he/she reads back the exact wording of any proposal offered in a consent round.
2. After the meeting, he/she types up and circulates minutes of that meeting via whatever media the Circle has determined it wishes to use.

Content of the minutes

We find it helpful to include at least the following information in our minutes:

1. The date of the meeting.
2. Names of participants in attendance.
3. A record of decisions made around each item of the Agenda.
4. Action items and closing comments.

Note: Where misunderstanding and/or conflict arises, we find it does so out of differences in interpretation. We appreciate that our records show the exact wording of any collective agreement rather than even our most trusted note-takers' interpretation of that collective agreement then.

Depending on the individual note-taker, action items - i.e. which member or members to do what by when – may appear under the headings provided by the meeting agenda or may appear under a separate heading, 'Action Items'.

Closing comments provide clues as to items to include for discussion during future meetings to those preparing agendas.

Beyond this 'essential' content and depending on the progress of a discussion, we may also include references to comments made during our meetings.

We find these helpful when it comes to sharing the aliveness of a discussion and helpful in conveying to a wider audience the significance of certain agreements that might not appear particularly relevant to our overall process – e.g. 'So and so to ask some other person about XYZ and report back to the group'.

What happens to the minutes

In our Circle, we appreciate a note-taker who can circulate minutes within 24 hours or so of the finish time of our meeting. This supports members in our Circle in receiving 'documentary evidence' whilst their experience of our meeting remains fresh. Members can communicate to the note-taker any discrepancies they might notice, particularly where the note-taker might have attributed closing comments they do not recall having made.

Note: To support the note taker's participation and the overall progress of our meetings, the note taker refrains from reading back during the meeting his/her interpretation of each member's closing comment.

Sharing in the Network

Readers can find a collection of minutes taken during S&EA/O meetings to date at http://en.nvcwiki.com/index.php/S%26EA/O_Sociocratic_Circle#The_South_26_East_Asia.2FOceania_Sociocratic_Circle. Members in our Circle may or may not choose to circulate a notice to members in their local networks each time we add to this archive.

Conclusion

We trust that others will take from this description any part of our strategy for 'controlling history' they feel attracted to. You may extract excerpts from this document for insertion into other documents without including any reference to source, and/or may circulate this document in its entirety to anyone.