Before Everyone Leaves the Meeting

Five questions that can save everyone another meeting.

The meeting is nearly over. Everyone is gathering their things, somebody has another call to join, and there seems to be a general feeling that progress has been made.

Excellent.

But before everyone disappears, it's worth checking that the meeting has actually produced something useful.

You don't need formal minutes for every conversation. You do need clarity about important decisions, actions and commitments.

1. What have we actually decided?

Can someone briefly confirm the decisions made? Be careful to distinguish a decision from an idea, a recommendation or something that still needs investigating.

2. Who has agreed to the decision?

Was it approved by someone with the authority to do so? If the decision affects other people or departments, does anyone still need to be consulted?

3. What happens next, and who is doing it?

For each important action, establish what needs to happen, who is responsible and when it should be completed. An action without an owner has an uncertain future.

4. What haven't we resolved?

Not everything needs to be settled today. Identify outstanding questions, dependencies and decisions that require further work. Agree who will take them forward.

5. Who is recording all this?

Make sure someone will capture the decisions, actions, owners and deadlines, share the record with the relevant people and arrange appropriate follow-up.

What if AI is taking the notes?

Tools such as Microsoft Copilot can help produce meeting summaries. That's useful, but a summary of the conversation isn't automatically a confirmed record of decisions and commitments. Where possible, confirm important outcomes while the relevant people are still together. Afterwards, check any AI-generated record for accuracy, omissions and unresolved questions before relying on it.

One final thought

You don't need to become the meeting secretary, and you certainly don't need to take over the meeting. Sometimes a simple question is enough:

“Before we finish, can we just confirm what we've agreed and who's doing what?”

It may be the most useful contribution you make all afternoon.