



## Knowledge to lead

# Organizing an After Action Review

## Step by Step

### Before the Meeting

- **Organize the meeting right after the event.** After Action Reviews should be conducted as soon as possible after the event took place, in order to have fresh memories of it, so that learning can be applied immediately.
- **Build a climate of trust.** The ideal climate for an After Action Review is one of trust, openness and commitment to learning. AARs are learning events, not critiques, and so should not be treated as performance evaluation. During AAR hierarchy should be excluded, so that junior members can feel free to comment the seniors' actions.
- **Recruit a facilitator.** Ideally the facilitator should be someone who has not taken part in the project so that he/she can remain objective.
- **Post the questions on flipchart sheets.** It can be useful for the audience, during the session, to be able to see the answers other people give to that and other questions.

### During the Meeting

- **Analyze what happened and what was supposed to happen.** It could be useful to revisit the original plan. This can help to identify the parts of the project that were effective and the ones that were not. Ask 'what did we set out to do?' and 'what did we actually achieve?'
- **Analyze the success obtained.** 'Ask what went well?' Here you are looking to build on Good Practices as well as learning from mistakes. For each point that is made about what went well, keep asking a 'why?' question.
- **Analyze what should be improved.** Ask 'What could have gone better?'. The focus is not on failures but on improvements. Even if no mistakes have been made as such there is almost always scope for improvement. Try to ask participants about things that should be done differently next time.
- **Ensure that everyone feels fully heard before leaving the meeting .** It is important that participants do not leave the meeting feeling that they have not been heard or that things have been left unsaid.
- **Appoint the answers** participants give on the flipchart sheet. The completed sheet can serve as a reminder of the progress.



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- **Record the meeting.** It is important to have a clear and interesting account of the After Action Review and its learning points, both as a reminder to those involved, and in order to effectively share that learning with others.

### After the Meeting

- **Share the learning.** As well as distributing your account of the After Action Review to the project team, you need to consider who else could benefit from it. You also need to make your learning more widely available so that people working on similar projects in the future might also benefit.

## Facilitator's Role

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The facilitator plays three main roles:

### Leadership role

- To focus on providing a direction to the group
- To stimulate and encourage constructive debate between group members
- To support members of the group, helping them to bring information, and to build new ideas
- To participate when the group is interacting poorly or in the wrong direction, by promoting new discussion
- To promote team building in a cohesive, interactive, and productive way

### Referee role

- To regulate and maintain order of the group discussion, discouraging participants from talking at the same time
- To protect members, and ensure that all contributions to the discussion are treated equally
- To deal with problems, and to control people within the group, allowing everyone to participate freely
- To manage the time, and adhere to the meeting timetable ensuring completion of the agenda

### Neutral role

- The facilitator is neutral, and pragmatic, because he takes a detached look at the discussion
- He encourages feedback, promoting discussion of each point of the meeting



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