

After Action Review Process

After Action Review (AAR) process allows for “real time” feedback and learning. AARs have roots in the US military, where the stakes are high and the impact of “real time” learning is critical. AARs are about taking better future action by learning from current action.

When to Perform an After Action Review:

Group/Team meetings—5-15 minutes at the end of each meeting
Critical Event--2-3 hours
Complex Project—1-2 days

At design team start-up
At a transition point in a project
At key milestones
At the end of a project

Tips

- Focus on objectivity (stick with what was actually said or done, not assumptions about intentions about what was said or done)
- Look for root cause
- Arrive at a shared understanding
- Don't over analyze before action is taken---use the continuous improvement/experimentation mindset
- Allow learning to happen in a safe environment free of the fear of retribution

An AAR

- Does ***not judge*** success or failure
- Attempts to discover ***why things happened***
- Focuses directly on ***tasks and goals*** that were to be accomplished
- ***Encourages participants to voice important lessons learned from the event***
- Is most successful when ***many people attend*** because a greater number of key events can be ***recalled*** and more lessons can be ***shared*** and ***learned***. What is said is more important than who said it.
- Determine ***what exactly happened***—get out the facts, not place blame
- ***Results*** in action and behavior change

AAR Format

1. Overview of AAR process
2. What was the intent of the project/event/situation? (Did everyone see the purpose in the same way?)
3. What happened (chronological, key event, level of detail) and why? Explore the continuum of task, process, output and outcomes. “Why” drives you to output and outcomes, while “what” drives you to task and process.
4. What have we learned?
5. What do we do now, based on our learning? (Unless a process, relationship, behavior or thinking changes, a lesson is not learned.)
 - Next Steps
 - Action Items
 - Responsibility
 - Timing
6. Who needs to know?
7. Reflect on the AAR process itself---what worked, what didn't work