After Action Review (AAR)

What is it?

An AAR is a simple process used by individuals and teams to capture the lessons learnt from their experiences with the goal of improving their future performance.

When to use it?

Use AAR at the end of a task or project to embody continuous learning and improvement as ‘the way we work’. It enables you to identify and mitigate future project risks.

AARs can be run during and / or after any task or project either at key milestones or at completion.

TIP: It is important to run your AARs whilst the team is still available and whilst memories are fresh.

How to use it?

It is a structured review or debrief of an activity, task, or project, which can be done in as little as 5 minutes to debrief halfway through an event, or can take up to half a day to debrief a complex project. An AAR consists of four simple questions:

1. What did I/we set out to achieve?
2. What did I/we achieve?
3. Why were there differences?
4. What have I/we learnt from the experience?

As a guide, spend 25% of the time allowed on the first two questions, spend a further 25% on the third question and then spend 50% of your time on the final question.

This process should strengthen the team, not divide it so, if at all possible, get support from a facilitator to:

- ensure everyone participates including the quieter members of the group
- keep to the allocated time
- define ground rules (openness, equality, confidentiality, focus on continuous improvement)
- reinforce the positive elements
- identify what could have been done better

Complementary tools

You may find it helpful to use the Kipling Questions (What - Where – When - How - Why – Who) and the 5 Whys to try to get to the root cause of issues.

Benefits at a glance …

- embeds continuous learning and improvement
- ensures that learning is captured and acted upon
- ensures learning is shared with peers and colleagues
- strengthens a team and builds trust