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CENWP-DE  
Pamphlet  
No. 5-1-1

31 October 2000

Management  
THE AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

1. PURPOSE. To provide the guidance necessary to plan and conduct after-action reviews.
2. APPLICABILITY. All Portland District organizational elements.
3. REFERENCE. Training Circular 25-20, A leader's guide to after-action reviews, 30 September 1993.
4. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF AN AFTER-ACTION REVIEW. An after-action review (AAR) is a professional discussion of an event/activity, focused on performance standards and desired outcomes, that enables personnel to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses. It is a **tool** managers and organizations can use to get maximum benefit from every major event/activity.

It provides --

- candid insights into specific strengths and weaknesses from various perspectives.
  - feedback and insight on critical events/activities and issues.
  - details often lacking in evaluation reports.
5. RESPONSIBILITIES.
    - a. The District Commander is overall responsible for after-action reviews.
    - b. Chiefs of divisions and staff offices, members of the project management business group, project managers, and other responsible person(s) are delegated the authority to determine the need to plan and conduct after-action reviews and appoint AAR leaders.
    - c. AAR leaders will plan and conduct after-action reviews.
    - d. The person(s) appointing the AAR leader will review and approve after-action review reports and coordinate recommendations.

## 6. PRINCIPLES OF AN AFTER-ACTION REVIEW.

An after-action review should --

- be led by an appointed AAR leader, and include all participants involved in the event/activity.
- focus on standards of performance to accomplish the intended objective or desired outcome.
- be pre-planned when complex or high-risk issues are identified in advance, conducted during or immediately after critical events/activities, or when the person responsible for the event/activity or the chain-of-command identifies the need.
- compare actual output with intended objectives or desired outcomes to determine strengths and weaknesses, and link future actions to achieving performance standards.
- be conducted in one to two hours depending on the complexity of the event/activity.

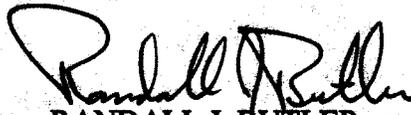
## 7. PROCESS OF PLANNING AND CONDUCTING AN AFTER-ACTION REVIEW.

Whenever possible, managers should identify the need to conduct and pre-plan an AAR during the planning phase of the event/activity. This will enable managers to ensure there is adequate time and resources allocated to conduct an AAR. However, there will be situations that arise when the need for conducting an AAR is identified during or after the event/activity. In either case, pre-planned or unplanned, the most important thing to remember is that the value of conducting an AAR comes from **using the results**.

The AAR process has four major steps:

- Step 1. Planning for a pre-planned AAR
  - Review projects and identify any applicable events/activities or issues.
  - Identify when the AAR should occur.
  - Determine who should attend and who will lead the AAR.
  - Document the pre-planned AAR in the PMP/PSP (Project Management Plans/Project Study Plans).
- Step 2. Preparing for a pre-planned AAR
  - Review event objective or desired outcome and identify key activities to observe.
  - Observe the activities and take notes.
  - Collect and organize notes.
  - Identify key discussion points.

- **Step 3. Conducting a pre-planned or unplanned AAR (See Appendix A)**
  - **Seek maximum participation.**
  - **Maintain focus on specific performance standards and desired outcomes.**
  - **Constantly review key points and issues.**
  - **Record key points and prepare AAR report. (See Appendix B)**
  
- **Step 4. Using the results of an AAR**
  - **Share strengths with other teams.**
  - **Reduce weaknesses through training and/or revising policies, processes and procedures.**
  - **Add information to lessons learned database.**

  
RANDALL J. BUTLER  
Colonel, EN  
Commanding

**2 Appendices**

**App A - Conducting the After-action Review**

**App B - Reporting the After-action Review**

## APPENDIX A CONDUCTING THE AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

After-action reviews are generally conducted at the conclusion of an event/activity, but can take place at anytime. The AAR is a professional discussion of the event/activity, which focuses on performance and compares it against the intended objectives or desired outcomes. The AAR is not a critique and should allow for everyone involved in the event/activity to actively participate in an open and honest dialog, and learn from each other.

Suggested sequence --

- **Purpose and ground rules.** The AAR leader should announce the purpose/objective and ground rules for the AAR.
- **Review of intended objectives or desired outcome.** The AAR leader should facilitate a discussion to ensure everyone understands what the intended objectives or desired outcomes of the event/activity were.
- **Review of what was supposed to happen.** The AAR leader should facilitate a discussion to ensure everyone understands what was scheduled to happen and the performance standards of the event/activity.
- **Review relevant policies, processes, procedures, and training.** The AAR leader should lead a discussion in identifying the relevant policies, processes, procedures and training that supported the event/activity.
- **Discuss what actually happened.** The AAR leader should guide the review using a sequence of activities to describe and discuss what actually happened during the event/activity and encourage everyone to participate in the discussion.
- **Identify and discuss key points and issues.** This is the critical phase of the AAR sequence. The AAR leader should facilitate a detailed discussion of the chronological order of activities from start to finish, identify any key points or issues that positively or negatively impacted on performance standards to accomplish the intended objectives or desired outcomes, and encourage everyone to participate and contribute.
- **Identify and discuss how to sustain strengths.** The AAR leader should facilitate a discussion to examine the strengths identified in the discussion of key points and issues, and adopt or develop recommendations on courses of action to sustain and share them.
- **Identify and discuss how to improve weaknesses.** The AAR leader should facilitate a discussion to examine the weaknesses identified in the discussion of key points and issues, and adopt or develop recommendations on courses of action to correct them.
- **Closing comments.** The AAR leader should review and summarize the key points and future actions identified during the AAR.

## APPENDIX B REPORTING THE AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

The person appointing the AAR leader should identify the specific reporting requirements. The format for any report should be dependent on the situation.

Suggested format --

- Project:
- AAR Leader:
- Participants:
- Project event/activity:
- Intended objectives or desired outcomes of the event/activity:
- Summary of key points and issues:
- Summary of strengths:
- Summary of weaknesses:
- Adopted courses of action:
- Recommendations: