

ARMY OPERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

"The Army's After Action Review (AAR) is arguably one of the most successful organizational learning methods yet devised. Yet, most every corporate effort to graft this truly innovative practice into their culture has failed because, again and again, people reduce the living practice of AARs to a sterile technique."

— Peter Senge, author of *"The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization"*

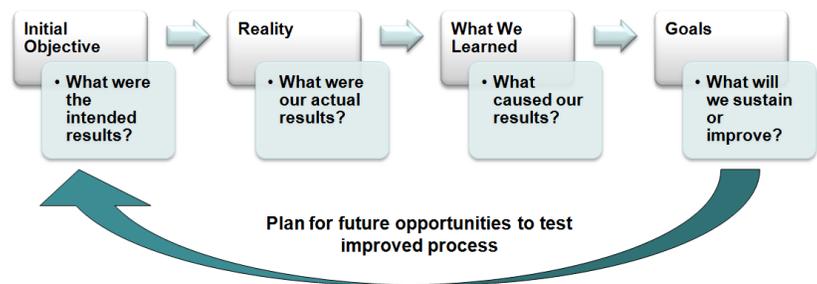
Has your AAR process become a "sterile technique?" Are AARs something your organization does only because they are expected? Are they often skipped because you run out of time? If any of these situations apply to your organization, it's time to rethink and reenergize your AARs.

An AAR is not a critique

An AAR is a professional discussion that should focus on process improvement. Unlike a critique, an AAR should not judge individual success or failure. Instead, an AAR analyzes what happened during an event, focusing on the tasks and goals that were to be accomplished. The participants of an AAR attempt to discover why things occurred the way they did. The purpose of any AAR is to learn from experience and use that learning to improve future performance.

A good AAR requires a good facilitator

The facilitator is the key to any AAR. Facilitators need to be involved even before an operation begins, determining what to observe, and how. Facilitators must understand the objectives of an operation and then must design a collection plan tied to these objectives. These observations help determine how actual results differed from the intended results. They also help frame the resulting discussion about the causes for these results. This discussion should lead to an assessment of which processes need to be sustained and which ones need to be improved. FMs 7-0 and 6-01.1 contain a wealth of information that can help facilitators plan, prepare and conduct AARs.



An AAR results in lessons learned...and applied

One aspect of AARs that is not discussed in much detail in the FMs is what should be done after lessons are collected. That is where the expertise of your organization's knowledge management team comes into play. Sharing, acquiring and integrating lessons learned into future operations are part of the core competencies of the KM community. Some unit-specific lessons may be kept internal to your organization to be incorporated into future training plans and SOPs. But most should be transmitted through tools like the Army Professional Forums and the ALLIS Rapid Adaptation system for the benefit of the entire Army.

There is a simple acid test for your AAR process: if the lessons you discover through your AARs are left in the briefing room at the end of your training event, exercise or operation, you are practicing the sterile technique Peter Senge cautions all of us to avoid.

To learn more about Army Knowledge Management, visit the AOKM web page:

<http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/AOKM/>