A LEADER'S GUIDE TO AFTER-ACTIVITY REVIEWS

A Training Tool for Business

December 2010

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Preface

Modern business is complex and demanding. To compete and win we must train our individual performers to successfully execute their business goals. We must use every training opportunity to improve individual performer, leader, and unit task performance. To improve their individual and collective-task performances to meet or exceed the company standard, individual performers and leaders must know and understand what happened or did not happen during every training event.

After-Activity Reviews (AARs) help provide individual performers and units feedback on goal and task performances in training and in normal business operations. After-Activity Reviews identify how to correct deficiencies, sustain strengths, and focus on performance, of specific Goal-Essential Tasks List training objectives.

This leader's guide describes how to plan, prepare, and conduct an AAR, competent leaders must understand and apply the techniques and procedures which produce good AARs.

Key is the spirit in which AARs are given. The environment and climate surrounding an AAR must be one in which the individual performers and leaders openly and honestly discuss what actually transpired, in sufficient detail and clarity that not only will everyone understand what did and did not occur and why, but most importantly will have a strong desire to seek the opportunity to practice the task again.

Unless this publication states otherwise, masculine pronouns refer to both men and women.

Chapter 1 - The After-Activity Review

Definition And Purpose Of After-Activity Reviews

An After-Activity review (AAR) is a professional discussion of an event, focused on performance standards, that enables individual performers to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses. It is a tool leaders and units can use to get maximum benefit from every goal or task. It provides:

- Candid insights into specific individual performer, leader, and unit strengths and weaknesses from various perspectives.

- Feedback and insight critical to service-focused training.

- Details often lacking in evaluation reports alone.

Evaluation is the basis for the manager's unit-training assessment. No manager, no matter how skilled, will see as much as the individual performers and leaders who actually conduct the training. Managers can better correct deficiencies and sustain strengths by carefully evaluating and comparing individual performer, leader, and unit performance against the standard. The AAR is the keystone of the evaluation process.

Feedback compares the actual output of a process with the intended outcome. By focusing on the task's standards and by describing specific observations, leaders and individual performers identify strengths and weaknesses and together decide how to improve their performances. This shared learning improves task proficiency and promotes unit bonding and esprit. Team and work group leaders will use the information to develop input for unit-training plans. The AAR is a valid and valuable technique regardless of branch, echelon, or training task.

0f course, AARs are not cure-alls for unit-training problems. Leaders must still make on-the-spot corrections and take responsibility for training their individual performers and units. However, AARs are a key part of the training process. The goal is to improve individual performer, leader, and unit performance. The result is a more cohesive and proficient business unit.

Because individual performers and leaders participating in an AAR actively discover what happened and why, they learn and remember more than they would from a critique alone. A critique only gives one viewpoint and frequently provides little opportunity for discussion of events by participants. Individual performer observations and comments may not be encouraged. The climate of the critique, focusing only on what is wrong, prevents candid discussion of training events and stifles learning and team building.

Types Of After-Activity Reviews

All AARs follow the same general format, involve the exchange of ideas and observations, and focus on improving training proficiency. How leaders conduct a particular AAR determines whether it is formal or informal. A formal AAR is resource-intensive and involves the planning, coordination, and preparation of supporting training aids, the AAR site, and support personnel. Informal AARs (usually for individual performer, team, team, and work group training) require less preparation and planning.

Formal

Leaders plan formal AARs at the same time they finalize the near-term training plan (six to eight weeks before execution). Formal AARs require more planning and preparation than informal AARs. They may require site reconnaissance and selection, coordination for training aids (business models, organization charts, and so on), and selection and training of observers and facilitators (facilitators).

NOTE: Figure 1-1 lists the key points in all AARs. Figure 1-2 shows the AAR format. Figure 1-3 lists characteristics of formal and informal AARs.

After-Activity Reviews:

- Are conducted during or immediately after each event.

- Focus on intended training objectives.

- Focus on individual performer, leader, and unit performance.

- Involve all participants in the discussion.

- Use open-ended questions.

- Are related to specific standards

- Determine strengths and weaknesses.

- Link performance to subsequent training.

Figure 1. AAR Key Points.

1. Introduction and rules.

2. Review of training objectives.

3. Manager's goal and Intent (what was supposed to happen).

4. Competing Force manager's goal and Intent (when appropriate).

5. Relevant policy and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).

6. Summary of recent Events (what happened).

7. Discussion of key issues (what happened and how to Improve).

8. Discussion of optional issues.

9. Discussion of force protection issues (discussed throughout)

10. Closing comments (summary).

Figure 2 AAR Format.

Formal AARs are usually held at account level and above. An exception might be an AAR of team, work group, or small-unit performance or after a work group Situational Training Exercise (STX). Team and work group AARs are held before the execution of formal account and higher organization AARs. This allows all levels of the unit to benefit from an AAR experience. It also provides facilitators and leaders with observations and trends to address during the formal AAR.

During formal AARs, the AAR leader (unit leader or facilitator) focuses the discussion of events on training objectives. At the end, the leader reviews key points and issues identified (reinforcing learning that took place during the discussion) and once again focuses on training objectives.

Formal reviews

- Have external observers and facilitators (facilitators).

- Take more time.

- Use complex training aids.

- Are scheduled beforehand.

- Are conducted where best supported.

Informal reviews

- Conducted by internal chain of command.

- Take less time.

- Use simple training aids.

- Are conducted when needed.

- Are held at the training site.

Figure 3 Types Of AARs.

Informal

Leaders usually conduct informal AARs for individual performer and small-unit training at work group level and below. At account and strategic business unit/strategic support unit (SBU/SSU) levels, leaders may conduct informal AARs when resources for formal AARs, including time, are unavailable. Informal AARs use the standard AAR format.

Leaders may use informal AARs as on-the-spot coaching tools while reviewing individual performer and unit performances during training. For example, after a countering a competitor's attempt to preempt a company/customer deal, a sales leader could conduct an informal AAR to make corrections and reinforce strengths. Using nothing more than a marker board and organization chart, he and his individual performers could discuss the attempt from start to finish. The team could quickly-

- Evaluate their performance against the company standards (or unit standard if there is no published company standard).

- Identify their strengths and weaknesses.

- Decide how to improve their performance when customer contact continues.

Informal AARs provide immediate feedback to individual performer s, leaders, and units during training. Ideas and solutions the leader gathers during informal AARs can be immediately put to use as the unit continues its training. Also, during lower echelon informal AARs, leaders often collect teaching points and trends they can use as discussion points during higher echelon formal AARs.

Informal AARs maximize training value because all unit members are actively involved. They learn what to do, how to do it better, and the importance of the roles they play in unit-task accomplishment. They then know how to execute the task to standard.

The most significant difference between formal AARs and informal AARs is that informal AARs require fewer training resources and few, if any, training aids. Although informal AARs may be part of the unit evaluation plan, they are more commonly conducted when the leader or facilitator feels the unit would benefit. Providing immediate feedback while the training is still fresh in individual performer s' minds is a significant strength of informal AARs.

After-Activity Review Planning And Execution Sequence

To maximize the effectiveness of AARs, leaders should plan and rehearse before training begins. After-Activity review planning is a routine part of unit near-term planning (six to eight weeks out). During planning, leaders assign facilitator responsibilities and identify tentative times and locations for AARs. This ensures the allocation of time and resources to conduct AARs and reinforces the important role AARs play in realizing the full benefit of training.

The amount and level of detail leaders need during the planning and preparation process depends on the type of AAR they will conduct and on available resources. The AAR process has four steps:

> Step 1. Planning.
>
> Step 2. Preparing.
>
> Step 3. Conducting.
>
> Step 4. Following up (using AAR results)

NOTE: Chapters 2 through 5 detail each of the four steps. Figure 1-4 is a list of actions leaders should follow to ensure effective AARs.

Planning

- Select and train qualified facilitators.

- Review the Training and Evaluation Program (TEP) Goal Training Plans (MTPs), and individual performer training publications (Job Family Matrices).

- Identify when AARs will occur.

- Determine who will attend the AAR.

- Select potential AAR sites.

- Choose training aids.

- Review the AAR plan.

Preparation

- Review training objectives, directives, goal-essential task list and policy.

- Identity key events facilitators are to observe.

- Observe the training and take notes.

- Collect observations from other facilitators.

- Organize observations (Identify key discussion or teaching-points.).

- Reconnoiter the selected AAR site.

- Prepare the AAR site.

- Conduct rehearsals.

Conduct

- Seek maximum participation.

- Maintain focus on training objectives.

- Constantly review teaching points.

- Record key points.

Follow-up

- Identify tasks requiring retraining.

- Fix the problem

- Retrain immediately

- Revise operating procedures (SOPs) and integrate into future training plans.

- Use to assist in making a manager's assessment.

Figure 4 The AAR Process.

Chapter 2 - Planning the After-Activity Review

The After-Activity Review Plan

Leaders are responsible for planning, executing, evaluating, and assessing training. Each training event is evaluated during training execution. Evaluations can be informal or formal and internal or external. Key points for each type of evaluation follow.

Informal evaluations are most commonly used at SBU/SSU level and below. They are-

- Conducted by all leaders in the chain of command.

- Continuous.

- Used to provide immediate feedback on training proficiency.

Formal evaluations are usually scheduled on the long-range and short-range calendars. They are:

- Sometimes unannounced.

- Normally highlighted during Quarterly Training Briefs (QRBs) and Yearly Training Briefs (YTBs).

- Resourced with dedicated evaluators or facilitators.

The unit undergoing the evaluation plans, resources, and conducts internal evaluations. They also plan and resource external evaluations. However, the headquarters two levels above the unit being evaluated conducts theirs. For example, leadership council evaluates SBU/SSU; region evaluates account; account evaluates work groups, or teams. Observers and facilitators assist managers in the evaluation process by collecting data and providing feedback.

A key element in an evaluation plan is the AAR plan. The AAR plan provides the foundation for successful AARs. Leaders develop an AAR plan for each training event. It contains:

- Who will observe the training and who will conduct the AAR.

- What trainers should evaluate (Training And Evaluation Outlines (TEOs)).

- Who is to attend.

- When and where the AAR will occur.

- What training aids trainers will use.

Trainers use the AAR plan to identify critical places and events they must observe to provide the unit with a valid evaluation. Examples include unit service provision events, internal support events, and external support events. By identifying these events and assigning responsibilities, unit leaders can be sure someone will be there to observe and take notes. This allows the training unit team to make the best use of its limited resources and conduct a first-class training event.

After-Activity Review plans also designate who will observe and control a particular event. The term observer and controller refer to the individual tasked to observe training and provide control for the training exercise as well as to lead the AAR.

NOTE: Figure 2-1 shows an extract from an exercise plan.

Selecting And Training Observers And Facilitators

When planning an AAR, trainers should select facilitators who:

- Can perform the tasks to be trained to company standards.

- Are knowledgeable on the duties they are to observe.

- Are knowledgeable on current TTPs.

Observer	Brenda Jones
Element	Customer Service Center team
Priority tasks	Resolve customer complaint requiring escalation to Strategic Service Unit.
Who attends	All
When held	Immediately after training exercise
Location	Conference Room
Special requirements	Account Leader will provide closing comments

Figure 5 An Exercise AAR Plan.

When using external facilitators, trainers must ensure that facilitators are at least equal in rank/stature to the leader of the unit they will evaluate. If trainers must choose between experience and understanding of current TTPs or rank, they should go with experience. A team leader with experience in a Customer Assistance Center can observe the work group better than an account manager who has no Customer Assistance Center experience.

Observers should not have duties which would detract from their facilitator duties. If this is not possible, leaders in the chain of command should evaluate subordinate units and conduct the AARs. For example, team leaders would evaluate the performance of individual performers in their teams and limit AAR discussion to individual actions. Work group leaders would do the same for teams, account managers for work groups, and so on. If possible, they should avoid evaluating their own duties and tasks. (It is hard to be objective about your own performance and to determine how it will affect your unit.)

Trainers must train their small-unit leaders and facilitators. Each facilitator leads AARs for the element he observes and provides input to the AAR leader for the next higher echelon. Leaders and facilitators must be trained in the use of the methods, techniques, and procedures in this training circular. If possible, trainers should assign someone with AAR experience to assist an inexperienced AAR leader until he is proficient. The trainer must conduct AARs to help AAR leaders improve their performances. Inexperienced AAR leaders should observe properly conducted AARs before attempting to lead one. The trainer must include classes on small-group discussion techniques in facilitator instruction.

Reviewing The Training And Evaluation Plan

Observers and facilitators selected to observe training and lead AARs cannot observe and assess every action of every individual. Training and evaluation outlines provide tasks, conditions, and standards for the unit's training as well as the bottom line against which leaders can measure unit and individual performance.

Once a trainer extracts TEOs from the Goal Training Plan (MTP) or, if none exist, develops his own, he gives a copy of the TEOs to the senior facilitator. The senior facilitator distributes them to his subordinates who review and use them to focus their own observations. The senior facilitator must be specific on what his subordinates are to evaluate and what standards of performance he desires. When possible, he should list the steps which units must accomplish to properly complete the action. By listing each step, an facilitator can more readily detect an error, especially in a drill when the actions of one individual performer may affect others.

The steps in MTPs and individual performer 's manuals provide the standard method for completing each task and help structure consistent observations. Using the evaluation plan, the 0C can concentrate efforts on critical places and times where and when he can best evaluate unit performance. This ensures that feedback is directly focused on tasks being trained and provides the unit and its leaders with the information they need to improve or sustain proficiency.

Scheduling Stopping Points

Leaders must schedule time to conduct AARs as an integrated part of overall training. When possible, they should plan for an AAR at the end of each critical phase or major training event. For example, a leader could plan a stopping point after issuing an operating directive, when the unit achieves a new milestone, after it consolidates a deliverable, and so on.

For planning purposes, leaders should allow approximately 30-45 minutes for team-level AARs, 1 hour for account-level AARs, and about 2 hours for region-level and above. Individual performers will receive better feedback on their performance and remember the lessons longer if the AAR is not rushed.

Reviewers must fully address all key learning points. They must not waste time on dead-end issues.

Determining Attendance

The AAR plan specifies who must attend each AAR. Normally, only key players attend. At times, however, the more participants present, the better the feedback. Leaders must select as many participants as appropriate for the task and the AAR site.

At each echelon, an AAR has a primary set of participants. At team and work group levels, everyone should attend and participate. At account or higher levels, it may not be practical to have everyone attend because of continuing operations or training. In this case, business unit and competing force managers, unit leaders, and other key players (support team leaders, and so on) may be the only participants.

Selecting Potential AAR Sites

An AAR will usually occur at or near the training exercise site. Leaders should identify and inspect AAR sites and prepare a site diagram showing the placement of training aids and other equipment. Designated AAR sites also allow pre-positioning of training aids and rapid assembly of key personnel, minimizing wasted time.

Ideally, the AAR site should allow individual performers to observe the environment where the exercise took place. If this is not possible, the trainer should find a location that allows them to observe the environment where the most critical or significant actions occurred. If needed, the trainer should have a business model or enlarged map or sketch and a copy of the unit's graphics so everyone can relate key events to the actual terrain.

The trainer should make individual performers attending the AAR as comfortable as possible (by removing suit coats and so on), providing seating, having refreshments (coffee, water), and creating an environment where participants can focus on the AAR without distractions. Participants should not be scattered around the room, and key leaders should have seats up front. Other activities should be far enough away from the AAR site to prevent distractions.

Choosing Training Aids

Training aids add to AAR effectiveness. The trainer should choose them carefully and request them well in advance. Training aids should directly support discussion of the training and promote learning. Dry-erase boards, business models, and enlarged organization charts are all worthwhile under the right conditions. (See also Figure 2-2.)

Training aid visibility, group size, suitability to task, and availability of electrical power are all things to consider when selecting training aids. The key is planning and coordination. The bottom line is to only use a training aid if it makes the AAR better.

To select the right training aids, trainers should ask:

- What points will I need to make during the AAR, and what training aids will help me make these points?

- Will the aid illustrate one or more of the main points?

- Can I use the actual business site or equipment?

- Does the aid have any restrictions or special requirements, such as special projectors?

- Will participants be able to see and hear it?

- Is it really necessary for the discussion or just nice to have?

Formal AARs	**Informal AARs**
• Business model	• Paper and pencil
• Enlarged organization charts	• Unit work flow graphics
• Models	• Communications recordings
• Dry-erase marker board	• Colored markers
• Photographs	
• Video camera and monitor	

Figure 6 Training Aids.

Reviewing The AAR Plan

The AAR plan is only a guide. Leaders should review it regularly to make sure it is still on track and meets the training needs of their units.

Caution: Remember that every change takes preparation and planning time away from subordinate facilitators or leaders. This may impact the quality of feedback. The purpose of the AAR plan is to allow facilitators and AAR leaders as much time as possible to prepare for the AAR. Frequent or unnecessary changes prevent that.

Chapter 3 - Preparing the After-Activity Review

Review Policy, Training Objectives, Directives, And Goal-Essential Task List

Preparation is the key to the effective execution of any plan. Preparing for an AAR begins before the training and continues until the actual event. Observers and facilitators should use the time before the training event to brush up on their knowledge. They must be tactically and technically proficient. Therefore, they should review current policy, technical information, and applicable unit SOPs to ensure they have the tools they need to properly observe unit and individual performances.

To gain understanding of both the focus of unit training and the exercise plan, facilitators must also review the unit's training objectives, directives, and goal-essential task list. The unit's training objectives focus on the specific actions and events that facilitators must observe to provide valid observations and to effectively lead the unit in its discussion during the AAR. Directives, including operational and fragmentary orders, which the leader issues before and during training, establish initial conditions for tasks the units must perform. The goal-essential task list contains the complete task, conditions, and standards for each task.

Identify Key Events Observers And Facilitators Are To Observe

Observers and facilitators must focus their observations on the actions required to perform tasks to standard and to accomplish training objectives. To do this effectively, they must identify which events are critical to accomplishing each task and objective. By identifying key events, facilitators can make sure they position themselves in the right place at the right time to observe the unit's actions. Examples of critical events include:

- Issuance of operational and fragmentary orders.

- Team-Leading Procedures (TLPs).

- Contact with Competing Forces.

- Re-supply and support operations.

- Intelligence preparation of the business environment.

- Contact with the customer.

Observe The Training And Take Notes

All unit activities have three phases: *planning, preparation, and execution*. These phases can help the facilitator structure his observation plan and note taking. He should keep an accurate written record of what he sees and hears and record events, actions, and observations by time sequence to prevent loss of valuable information and feedback. He can use any recording system (notebook, prepared forms, 3-by-5 cards) that fits his needs as long as it is reliable, sufficiently detailed (identifying times, places, and names), and consistent. The facilitator could also use a small portable tape recorder, but he should not get carried away with gadgets when a pencil and paper would do.

The facilitator should include the date-time group (DTG) of each observation so he can easily integrate his observations into those of other facilitators. This will provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of what happened. When the facilitator has more time, he can review his notes and fill in any details he did not write down earlier.

NOTE: Figure 3-1 shows a sample observation format using a prepared form. Figure 3-2 shows similar comments using 3-by-5 cards. See also Appendix A for AAR techniques.

One of the most difficult facilitator tasks is to determine when and where to position himself to observe training. The facilitator does not always need to stay close to the unit leader. Sometimes he can see more from locations where he can observe the performance of critical tasks or the overall flow of unit actions.

However, he should not position himself where he would be a training distracter. He must look and act as a member of the unit. He must not compromise the unit's goals/objectives or intent by being obvious. At all times, he should be professional, courteous, and low-key.

Training/exercise title:

Event:

Date/time:

Location of observation:

Observation (player/trainer action):

Discussion (tied to task and standard it possible):

Conclusions:

Recommendations (indicate how the unit could have executed the task(s) better or describe training the unit will need to improve future performances):

NOTE: Units may modify this format to meet their specific needs.

Figure 7 Example AAR Observation Worksheet (Note).

Collect Observations From Other Observers And Facilitators

The AAR plan designates a time, place, or method to consolidate feedback from other facilitators. The leader will need a complete picture of what happened during the training to conduct an effective AAR. Therefore, each facilitator must give him input. This input may come from subordinate units, business support units and service support units, or adjacent units.

The leader may also receive input from customer leaders, role players, and facilitators. The (role playing) opposition's perspective is often useful in identifying why a unit was or was not successful. During formal AARs, the role playing customer leader briefs his plan and intent to set the stage for a discussion of what happened and why.

Organize Observations

After the leader has gathered all the information, he puts his notes in chronological sequence so he can understand the flow of events. Next, he selects and sequences key events in terms of their relevance to training objectives, identifying key discussion and/of teaching points.

Select And Reconnoiter The AAR Site

The leader selects potential AAR sites as part of the overall planning process. He should select areas near where the training occurred or where most of the critical events took place. However, he must be sure to reconnoiter alternate sites in case he finds he cannot use his first choice.
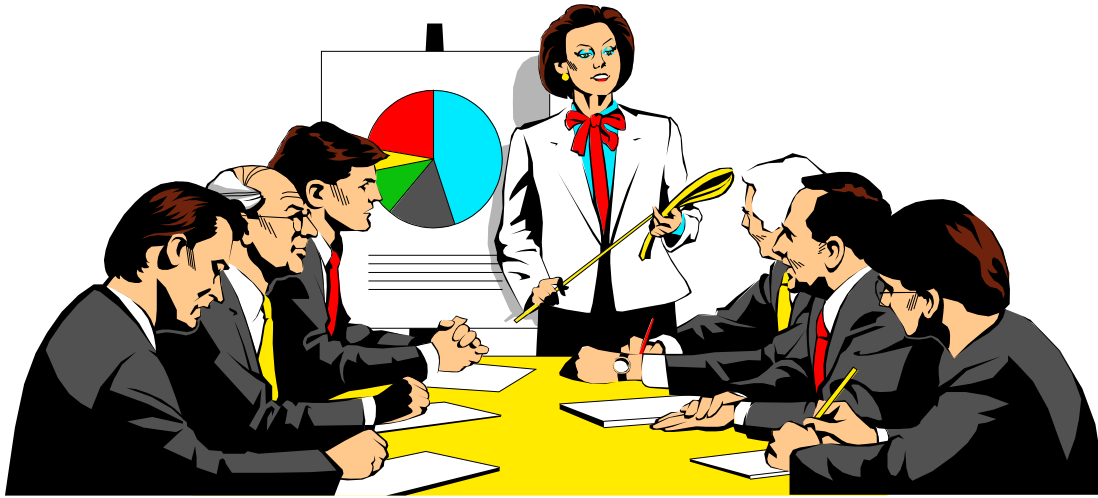
Figure 8 Typical AAR Site.

Prepare The AAR Site

The leader sets up the AAR site so participants can see the actual terrain or training aids. Horseshoe arrangements encourage discussion and allow everyone to see. Figure 3-3 shows a typical AAR site.

If possible, the leader should pre-position training aids and equipment. If he cannot, he should place them nearby under the control of a responsible individual.

Rehearse

After thorough preparation, the leader reviews the AAR format (Figure 1-2), rehearses at the AAR site, and gets ready to conduct the AAR. He should then announce to unit leaders the AAR start time and location. He must allow enough time for facilitators to prepare and rehearse while unit leaders account for personnel and equipment, perform actions which their unit SOP requires, and move to the AAR site.

Chapter 4 - Conducting the After-Activity Review

Introduction And Rules

The training exercise is over, AAR preparation is complete, and key players are at the designated AAR site. It is now time to conduct the AAR. The leader should begin with some type of "attention getter"-a joke, an appropriate anecdote, or a historical example that relates to the training, exercise, event, or conduct of the AAR. Then, if necessary, he reviews the purpose and sequence of the AAR to ensure everyone understands what an AAR is and how it works. His introduction should include the following thoughts:

- An AAR is a dynamic, candid, professional discussion of training which focuses on unit performance against the company standard for the tasks being trained. Everyone can, and should, participate if they have an insight, observation, or question that will help the unit identify and correct deficiencies or maintain strengths.

- An AAR *is not a critique*. No one, regardless of rank, position, or strength of personality, has all of the information or answers. After-Activity Reviews maximize training benefits by allowing individual performer s, regardless of rank, to learn from each other.

- An AAR does not grade success or failure. There are always weaknesses to improve and strengths to sustain.

NOTE: Figure 4-1 contains a recommended sequence for conducting an AAR.

Individual performer participation is directly related to the atmosphere created during the introduction. The AAR leader should make a concerted effort to draw in and include individual performers who seem reluctant to participate. The following techniques can help the leader create an atmosphere conducive to maximum participation. He should:

- Enter the discussion only when necessary.

- Reinforce the fact that it is permissible to disagree.

- Focus on learning and encourage people to give honest opinions.

- Use open-ended and leading questions to guide the discussion of individual performer, leader, and unit performance.

1.   Introduction and procedural rules

2.   Review of objectives and intent

      a)   Training objectives

      b)   Manager's goal/intent (what was supposed to happen)

      c)   Customer (role playing) manager's goal/latent

      d)   Relevant policy, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs)

3.   Summary of recent events (what happened)

4.   Discussion of key issues

      a)   Chronological order of events

      b)   Business Operating Systems (BOS)

      c)   Key events/themes/issues

5.   Discussion of optional Issues

      a)   Individual performer/leader skills

      b)   Tasks to sustain/improve

      c)   Statistics

      d)   Others

6.   Discussion of personnel protection (safety) as applicable

7.   Closing comments (summary)

Figure 9 Sequence For Conducting An AAR.

Review Of Objectives And Intent

Training Objectives

The AAR leader should review unit training objectives for the training goal(s) the AAR will cover. He should also restate the tasks being reviewed as well as the conditions and standards for the tasks.

Manager's Goal And Intent (What Was Supposed To Happen)

Using maps, operational graphics, terrain boards, and so on, the manager should restate the goal and his intent. Then if necessary, the discussion leader should guide the discussion to ensure everyone understands the plan and the manager's intent. Another technique is to have subordinate leaders restate the goal and discuss their manager's intent.

Competing Manager's Goal And Intent

In a formal AAR, the (role playing) competing manager explains his plan to defeat the business objectives of the friendly forces. He uses the same training aids as the friendly force manager so participants can understand the relationship of both plans.

Summary Of Recent Events (What Happened)

The AAR leader now guides the review using a logical sequence of events to describe and discuss what happened. He should not ask yes or no questions, but encourage participant and guide discussion by using open-ended and leading questions. An open-ended question has no specific answer and allows the person answering to reply based on what was significant to him. Open ended questions are also much less likely

to put him on the defensive. This is more effective in finding out what happen. For example, it is better to ask,

> *"Amy, what happened when your proposal was received by the customer?"*

rather than-

> *"Amy, why didn't you make sure all of the proposal copies were received?"*

As the discussion expands and more individual performers add their perspectives, what really happened will become clear. Remember, this is not a critique or lecture; the facilitator does not tell the individual performers or leaders what was good or bad. However, the AAR leader must ensure specific issues are revealed, both positive and negative in nature. Skillful guidance of the discussion will ensure the AAR does not gloss over mistakes or unit weaknesses.

Discussion Of Key Issues

The AAR is a problem-solving process. The purpose of discussion is for participants to discover strengths and weaknesses, propose solutions, and adopt a course of action to correct problems. Leaders can organize the discussion using one of the three techniques in the following paragraphs.

Discussion Techniques

Chronological Order Of Events

This technique is logical, structured, and easy to understand. It follows the flow of training from start to finish and allows individual performers to see the effects of their actions on other units and events. By covering actions in the order they tools place, individual performers and leaders are better able to recall what happened.

Business Operations Systems (BOS)

To focus and structure the AAR, the leader can also use the seven BOS (Figure 4-2). By focusing on each BOS and discussing it across all phases of the training exercise, participants can identify systemic strengths and weaknesses. This technique is particularly useful in training staff work groups whose duties and responsibilities directly relate to one or more BOS. However, leaders using this technique must be careful not to lose sight of the big picture. They must not get into long discussions about business operating systems that do not relate to goal accomplishment.

1. Intelligence of the business environment, customer and competitor
2. Ability of the unit to maneuver and respond
3. Security of operations
4. Mobility and counter mobility
5. Competitor defense
6. Business service support
7. Command and control

Figure 10 The Seven BOS.

Key Events/Themes/Issues

A key events discussion focuses on critical training events that directly support training objectives, which the chain of command identified before the exercise began. Keeping a tight focus of these events prevents the discussion from becoming sidetracked by issues which do not relate to training objectives. This technique is particularly effective when time is limited.

Flexibility

One of the strengths of the AAR format is its flexibility. The leader could use the chronological format to structure the discussion, then, if a particular BOS seems to have systemic issues that the group needs to

address, follow that BOS across the entire exercise. Once that topic is exhausted, the AAR could proceed using the chronological format. Each technique will generate discussion, identify unit strengths, weaknesses, and training the unit needs to improve proficiency. However, the leader must remember to:

- Be specific, avoiding generalizations.

- Be thorough.

- Not dwell on issues unrelated to goal accomplishment.

- Focus on actions.

- Relate performance to the accomplishment of training objectives.

- Identify corrective action for areas of weakness.

- Continually summarize.

Discussion Of Optional Issues

In addition to discussing key issues, the leader might also address several optional topics, included in the following paragraphs.

Individual Performer -Leader Skills

Through discussion, the unit can identify critical individual performer and leader skills which affected unit or individual performance. The leader should note these skills for retraining or for future unit training.[1] The AAR leader for follow-on meetings should be a member of the unit so participants can candidly address key training issues without fear of airing dirty laundry in front of outsiders.

Tasks To Sustain/Improve

This technique focuses on identifying tasks on which the unit is proficient and tasks on they need further training. The intent is to focus training on goal-essential tasks and supporting individual performer, leader, and collective tasks which need improvement rather than training to known strengths. Although it is important to sustain proficiency on tasks whose standards the unit has met, it is more important to train to standard on new or deficient goal-essential tasks. Train to weakness, not to strengths.

Statistics

Statistics is a double-edged sword. Effective feedback requires participants to measure, collect, and quantify performance during the training exercise. Statistics supply objective facts which reinforce observations of both strengths and weaknesses. The danger lies in statistics for statistics for statistics' sake. Chart after chart of ratios, bar graphs, and tables quickly obscures any meaning and lends itself to a "grading" of unit performance. This stifles discussion and degrades the AAR's value. Statistics and statistics-based charts should *identify critical trends or issues and reinforce teaching points*. (An example for an armored unit would be to link the number of rounds fired to the number of enemy vehicles destroyed. This would provide a good indication of unit gunnery skills.) Judicious use of statistic feedback supports observations and provides a focus to AAR discussions.

Other

Other topics which participants may need to discuss include troop-leading procedures, troop deployment and use of terrain, synchronization, enemy disposition and tactics, information dissemination and use, obstacle emplacement and breaching, vision of the battlefield, knowing the enemy, and so forth.

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[1]Often it is best to discuss leader skills in a separate meeting or AAR specifically for that purpose. This allows for a candid discussion of leadership issues without wasting unit AAR time best spent on reviewing the entire training exercise.

Discussion Of Personnel Protection (Safety) Issues

Protection of personnel is every individual performer's business and applies to everything a unit does with the customer and back in the office. Safety should be specifically addressed in every AAR and discussed in detail when it impacts unit effectiveness or individual performer. The important thing is to treat safety precautions as integral parts of every operation.

Closing Comments (Summary)

During the summary, the AAR leader reviews and summarizes key points identified during the discussion. He should end the AAR on a positive note, linking conclusions to future training. He should then adjourn the AAR to allow unit leaders and individual performers time to discuss the training in private.

Chapter 5 - Following Up (Using The Results Of The After-Activity Review)

Benefits

The real benefits of AARs come from taking the results and applying them to future training. Leaders can also use the information to assess performance and to immediately retrain units in tasks where there is weakness. Leaders can also use AARs to help assess unit goal-essential task list proficiency. Immediately or shortly after the training event, leaders should conduct a trained-practiced-untrained (T-P-U) assessment and develop a future-training concept.

Leaders should not delay or reschedule retraining except when absolutely necessary. If the leader delays retraining, he must be sure the individual performers understand that they did not perform the task to standard and that retraining will occur later.

After-Activity Reviews are the dynamic link between task performance and execution to standard. They provide managers a critical assessment tool to use to plan individual performer, leader, and unit training. Through the professional and candid discussion of events, individual performers can compare their performance against the standard and identify specific ways to improve proficiency.

Immediate Retraining (Same Training Exercise)

Retraining may be immediately necessary to address particularly weak areas. By applying its learning, a unit can improve its performance to meet the company standard. However, the focus of this effort is not to get an A or B; it is to improve individual performer and unit performance. By the end of an AAR, individual performers must clearly understand what was good, bad, or average about their performance.

Leaders should schedule time for retraining as a normal part of the planning process. The unit must retrain on the tasks which they did not perform to standard before the unit can go to the next training event. The unit must always retrain and perform critical gate tasks to standard before progressing to the next level of tasks. This reinforces the learning process by immediately correcting substandard performance. The unit must conduct any necessary retraining of supporting individual performer or leader tasks before retraining on deficient collective tasks. This ensures that the unit can focus on performing the collective task. When there is not enough time to retrain the task or tasks, the leader must integrate it into the unit's training plan and reschedule it

NOTE: Critical gate tasks are tasks grouped in a training event that an individual performer or unit must perform and receive an evaluation for before progressing to more complex or difficult task or events. Managers must prescribe the performance of task to standard as a prerequisite for progressing to subsequent tasks or events.

Time or complexity of the goal may prevent retraining on some tasks during the same exercise. When this happens, leaders must reschedule the goal or training. As part of this process, leaders must ensure that deficient supporting tasks found during the AAR are also scheduled and retrained.

Revised Operating procedures

After-Activity Reviews may reveal problems with unit SOPs. If so, unit leaders must revise the SOP and make sure units implement the changes during any future training.

The After-Activity Review In Business operations

Training does not stop when a unit does not stop when a unit goes into business operations. Training is always an integral part of pre-business and business operations although limited time and proximity to the customer may restrict the type and extent of training. Only training improves business performance without imposing the stiff penalties business inflicts on the untrained.

The AAR is one of the most effective techniques to use in a business environment. An effective AAR takes little time, and leaders can conduct them almost anywhere consistent with business security

requirements. Conducting AARs helps overcome the steep learning curve that exists in a unit exposed to business and helps the unit ensure that it does not repeat mistakes. It also helps them sustain strengths. By integrating training into business operations and using tools such as AARs, leaders can dramatically increase their unit's chances for success in the business arena.

Appendix A - After-Activity Review Techniques

Observers and facilitators from business training centers should administer AARs every day. The experience of professional AAR leaders yields techniques that apply to all business units, not just those that rotate personnel through training centers. The techniques in the following paragraphs can help leaders conduct effective AARs.

Site Selection

After-Activity review leaders should select sites where a free exchange of ideas and discussion of recent events can take place. An appropriate site would overlook areas of significant action, such as a conference room overlooking a plant floor. The importance of selecting a site where participants can observe the actual location where key events took place cannot be overstated.

Environmental factors can impact significantly on AAR efficiency. When possible, avoid subjecting individual performers to interruptions, excessive heat and cold, or exposing them to noise or other distractions.

Site Improvement

Site improvement enhances an AAR's chance of being successful. If there is no way to avoid interruptions, the leader should implement some type of control mechanism, such as posting a "do not disturb" sign. Protection from interruptions allow individual performers to concentrate on the task at hand. Likewise, protecting individual performers from excessive heat or cold has a positive effect.

Some sites lend themselves to rapid improvement. Others require a large investment in time and energy to make them suitable. The AAR leader must carefully weigh the costs and benefits of the site. The prudent decision may be to move to an area which may not be near the training area but which does facilitate a good AAR.

Training Aids

The best training aids are those that enhance learning without distracting from the AAR's overall goal. Leaders must carefully select only those training aids which directly apply to key events. For example, it would be appropriate to have a detailed scaled business model when conducting an AAR of a sales cycle execution. However, a detailed scale business model is probably not appropriate when conducting an AAR for interpersonal communication training. The key is, that if it does not assist, then it detracts. Figure A-1 is a list of common AAR training aids.

Training Aid	**Application**
Tape recorder	Used to record directives, and so on.
Video tape recorder; TV monitor	Used to record key events for playback.
Dry-erase board	Used as a portable chalk board.
Flip chart paper	Used for outlines, teaching points, agenda, or other details.
Organization charts	Used to guide discussion of events and interactions.
Business model	Used to guide discussion of events in greater detail than with an Organization chart.
Process Model; flow charts, procedure manuals	Used to simulate organization performance and procedure within business models.

Figure 11 Common Training Aids And Their Applications.

Training aids need not be complicated or fancy to be effective. For example, instead of flip chart paper or a dry-erase board, paper and pencil would do. If a business model is needed, use the same one that the unit used for the operation, if possible.

Organization Of The AAR Site

Organization of the site is essential to establishing the right atmosphere for a good AAR. Areas that the AAR leader must address include the location of the AAR discussion leader, seating for individual performer s, and positioning of training aids.

The AAR discussion leader should be centrally located and stand directly facing the majority of the individual performers taking part. If the AAR is for a large group, the discussion leader should be elevated.

Seating should be in a horseshoe shape when possible. This allows the maximum number of individual performers to have "front row seats" with no one standing behind the discussion leader. The leader of the unit undergoing the AAR should be seated in the front and center of the horseshoe. Higher organization leaders and managers should be seated to the flanks and rear of the horseshoe.

For example, for a work group AAR, the work group leader and work group sergeant should be seated in the front and center of the horseshoe, with their individual performers spread out to the left and right. The account manager and SBU/SSU manager would be located behind the back row of individual performer s. This allows individual performers taking part in the AAR to feel that their comments are valued as much as those of senior leaders. It is important that the atmosphere of the AAR be one of open discussion, not one stifled by rank consciousness.

Training aids must be centrally located so the maximum number of individual performers can benefit from their use. Business models should be displayed to allow greater visibility. Television monitors, if used, should be placed out of direct light. Flip chart-paper charts and dry-erase boards work best when everyone can see them. However, they must not dominate the AAR. When using flip chart-paper charts, the leader should be sure printing is in block style and large enough for everyone to read.

These techniques, when properly applied, assist in the efficient execution of AARs.

Appendix B - AAR Tools

AAR Observation Worksheet

Training/exercise title:

Event:

Date/time:

Location of observation:

Observation (player/trainer action):

Discussion (tied to task and standard it possible):

Conclusions:

Recommendations (indicate how the unit could have executed the task(s) better or describe training the unit will need to improve future performances):

NOTE: Units may modify this format to meet their specific needs.

Exercise AAR Plan

Observer	
Element	
Priority tasks	
Who attends	
When held	
Location	
Special requirements	

AAR Agenda

1. Introduction and rules

2. Review of objectives and intent

    a) Training objectives

    b) Manager's goal and intent (what was supposed to happen)

    c) Competing manager's goal and intent

    d) Relevant policy, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs)

3. Summary of recent events (what happened)

4. Discussion of key issues

    a) Chronological order of events

    b) Business Operating Systems impact/issues

    c) Key events/themes/issues

5. Discussion of optional Issues

    a) Individual performer /leader skills

    b) Tasks to sustain/improve

    c) Statistics

    d) Others

6. Discussion of employee protection (safety)

7. Closing comments (summary)