

# After Action Reviews

Co-Working Solutions Pty Ltd

## What Are They?

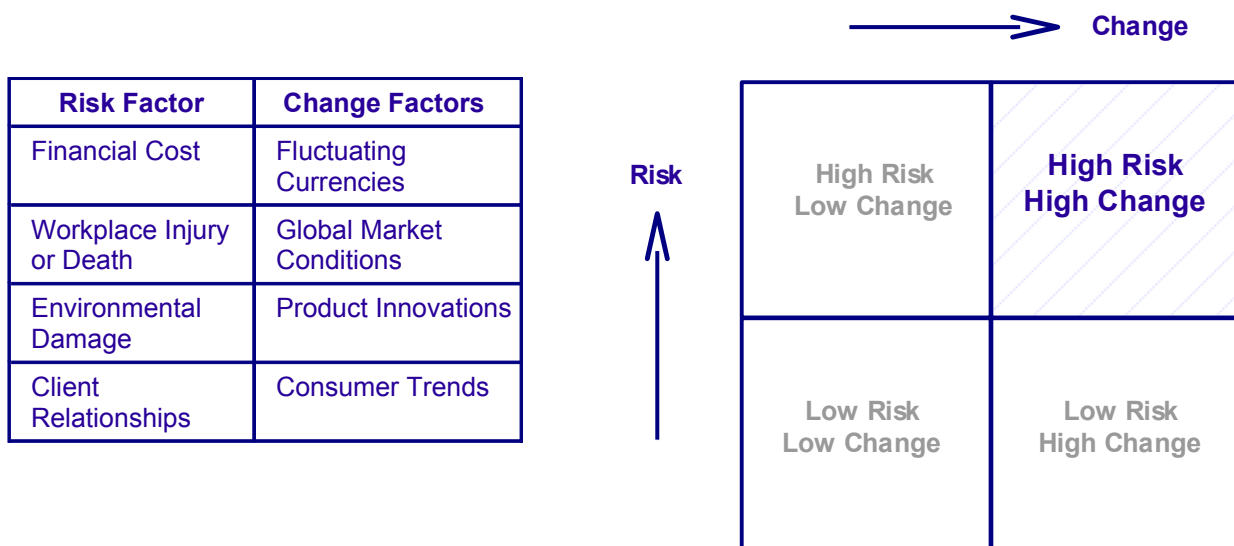
An After Action Review (AAR) is a meeting held by a work group immediately following an organisational event, task or “action” they have completed. Typically they are completed at the end of major steps within a larger change management programme. Their purpose is to quickly capture and take the lessons learnt in the recently completed action into the next phase of the programme or for further use at a late time by the organisation. An AAR is a group activity conducted by those who took part in the action and builds a shared understanding of what actually happened and collaboratively identifies how it could be improved the next time around.

## What They Are Not

After Action Reviews are not a formal Audit or Quality Assurance reviews which analyse large amounts of data and focus on determining accountability and assessing quantitative impact. AAR's are a more informal process whose purpose is to capture qualitative knowledge for immediate reuse and action – they don't make judgements or apportion blame.

## When Are They Used?

Organisations and/or work groups which find themselves operating in rapidly changing environments with high risk outcomes will have a greater need for AAR's and can more easily justify the time and costs involved in the process. However, they are also an effective tool for work group development and can be applied effectively in any given group based project.



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## How Is It Done?

There are a few easy steps to follow and simple guidelines to remember when doing After Action Reviews:

### 1. Held at regular intervals:

AAR's are held at set intervals in any project – after each and every major step or project action. It should be understood and accepted by all that AAR's are an integral part of the way a group does its project work. They should never be used only in special circumstances, to address only special problems or issues.

### 2. Brief and to the point:

These reviews are direct and should last no longer than 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the interval between AAR meetings and the complexity of the task under review. A “stand-up” review sets a tacit understanding that the meeting will be brief and direct.

### 3. Follows a set format:

There are a set number of steps and agreed content in the process that are followed for each review and include:

- ◆ What did we set out to do? What was our intent when we set out? Did we all share the same intent? Or do you think your intent / understanding differed at the start?
- ◆ What did we actually end up doing? What happened at each point? What was your role? What do you remember yourself or others saying? Or what actions were taken? *Aviod blame at this step...*
- ◆ What was learned? What strengths or weaknesses have been revealed? What do we know now that we didn't know yesterday? What would you tell another work group about to take a similar step? *Stick to what was learned, not what you'll do differently...*
- ◆ How will this learning impact what we do next? What can we apply immediately to our next steps in this project? What can we anticipate and how can we respond or prepare?

### 4. Everyone attends:

It is critical that all parties attend. A full understanding of what happened and collaborative learning can not be achieved if individuals are missing. It also reinforces that the outcomes were the result and the responsibility of what the group did and the solutions and improvements are also their collective responsibility.

### 5. Everyone talks:

AAR's are based on a process of open and honest dialogue. It is not debate or an argument. It's an open and honest conversation, where the goal is understanding of others points of view and the result is not a compromise, but a consensus based understanding what happened, what was learnt and what needs to be done.

### 6. No Recrimination:

This process does not work without a high level of trust within the group. If there is no trust, individuals will not be forthcoming to bring out their own mistakes or give honest feedback about the actions of others. NO BLAME - NO RECRIMINATION - NO REPRISAL

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## 7. Recording is optional:

If notes are taken, the results can be made available for the group to review internally and/or as a tool for the planning of the next step in the project. They can be kept in a serial diary format if it is going to be used solely for work group review.

If the AAR's are going to be used by other groups within the organisation as a tool of shared organisational learning, then it would be best to record it in a searchable database. There should be a contact named for each AAR session recorded, so that at a later date others in the organisation can have access to additional contextual information if need be.

Whether the information is for internal use only or kept for organisational learning, the group should collaboratively decide what learning is private and not to be recorded, what is for internal use only, and what is public domain for reuse by the organisation.

AAR's should never be used as a substitute for formal reports or records, nor should AAR findings be cited directly in any organisational reports. This will minimise the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of information and help to build trust and open dialogue when the group knows their information will be adequately safeguarded.

Adapted from: *Common Knowledge: How Companies Thrive by Sharing What They Know*, by Nancy M. Dixon



At Co-Working Solutions, we can facilitate After Action Reviews for your organisation on either a one-off or regular basis. Alternatively, we can train your work teams to run these sessions on their own. For more information, please contact us at:

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