After Action Review (AAR)

After Action Reviews are performed to ensure continuous learning and to aid in process, procedure and performance improvement. There are many forms of post project, post activity evaluation approaches. AAR's are of interest due to their focus on learning and improvement . Other approaches are notorious for focusing on criticism and blame with no time left for the process of creating sustainable change. Other versions include: Post Mortems, Plus-Delta analysis and others.

The key point of AARs is that they are based upon what actually happened versus specifically what was supposed to happen. There is no room for speculation or hypothesis. AARs capture what went well, so that good behaviors and practices are reinforced. Critical areas for change are identified and assigned for action to close the gap between what actually happened and what was supposed to happen.

Materials needed:

- Flip chart to record meeting
- Key documents supporting what happened (logs, project records, incident reports, etc)
- Key documents supporting what was supposed to happen

Time:

AARs are typically targeted for 15 - 30 minutes for small to medium sized actions or projects. Several hours may be required for large scale project or action review. **AARs should be conducted immediately following the action if possible**. Memory of key elements fade quickly and therefore AARs should almost always be conducted within 24 hours of the completion of a project or action.

Who is involved:

- All participants in the action, project or activity under review. Other interested parties or observers may be present however, during the "What happened?" phase, only actual participants are permitted to speak.

Directions:

- Review the chronology of what happened
- Discuss what was supposed to happen according to plans, documents governing the type of activity involved
- Identify what went well so that good behaviors and practices are reinforced
- Identify what MUST be changed next time, to close the gap between what actually happened and what was supposed to happen.