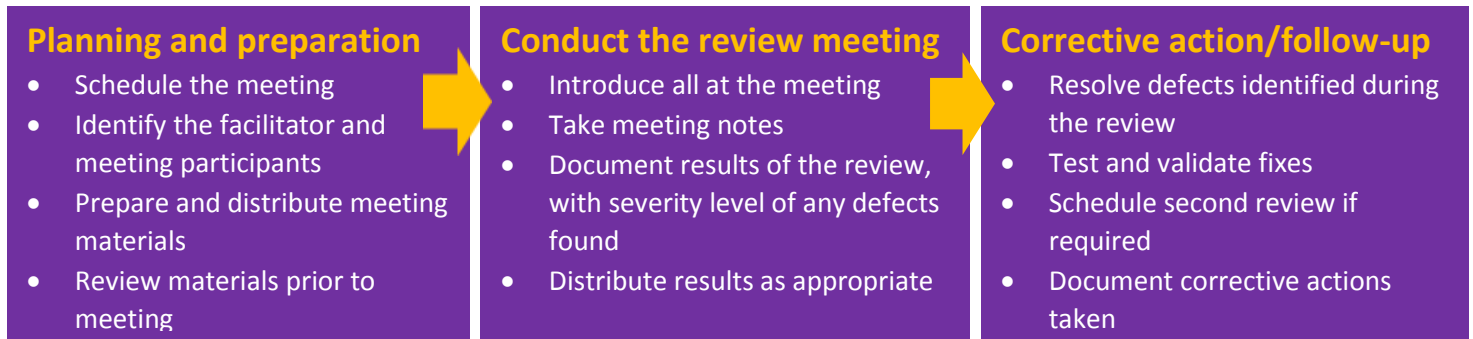# After Action Review (Pause and Learn)

What is it?

"After Action Reviews (AAR) are an effective approach for capturing the knowledge gained from activities and projects. They're great for ensuring that the lessons learned from one project or team are shared with the rest of the organization, with a view to improving overall performance."[1] NASA has adapted the Army's AAR to become a "Pause and Learn" methodology. Rather than being conducted at the end, "PaL" sessions are conducted throughout a life cycle.

Planning and preparation	Conduct the review meeting	Corrective action/follow-up
• Schedule the meeting • Identify the facilitator and meeting participants • Prepare and distribute meeting materials • Review materials prior to meeting	• Introduce all at the meeting • Take meeting notes • Document results of the review, with severity level of any defects found • Distribute results as appropriate	• Resolve defects identified during the review • Test and validate fixes • Schedule second review if required • Document corrective actions taken

How do I start? [2]

Step 1 — Hold the AAR immediately.
AARs are carried out immediately while all of the participants are still available, and their memories are fresh. Learning can then be applied right away, even the next day.

Step 2 — Create the right climate.
The ideal environment for an AAR to be successful is one of openness and commitment to learning. Everyone should participate in an atmosphere free from the concept of seniority or rank. AARs are learning events rather than critiques. They certainly should not be treated as personal performance evaluations.

Step 3 — Appoint a facilitator.
The facilitator of an AAR is not there to "have" answers, but to help the team to "learn" answers. People must be drawn out, both for their own learning and the group's learning.

Step 4 — Ask "what was supposed to happen?"
The facilitator should start by dividing the event into discrete activities, each of which had (or should have had) an identifiable objective and plan of action. The discussion begins with the first activity: "What was supposed to happen?"

Step 5 — Ask "what actually happened?"
This means the team must understand and agree with the facts about what happened. The team needs to be as accurate as possible when describing the events that transpired.

Step 6 — Ask "what was the difference?"
The real learning begins as the team compares what was supposed to happen with what actually happened. "Why were there differences?" and "What did we learn?" Identify and discuss successes and shortfalls.

Step 7 — Now compare the plan with reality.
Ask "What will we do differently to ensure this doesn't happen again," and "What should we do to ensure we repeat this success in the future?" Put in place action plans to sustain the successes and to improve upon the shortfalls.

Step 8 — Record the key points.
Recording the key elements of an AAR clarifies what happened and compares it to what was supposed to happen. It facilitates sharing of learning experiences within the team and provides the basis for a broader learning program in the organization.

---

[1] MindTools. After Action Review (AAR) Process. Retrieved from: http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newPPM_73.php
[2] Chris Collison. Learning to Fly. Learning While Doing – Time to Reflect. Retrieved from: http://www.kstoolkit.org/After+Action+Review

After Action Review (Pause and Learn)

Important Tips[3]

- Evaluate actions based on the objectives, specific standards, and required outcomes that are aligned with the strategic plan.
- Determine the actions of employees, leaders, senior management and the unit, separately and as a whole.
- Identify, recommend, and implement specific training or process improvements based on the results.

How can I learn more?

- **Pause and Learn Methodology (PaL). Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA**
  http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/about/organizations/OCKO/pause/index.html

- **Video: After Action Review** – University College London Hospitals.
  http://www.ucheducationcentre.org/behaviouralprogrammes.html

- **Conducting Successful Projects Using After Action Reviews (AARs)**. New Your University.
  http://www.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu/hr/documents/Projects_123-AAR.doc

- **Capturing Lessons Learned with an AAR**. Knowledge Jump
  http://www.knowledgejump.com/learning/strategy.html

- **NASA Pause and Learn Brochure**
  http://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/files/PaLBrochre(1).pdf

- Ed Rogers, "**Introducing the Pause and Learn (PaL) Process: Adapting the Army After Action Review Process to the NASA Project World at the Goddard Space Flight Cente**r," Revised June 8, 2006.
  http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/pdf/287922main_PALwhitepaperV3.pdf

---

[3]Army. A Leader's Guide to After Action Reviews. TC 25-20. September 1993.