WORKSHEET + WORKED EXAMPLE

Learn From What Just Happened

A shared account of what happened and one change someone will carry forward.

20 minutes with others | After Action Review · AAR

Use it in three moves

1. Hear from the people who did and experienced the work. Write the intended result and what actually happened separately.

2. Explore why they differed. Keep competing explanations visible and distinguish evidence from hindsight.

3. Choose what to sustain and what to change. Give the next action an owner who accepts it and a time to review.

What are we reviewing?

What did we intend?

What actually happened?

Include outcomes for people, not just the target.

Where did experience differ from the plan?

Learn From What Just Happened

YOUR WORKING NOTES / CONTINUED

What might explain the difference?

Separate what you know from what you still need to check.

Whose perspective is still missing?

What should we sustain?

One thing to change next time

Who agrees to carry it?

When will we see whether it helped?

A question for me

Whose account would make this review less comfortable and more useful?

See one way through

FICTIONAL WORKED EXAMPLE / NOT THE ANSWER TO YOUR SITUATION

What are we reviewing?

Friday's end-of-month dispatch

What did we intend?

Dispatch all confirmed orders and leave returns ready for the morning shift.

What actually happened?

All confirmed orders left on time. Eleven returns arrived at the next shift without usable labels.

Where did experience differ from the plan?

Dispatch met its target while returns work moved out of sight.

What might explain the difference?

The returns printer failed during the busiest hour. The fallback process was unclear, and the shift handover did not flag the unfinished work.

Whose perspective is still missing?

Hear from both shifts and the colleague who handled the printer failure.

What should we sustain?

Keep the short check-in that surfaced late orders.

One thing to change next time

Agree and practice a labeling fallback, with a visible handover note for anything unfinished.

Who agrees to carry it?

Proposed: warehouse coordinator; agreement still needed.

When will we see whether it helped?

After the next end-of-month dispatch

The thinking behind it

Nic distinguishes learning about leadership from being formed through practice. Reflection earns its place when it changes the conditions or choices in the next real situation.

After Action Reviews grew from US Army practice and are used in many settings, including wildland firefighting. Their core questions compare intent with events, explore the difference, and identify what to sustain or change. This version includes whose experience is missing and who will carry the learning.

US Forest Service AAR worksheet

Read The $366 Billion Failure: It's Time to Burn the Leadership Playbook by Nic Payne