

# Mission Ready

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## Do You Practice "After Action Reviews"?

There is much the business community can learn from the FBI when it comes to managing challenges in the present and in the future. How do you manage challenges that have yet to come? By conducting after action reviews of challenges successfully met.

When FBI agents crack a case - be it a short term challenge, such as a kidnapping, or a long term investigation into organized crime - the agents do not bask in their glory - at least not for long. With the victory fresh in their minds, the agents gather around the table for a review of the methods used in the successful investigation. The agents objectively examine their own actions, searching for techniques that worked, or did not work, or that could have worked better if modified. Mind you, this soul searching follows a successful case; the infrequent failures of the FBI are given even more thorough treatment.

Techniques that helped solve the case are then codified into FBI policy, and shared with agents throughout the organization. Conversely, practices that did not work well are also shared as "what not to do." In this way the FBI prepares its agents for the future; they will not have to re-invent the wheel, should a similar case appear. Best practices have been identified for future reference, and perpetuated.

Is this kind of objective self evaluation of successful projects always present in the business world? Sadly, no. Oh, the failed project will be autopsied, that's for sure - often by solemn execs who had nothing to do with the project, and who are there not to find out "Why", but "Who." Those who were intimately involved in the failure will not search for the truth, they will search for clever job-protecting answers. When the inquisition is over, someone will have been fired, others reprimanded, and the executive will be thought to have done his or her job. But the company will likely not have identified the practices responsible for the failure. And certainly, many companies, as crazy as it sounds, do not have a clear, repeatable, strategy that can be taken from one success and applied to similar challenges.

Only when honest after action reviews are conducted - for both unsuccessful and successful projects - can it be said a company is taking the future seriously.