

Debrief Guide



What is an Exercise Debrief?

An exercise debrief, also known as a post-exercise debriefing, is a structured discussion reflecting on an exercise or activity that has recently occurred. It provides the participants an opportunity to discuss what went well, what went wrong, how to improve, and to renew focus on next steps and actions.

What are the benefits of a debrief?



Learning Opportunity

Participants can learn from their mistakes, successes and from each other. The debrief provides the perfect place to complement and reinforce the overall exercise learning outcomes and objectives.



Feedback

Debrief provide a safe space for everyone to be able to give and receive feedback, both on the exercise performance and the exercise experience itself.



Further insights

Debriefs allow participants to share personal perspectives, revealing unexpressed challenges from the exercise. This diversity of backgrounds can also help identify connections and generate unique ideas grounded in specialist knowledge.



Continuous Improvement

Identifying strengths and weaknesses will help pinpoint improvement actions that can be taken to improve procedures and response effectiveness.



Team Building

Debrief discussions promote open and respectful communication among teams; fostering trust and understanding, encouraging a more resilient team dynamic under adversity.

Debrief Preparation Checklist



Identify Participants

This should ideally be everyone who participated in the exercise.

Decide on structure

Depending on the size and scale of your exercise, you may wish to adopt different approaches such as multiple debrief sessions or break out groups. You may wish to account for factors that could influence discussions, like junior staff possibly being uneasy raising issues in front of senior management.

Identify data capture

Discussion points and actionable items should be captured for effective follow-up. We recommend assigning observers to listen and make notes to capture key discussion points, feedback and actions.

Arrange logistics

Decide and arrange practical logistics for your debrief. Send out calendar invitations to block out time at least 2 weeks prior to ensure high attendance. At a minimum your arrangements should include:

- When: date & time
- Who: invitations to participants
- Where: venue details or video conferencing for virtual meetings.

Hot or cold?

Hot debriefs are conducted immediately after the exercise, meaning the exercise is fresh in the mind. Cold debriefs are conducted a few days after the exercise, allowing participants to reflect, digest and rationalise what happened which can lead to more effective learning.

Assign & brief facilitators

Depending on the debrief structure, you may require more than one facilitator. Ensure all facilitators are notified in advanced and understand what is expected of them. You may wish to share this guide with them.

Set session agenda

A structured agenda will ensure a smooth and effective session. See page 4 for more guidance.

Prepare discussion questions

Plan questions to prompt discussion and encourage conversation. You may wish to structure the conversation to focus on specific areas or elements of the exercise.

Plan follow up

Close the exercise as a whole with a follow up email to thank participants, summarise actions and setting expectations for any After Action reports that may follow. You may wish to include a short feedback form to formally capture data..

Debrief Facilitation Tips



Effective practical preparation is crucial for a successful post-exercise debrief, but excellent facilitation is equally important! Here are some facilitation tips to foster constructive and meaningful discussions.



Stay neutral

Maintain impartiality, facilitating the discussion based on facts and observations rather than imparting personal biases or opinions.



Foster a safe space

Create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences without fear of criticism or judgement. Avoid finger pointing and blaming.



Ensure everyone is heard

Encourage and allow all participants to voice their opinions to promote a balanced and inclusive discussion. Ensure there are other avenues to capture thoughts, such as meeting chats and follow up feedback forms.



Ask open ended questions

Encourage comprehensive responses by asking questions that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no", stimulating thoughtful conversation. Follow up using the "What? So What? Now What?" method. For example,

- What have you learned?
- What is the significance of what you learned?
- What are you going to do or change going forward?



Practice active listening

Show attentiveness to each participant's input, acknowledging their points of view, and seeking clarification when necessary. Ask follow up questions to points raised.



Keep discussion on track

While exploratory conversation can be beneficial, ensure the conversation stays focused on discussion topics relevant to everyone in the room.



Be positive

While debriefs often highlight areas of improvement by concentrating on things that didn't work so well, it's crucial to actively acknowledge successes and celebrate positive aspects to uplift team morale.



Bring discussions to an actionable conclusion

Summarize key points and ensure the debrief ends with clear next steps or action items based on the discussion.

Debrief Discussion



Example Agenda

1. **Welcome & Exercise Overview:** Open the session, set expectations and any ground rules or housekeeping. The facilitator provides an overview of the exercise events as a reminder, unless the debrief is occurring immediately after the exercise. (10% of time)
2. **Performance Reflection:** Participants share and discuss their thoughts on the team performance during the exercise. Discussions will cover successes, challenges and a review on effectiveness of the decisions made and actions taken, sometimes against relevant processes and procedures. (65%)
3. **Exercise Experience Feedback:** Participants share their thoughts on the overall exercise delivery, what they enjoyed the most and what could be improved. Feedback gathered may help inform the focus of future exercises. (10%)
4. **Confirm next steps & actions:** This segment involves collating the lessons identified, tangible actions and assigning action owners.. (10%)
5. **Summary & close:** Facilitator summarizes key discussion points and actions. Thank participants for their time and detail any follow up activity to be expected. (5%)

Discussion Questions

Positives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What went well? • Was there anyone in the team who did something really well in the exercise? • What did you enjoy most about the exercise?
Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What didn't go so well? • Were there any aspects you found challenging?
General Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there any unexpected challenges? • How did the team communicate throughout? Was it effective? • Were the results what you expected? • What was something new you learned?
Process & Procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the documented procedures align with the actions taken? • Did procedure documentation contain the appropriate information? Was anything missing? • What other scenario or procedure requires further exercising?