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After-Action Reviews in Emergency Management

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Emergency Management After-Action Review Processes to Influence Ontario Municipalities

This project reviews the current process for after-action reviews (AAR) completed by municipalities in Ontario under the direction and influence of the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM). It is found that there is a lack of guidance provided from the OFMEM regarding the AAR process. This project discusses how the OFMEM can better encourage the standardized use of the AAR by municipalities in Ontario. The research question asks what literature is available to assist the OFMEM when making AAR process suggestions to municipalities in Ontario.

Without proper guidance from the OFMEM in Ontario, the lessons learned process may be avoided when a municipality experiences an incident or exercise. Lessons learned can increase an organizations agility and allows municipalities to build a well-rounded, broader, and strategic approach after an event (Friesen, Kelsey & Legere, 2017).

Questionnaires were sent to Ontario municipal emergency management professionals to discuss their AAR processes. The results were tallied into a table and utilized to compare against each other, the template offered by the OFMEM, and the literature. The literature collected focused on the essential elements of AAR's; culture, best practices, active learning, and reflective learning.

The inexpensive AAR process can deliver great results if completed properly. The benefits of the AAR are found to enhance strengths, address limitations and allow organizations to learn from experiences. The OFMEM may play a large part of the AAR process that municipalities choose to use within their emergency management divisions to promote active and reflective learning.

JIBC Research Brief

Structured Abstract

Introduction: The research question is what literature is available to assist the OFMEM when making AAR process suggestions to municipalities in Ontario? Without proper guidance from the OFMEM in Ontario, the lessons learned process may be avoided when a municipality experiences an incident or exercise. This is unfortunate because lessons learned will increase organizational agility and play an important role in EM (Friesen et al., 2017). Municipalities may not build well-rounded, broader, and strategic approaches to lessons learned without proper steps taken after an incident or event (Friesen et al., 2017). Errors may be repeated in the future if there is no organized system that considers their rectification. Further, if municipalities do complete the AAR process, what method do they use to input and track the changes they have identified? What recommendations are there for sharing the information with others inside and outside of the organization? And what research studies are available to assist with these recommendations?

Methods: A literature search was completed to gather existing data regarding essential elements of the AAR. A questionnaire was sent to emergency management professionals in Ontario and the answered data was compared to each other and the template provided by the OFMEM. The literature provided information to encourage useful information for the OFMEM to create a comprehensive AAR process.

Results/Findings: Common themes discovered in the literature review pertaining to AAR's was the importance of organization culture, AAR best practices, active learning and reflective learning.

Discussion: The AAR provides an opportunity for municipalities to address limitations and enhance strengths within their organization. By taking the time after an incident to discuss the results of an incident or exercise the municipalities can increase their agility and ensure due diligence is completed.

Practical Applications: If the OFMEM creates a complete AAR process recommendation for municipalities in Ontario to utilize, they may increase resilience within the province. Increased resilience may save lives and funding in the future.

References:

Friesen, S. K., Kelsey, S., & Legere, J. A. (2017). Defining a risk-informed framework for whole-of-government lessons learned: A Canadian perspective. *Journal of Emergency Management*, *15*(4), 219–232. https://doi.org/10.5055/jem.2017.0331