

Welcome to Module 4: Post Operations Learning

Welcome to Module 4 of Field Operations Management. This module will focus on Post Operations Learning. Post Operations Learning refers to the opportunities you will have to learn from an operation after you have returned to your home base.

There are 3 key components which will be covered below. These include:

1 - Incident Reporting

2 - Team Learning

3 - Individual and Organizational Learning

Incident reporting

Incident reporting, procedures and planning reviews are important parts of Post Operations Learning.

When you return from a mission, it is important to reflect on what has occurred. You should ask yourself questions such as:

- What was the original plan and how did the plan work out?
- What incidents were reported and how could they have been avoided?
- How were incidents managed?
- Were incidents dealt with according to organizational procedures?

Remember, no operation is going to go as well as originally planned. Real-world contexts and changes can greatly impact the delivery of said plans and so Post Operations Learning offers a great opportunity to review plans, procedures, and how they're put into practice. These can then be adapted and improved for the next mission.

Post Operations Learning is also an opportunity for individuals and team leaders to review how they managed in the operation.

A lot of missions can be quite stressful and so from a psychological point of view it's always good to properly debrief and understand what team members gained and learnt from the operation and any related incidents, and how they think responses could be improved next time. This form of reflection is crucial to not only individual and team development, but also to the improvement of your organization as a whole.

Team Learning

Operations teams can go into the field with a clear plan to implement a specific program. However, sometimes plans can go awry. To avoid situations like this and to maintain learning during and after an operation, it is good to get feedback on your program from local authorities, communities, and beneficiaries. This should not just be a regular occurrence but also a fundamental part of your operation.

Another way to improve team learning is through briefing and debriefing. This is particularly important if you have split the team up into different areas of the operation. When they return from each mission they should then be offered the opportunity to give feedback on what they learnt from that particular experience to the rest of the team.

Upon returning home, it is also crucial that your team update their contextual information and knowledge of the geographic region in which their mission was conducted. Situations can change very quickly and so it is important that your team can learn how and why such changes occur.

- Accounting for unexpected occurrences and revising original plans accordingly
- Keeping records of learning and decisions made
- Keeping the field office informed and requesting their approval if necessary.

There might be some unexpected results coming out of your mission. These provide great opportunities for team learning and can be investigated further. Some may be caused by mistakes or errors in which case these can be recognised and avoided in future. Others may be the result of unforeseen circumstances and may prove useful.

If this happens then make sure that you don't narrow your investigation just to one operational outcome. Look for the unexpected and feed your findings back to the team. You might need to revise your original plan based upon this feedback so be prepared to do this regarding the timings, the type of goods you are providing, the beneficiary selection, and other variables.

Finally, make sure that you record your team learning and the decisions you make throughout and after the mission. If a decision significantly changes the mission plan prior to departure then you need to check with the field office for their acknowledgement and approval.

Organizational and Individual Learning

In terms of **organizational** learning, it is useful for the project manager and/or team leader to review operations documents upon returning home.

Ask yourself what you have learnt from post distribution monitoring reports, third party monitoring, and monitoring and evaluations. To do this, you need to do more than just compare the output and the input factorials. You should examine the impact the operation had on people's lives and behaviours and try to learn from this for future operations. Consider both your mistakes and your successes.

Team debriefs are also important to organizational learning. It is helpful for the team leader to debrief all team members individually. By doing this one-to-one, it gives individuals more flexibility and freedom to speak. They also may feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts with one person rather than with a large group. On the other hand, the opposite can also be true. Certain team members may prefer to give feedback as a cohesive unit. To satisfy both parties, a full team meeting debrief as well as individual debriefs should be standard operating procedures.

When people return home after a difficult mission, they can feel either satisfied with the result of the mission and their personal performance or they might have prostrations. It's important to give every team member the opportunity to give their feedback on the project, on what went well and what didn't. This includes the project manager. This is useful because it helps organizations to update and professionalize their review procedures and planning in addition to improving internal hierarchical relations.

To promote **individual** learning, it's important to get feedback from your supervisors.

This could be your team leader, deputy team leader, or your project manager. Ask for their perceptions of how well you worked on that particular mission.

You should also take the time to personally reflect on your achievements and possible areas for improvement. Working in humanitarian operations is tiring, it's tough, it's complex and mistakes are somewhat inevitable. So don't be too hard on yourself if you made mistakes. Mistakes provide learning opportunities. Take time to ask yourself some key questions such as:

- How did this particular field experience develop me and my professional experience?
- Am I working in the right role?
- Do I want to change roles?
- Are there opportunities for advancement in my current role?

It's very easy to pigeonhole individuals in certain functions or job roles like finance or logistics. However, maybe these people actually want to be and do something else like project management, for example. Just remember that change starts with you. Decide how you feel about what you are doing now, plan what you want to do and enroll in the training you need to make that change happen.