



RNZPBA
EDUCATION
GROUP

ORGANISATIONAL DEBRIEFING

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Organisational Debriefing

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Well, the National Pipe Band Championships in Masterton has been and gone. Reports sheets have been read, discussed in the normal fashion at the after-match function, and now pretty much forgotten. I wonder how many bands conducted a 'hot' debrief (i.e. a debrief session immediately following their performances) and captured the good and not so good elements of their performances, and later a more structured 'organisational' debrief. This latter debrief is a more deliberate look at the bands performance and the relevant factors contributing to that performance – both positive and negative. Debriefs are an important part of a quality assurance process and help shape the actions taken in the following season and beyond.

The organised debrief is an opportunity for stakeholders in the band – pipers, drummers, support people, etc – to communicate their experiences of the event, the years work or whatever is identified so that opportunities for improvement can be identified. Arrangements can then be put in place for learning the lessons identified, therefore improving the potential for the band to perform well during the next season.

All stakeholders involved in the activity must have the opportunity to contribute to the debrief, regardless of their age or stage of development. All stakeholders must also realise that a debrief is not about assigning blame – it is about identifying factors that need to be addressed in order to improve a bands performance level, and to maintain the things that are being done well.

Once debriefs have been conducted, a review should be undertaken. This review should look at plans and arrangements in place leading up to the (in this case) National Pipe Band Championships or competitive season, and compare them to what actually happened. Did we follow the plan? If not, why not? Were there valid reasons for diverting from the plan? What should we have done? Was the plan valid? Were we distracted by short term imperatives that did not contribute to the mid-longer term goals? What worked and what did not work? What factors to we need to include in the plan for the next year, what needs to be kept and what needs to be changed? This may seem like a lot of questions, and perhaps some of this is happening anyway at a fairly informal level. However, options need to be captured (written down) so that they are not forgotten and can be fed into the planning process for the next season. It is also important to understand that actions we take must directly relate in some way or form

to the vision, goals and objectives we have agreed as an organisation (see previous tutorials). If they do not, then we must question conducting that action at all if it is not contributing to the outcomes we seek.

Preparing for debriefing

All members and stakeholders in the band must understand the debriefing process and how it will be conducted. This requires prior planning – prior to, or at least early in, the season. If members and stakeholders understand the process that will be worked through during the season, they will be better able to shape their own actions to conform and contribute to the achievement of the goals and objectives during the year. This may be as simple as learning all the tunes/scores accurately and on time, turning up to rehearsals on time with a good instrument, focusing during the rehearsal period, and taking on additional 'off the field' activities that contribute to the organisation. Pipers and drummers in bands I have played in may remember me going on about each individual member arriving at a rehearsal or performance with a '+' on their T-shirt (equipped to add to the rehearsal/performance) rather than a '-' on their T-shirt (taking something away from the rehearsal/performance). I think they understood what I was trying to get across to them! If people understand the processes of an organisation and the part that they are expected to play, they will perform better under effective leadership (see the latest 'College Comment' by Lester Flockton in the May 2010 Pipe Band magazine).

The 'Hot' Debrief

Immediately following an activity, a 'hot' debrief should be conducted. The aim of this is to capture immediate feedback on what went well and what went not so well. These can be validated and integrated with the more structured and deliberate organisational debrief at a later date. If a hot debrief is not conducted, then some valuable lessons may not be captured as people's memories fade, and they remember only the good points (or have an overly pessimistic view of the performance where there was nothing good!). A non-playing member (or playing member that did not play) of the band should be identified to capture the relevant points. The Pipe Major and leading drummer should lead the hot debrief. Contributions from knowledgeable stakeholders standing on the sidelines should also be included. The hot debrief will give a very good snapshot of where people think the band is at that particular point in time. Some contributions may be very

emotional (one way or the other!), but these tend to be moderated in the later organisational debrief. A hot debrief should be conducted after every competition performance, reviewed and actions to be taken confirmed (with reference to the previously written plan). This will progressively monitor the bands performance during the season and allow good development to take place.

The hot debrief allows for the immediate off-load of any concerns or issues and helps to clear the air. More than a few readers will be able to recall some 'debriefs' being conducted at the after-match function with a couple of social lubricants on board – not constructive at all and potentially very damaging. The immediacy of the debrief also allows those in leadership positions to thank the team and particular individuals as relevant and provide positive feedback to the team as a whole. There may be a series of hot debriefs where each section (pipe corps, mid-section, snare section etc) conduct their own debrief immediately after or prior to the whole team debrief. Again, I stress that time must be made to do this immediately following the event/performance etc to allow for the release or off-load of issues from members. They will all thank you, as they will have a much better experience at the after-match function!

The Organisational Debrief

As we have covered to some extent already, the organisational debrief is where members and stakeholders have the opportunity to communicate their experiences of the performance, season, or whatever else is being 'debriefed' in order for lessons to be identified. Studies have shown that this is best conducted within 4-6 weeks on the activity/event/competition. This allows time for those involved to reflect on the activity, their part in it and how the organisation (band) performed as a whole in relation to objectives and goals set. A regular series of organisational debriefs may need to be conducted during the season to accurately and completely debrief after each competition.

The organisational debrief should address a number of factors. Some of these include:

- Strengths (what went well?)
- Weaknesses (what could have been done better?)
- Ideas to make things better
- Provision of positive feedback
- Opportunity to thank the playing members and wider group

This is not an opportunity to apportion blame or to address any personal issues that may have arisen. The environment should be non-threatening to encourage effective contributions from the whole team and extract all of the information necessary to allow the band to move forward on a better footing.

Much has been written on the organisational debriefing process. I have not set out here to give an exhaustive breakdown of the process, rather some key considerations and an outline that might be relatively easily followed. I would encourage all those so inclined to delve into the material written on this process to further enhance their own knowledge and better equip them to understand and conduct the debriefing process. In generic terms, there are five stages to the organisational debriefing process:

- Planning
- Opening/introduction
- Feedback and discussion
- Closing the session
- Review – dealing with results of the session

Planning

This first phase sees the initiator of the debriefing session (pipe major, band president) commence planning for the debrief. They need to identify who is going to plan the session base and define the key questions, who is going to facilitate the debrief, and who the participants are. In a relatively small organisation like a pipe band, the Pipe Major may be doing all of these roles. However, it would be good if a non-playing member could lead/facilitate the session. The planner needs to address issues under each of the following areas:

Purpose – aim/purpose of the debrief, identify the event/activity being debriefed, what period of time is being covered

Participants – are all relevant participants aware of the debrief, are they willing to contribute, what questions might they ask

Numbers – how many people need to be catered for
Time – when should the debrief be held, how long should we allow for it, is a social gathering immediately following a good idea

Location – where is the best place to conduct the debrief

Facilitator – who is the best person to facilitate the debrief

Resources – what supporting 'props' are required (reports, recordings, band plan etc)

Once these areas have been addressed, a debriefing plan can be drafted. One example is at the end of this article.

Pre-Debrief

The facilitator and planner should make sure all the relevant information relating to the debrief session is well communicated to all stakeholders and potential participants. The advertisement of a social gathering at the conclusion may help get a greater attendance! Participants should be aware of what the debrief is about and how long it will take. The facilitator and planner should arrive early to ensure the venue is set up properly to allow the debrief to go smoothly.

Opening/Introduction

This phase is where the facilitator welcomes the participants, introduces him/herself, and provides an overview of the reason for the debrief and the process that will be followed. The aim of the session should be clear to all participants. Participants should then be asked to think about:

- what were the three main negative aspect of the event/competition season
- what were the three most positive aspects of the event/competition season

Feedback and Discussion

Each participant is then given the opportunity to briefly explain their positive and negative aspects. The points identified should be captured on sticky notes (different colour for positive and negative points), and stuck on a board (positive on one side and negative on the other). Once all those who wish to speak to their points has had the opportunity to do so, and all stick notes are on the board, the facilitator should give participants the opportunity to add anything else to the discussion that has not already been discussed. Finally, the facilitator summarises the main points raised. This requires some note taking by the facilitator during the process.

Closing the Session

Finally, the facilitator gives participants the opportunity to write down two things:

- The most significant ‘thing’ I have learned during this event/competition/season is.....
- For the next event/season/competition, I am going to.....

Participants who wish to speak are given the opportunity, and the points above are collected for later collation. The facilitator details the process from hereon, ie, that notes will be summarised and written up. All participants are thanked for their contribution and the festivities (if organised!) can begin.

Review – dealing with results of the session

The notes must be organised into a readable and logical format. These, combined with hot debrief notes, should be collated into a single report that clearly summarises:

- Where the band was effective and where there is further opportunity
- Establish objective reasons for underperformance and good performance
- Recommend ways to improve

Remember, there should be a no-blame culture and individuals should not be critiqued for their actions. An action plan/work programme (rehearsal/practice regime) is then formulated, the annual plan updated and work towards making the most of the opportunities for improvement identified commences.

This may all seem a little involved and complicated. It is actually quite a straight forward and rewarding process. If you as an organisation do not have the skills to conduct a debrief of this kind, there are plenty of people in the wider community that offer this service. The investment will pay dividends many times over.

In order to survive and thrive in the world that we live in, all organisations will need to become increasingly professional in their approach. They will have great buy-in and participation from their members, they will be well respected by the local and wider communities, and they will be a (relatively) attractive organisation to receive funding from various funding organisations.

A quote on a wall in the Dunedin Teachers College building reads along the lines “If we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we have always got.” This is not attributable to any famous person that I am aware of, but it certainly has a ring of truth about it! Happy debriefing!

Some information taken from the Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management “Organisational Debriefing” publication IS6/05, 2006 (non-copyright)

Example Organisational Debrief Structure

Experience: The National Pipe Band Championships, March 2010 or The 2009/10 competing season	
Date: 2010	Time: 2.30pm – 3.40pm
Introduction 5 minutes	Debrief Aims To reflect on the experiences of band members involved in the National Pipe Band Championships 2010. Identify personal experiences Views shared and discussed to establish personal learning and future positive use of that learning
Review 5 Minutes	Consider your responses to the two questions below.
Ponder 10 Minutes	1. What were the three negative/worst/bad/lowest/least successful aspects of the response to these events? A B C What were the three most positive/good/best/most successful parts to the response to these events? A B C
Sharing and discussion (40 minutes)	
Summary 2 minutes	
Ponder 6 minutes	1. The most significant ‘thing’ I have learned during this event/competition/season is..... For the next event/season/competition, I am going to.....
Sharing 10 minutes	
Closure 2 minutes	
Debrief led by	