Driving Efficiency at the Battalion Level

by LTC Michael D. Hebert and MAJ Andrew T. Kilcer

Army leaders have a duty and vested interest in running their organizations efficiently. This article is a compilation of various techniques to drive efficiency within a battalion, organized along Lean's 8 Wastes categories. Regularly used in manufacturing and office environments, Lean's 8 Wastes categorize ineffective use of resources and can be used by Army leaders looking to maximize the output of their units. Leaders can then reinvest the rewards in benefits across their people, training and equipment.

Defects

Quality Control. Commanders must determine who is validating the work performed within their organization accounting for incentive structures. An individual validating his own work presents an incentive structure that may produce defects. The leader managing the troops to task should also be inspecting the work, particularly for maintenance teams. Battalions should require their platoon leaders to validate the faults listed on the platoon's equipment maintenance and inspection worksheet (5988-E), ensuring the quality of crew preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) and educating the platoon leaders on the technical aspect of their equipment. Ideally all work performed, even at the individual level, will have an external evaluator. A battalion can designate subject matter experts to host training or quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) for the entire battalion to improve quality. Units must design quality checks to capture the actual status of the system being tested, i.e. a mission command system may turn on but not able to communicate to the network.

Manuals, Publications, and Diagrams. Work instruction documents within units must have both breadth and depth throughout the formation as their use reduces costly errors. Ensuring instruction documents are in the right place at the right time requires efforts from the publications manager, usually the S1, Maintenance Support Device (MSD) manager, often the S6, and individual staff members. Physical libraries should be located within each company, particularly for training materials. Units should anticipate ordering new rolling stock manuals each fiscal year to account for updates and document degradation. Public releasable manuals should be distributed as widely as possible via electronic means, often by company executive officers (XOs). The MSD manager should include the MSD status in the Battalion's communication situation report (COMSTAT). Individual staff members should design diagrams and flow charts for tasks. Large printing can be completed via the brigade's geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) section or installation print shop. A battalion's motor pool should have diagrams depicting vehicle dispatching, parts accountability, oil disposal, and other common tasks. Companies should have soldier skill level 10 tasks publicly depicted, sourced through installation Training Aid Support Centers (TASCs) or unit generated.

Overproduction

Products for One. Commanders need to push their staff to produce products that drive action, tell the staff what you want. Products intended only for a commander, often tied to decision making or informing, waste time if these products can't be directly issued to subordinates. Commanders and

Figure 1. Lean's 8 Wastes as defined by authors *(U.S. Army Graphic)*

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staff should become practiced in examining options based on bed rock products i.e. Long-Range Training Calendars, Common Operating Picture, and Mission Command Systems. Ideally battalion products should be "pocketable" one sheet of paper front and back, one swipe of the phone. Getting draft products to a commander for feedback early and often via battle rhythm events can save hours of time. Commanders are ultimately responsible for what their unit's output and should focus their staff's efforts accordingly.

Waiting

Time on Tasks. Commanders and planners should maximize the amount of time Soldiers spend on value adding task(s) compared to the total time invested into an event. Waiting in the military can be broken down into the following categories: waiting for a process to start, waiting your turn, waiting on movement to another task. Nowhere is this more manifested than range day for a unit, usually spans an entire workday, and only produces about 20-40 minutes of trigger time per individual. Units need to identify the bottlenecks in their activities and then optimize those bottlenecks until they reach a point beyond their control i.e. the physical space at a range. Training timetables, continuous transportation, alternative training events, and consolidation of training events all can be employed to reduced waiting time. Commanders can drive efficiency through their battle rhythm events. Production control meetings and operation sync meetings should specifically address management of limited recourses and bottlenecks.

Non-Utilized Talent

Schooling to Master Level. Commands must task to fill master level producing school regardless of individual hesitancy or operational demands. Schools such as master gunner, master drive, master fitness, and master marksmen instructor should always be filled. Units should prioritize individuals with a propensity to pass and retainability,

not seniority. Individuals in a skill identifier coded position should be sent without option. Qualified individuals should be sent regardless of their general desires. Many individuals have anxiety over attending high visibility schools. Commands should prioritize and slot these individuals anyway; a set school date will reduce procrastination. Even individuals who fail will bring back knowledge that will generate improvements at the platoon or company level.

Qualifying Expiring Crews. Individuals scheduled to depart the unit during the qualification window, normally 270 days, should be removed from the firing line. Their participation as firing members in gunnery has a cooling effect on the subordinates that would advance to fill their space. Senior individuals scheduled to depart the unit should be utilized as trainers, quality control inspectors, and training support during the gunnery cycle. Evaluation reports should not penalize an individual for not being offered a chance of qualifying on a crew due to a permanent change of station (PCS) window. Company 1SGs and the Battalion CSM are critical to enforcing this through accurate management of troops to seat rosters. The battalion commander must validate crew rosters a minimum of quarterly and provide top cover to company leaders when their members are removed from the gunline.

Transportation

Combat Load Plans. Underloaded or improperly loaded combat platforms generate future unnecessary demand on combat trains. Most modern military vehicles can easily accommodate over a week of food and water for their occupants, especially once they are relieved of their full combat ammunition carrying requirements such as during a combat training center (CTC). Designers should examine the historical record for the load plans of the 2003 Iraq invasion. Units can build further efficiency by designating vehicles as specialty carriers for common parts and all vehicles should maximize their use of combat spares. Load plans should be enforced consistently to build habits

and prevent loss. Securing components separate from vehicles encourages loss during movement, slows crew level maintenance, and risks those components being lost during mobility operations, especially if the sea lanes are contested. Keep your vehicles loaded as combat ready as possible including during motor pool and mobility operations, secondary loads are authorized for a reason.

Inventory

Excess Property. The Battalion S4 must drive property divestiture. Companies are busy and the nuances of specific individual property divestitures leads to avoidance. Non modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) equipment not used on a deployment or during a complete training cycle should be divested. Centralizing divestitures within the S4 with a weekly battalion (BN) XO review during a logistics synchronization (LOGSYNC) meeting enables efficiency of efforts, setting of priorities and sharing of lessons learned. Every company commander should appoint an additional duty supply officer, who is not the executive officer. The supply officer should have two primary goals, forecasting equipment orders and supervising divestiture of excess. The Battalion S4 noncommissioned officer-in-charge (NCO-IC) should conduct monthly low-density training with company unit supply specialists (92Ys) ensuring current Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-A) processes and administrative procedures are adhered too. The divestiture process should be continuous with dedicated clean sweeps incorporated into mobility operations, if you didn't take it on deployment, you probably don't need it.

Motion

Form Determines Function. Setting the office layout is critical in ensuring optimal administration. The Army's propensity to move around and operate in environments of various austerity can produce suboptimal working spaces. While each battalion is unique in terms of staff skill, members personalities,

mobility needs, and space available, benefits can be reaped via establishing an optimized workspace layout. Battalions should follow some common principles when considering their administration layout. War Fighting Functions should be established to collaborate internally and externally, preventing information "stovepipes". Doctrinally the staff is consolidated into the Main Command Post (CP) and a smaller Tactical Command Post (TAC).[1] A physically consolidated battalion main CP is not always practical, in these cases an operations and sustainment split with information link(s) is a possible arrangement. Regardless of the layout, junior soldiers should be within direct observation of a leader, accommodations similar among grades, and considerations should be made for extreme introverts or extroverts.

Extra Processing

Workflow Management. Tasks should be operationalized into formats that enable rapid action, feedback, and enables the commander to make decisions. The traditional orders process via word processer files is manpower intensive. Subordinate feedback should be a semi-automated process via voice, email, or shared file arrangement. The contracted Microsoft suite of tools provides several options for automating workflow management such as Share-Point Excel, Planner, or Lists. These tools, integrated into Microsoft (MS) Teams allow for the assigning of tasks to individuals and provides a centralized area for feedback. Units should use a centralized task tracker and subsequent trackers for detailed tasks such as command inspections. A simple MS Teams excel document enables multiple users to collaborate, while replacing or supplementing written orders.

Material Situation (MATSIT). Units should invest the upfront and quarterly inventory time to ensure their GCSS MATSIT is accurate for class II and class IX items. Accurate MATSITs save processing time by automatically ordering when stock falls below set levels. It provides hard data during consumption projections. The battalion maintenance officer and maintenance tech should have the responsibility to ensure quarterly updates are made to the class IX MATSIT. The Battalion S4 officer-in-charge (OIC) or NCOIC should supervise each supply room's class II MATSIT. Further efficiencies can be gained by designative subordinate units as key items holders, such as the Forward Support Companies (FSCs) stocking paint supplies and subsequently consolidating the storage requirements.

Conclusion

The combined arms battalion exists "to close with and destroy enemy forces using fire, maneuver, and shock effect or to repel their assault by fire and counterattack".[2] Commanders must create effective and efficient units if they are to accomplish this purpose. Applying a detailed analysis to generate specific efficiencies within a unit will raise that organizations overall effectiveness. Commanders must optimize workflows, eliminate bottlenecks and maximize the use of resources. Efficiently run units instill pride in its members, and its savings can be reinvesting into increasing lethality.

LTC Michael D. Hebert is a U.S. Army Armor Officer currently serving as the Commander of 1-68 AR, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 4th Infantry Division (ID). He has previously served in Light, Stryker, and Heavy Calvary Formation, including deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, Republic of Korea, and Poland. LTC Hebert's military schools include U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI; Ranger, Pathfinder, Airborne, and Calvary Leaders Course. He has a bachelor of arts from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA; and masters of arts from the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI.

MAJ Andrew T. Kilcer is a U.S. Army Armor Officer currently serving as the Battalion executive officer for 1-68 Armor, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. He has previously served in Stryker and Tank formations, including deployments to Afghanistan, Republic of Korea, and Poland. MAJ Kilcer's military schools include Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS; Maneuver Captains Carrer Course, Fort Benning, GA; Basic Officer Leader Course, Fort Knox, KY; Ranger and Calvary Leaders Course. He has a bachelor of science from Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY; and a masters of business administration from The Mason School of Business, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg VA.

Notes

[1] ATP 3-90.5 Combined Arms Battalion, July 2021, Pages 2-6 to 2-7

[2] ATP 3-90.5 Combined Arms Battalion, July 2021, Page 1-1