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Seminar Training for Command Groups

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SEMINAR TRAINING FOR COMMAND GROUPS

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
THE BCTP MODEL	1
Overview	1
Read-Ahead Material	3
Workshops	3
Decision Exercises	3
METHODOLOGY	3
Participants	3
Data Sources	3
RESULTS	4
Perceived Utility of the Seminar	4
Perceived Utility for Lower Echelons	5
Impact on Warfighter Performance	5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	5

SEMINAR TRAINING FOR COMMAND GROUP

Introduction

Seminar type training events have become increasingly popular with adult educators over the past several years. Seminars provide an educational forum for students who have already attained at least the minimum requisite degree of expertise in a given area to come together and learn from one another. Seminars are usually modeled with small dynamics in mind to provide an atmosphere that promotes discussion and free exchange of ideas.

The Seminar concept was adopted by the Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) as part of their program. The BCTP Seminar offers the opportunity for division and corps commanders to bring their warfighting teams together to discuss warfighting topics and develop teamwork with the aid of BCTP facilitators in an environment free of external distractions.

The Seminar approach to training has been growing in popularity in the Army training community as a result of the apparent success of the BCTP program, and, in April 1992, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Command--Training, requested that the Fort Leavenworth Field Unit of the U.S. Army Research Institute conduct a project with the following goals:

1. Using the Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) Seminar as a model, evaluate the effect of seminars on subsequent performance on a command post training exercise (CPX).
2. Define a suitable format for a seminar as part of a command post training strategy for each echelon of command.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the BCTP model and present findings and recommendations concerning the above goals.

The BCTP Model

Overview

A BCTP rotation consists of a Battle Command Seminar, followed several months later by a CPX, referred to as a Warfighter Exercise (WFX).

The BCTP Command Seminar is usually conducted at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for division and corps command groups. The Seminar is five days in length and focuses on synchronization of tactical operations and team building. The Seminar is a combination of workshops and decision exercises designed to assist the Commander in training his staff in AirLand Battle doctrine as it pertains to his unit and to improve command and staff

teamwork, procedures and skills. Further, it provides an opportunity for the Commander to clearly articulate his philosophy on the functioning of his organization. Specifically, the learning objectives for the Seminar are as follows:¹

1. Enhance the decision making process and associated command and control procedures.
2. Gain insights on the application of Airland Battle doctrine as it applies to operations.
3. Achieve a common understanding of the Commander's leadership style and intent.
4. Achieve an understanding of the Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIR).
5. Enhance staff coordination.

Since BCTP aims to promote team work and build a more cohesive command and staff team, the Seminar is designed to encourage free discussion and idea exchange. Therefore, the participants are typically limited to the group of key decision makers. For example, the attendees for a division Seminar would include the following:

Commanding General
Assistant Commanders (Maneuver and Support)
Chief of Staff
Assistant Chiefs of Staff for Personnel (G1), Intelligence (G2),
Operations (G3), Logistics (G4) and Civil Affairs (G5)
DIVARTY Commander
DISCOM Commander
Air Liaison Officer (ALO), and
Principal subordinate unit commanders.

Additionally, the unit typically brings a small battle staff support cell to provide situation updates, primary staff support, decision support, and orders preparation. The battle support staff do not typically participate in the workshops and discussions, however they do receive feedback on their performance in the form of at least one After Action Review (AAR) during the course of the Seminar.

The BCTP Seminar is structured to achieve the training objectives through a mixture of read-ahead material, workshops, and computer-driven decision exercises, each of which is described below.

¹Battle Command Training Program, Instructional Guide to Battle Command Seminars.

Read-Ahead Material

Reading material is mailed to the participants several months in advance of the Seminar date. The reading material is composed of current doctrine and articles on contemporary issues pertinent to the unit, together with articles on military history and threat doctrine.

Workshops

The Workshops provide the training unit the opportunity to acquire information and discuss relevant topics in a seminar environment. Training units may either select workshop topics from a BCTP master menu or make requests for specific non-standard topics. Additionally, a representative from the Center for Army Tactics (CTAC) is present and available to answer any doctrinal questions which may arise during the Seminar.

Decision Exercises

The Decision Exercise component of a Seminar provides the opportunity for the Commander and his staff to exercise the decision making process in a simulation-driven, mini-CPX mode. The exercise consists of a series of decision cycles generated by a hypothetical conflict. The intent of the exercise is to provide insights on the application of AirLand Battle doctrine, and to refine the commander/staff action sequence which leads to the production of plans and orders. Additionally, the Decision Exercise provides an opportunity for the staff and subordinate commanders to develop a common understanding of the Commander's intent, philosophy, and preferences.

Methodology

Participants

Originally, three U.S. Army division command and staff groups were scheduled to participate in this study as they went through their BCTP rotations during 1993. Two of the divisions were active divisions and one was a RC division. However, due to unexpected constraints on data collection, information was available for only one division (active) through the whole rotation. However, minimal data was obtained from the other two divisions after the Seminar portion of their rotation.

Data Sources

The division was tracked through its BCTP rotation from Seminar through WFX. Information was obtained from the BCTP O/C cadre and the training audience during the Seminar in an attempt to trace the ways in which information obtained during the Seminar was used to prepare for the WFX. The

O/C cadre completed surveys which described their observations concerning their cell or area of coverage with the battle staff. Observations included information concerning improvements which the cell needed to make in their process, as well as recommendations provided to the cell for how to make the improvements. The training audience (attendees listed above) completed a survey covering their perceptions of the Seminar, what changes they would make to the format or content, how Seminar attendance changed the way in which they would prepare for the WFX, etc.

After the WFX, the O/C cadre was queried regarding improvements in the areas identified during the Seminar, and if any of their recommendations for improvements had been implemented during WFX. Additionally, the training audience which was surveyed during the Seminar was again surveyed concerning specific ways in which they believed their WFX performance was better than it might have been had they not attended the Seminar.

Information concerning training practices preceding WFX equivalent rotations at lower echelons (NTC and JRTC) was obtained from studies conducted earlier by Army Research Institute.² These studies will be described and the results discussed in a later section of this paper.

Results

Perceived Utility of the Seminar

The respondents were almost unanimous in stating that the Seminar provided the Commander an excellent opportunity to train his command and staff team, provided a challenging team building opportunity and contributed very much to a better understanding of the Commander's expectations. The belief was expressed that the separation of the Commanders and their command groups from the distractions of daily activities, the availability of personnel from outside the unit to run and staff the simulation, and the availability of the external facilitators were the things which made the Seminar more beneficial than home station efforts. Many stated that the Seminar provided one of the few opportunities for the Commander to meet with his subordinate commanders and staff to discuss warfighting philosophy, and that this opportunity to "get into the Commander's head" was the real strength of the Seminar.

Respondents were somewhat less complimentary concerning their evaluation of the Seminar's contribution to their understanding of Airland Battle Doctrine and generally did not find it very useful for this purpose. However, most felt that the Seminar contributed very much to their unit's warfighting skills

² Keesling, J. Ward; Ford, Patrick; O'Mara, Francis; McFann, Howard; and Holz, Robert (1992). The Determinants of Effective Performance of Combat Units at the National Training Center.

Thompson, J. Thomas; Thompson, George D.; Pleban, Robert J.; and Valentine, Patrick, J. (1991). Battle Staff Training and Synchronization in Light Infantry Battalions and Task Forces.

and to their unit's understanding and execution of command and staff procedures.

Although the Seminar was viewed as having moderate to very little impact upon how they intended to prepare for the Warfighter Exercise, the majority of the respondents indicated belief that their unit's performance in the Warfighter would be significantly improved by having attended the Seminar. Some of the things mentioned which they felt would enhance Warfighter performance were a heightened awareness of the level of detail required in the planning process, the opportunity to walk through the planning process from front to back, and the improved teamwork and lines of communication. A majority of the respondents indicated that there was no other training event that they knew of which could better prepare them to perform well in their Warfighter.

Perceived Utility for Lower Echelons

The brigade and separate battalion commanders who attended the Seminar with their Divisions were asked if they felt that a similar seminar would be beneficial at their echelon of command. The respondents indicated that such a training event would be very beneficial to their units and their recommendations were that the structure and attendees list be similar to BCTP's Seminar, only tailored for their echelon.

Impact on Warfighter Performance

For one of the Divisions included in this study, we were able to have the BCTP Observer/Controller (O/C) Cadre track specific areas of performance from Seminar through Warfighter. The O/Cs recorded areas where the Battle Staff's performance during Seminar showed need of improvement and for which the O/Cs provided diagnostic feedback to the unit. Suggestions were also made during the Seminar for ways in which the staff could improve in areas where needed. During the Warfighter, the O/Cs recorded whether the weak areas showed improvement and whether recommendations had been implemented. The O/C respondents reported substantial improvement during Warfighter in nearly all of the areas identified during the Seminar.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the data collected in this study was minimal, the indications are that the Seminar does in fact have utility in preparing the units for Warfighter Exercises. For the Commander, his primary staff, and major subordinate commanders, the major impact appears to be through the team building opportunity and the undisturbed environment in which to develop a common understanding of the Commander's style and philosophy. For the Battle Staff, the Seminar provides an opportunity to identify and work through any "bugs" which they may have in their staff processes.

In regard to the question of desirability of seminar-like training events for echelons below Division, little new data was gathered for this study. Instead, data from two other ARI studies (referenced above) were used to determine if there is a documented NTC and JRTC performance shortfall at battalion and brigade level which could be improved by pre-rotation seminar training. These studies compared NTC and JRTC performance data to measures of personnel and training factors taken at home station prior to the rotation in order to determine what distinguished high performing units from others.

Some of the relevant findings of these studies are that :

-staff integration tasks - obtaining and sharing information among staff, making staff decisions, and performing as a team were associated with high performing units at the NTC.

-units which engaged in a variety of training events were higher performing at the NTC.

-there is some relationship between leadership competencies and mission performance at the NTC.

-synchronization of critical command and staff technical and tactical activities has not been consistently effective when measured at the JRTC. Furthermore, unit commanders and staff frequently did not recognize staff deficiencies until after rotation to the JRTC.

These problems are ones which can appropriately be addressed with pre-rotation seminar training. Both Seminar Workshops and Decision Exercise components would be beneficial to battalion and brigade commanders and staffs preparing for a CTC rotation. This training event must be tailored to the echelon and ideally would have outside support for information presentation, discussion facilitation, feedback to the unit, and interface with the computer simulation. Also, one of the key factors for success of the BCTP Seminar is the fact that the commanders and staffs are isolated from daily distractors so that they may concentrate fully on the training event. This should be considered a crucial element when planning for seminar events at any echelon.

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