



U3C1L3

## Continuous Improvement

### Keywords:

accreditation  
collaboration  
continuous  
improvement  
incremental  
mitigate

### What You Will Learn to Do

Develop a Continuous Improvement Plan for your JROTC Battalion

### Linked Core Abilities

- Build your capacity for life-long learning
- Communicate using verbal, non-verbal, visual, and written techniques
- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world
- Take responsibility for your actions and choices
- Treat self and others with respect
- Apply critical thinking techniques

## Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- **Identify** Battalion problem areas or areas in need of improvement
- **Establish** goals that facilitate continuous improvement
- **Outline** milestones for progress toward your Battalion goal
- **Document** progress toward the goal
- **Revise** your plan based on the results of an evaluation
- **Define** key words: accreditation, collaboration, continuous improvement, incremental, mitigate

### Essential Question

How will you lead your Battalion to achieve continuous improvement?

## Introduction

As a JROTC Cadet leader, you are responsible for the goals and outcomes of your team. You need to have a clear idea of how the program mission, vision, values, and goals relate to your Battalion. You also need to work with your Battalion to establish goals that facilitate **continuous improvement**. In this lesson, you'll learn how to identify problem areas (or areas in need of improvement), set goals, establish milestones, document progress, and continuously improve your Battalion's performance.

## Continuous Improvement

Have you ever tried to fix something that was broken? If it was a flat tire or a school paper with grammar errors, you were probably able to make corrections in one step. Working with teams and Battalions usually isn't that simple. Making corrections and improving the outcomes for your team will involve a series of steps, where behaviors improve over time. We call this process of ongoing improvement continuous improvement. It requires you as a leader to identify problems, develop plans for improvement, monitor performance, and maybe even change your plans a number of times.

The idea of continuous improvement dates back to American manufacturing processes in the 1920s. Managers and engineers working in factories developed plans to improve the quality of their mass-produced products, as well as improve the performance of workers. Today, there are several models that focus on continuous improvement—Deming's PDCA model, Six Sigma, Lean, and Total Quality Management.

In this lesson, you learn about the model used by Army JROTC—Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate. This process is not unique to JROTC. When you get a job, your employer may have a continuous improvement process. In addition, almost all educational institutions use some sort of improvement program as part of their **accreditation** process. Talk to your instructors, teachers, or administrators about the improvement program used at your school. Your faculty can be a great resource as you embark on your effort to affect continuous improvement in your Battalion.

### *Essential Question:*

*How will you lead your Battalion to achieve continuous improvement?*

## Keywords

**continuous improvement:**  
The ongoing process of improvement

**accreditation:**  
The process of certifying that all requirements of a school, curriculum, etc., have been met

## Improving Your Battalion

You have obligations and duties as a leader to help your school's JROTC program run smoothly. Many of these duties are part of the Cadet Command regulations. But beyond that, what kinds of goals do you have as staff for your unit? Are you looking at ways to continuously improve your Battalion? Perhaps you've worked with the principal of your school about a mentoring or tutoring program to help increase test scores. Maybe you'd like to help Cadets in your unit become more active in community service or service learning projects. What goals has your staff set for the academic school year? What benchmarks have you developed to check the goal and make changes as needed to accomplish it? This lesson will guide you through the process of identifying areas for improvement, setting goals, assigning tasks, monitoring progress, and evaluating your results.

Throughout the JROTC curriculum there are lesson topics that focus on improvement. Most pertain to personal improvement, but the principles and concepts of goal setting, personal success, and leadership development can be enhanced as you look at unit or Battalion improvement initiatives. If your staff has not already considered a unit goal for this school year, take a peek at some lessons within the curriculum that may spur you on toward developing a Continuous Improvement Plan with checkpoints along the way. Some topics you might review include:

- Decision Making and Goal Setting
- Elements of Leadership
- Communication Skills
- Team Building Skills
- The Planning Process

As part of the JROTC program evaluation, you will prepare your battalion's Continuous Improvement Plan, followed by a briefing that outlines your plan. Use the Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate process and checklist to assist you and your team on this project.

## Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate

To understand the Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate model, think of it as a cycle—not a series of steps. When you apply continuous improvement, you may go through the steps many times. Sometimes, you may change plans in mid-course. The important thing is that each time you go through the cycle, the performance of your Battalion should make some improvement.

**Incremental** improvement indicates that your team is making progress; breakthrough improvement shows that the team has made large gains.

## Keyword

**Incremental:**  
Adding on, often in a series of small steps



Figure 1.3.1

In JROTC, you'll research and collect data to help you identify areas in need of improvement. Once you've decided where to focus your efforts, you'll develop and implement your Continuous Improvement Plan using the Plan, Do/Act Evaluate model. You won't learn the process overnight; expect to be mentored by your instructors. Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate may sound like a simple process, but implementing it with results takes time and experience.

As you read the details of Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate, you'll notice that this model uses the seven step Decision-Making/Problem-Solving process introduced in an earlier lesson. Used together, the continuous improvement and the seven step processes make a sure pathway to success.

### PLAN

At the start of a new school year, Cadets review JROTC program mission, vision, values, and outcomes and discuss how these relate to their Battalion. Cadet staff uses the review to plan activities for the year, assuring that each activity supports the program. If you are not addressing one of the program goals with an activity, you may need to plan something else or rethink the importance of the goal in the first place.



Figure 1.3.2

1. **Identify the Problem:** What are the significant issues in your Battalion? Which issue is having the greatest negative impact on your Battalion? Which issue, once solved, will have the greatest positive impact on your Battalion? This is the starting point for your Continuous Improvement Plan: Define the problem you intend to solve. Identifying problems is a skill that will serve you later in life and in other aspects of JROTC.

**Example:** During a recent JROTC Leadership and Academic Bowl (JLAB), the top 40 leadership teams were required to identify the greatest challenge faced by their Battalions. Challenges ranged from academic proficiency among Cadets to Battalion communication. Close to 25% of Battalions indicated that low Cadet involvement in Battalion activities was a significant issue.

2. **Gather Information:** Now that you've settled on a problem, gather information relating to the problem. For example, what are the causes of the problem? What are the impacts of the problem? Consider all your resources including Cadets, instructors, teachers, counselors, etc. that can give you information about the problem. Look at unit challenge and best practice reports generated by other Battalions. These reports are available on the JROTC Web Portal [www.usarmyjrotc.com](http://www.usarmyjrotc.com). The more you research and learn about the problem, the better equipped you will be to solve it.

3. **Develop Solutions:** Leaders in all walks of life are problem solvers. Solving problems requires critical thinking, analysis, and **collaboration** with team members. You might see only one or two options. Brainstorming solutions with your team will bring multiple perspectives and opinions. You'll probably find that there are many ways to overcome or **mitigate** the problem.

**Example:** Low Cadet involvement experienced by many JROTC Battalions. What can be done to encourage Cadets to get involved? Here are some of the ideas from teams at a recent JLAB:

- a. Provide incentives. Awards, trips, and public recognition
- b. Improve communication. Make sure Cadets are aware of opportunities for involvement. Ask Cadets to brief classmates on their activities to generate interest.

## Keywords

**collaboration:**

The act of working together

**mitigate:**

To overcome or fix a problem

- c. Improve publicity. Showcase Cadet activities and accomplishments in the Battalion (newsletter, posters, announcements), in school (web site, posters, bulletin boards, school board), and in the community (local TV station, newspaper)
4. Analyze and Compare Options: Once you have brainstormed possible solutions, list the pros and cons of each option. In some cases, you will be able to take several actions to solve the problem. In other cases, you'll have to compare solutions and choose the one that will work best for you. When comparing solutions, be sure to use the same criteria in your evaluation. Some criteria you may use include time, cost, resources, facilities, or approval process.

**DO/ACT**

5. Decide: Leaders are decision makers. You have collectively identified the problem, causes, impacts, and potential solutions and now it's time to decide, plan, and act.

- Choose the solution(s) most likely to achieve results
- Provide planning guidance to the staff
- Begin to develop your plan

Remember to use SMART goals as you assign responsibilities to Cadet leaders.

- Specific
- Measureable
- Attainable
- Results
- Time Frame



Figure 1.3.3

6. Plan (Develop the MOI and Briefing): Communicating your decision and plan to the Battalion (subordinate leaders and Cadets) is crucial to solving the problem. The most common methods used in JROTC include the Memorandum of Instruction (MOI) and Five Paragraph Field Order. Both documents contain the same information so the choice is yours. (Your instructor will give you examples of these documents.) In addition to an order or MOI, you will need to develop a presentation that briefs others on your Continuous Improvement Plan. You can use the briefing to communicate your plan to the JROTC Battalion, school administrators, the School Board, parents, or community members. You will also use the briefing as part of your presentation for the JROTC Program of Accreditation (JPA), which is described in the next section of this text.



**7a. Implement the Plan:** This is where the rubber meets the road. You have developed a detailed plan and presentation; you have communicated well and the key players understand their roles and responsibilities. Now it's time to supervise, manage, and accomplish the mission.

Cadets should do all the work to plan, establish the funds or resources needed, find Cadet volunteers to help setup, clean-up, publicize, execute the project, and send reports to their supervising instructor. When an activity is accomplished that supports a goal, the progress and measures of success should be recorded and kept in a portfolio.

There's an old saying in the Army that no plan survives first contact with the enemy. A significant leadership responsibility is adjusting to changes and unforeseen conditions. As the operation unfolds, you will need to have periodic meetings to assess and document your progress. These meetings are typically referred to as In-Progress Reviews (IPR). During the IPR, record your accomplishments and adjustments to your plan. Record your progress using whatever tools make the most sense (notes in a binder, spreadsheet documents, flowcharts, or timelines). You will need to incorporate these into your JPA briefing. (Your instructor will give you an example of this document.)

Remember that every successful meeting begins with an agenda outlining what you plan to cover. Designate a recorder or secretary to take minutes and document progress and action steps.

## EVALUATE

**7b. Assess the Results:** Once the action is complete, you will need to determine if you accomplished your goal. The common process used in the Army and JROTC is the After Action Review (AAR). Like the Army, JROTC is a learning organization. We use the AAR process to assess our strengths and weaknesses and learn from our mistakes. The AAR should compare the list of what you planned to do with the list of what you actually accomplished. It should include reflection on the planning process, communication, and cooperation as well as the continuous improvement activity you just completed. (Your instructor will give you an example of this document.)



Figure 1.3.4

The AAR format includes areas of success, which you would like to “sustain” and areas you would like to “improve.” To ensure adequate understanding, each issue should be addressed using the following outline:

- Issue (What happened?)
- Discussion (Why did it happen?)
- Recommendation (How can we do this better?)



Significant AAR findings will be incorporated into your year-end or JPA briefing. AAR findings will also be used by subsequent Battalion leaders to strengthen the process of continuous improvement. An additional requirement of the JROTC Program of Accreditation is to write impact statements on the outcome of your Continuous Improvement Plan. The impact statement should include the positive result of your effort and the manner in which it has improved your Battalion.

## Presenting Your Continuous Improvement Results

Your Continuous Improvement Plan is closely tied to the JPA presentation. The presentation to brigade personnel should involve participation by all staff and include the:

- Overview of the purpose of the Continuous Improvement Plan.
- Introduction of all Cadet Staff and their role in this project.
- Details of the problem, improvement plan, implementation, evaluation, and reflection.
- Conclusion of the presentation should include a plan for next steps in continuous improvement.



*Figure 1.3.5*

There are fifteen specific criteria your team should know about for your JPA presentation. As you and your team prepare for the presentation, review the checklist below:

<b>Battalion Staff Continuous Improvement Presentation Checklist</b>	✓
Presentation includes statement of goal, purpose of goal, and how goal supports the mission of JROTC or school	
Battalion staff are introduced; those present introduce themselves and explain their role in the Continuous Improvement Plan	
Presentation clearly identifies problem or area for improvement	
Presentation includes data or research gathered to inform need for improvement	
Presentation includes a SMART goal-setting strategy appropriate for the problem defined	
Presentation includes reference to knowledge and skills acquired from JROTC curriculum—such as decision making, goal setting, problem solving, and team building	
Cadet staff react appropriately to verbal and nonverbal feedback; staff are knowledgeable about their portion of delivered presentation	
Presentation includes benchmarks, milestones, and timelines for accomplishing the goal	
Presentation includes final data and effect of change based on milestones set and met; plan states if the goal was met and how curriculum supported meeting the goal	
Presentation states if the goal was met or not met; states areas of improvement based on benchmarks or milestones not achieved or met	
Presentation includes individual reflection (from each staff presenting)	
Presentation includes team reflection and what area in the continuous improvement process to improve upon in the future	
Cadets are introduced properly and in proper attire	
Presenting staff refer to their visual, support visuals with appropriate speaking skills	
Presenting staff establish good eye contact and appropriate gestures throughout presentation	

## Conclusion

In this lesson, you learned that continuous improvement is an ongoing process. It contributes to effective leadership and can make your team more cohesive and productive.

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## Lesson Check-up

1. Describe the Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate process of continuous improvement.
2. Explain how Plan, Do/Act, Evaluate relates to the decision-making process.
3. How is the SMART goal-setting process used in continuous improvement?