

FEATURED PAPER – OCTOBER 2007

Churchill the Agile Project Manager
Churchill Personally Communicates
Part 14 in the Series

By Mark Kozak-Holland

Parts 1 - 13 in this series available at:

http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/aug.htm

Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his “agile” approach to project management and his skills as a PM in the summer of 1940. Part 13 looked at how Churchill put in place a communication plan to bolster morale in the Government, media, and public. This article discusses how Churchill personally communicated using both verbal and non-verbal communication to fight the mood of defeatism, build confidence, and get buy in into his plan.

In today’s world PMs need to set up effective communication mechanisms where “effective project communications preserves your control in a project.” This requires a monitoring component in the communication plan to provide feedback on the plans effectiveness, and what is happening on the ground.

Churchill’s project communications were centered around radio broadcasts used to speak directly with the public. The need to keep public opinion behind the war effort and home front morale high was at the core and he was deeply conscious of this. To get it right and to gain and sustain public confidence he invested inordinate amounts of time. For example he would prepare for one hour, an incredible amount of time for every minute of speech. A typical 40 minute speech would take 40 hours of preparation. This is completely unrealistic for today’s PM but it does put the high value of this activity into perspective.



Churchill's schedule of broadcasts delivered a series of renowned speeches which when all seemed lost rallied the country to a cause. Vision and realism were central to the speeches and Churchill's gift was his ability to personally address his radio listeners “not as unseen masses but as individuals.”

Churchill envisioned his audience as a “couple and their family gathered around their coal fire in the cottage-home” and so personalized his message.



In today’s world PMs know that project morale is essential to a fully working project as it can make or break it. Not all communication is verbal, actions or “non-verbal” communication also send out a strong message, and make a statement that can be equally important to a project.

In June 1940 Churchill exemplified this approach as he recognized early on that a mood of defeatism transfixed the U.K. at all levels. Encouraged by the propaganda victory of Dunkirk (Part 13) Churchill took actions to show determination to cause, instill confidence in his people and build project morale:

- He revoked the plans for the Royal Family and Government from being evacuated to Canada, where Royal Navy ships had been placed on standby.
- He ordered the disposition of great art works from the National Gallery into caves rather than being sent out of country.
- He also discouraged the evacuation of children around the Empire, up to 6,000 children mainly of the rich had been evacuated.
- He stopped bombed out theatres from being boarded up, condemning any idea that Londoners should "scuttle" the culture and arts, “that to forsake the normal routine would be an admission that the enemy had won.”
- He sent an edict to all civil servants to avoid defeatist talk expecting them to set an example of “steadiness and resolution.” He also encouraged the reporting of any officers “found to be consciously exercising a disturbing influence.”

- He stopped defeatist chatter in his cabinet and focused on changing the outlook and attitude of his ministers.
- After learning about the demoralizing effects of an air raid in the north east he responded by sending a personal message to 3,000 people on the eve of an attempted invasion.

Churchill had the ability to hide his doubts and fears from the public. He stated that “one of his hardest tasks and greatest achievements was projecting confidence, even at the blackest of times.”

Churchill monitored the effectiveness of the plan through the following activities:

- He scoured all the newspapers every day (9 or 10) for what the population was reading, studying the editorials in detail.
- Churchill traveled and visited areas and cities that were attacked, and bombed out. Tentative at first meeting people face to face he was pleasantly surprised at how well he was received and his visits proved an enormous boost to public morale.
- The Ministry of Information carried out regular and detailed investigations into opinions, morale and feelings of the public. The fieldworkers of Mass Observation were an army of mostly middle-class eavesdroppers and pub conversation listeners who reported the mood of the nation for Churchill, occasionally even with statistical estimates of a town by town synthesis. These were the early days of scientific polling later known as the Gallup Poll.
- Professor Lindemann ran Churchill’s personal statistical branch with 8 university statisticians made up from subject specialists. On a daily basis this group would provide an independent assessment of any aspect of the war. This was distilled from thousands of sources of data into succinct charts and figures. Today this is known as Operations Research, used to the conduct of the war. This allowed Churchill to make quick decisions based on accurate data.

Conclusion

Churchill’s personal communications had a significant impact on the population, and further continued the positive effect from the propaganda victory at Dunkirk (Part 13). He also actively used the mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of the plan, and adjusted it as needed.



Mark Kozak-Holland
Author



Mark Kozak-Holland's latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled "*Project Lessons from the Great Escape (Luft III)*" <http://www.mmpubs.com/books-LFH.html>. It draws parallels from this event in World War II to today's business challenges. His previous books include "*Churchill's Adaptive Enterprise: Lessons for Business Today*", "*Titanic Lessons for IT Projects*", and "*Avoiding Titanic Disasters: Project Lessons for IT Executives*". Mark is a Senior Business Architect with HP Services and regularly writes and speaks on the subject of emerging technologies and lessons that can be learned from historical projects. He can be contacted via his Web site at www.lessons-from-history.com or via email to mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca. For more information on the Great Escape Memorial Foundation see www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com