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Churchill the Agile Project Manager
Churchill's Team
Part 16 in the Series

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Parts 1 - 15 in this series available at:

http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/nov.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 15 looked at how Churchill stiffened resolve, took the offense with decisive action, and focused on the morality of events. This was very pertinent to Churchill's long term strategy. This article switches gears and looks at how Churchill's organization prepared itself for the air battle to meet his short term objectives of staving off the invasion.

For Churchill radio broadcasts were the core to his project communications and used to promote his strategy (Part 10). Combined with his governance framework (Part 11) this would allow his organization to pursue the complex project, the single objective of which was the survival of the U.K. The successes of his public communications after Dunkirk (Part 14) took the pressure off him and his team to execute the project.

The project would span the breadth of the U.K. and touch the British establishment, government, industry, armed forces, society, and economy. Churchill threw everything behind the project that would deliver a solution (part 11) to ramp up the capabilities of the much depleted Royal Air Force (RAF) Fighter Command squadrons. The solution consisted of four areas:

- The first, *the “fighter” supply-chain*, focused on supplying the essentials to meet the specific demands of RAF Fighter Command. From the gathering of vital raw materials, transporting these, and prioritizing their use to the most critical factories related to fighter production. In parallel a reorganization of the labor force ensured the manpower, with the right skills, to run the *supply-chain*.
- The second, related to amassing information on enemy activities, *creating intelligence and ultimately knowledge*. It could also provide feedback collecting data after actions were taken to determine the impact of these.
- The third, related to investing in emerging technologies so that RAF Fighter Command could *better manage its resources* specifically its pilots and fighters.

The output would be an integrated air defense system, a sense-and-respond system, with a complex decision-making environment, at its center.

- The fourth, was a *command centre* and executive dashboard for Churchill, his inner government and Chiefs of Staff. It was a principal facility and community that made the overriding decisions that affected the other areas.

In today's projects establishing the right mix in the project team is a prerequisite for success. A good team is a prerequisite to a successful project. Every PM knows that people make or break a project. Looking for skill sets is just part of the search, as important is leadership and personalities for the team leader roles that will help install confidence and rally support for the project. Yet in a recent study only 41% of project managers engage senior management and/or sponsor support to build their team, and as few as 6% of fight to get the best people on their projects.

Churchill needed leaders and visionaries that could cut through the red tape of bureaucracy for this project to be successful. He saw the mistakes of the First World War where the government had failed to centrally coordinate the war effort. He created a National Government or *Grand Coalition* so as not to repeat these mistakes and brought into the highest positions the "*best qualified*" members. To the annoyance of his supporters he kept in adversaries like Chamberlain and Halifax to unify his War Cabinet and strengthen national confidence. He also knew an "*outcast*" could become a "*focus for negotiating discontents*" with the war. "*Better in than out*" and "*let bygones be bygones,*" was a magnanimous gesture.

Churchill knew what problems had to be addressed. He had the power to appoint or dismiss everyone, and used this power readily. As a PM he had to make sure he had the right leaders in place to be able to pull the teams together:

- The first saw Churchill's appointment of Max Beaverbrook (see image below), a Canadian newspaper magnate, to run the fighter supply chain at the newly formed Ministry of Air Production. He was Churchill's confidant, friend, industrialist, and a no nonsense newspaper baron. It was significant because he was given the mandate to cut through the red tape.
- The second, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), had Stewart Menzies at its head. As Chief of SIS, appointed in 1939, he was responsible for wartime intelligence and counterintelligence departments, and the fledgling codebreaking efforts at Bletchley Park. He became Churchill's master spy chief.
- The third, RAF Fighter Command, had Hugh Dowding at its helm who had helped establish it in 1935. Dowding was seen as difficult and remote, but in reality he was very focused on objectives, and very close to his crews and pilots. Although some wanted to remove Dowding, Churchill told his Air Minister, "*I think he is one of the very best men you have got... he has my full confidence.*"

When Dowding presented the case not to send any more fighters to France Churchill supported him.

- The fourth, the command centre had Churchill at its head. He appointed himself Minister in the newly created Ministry of Defense (Part 11) so that he would be in a position to put forward suggestions that had to be considered by the CoS and control the course of the war.



Max Beaverbrook pictured on Time magazine, Sep. 16, 1940

Conclusion

In today's projects, specifically those that cross organizational boundaries, finding the right mix of people for the project team is a prerequisite for success. Often players from across the organization are needed to help with adoption and buy in.



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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 (presentations and workshops) 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