

FEATURED PAPER
Churchill the Agile Project Manager - Part 9
Aftermath of Dunkirk
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Parts 1 - 8 in the series are available at:

http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/mar.htm#2

Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his "agile" approach to project management, and his management skills as a PM in May 1940. Part 8 looked at how the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) faced with destruction left Churchill with no option but to evacuate, straining the Allied relationship to a breaking point. This article looks at how Churchill's position as PM was at considerable risk, and how he turned things around through communications and the most significant speech of his career.

On June the 4th the Dunkirk evacuation ended. Although the British had evacuated a greater number of exhausted troops, most of its heavy fighting equipment, enough for ten divisions and over 200 ships, was lost (Part 8). Dunkirk was a complete disaster in terms of equipment loss. In retrospect the BEF faced complete elimination and for Churchill there was no other choice but to evacuate.

In today's world project timing is everything in terms of communication and delivery. As the project twists and turns a PM needs to be in tune with the pulse of the project and know when to communicate, and deliver key morale raising talks/speeches.

On the evening of June the 4th Churchill knew he had a split in the war cabinet (Halifax and Chamberlain Part 8), and discontent with senior members in Parliament. He was in shaky position, a further loss in support meant he could be quickly evicted from power. However, when he addressed the junior members of his government in a private meeting he was bolstered by their emotional support, as they rallied to him (Part 8) and the cause. Through the evacuation Churchill kept repeating "*whatever happens at Dunkirk, the British will fight on*" a resoluteness to cause.

Churchill went to address Parliament and he knew that not in 900 years had Britain faced such a humiliating defeat. He had to make the most of it and spin it into a victory of morale. Churchill explained the sequence of events and how initial expectations for evacuating 45,000 troops were vastly superseded with the evacuation of 338,226. This was a triumph in itself,

although the truth lay in that Hitler was looking for a peaceful solution he thought he could better obtain if he allowed the BEF to escape.

Churchill had to admit and address the biggest issue the equipment loss:
"The best of all we had to give had gone to the British Expeditionary Force, and although they had not the numbers of tanks and some articles of equipment which were desirable, they were a very well and finely equipped Army. They had the first-fruits of all that our industry had to give, and that is gone.

He also made it a rallying point for bringing in vast changes to war production:

"An effort the like of which has never been seen in our records is now being made. Work is proceeding everywhere, night and day, Sundays and week days. Capital and Labor have cast aside their interests, rights, and customs and put them into the common stock. Already the flow of munitions has leaped forward. There is no reason why we should not in a few months overtake the sudden and serious loss that has come upon us, without retarding the development of our general program."

Churchill praised both the Royal Navy in running the gauntlet into the harbor and beaches, and the army for holding the perimeter through the evacuation. He pointed out the army was saved to fight another day and that planning a defense was a priority:

"We have to reconstitute and build up the British Expeditionary Force once again, under its gallant Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gort. All this is in train; but in the interval we must put our defenses in this Island into such a high state of organization that the fewest possible numbers will be required to give effective security and that the largest possible potential of offensive effort may be realized."

Churchill talked up the role of RAF fighters because he knew from the Chiefs of Staff strategic report (Part 7 and 8) this is where the short-term investments had to be made:

"The Royal Air Force engaged the main strength of the German Air Force, and inflicted upon them losses of at least four to one; and the Navy, using nearly 1,000 ships of all kinds, carried over 335,000 men, French and British, out of the jaws of death and shame, to their native land and to the tasks which lie immediately ahead."

Churchill brought the civilian population into the conflict by explaining the massive impact of civilian craft, without which the evacuation would not have been possible. The public readily identified with this, and the popular press made it central to the story.

Churchill also dispensed ideas about suing for peace and sent a clear message to fight on:

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail."

Churchill then went on to deliver probably the most memorable speech in British history:

"We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender..."

Parliament broke into boisterous cheers and he was congratulated warmly. One member wrote to him: *"That was worth a 1000 guns, and speeches of 1,000 years."*

In a significant lesson for today's projects Churchill had told a story that could be related from person to person. This was a rallying cry for the nation and became a historical turning point for the British to build on the positive psychological boost that was needed. To emphasize the point he knew the road ahead was hard he said *"wars are not won by evacuations."*

Conclusion

Churchill walked a tight rope were he could have been ejected from power following Dunkirk. Instead he pulled off one of the most significant speeches of the whole war and that of his life. In this one speech not only did he boost morale but he started to set the priorities which will be examined in Part 10. This was leadership at the finest and Churchill's prestige was elevated, and so was his resolution to keep going.

Mark Kozak-Holland's latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled "Churchill's Adaptive Enterprise: Lessons for Business Today" (<http://www.mmpubs.com/churchill/>). It draws parallels between events in World War II and today's business challenges. 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



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