

FEATURED PAPER
Churchill the Agile Project Manager - Part 10
Churchill Lays Out a Strategy with
Short/long Term Objectives

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Parts 1 - 9 in the series are available at:

http://www.pmworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/apr.htm#2

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 May 1940. Part 9 looked at how Churchill’s position as PM was put at considerable risk, by the Dunkirk evacuation, and how he swung his communication plan into action. This article looks at how Churchill laid out a strategy with short and long term objectives.

On June the 5th Churchill had been swept up by a series of event (Parts 3 to 8) and had to operate reactively. He had been in power for less than a month. Dunkirk, a grasped victory from the jaws of defeat, gave Churchill a small window to operate proactively and start to implement an overall strategy. In every project there comes a point were the PM needs to lay down plans and bring clarity to the project.

On the same day the Axis forces lined up against the rest of France 119 divisions, including 10 Armored divisions. By June the 7th, Allied troops fell back to a front, 60 miles north of Paris. The Battle of France became a foregone conclusion. With the threat only 21 miles away the U.K. was now the next target. Churchill warned Parliament that “*invasion was a real risk to be met with total and confident defiance.*” He was determined to fight on but this was not going to be easy. Churchill had to identify and prioritize all the problems, lay out a strategy with short and long term objectives, and then develop solutions. The problems were:

- With no potential allies in the Soviets who had a non-aggression pact with the Nazis, and the U.S. was staunchly neutral, the fight was in one theatre.
- An invasion was likely in July to August as the U.K. was the last Western Ally still at war.
- The small British army was responsible for defending a very long 700 mile coast line, with no existing fortifications, and had little equipment, and no heavy equipment.
- The large over populated and vastly industrialized island had an economy on a civilian and not a war footing.
- With the exception of coal all raw materials were scarce, expensive (driving up the costs of production), and imported. About 67% of food was imported.

- Serious splits within the government with some senior ministers reluctant to fight on. Public confidence in Churchill and his project team was still at a very low.
- The Royal Air Force (RAF) was about 50% below its target strength and woefully behind in its ability to fend off the German Luftwaffe, having lost 509 fighters (50%) in April and May of 1940. With 675 RAF fighters it faced an estimated 3,500 aircraft (1100 fighters).
- The race to reach a target (set in 1939) of 1,200 fighters was lost. Aircraft production was 6 months behind schedule and needed to be stepped up but it could not possibly meet the Luftwaffe strength in time. The total U.K. factory output of 290 fighters per month was very low, compared to the Axis output of 500 fighters per month, and could not possibly produce enough in fighters in time for a prolonged air battle. A new Spitfire factory had been trying to get up to speed for 6 months and was still unable to meet its targets.
- An acute shortage of pilots, around 60%, meant the force was below operational strength.

Churchill set out clear objectives of what he had to do, related to the problems, their scope, whether they could be solved, and determined what resources were available.

- In the short term he had to stave off the invasion.
- In the long term he had to somehow get the Americans involved in the war. There were no other powerful allies he could call upon, as the Soviet Union and Nazis had signed a non-aggression pact.

Churchill defined a short and long term strategy to win the war. In the short term (2 months):

- He had to restore confidence in his project and the will to fight on first within his cabinet, then with the government, and then with the public.
- He had to inspire his nation to continue a fight already considered lost by many, win the air battle and stall invasion till spring 1941.

Based on everything Churchill had learned in his short time in the office he had to immediately:

1. Set up an effective project team.
2. Create an overarching governance framework.
3. Make up for the numerical disparity in fighters by:
 - Improving the supply-chain, focusing on producing essentials tied to the specific demands of RAF Fighter Command.
 - Investing in emerging technologies so RAF Fighter Command could better manage its resources.
4. Transform his organization and processes to line up behind the project.
5. Run it is an “agile project”— flexible and open to new and changing requirements.

As part of the long term strategy (up to 5-7 years), Churchill had to:

- Quickly move the peacetime economy to a war footing to sustain total economic warfare.
- Expand the war through an alliance with U.S.
- Bring hope to Nazi occupied Europe and to the free world.

This could only be enabled if the short term strategy was met, which looked unlikely and against all the odds.

In summary, Churchill committed himself and the nation to all-out war until victory was achieved. Behind this objective lay his short and long term strategies to which he adhered with remarkable consistency throughout the war. The Axis was the enemy and nothing would distract the entire British people from defeating it. Anyone who shared this goal, even a Communist, was an acceptable ally.

“The problem is not winning the war, but persuading people to let you win it.”
—Winston Churchill”

Conclusion

Churchill used the breathing space he gained to lay out a strategy which he immediately enabled. Part 11 discusses how he set up a Governance Framework to aid in transforming the U.K.

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 Architecture 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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