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Churchill the Agile Project Manager

Storey's Gate

Part 21 in the Series

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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. With an invasion imminent Part 20 looked at the third area of the overall project (Part 16) RAF Fighter Command, and how emerging technologies could better manage its pilots and fighters in an integrated air defense or sense-and-respond system. This article looks at the fourth area of the overall project, *command and control of the whole system*. A command centre at the heart of the solution was the final piece in the jigsaw.

For the British the Battle of Flanders/France was a wake up call as agility was the new paradigm in modern warfare. An agile war is dependent on making the best decisions quickly based on the best intelligence available. This starts at a strategic level with the commander at the top passing strategic directives that are cascaded to operational leaders to make decisions and implement in the field. Churchill as a soldier knew the importance of this, so in May 1940, when he visited the newly completed underground facility Storeys Gate, he recognized the value of a secure, and blast proof site. It was close to Downing Street and was designed to protect him, and the War Cabinet, from the expected air raids.

For Churchill it was much more than a bunker (see figure 1 below), and when he saw this he became very enthused to declare: *“This is the room from which I will direct the war.”* The facility was designed to provide Churchill a conducive decision making environment so he could respond with agility. It was a principal facility of close collaboration that made overriding decisions that affected the three other areas (Part 16-20). As a result, it subsequently became his new headquarters for the rest of the war.



Figure 20.1: Storey's Gate Entrance to Churchill's Bunker

The Cabinet War Room, the heart of Storey's Gate, was used for collaboration and real-time decision making at the most senior levels. Here Churchill, embedded into the war cabinet the military arms (Chiefs of Staff) to take part in all cabinet meetings, held daily to deal with all issues from military planning to food rationing. This is symbolized by the seating arrangement. In the First World War he saw how the government was unable to unite the army and navy on the same page, and a lack of overall coordination. Churchill was determined to rectify this by building a close working relationship with the chiefs.

In May 1940 Churchill's mission goals were very clear in that he needed a snapshot of the war, a macro view of battle situations, and this had to be done in real time, or an executive dashboard in today's world. The critical success factors for this were related to the use, at a tactical level, of intelligence to preserve critical resources. Operational data that was readily available included production or manufacturing output, stock levels on fuel and ammunition, and resource losses.

Storey's Gate had to track the changing world and events for rapid complex decisions-making, and for a real-time view at the highest (strategic) level. It needed meaningful real time indicators that were varied and included fighter indicators from Bentley Priory and the Air Ministry like the availability of fighters and stockpiles of fuel, to the supply-chain performance and manufacturing for fighter production from Whitehall, and the enemy order of battle indicators from Bletchley Park and other theatres of war (see figure 3 below).

Source	Lead Indicators (Supplied Daily)
Bentley Priory (and Air Ministry)	Fighter losses by squadron
	Number of sorties flown
	Pilots lost versus new pilots trained and available
	Enemy losses by aircraft type
	Fighter fuel and ammunition stocks available

	Civilian casualties
	Bombing damage to factories, loss in production
Whitehall (ministry of aircraft production)	Fighter production numbers and delivery to airfields
	Raw materials/labor utilization (person hours in production)
	Key fighter-component production numbers and inventory
	CRO repair turnaround in timeframe
	Fighter engine imports from Canada
	Anti-aircraft production numbers
Bletchley Park	Indicators of enemy order of battle
	Enemy plans or intentions

Figure 20.2: Sources of operational data for Key Performance Indicators at Storey's Gate

The Map Room displayed the indicators through real-time maps. The map room was effectively a real-time executive dashboard used for decision making. It had to present different types of indicators and content; the former was of particular importance. Indicators were carefully selected to provide early warning of a challenging situation or a specific event, based on trigger thresholds, so timely, proactive decisions could be made, e.g., the availability of fighters and pilots was critical in battle situations. The pilot losses were by far the more critical.

The maps displaying indicators had to be incisive, intuitive so visitors could rapidly absorb and grasp these to understand decisions and their repercussions. The indicators had to be presented to the right person for decision-making in a timely manner.

Aside from indicators other content/information that was also available from within Storeys Gate took many forms, including extracts from minutes and papers of top-level conferences, letters from the Foreign Office, and situation reports. This enhanced the primary information and helped fill in the blanks.

An executive dashboard drives qualitative improvements, reports performance against goals, establishes priorities, identifies ways to improve performance, highlights flaws in the operation, and ensures sustainability.

In the Map Room he linked the military chain of hierarchy into this command centre. Decisions from the Cabinet War Rooms were transferred immediately to the chain of command. Churchill incorporated the (armed forces) military structures into Storey's Gate, and forced them to share some resources/expertise.



Figure 20.3: Map Room's Underlying Chains of Command

With the map room Churchill could readily follow events from all theatres of battle, and have a big picture view so he could respond accordingly. Churchill was so pleased with the map room that his architects created a traveling map room inside his personal railway carriage. As Churchill traveled across the UK visiting military installations the traveling map room of lead indicators provided him a real-time pulse by which he could read the war, understand battle situations, and determine short-term needs. He could then communicate with the respective commanders, and influence them in the control and performance of the supply chain and production. These lead indicators recognized events like changes in battle fronts that had a direct impact on the supply chain.

Conclusion

The Map Room supported the Cabinet War Room by tracking events, analysis, and real-time information. It cascaded actions to a vast network of linked commands. It processed real time information for decision making, and has a real time view of all war theatres. Storey's Gate became the center of the British War Machine.

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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. Further information on Storey's Gate, visit: <http://cwr.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.923>.