

## **Churchill the Project Manager – Part 4**

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### **Changing face of war Sep 1939 - May 1940**

Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his approach to project management and his PM skills. Part 1 introduced the overall series and how Churchill acquired a project from hell, a project that no one wanted. Part 2 looked at his background, and the skills that he brought to bear to the project that made him so uniquely qualified in May 1940. Part 3 looked at his actions up to 1939 that made him become a real alternative to the status quo. This article looks at the impact of technology, and how when war broke out the Allies were wrestling with how to respond, grounded in a First World War frame of mind. This is important for today's PMs who must determine how to keep abreast of new technologies and their impact.

On the eve of the Second World War in 1939, Churchill had gained enough credibility that the public commanded to bring him back. But Chamberlain believed that Churchill's inclusion in the Cabinet would frustrate his appeasement efforts (Part 3). After the invasion of Poland, Chamberlain declared war and reluctantly, under pressure, brought Churchill into a war cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. Although unwanted by his cabinet colleagues, they needed him to maintain credibility with the changing public disposition. The public saw him not as a warmonger but the backbone of the government, someone who could awaken the nation to fight.

Many organizations today toil to bring forward people for the "top" project jobs. Ask the PMs in the organization who they would support and natural leaders will be pushed forward, those with the credibility and weight to make a real difference with projects.

The Allies should have been woken up with the surprise attack on Poland. With no declaration of war the attack came in the early hours of Sunday morning when the defenders least expected it. Luftwaffe air strikes at airfields started the Blitzkrieg, destroying aircraft still on the ground. By winning air superiority without a major air battle, the Luftwaffe could then concentrate attacks on ground defenses, coordinated closely to rapidly mobile mechanized divisions. Agility, mobility and highly advanced communications were needed. The Soviet Union marched into Eastern Poland under the Nazi-Soviet non-Aggression pact, two weeks into the campaign, highlighting the follies of Chamberlain's appeasement policy (Part 3).

Poland's defeat came quickly, having to fight on two fronts. The defeat was used as propaganda to enhance the Wermacht's profile as Hitler was trying to intimidate other countries into submission without a fight. Chamberlain's reluctant declaration

of war missed the opportunity for a counter attack on the thinly defended Western border that could have given hope to the Polish ally.

In today's world organizational leaders need to be equipped for worse case scenarios with a plan that is ready to launch into a project quickly and that reacts to a particular scenario.

The next 9 months was known as the "phony war" as the U.K. and France dug in and waited in the trenches, and behind the Maginot line. Both countries expected a long drawn out static war like that of the First World War, so the British Army had gone out with the same strategy and tactics. It was outfitted for colonial warfare and to police a global commercial empire.

New emerging technologies through the 1930s had driven the rapid development of military planes, tanks, and motorized vehicles. Even though the western powers had these in greater numbers, they were organized and used to support a static war. For example, elementary equipment such as wireless sets was lacking. And tank fuel tanks were small, as mobility was not seen as critical as supporting infantry. The Allies had failed to realize how technology had changed war.

Today's leaders need to understand how competitors are acting in response to change. What is giving them an edge? Is it an emerging technology? How is it being organized? Are they able to take advantage of a situation? The important lesson is to be proactive and not sit back.

Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty was prepared to sponsor new emerging technologies. He stepped up the experimentation and research of Asdic radar, used in the detection of submarines, and introduced it into ships of the Fleet. He understood the strategic and tactical advantages it would provide.

Churchill was proactive and tried to press the neutral countries (Norway, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and Belgium) to create a united front against Nazism:

*"Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, that the crocodile will eat him last."*

- Winston Churchill, House of Commons, Winter 1939

In February 1940 Churchill wanted to be proactive and to take the war forward through a pre-emptive occupation of the neutral iron mines in Kiruna, Sweden, and the Norwegian iron-ore port of Narvik. However, Chamberlain and the War Cabinet disagreed so the operation was delayed. This gave the Germans the initiative and in April 1940 they invaded Denmark and Norway through a simultaneous operation. German paratroopers were dropped from the air to capture strategic positions, troops emerged from merchant ships to seize key harbors, and seaborne landings were made. The German Air Force quickly established domination of the skies and supported the German army and the *Kriegsmarine*, German Navy, which was only a fraction of the size of the Allied Navy. Roads thought impassible were negotiated

quickly by Germany's mobile troops. The whole German invasion happened so quickly it caught the Allies out despite British efforts. It was an indication of what was to come. Churchill synchronized an Allied response, but it was uncoordinated and too slow.

In today's projects the new mantra has become agility. PMs need to be proactive in understanding changes in technology, managing expectations, and mitigating risks.

## Conclusion

The early events of the Second World War highlighted how technology had changed war and the Allies' failure to grapple with it. As Churchill gained power he recognized that one of the topmost goals of a project manager is to understand changes and how to be proactive and agile. By May 1940 he had established much credibility and had become a real hope for the public.

*Editor's note: This is the fourth article in a series by Mark Kozak-Holland published in PM World Today about Winston Churchill the Project Manager. The previous three parts were published in January, April and August 2006. Information about Mark Kozak-Holland's book **Winston Churchill, the Agile Project Manager**, can be found at [www.mmpubs.com](http://www.mmpubs.com).*

### About the Author:



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 <http://www.lessons-from-history.com> or via email to [mark.kozak\\_holl@symantec.com](mailto:mark.kozak_holl@symantec.com)