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Plot Summary:
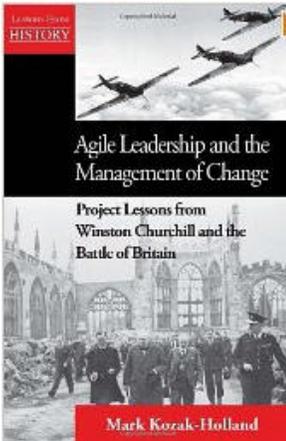
"Around the turn of the millennium, there was a poll conducted in Britain that asked who people thought was the most influential person in all of Britain's history. The winner: Winston Churchill. What set Churchill above the others was his leadership qualities: his ability to create and share a powerful vision, his ability to motivate the population in the face of tremendous fear, and his ability to get others to rally behind him and quickly turn his visions into reality. By any measure, Winston Churchill was a powerful leader.

What many don't know, however, was how Churchill used his leadership skills to restructure the British military, government, and even the British manufacturing sector to support his efforts to rearm the country and get ready for an imminent enemy invasion in early 1940. Churchill started making massive changes immediately after his appointment as Prime Minister, with little time for preparation. That summer, British and German aircraft skirmished in the skies above Britain in preparation for a full German assault on the island nation. Churchill's adaptive sense-and-respond approach to the invaders made the Royal Air force much more agile and responsive to the changing situation, allowing them to repel a much larger and better-equipped enemy. In addition, his changes to the manufacturing sector allowed the nation to dramatically speed up the production of new aircraft to replace their staggering losses.

A lot can be learned about how he managed this enormous change effort. Fortunately, documents and other evidence exist that explains how he did it. Join author Mark Kozak-Holland as he explores how Churchill acted as the head project manager of a massive change project that affected the daily lives of millions of people. Learn about Churchill's change management and agile management techniques and how they can be applied to today's projects." – www.BarnesandNoble.com Overview.

Book Club Meeting Discussion:

The discussion of this book included a review of the importance of communication in several areas. The first was the importance of tailoring the message to the audience and getting the right information to the right stakeholder. This means ensuring that the right person is getting the right information at the right time. An example of this is the differing information that was needed and sent to the manufacturing arm of the Air Ministry, to the Intelligence Services, and to the public. The communication to the public also highlighted the importance of team building. The efforts for the public to recycle and collect aluminum was an example of getting the public involved in the war effort and making them feel that they were all an important part of the process. Another aspect of communication that was discussed was the use of dashboards. The near real time updating of the position of all British and Nazi planes on a map of the coast/country

allowed accurate and rapid decision making to occur. There was even a mobile version of the dashboard created to allow Churchill to be up-to-date in his railroad car.

The group discussed Churchill's implementation of distributed manufacturing and just-in-time inventory. After bombing raids on the large manufacturing plants, the Air Ministry created numerous small manufacturing plants in their stead. This lowered the risk of manufacturing being disrupted by bombings or interrupted supply chains. The Air Ministry also eliminated the spare parts inventory and directed all supplies to the building of new planes. They received daily information on where and how many planes and been shot down and replenished the planes to the affected airfields as new planes came off the assembly line.

Personal Comments:

As a general rule, I do not care for books about the history of wars because they are mostly recitations of battles, troop movement, troop strength and casualties. However, this book fascinated me. It gave insights into the decision making processes of Churchill and his War Cabinet, as well as the swift transformation of processes needed to achieve a British victory. It told me things about the Battle of Britain that I had never heard before underlined the criticality of swift, accurate communication and decision making. The book smoothly transitioned the reader from the review historical events into the view of the war effort as a project to be managed with the stakes being much higher than a normal project, of course. It pointed out how the actions of the War Cabinet and Churchill resemble that of an agile team and agile leader.

From a project management standpoint, the highlight to me was the importance of communication. We often don't pay enough attention to communication in a project especially to the need to send differing messages to the various stakeholders and to the team. Based on the type of projects I usually manage, this is the most beneficial thing I will take back to my projects.