What Changed Your Cheese?

by Sandra Noble, President
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Feeling stressed? Are you pursuing too many moving targets? Or, are there just too many details to keep up with in general? You can't stop the world and get off. Find out how to get on the bus and not get left behind.

GOD, grant me the Serenity

to accept the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can,

and Wisdom to know the difference.

-The Serenity Prayer

In software and technology implementation projects, there needs to be something called "Change Control". And why is this needed? No matter how thorough the business analysis job or how complete the project plan, there's always something that needs to be changed or added after the fact. Users and potential users of the system or technology change their minds. Or think of something that they absolutely cannot live without. Then from the technical side, the developers, programmers and implementers discover things that are incorrect or just won't work. Programmers or testers find things called "bugs" - which is techie talk for errors or system glitches. After all, that's what quality, quality control and testing is supposed to do - Find things that will cause less than desired results.

Testing and quality is key. And it needs to start at the beginning. Once the technology requirements are finalized, you have the basis for test scripts that can be used throughout the implementation process. There will be change. So, there needs to be an orderly process for incorporating changes and corrections / fixes.

One reason is that it helps everyone on the project is in sync. It avoids duplication of effort. And, it's less disruptive when there are multiple environments (development / test versus live / production) or multiple releases versions. It's an essential piece of the communications plan. Change control is a recipe for success. And, back to the Serenity Prayer: the introduction of new systems, features or functionality is something that can be controlled. And the smart project manager has the courage to mandate a change control process.

What we cannot change is people and how they react to change. Change, even positive change, creates stress - another thing we can't change. What we can control is the implementation and use of programs and techniques that ease the pain and stress of change. And that's called Change Management.

I worked for the telecommunications superstar, Lucent Technologies, right before its big fall from financial grace. I was fortunate to be in the CIO organization which was lead by a very visionary executive Earnestine Barnes-Linder. She encouraged us to prepare for the changes that she so wisely foresaw. Earnestine even distributed copies of the book "Who Moved My Cheese?" by Dr. Spencer Johnson. I attended a workshop by the author and was less than impressed. But, when I finally took the time to read the book, it was indeed outstanding. Mr. Johnson is an expert on individual and organizational change. The book gave insight into how to recognize that your cheese or goal had moved and provided suggestions on how to work through the feelings and adjust to change. However, there are other books that provide more substance and detail on stress and change management techniques.

Noble & Associates Consulting and its consultants have years of experience with software and technology implementations. The whole point of any new system is to change or improve some process, capability or results. Since there is always change and people are stressed by change, then change management should always be a consideration in project funding, planning and management.

So what's the cheese?

* For an individual, it might have been owning a home. The current mortgage crisis may be moving that cheese.

* For others, it might be life long employment with a company paid pension. The economy and corporate mergers, acquisitions and downsizing may be moving that cheese.

* For production managers the cheese may be efficient operations and on-time deliveries. Disruptions in the supply chain, broken processes and quality problems may be crumbling that cheese.

* The corporate executive may have thought that the least and greatest system or technology was the cheese. However, cost overruns, unrealized functionality and out of sync processes could be slicing away at that cheese.

* For the average employee, the cheese may be to feel like they are competent and even expert at doing the job. The introduction of a new system or technology, and the need to learn new ways of doing things, could be the last straw.

In the final analysis, it doesn't matter what caused your cheese to change. Change happens. Stress happens. Deal with it. Consider implementing stress management and change management programs.

About the Author
Sandra Noble, Sandra Noble - MBA, CPIM, Six Sigma, DCFS, CDP, is president / CEO of Noble & Associates Consulting Inc, which offers cost effective, strategic, enterprise e-Business solutions delivered by experienced professionals with industry, business and application knowledge and expertise. We specialize in IT strategy, needs assessments, software evaluation & selection and implementation of SAP, Oracle, ERP and other enterprise-wide software solutions. And we're the cure for Post Implementation Distress.
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