

Who Moved My Cheese?

By Spencer Johnson, M.D.
(Putnam, New York, 1998) 94 pages,
hardbound \$19.95

Foreword by Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D.

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The national business bestseller *Who Moved My Cheese?* is a simple parable that reveals profound truths about change. This amusing and enlightening story concerns four characters living in a maze and looking for cheese to nourish and make themselves happy.

Two of the characters are mice named Sniff and Scurry. The others are "little people" the size of mice who look and act a lot like people. Their names are Hem and Haw. "Cheese" is a metaphor for what you want to have in life, whether it is a good job, a loving relationship, money, a possession, health, or spiritual peace of mind. The maze is where you look for what you want: the organization you work for, the family you live with, or the community you live in. In the story, the characters face unexpected change. Eventually, one of them deals with it successfully and writes what he has learned from his experience on the maze walls.

In the foreword, Kenneth Blanchard reveals the entire plot and describes "the story behind the story" well before the author tells the tale. It is unusual for those who write a foreword to steal such content from the principal author. However, it is Blanchard who first explains how some people act like Sniff—sniffing out change early and following their nose. Others react like Scurry, who scurries quickly into action trying new paths to find new cheese. Others may deny the situation and resist change like Hem, who fears that change will lead to worse things. Finally, the story's hero, Haw, offers comic relief and serves as the narrator of this tale. He learns to adapt, overcome his fears, and act to find new cheese.

Johnson, however, tells the story like no other storyteller. He fully develops each pint-sized character. Readers learn about emotions, habits, and fears, then discover the "handwriting on the wall" as Haw scratches out guidance for his friends in the form of business axioms, observations, or guideposts to steer Hem (and the reader) to a better future. Johnson's storytelling technique is masterful, leading readers to examine their motives, strengths, and weaknesses along the way.

Dr. Johnson prescribes a remedy that also helps Haw, the story's least proactive character.

So why should a member of the acquisition community purchase or borrow this very short book written about two rodents and two cartoon-like characters? Philosophically speaking, one can call on the poet Robert Burns who said, "The best laid schemes o'mice and men/Gang aft a-gley." Such sage advice has universal appeal and application. But more substantive reasons come from the significance of this story to any company's business situation in today's stress-filled environment.

Clients within the acquisition community include all stakeholders who might affect a program's outcome. Warfighters, maintainers, suppliers, commercial partners, Congress, Defense executives, etc.; any may decide to move your cheese. Those in a program office must be ready to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. As technology advances, acquisition professionals must keep their skills current. They must be willing to insert new technology into existing systems. They must remain mentally sharp and maintain positive attitudes toward accepting and dealing with inevitable change.

Successful programs bring new capabilities and will transform the Army. Therefore, today's acquisition professional should think of the skills needed both in adapting to change and in serving as a change agent.

Some say that *Who Moved My Cheese?* is Johnson's best work to date. This is high praise, given that Johnson and Blanchard are coauthors of *The One Minute Manager*, the book that gave American business "management by walking around" and related techniques for building high-performance teams. This book is a practical guide for just about anyone who wants to succeed in a changing world.

The Project Manager's Desk Reference

By James P. Lewis. McGraw-Hill Professional Book Group, 2000.

Reviewed by LTC Kenneth H. Rose (USA, Ret.), a Management Consultant in Hampton, VA, and former member of the Army Acquisition Corps.

Many project managers face the dilemma of having to select a single reference book to keep close at hand. *The Project Manager's Desk Reference, 2nd Edition* by James P. Lewis is a good choice. Lewis' book is designed for practitioners and is not a textbook for academic study. Rather, it is a hands-on resource that offers practical advice for day-to-day use. The second edition includes current information and a revised format based

on reader feedback to improve its direct application to project management.

The book's 30 chapters present bite-sized, concise morsels that address principal elements of project management. They are organized into five sections for continuity and easy indexing. Lewis covers the basics of planning, scheduling, controlling, and evaluating, and then advances to other issues that affect or often determine project success.

The opening section is brief and to the point. It introduces two unique aspects of this book: a view of a seven-part project management system that defines essential components, and a proprietary 16-step project management model that provides a roadmap—a process for managing projects of any size in any domain. Succeeding chapters add detail to the framework.

Lewis explains that project planning begins with understanding what customers really want. This leads to establishing the project's mission, vision, goals, and objectives. In discussing project strategy, Lewis opens the door to social aspects of project management, which receive additional attention later in the book. He also introduces SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), which recurs throughout the text.

The planning section ends with the work breakdown structure (WBS). Lewis reminds readers that the WBS does not show the sequence of activities, and he advises readers not to include more detail in a WBS than they can manage. He also introduces "consensual estimating" in which several people collaborate to develop an estimate through interactive discussion rather than through mathematical models or majority votes.

Scheduling is both an art and a science. With all the tools available to project managers, the science part is well understood. According to Lewis, it's the "art" that's a real struggle. In spite of the many network and simulation tools, there is usually no "one best way" to schedule a project. The key often lies in a combination of wise choices. Lewis offers suggestions for applying art and science, and includes a walk-through of a sample schedule for a common event—a dinner party—as an illustration.

Project controls are essential in getting to where you want to go. Lewis briefly discusses three types of project reviews: design, status, and process. He offers tips for conducting reviews that produce meaningful results. He also addresses the important issue of canceling projects, a traumatic but often necessary action. The project control overview closes with a summary of a project control system that emphasizes dividing work into "chunks" that can be monitored using tangible deliverables as progress indicators.

Lewis pays considerable attention to earned-value analysis as a control mechanism. His explanation is clear and concise considering the number of acronyms associated with this topic. His frank discussion of cross-charging is a welcome illumination on a shadowy subject that is often neither recognized nor addressed. Lewis extends the text to cover progress payments and general budgeting topics that are informative to readers whose careers involve developing and delivering products.

Lewis concludes the traditional handbook material with causes of project success and failure. He presents 13 potential causes for failure that serve as project planning warning signs. He includes risk management as the means for preventing trouble by avoiding, mitigating, or transferring project risk.

What makes this book different is the section on "other issues"—issues that go beyond typical project management handbooks. Lewis' chapter on sociotechnical systems is an eye-opener for those who consider people as just another resource to be assigned. His analysis of the sociotechnical interaction in project organization is augmented by a chapter contributed by Robert K. Wysocki that profiles world-class project-management organizations. The chapter includes a quick diagnostic survey instrument for project organizations, a discussion of project management competencies, and a series of evaluation tools with guidance on interpreting results.

Projects are completed by people, and communication can bring people together or tear them apart. Lewis discusses five factors for good communication and defines conditions required for effective communication.

Julian Stubbs, another contributor, addresses business-to-business marketing using a structured approach that brings discipline to a highly creative domain. While the approach is valuable in its own right, the concepts can also be useful to project managers for communication within their organization.

The book closes with several chapters on systems thinking, problem solving, and decisionmaking. These are important in contemporary project management where scheduling is not the primary focus. In today's "systems" world, project managers must be virtuosos skilled in the tools and techniques necessary for success.

Many handbooks compete for the project manager's attention, and most handbooks claim to be the best. However, such a designation is difficult to confer. James P. Lewis' *The Project Manager's Desk Reference, 2nd Edition*, will not let you down. It provides an extensive repertoire from which busy project managers can extract practical information for immediate use.