

Lucidum Literature Review

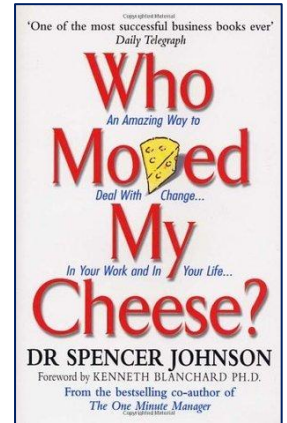


Title **Who Moved My Cheese?**
 Author **Dr Spencer Johnson**
 Published **1998 by G.P. Putnam's Sons**
 Review By **Christelle Marais (Executive Director, Lucidum)**
 Review Date **August 2026**



Lessons For
 Directors, Prescribed Officers, Executives
 Governance Officers, Company Secretaries
 Ethics Officers, Risk Managers, Compliance Managers
 Audit Professionals
 Strategy Professionals
 Line Managers

Relevance	Overall Rating
10	
7	
9	
5	
9	
9	
	8.2



Synopsis

Four characters – two mice, Sniff and Scurry, and two 'littlepeople', Hem and Haw – live in a maze, searching daily for cheese: a metaphor for whatever we want out of life, whether that is a job, security, money, health or peace of mind. All four eventually find abundant cheese at Cheese Station C and settle into a routine. The mice keep inspecting the station daily for small signs of change; the littlepeople grow comfortable, taking the cheese for granted and building their identity around it. When the cheese suddenly runs out, Sniff and Scurry immediately head back into the maze in search of new cheese. Hem and Haw are blindsided. Hem, gripped by fear, denial and a sense of entitlement, refuses to leave the empty station, certain the cheese will reappear. Haw, after much internal struggle, eventually laughs at his own resistance, confronts his fear, and ventures back into the maze. Along the way he writes reflections on the wall for Hem to find, and gradually rebuilds his confidence until he discovers a vast new supply at Cheese Station N. The book is a reflection on how individuals and organisations respond to change, and why anticipating and embracing it beats denying it. Although written as a business fable, its lessons apply equally to entrenched corruption – a system that, like Hem's cheese, is defended by those benefiting from it long after it has stopped serving the people who depend on it.

Key Concept:

Complacency The familiarity and comfort of corruption to those who benefit from it, those who defend it, and those that deny the warning signs rather than confront the truth. Combating it requires vigilance, courage and insight.

Quotes:

"The more important your Cheese is to you, the more you want to hold on to it." "If you do not change, you can become extinct." "They keep moving the Cheese." "Smell the Cheese often so you know when it is getting old." "The quicker you let go of old Cheese, the sooner you find new Cheese." "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" "When you move beyond your fear, you feel free." "Old beliefs do not lead you to new Cheese." "Noticing small changes early helps you adapt to the bigger changes that are to come." "The fear you let build up in your mind is worse than the situation that actually exists." "It is safer to search in the maze than remain in a Cheeseless situation."

Practical Tips

- Build routine, independent monitoring into procurement, appointments, and financial reporting so early signs of corruption are caught before they become entrenched, the way Sniff and Scurry inspect the cheese daily.
- Let go of 'business as usual' tolerance for patronage and informal arrangements once they are recognised as corrupt.
- Protect whistleblowers and change agents who act early, rather than retaliating and keeping others trapped in silence like Hem.
- Use simple, accessible language and stories to help ordinary people recognise and name corruption without feeling threatened.
- Address the fear driving silence and inaction directly – fear of retaliation, job loss, or social exclusion often keeps people from confronting corruption more than the risk itself.
- Document and share lessons from anti-corruption interventions across sectors and countries so that transparent, accountable systems – the new cheese – can be found and replicated faster.

Think About

- How quickly do our institutions notice when the 'cheese' (public funds, procurement, or appointments) is being diverted, and how much evidence is usually required before anyone acts?
- Do our anti-corruption structures behave more like Sniff and Scurry, alert and quick to respond, or like Hem, waiting for the old, corrupt order to return?
- What fears – of retaliation, exclusion, or loss of patronage benefits – are keeping citizens, officials, and leaders from confronting corruption directly?
- What would 'New Cheese' – a transparent, accountable system – look like for our organisation, sector, or country, and are we actively searching for it?

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