Client Case Study

Change Management

Introduction

Development projects whatever their size will always require testing ranging from verifying that requirements have been met to non-functional aspects such as security penetration. These tests will not always pass and it is an astute organisation that realises the need to manage these defects. Most organisations will claim that defect management is already integral to their governance – or are they really just performing defect administration? It is the successful organisation that obtains increased quality from practising effective defect management.

In this case study we will consider a financial services organisation that had been for some time developing a new payments and enquiry system for its corporate client base. Functionality had been delivered regularly on a release basis and aggressive dates were being routinely achieved. Customer satisfaction was high and the order book of enhancements from both customers and internal management was healthy.

Under the surface though it was another matter. Stresses had been building up, for example, minor cosmetic defects were being systematically deferred into a future that was already at capacity through demand for new functionality. The focus on achieving dates meant that in-flight defects were not being closed down when a release was implemented as resources had to be quickly switched to the next release. The 3rd party supplier of the front end system had been allowed to drift into a laissez faire culture when considering fixing defects resulting in hundreds of deferrals accumulating over time.

The increasing number of live cosmetic defects was becoming noticeable, there was a trend to them becoming more serious in nature and deferrals had even started to adversely impact components of functionality. Previously satisfied customers began to question quality but even then there was still belief in the current approach and the organisation continued on. Eventually the situation became untenable and the crunch finally came when a piece of new functionality with high visibility was only paritally implemented.

How SQA assisted is described in the next column.

If you would like to discuss this case study please email kenny.laing@sqa-consulting.com

How SQA assisted

SQA Consulting was invited into the organisation to help turn the situation around. We took a step by step approach over a period of several months that built up momentum resulting in a sustainable change solution.

Our experienced consultant quickly took charge of running the daily defect calls more effectively and ensuring participation. Productive working relationships were forged with the key stakeholder represented business areas as well as with the 3rd party software supplier. This stabilised the situation, established relationships and won credibility with key people across the organisation.

With the foundations for success in place, we started reviewing internal processes and the flow of management information. The mutual agreement of a processes and governance that is not only fit for purpose but one that everyone bought into was essential. The organisation had to collectively feel that it was changing because it wanted to rather than having the feeling of change being enforced upon it. With the infrastructure now in place we could focus on changing the culture.

The next phase was focused on making the culture change happen and overcoming inertia. At SQA we realise that it is not possible to simply flick a switch to make an organisation or even part of one change. Our approach is to lead by example and show that being quality driven is actually easier and more fulfilling for everyone. Our consultant adopted a quality driven approach to managing defects and it was not long before he was building up a body of support. The 3rd party software supplier was approached and they embraced the change as there was realisation that managing a growing stack of deferred defects was costly and was constraining efficient further development of the system. We could see a clear urgency being shown by the organisation for the new processes to be implemented. The organisation was now wanting to change – and change it did!

An emergency release was negotiated with the 3rd party supplier to address urgent functionality issues. The nettle was then grasped around the deferred cosmetic defects and a planned release was reserved for fixing these. Historical open defects were researched and a tracked programme of investigation and closure commenced.

Finally, a permanent defect manager was recruited by the organisation with our consultant performing a full knowledge transfer and handover. The realisation of the organisation that the defect manager role was a full time position and a career role showed strong commitment and demonstrated that the change was sustainable.