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CSD 380

2 / 22 / 2025

The Dangers of Change Approval Processes

Organizations must adapt swiftly to remain competitive in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. Change approval processes are designed to manage and control organizational modifications, ensuring that changes are implemented smoothly and with minimal disruption. However, while these processes aim to mitigate risks, they can inadvertently introduce challenges that hinder organizational agility and efficiency. This paper explores the potential dangers associated with change approval processes, drawing insights from various studies and expert analyses.

Introduction

Change approval processes are integral to organizational governance, providing a structured approach to implementing systems, processes, or product modifications. These processes typically involve multiple layers of review and authorization to ensure that changes align with organizational objectives and do not introduce unforeseen risks. However, the rigidity and complexity of these processes can lead to unintended consequences, such as delays, decreased employee morale, and reduced competitiveness.

**Potential Dangers of Change Approval Processes**

**Slowed Time-to-Market**

One significant drawback of stringent change approval processes is the potential delay in delivering new features or products. Extended approval timelines can hinder an organization's ability to respond promptly to market demands, resulting in missed opportunities and decreased customer satisfaction. The State of DevOps 2019 Report found that heavyweight change approval processes were associated with worse software delivery and operational performance, indicating that bureaucratic procedures can impede the timely delivery of services and products.

**Increased Risk of Change Failure**

Contrary to the primary objective of mitigating risks, overly complex change approval processes can increase the likelihood of failure. The same State of DevOps 2019 Report revealed that heavy change management was correlated with worse change failure rates, suggesting that excessive bureaucracy does not necessarily translate to improved safety or reliability. Instead, it may lead to inadequate testing and rushed implementations as teams strive to navigate through cumbersome approval stages.

**Decreased Employee Morale and Engagement**

Bureaucratic change approval processes can lead to frustration among employees, particularly when they perceive these procedures as obstacles to innovation and efficiency. The Director of Enterprise Engineering at a Fortune 500 financial services company said, "Change management is a big burden on our digital product owners and developers. No one likes it." Such sentiments can result in decreased morale, reduced productivity, and higher turnover rates, as talented employees may seek more dynamic and less restrictive work environments.

**Inefficiencies and Increased Costs**

Overly detailed and bureaucratic change approval processes can introduce inefficiencies, increasing operational costs. The Harvard Division of Continuing Education highlights, "Without a comprehensive change management strategy, short-term tactical decisions can delay or undermine long-term results." This indicates that inefficient approval processes can result in resource wastage and misaligned efforts, ultimately affecting the organization's bottom line.

Mitigating the Dangers

To address the challenges posed by traditional change approval processes, organizations can consider the following strategies:

* **Streamlining Approval Workflows**: Implementing a risk-based approach to change approvals can help distinguish between low-risk and high-risk changes, allowing for expedited processing of routine modifications. This approach ensures that critical changes are scrutinized without bottlenecking the entire process.
* **Empowering Teams**: Shifting decision-making authority closer to the teams responsible for implementing changes can enhance accountability and speed. Trusting skilled professionals to assess and approve changes within their domain reduces unnecessary delays and fosters a culture of ownership.
* **Leveraging Automation**: Utilizing automated tools for routine approvals and monitoring can reduce manual intervention, minimize errors, and accelerate the change management process. Automation ensures that standard changes follow predefined workflows, freeing resources for more complex decision-making tasks.

**Conclusion**

While change approval processes are essential for maintaining control and ensuring alignment with organizational goals, it is crucial to balance oversight with agility. Overly rigid and bureaucratic procedures can impede progress, increase risks, and negatively impact employee morale. Organizations can mitigate these dangers by adopting streamlined, risk-based, and automated approaches, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and continuous improvement.

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