**The Dangers of Change Approval Processes**

Change approval processes are an essential aspect of IT service management, aiming to ensure that changes to IT services are thoroughly assessed, approved, and implemented with minimal risk to the business. However, if not designed and executed carefully, these processes can become bureaucratic, inefficient, and even counterproductive. One of the most significant pitfalls of change approval processes is relying on centralized Change Approval Boards (CABs) to catch errors and approve changes. This approach can introduce delays and errors, as the people involved in the approval process may not fully understand the implications of the changes.

Another pitfall is treating all changes equally, subjecting them to the same approval process regardless of their risk profile or timing requirements. This approach fails to acknowledge that changes have varying levels of complexity and urgency, making it difficult for teams to devote the necessary time and attention to each change. Furthermore, change management processes should be regularly evaluated and refined to improve performance, but often, this critical step is overlooked. Key performance metrics such as lead time and change fail rate should be targeted for improvement, and teams should be provided with the necessary tools and training to navigate the process more effectively.

When faced with stability problems in production, organizations often respond by adding more process and heavyweight approvals, which can drive up lead times and batch sizes, creating a vicious cycle. Instead of relying on additional bureaucracy, organizations should focus on making it quicker and safer to make changes. This approach requires a fundamental shift in mindset, recognizing that the goal of change management is not to add layers of process, but to enable teams to deliver high-quality services quickly and efficiently.

The consequences of slow time-to-market can be severe, leading to wasted resources and opportunity costs. Every day spent building, testing, and deploying a feature increases overhead costs, and if customers do not respond positively to the feature, valuable resources have been wasted on a fruitless endeavor. In today's fast-paced digital landscape, organizations must prioritize speed and agility to remain competitive.

The needs of developers and IT operations teams must be balanced. Developers want to roll out code quickly and efficiently, while IT operations teams seek to reduce risk, maintain detailed records for audits, and avoid incidents. The challenge lies in finding a balance between these competing interests, recognizing that both teams have critical roles to play in delivering high-performing services.

To overcome the dangers of change approval processes, organizations must dispel the myth that heavy process reduces risks. Instead, they should foster a culture that encourages teams to collaborate and ship changes quickly and safely. This requires implementing corresponding practices and tools that support automation, continuous improvement, and collaboration. By regularly evaluating and refining change management processes, organizations can demonstrate value and drive improvement, ultimately delivering high-performing services that meet customer expectations.

**Resources**

Atlassian. (n.d.). Change management. Retrieved from <https://www.atlassian.com/itsm/change-management>

LaunchDarkly. (n.d.). The downsides of heavy change management. Retrieved from <https://launchdarkly.com/guides/reconciling-change-management-and-continuous-delivery/the-downsides-of-heavy-change-management/>

Dora. (n.d.). Streamlining change approval. Retrieved from <https://dora.dev/capabilities/streamlining-change-approval/>