The Dangers of Change Approval Processes

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Change management is a critical element in ensuring that organizations can adapt to new demands, technologies, and business environments. According to ASQ.org, change management is described as "the methods and manners in which a company describes and implements change within both its internal and external processes. This includes preparing and supporting employees, establishing the necessary steps for change, and monitoring pre- and post-change activities to ensure successful implementation" (ASQ, n.d.). While change management is vital for maintaining control over organizational transformations, particularly in IT environments, the approval processes involved in managing changes can introduce significant risks.

**Understanding the Change Approval Process**

In many organizations, the change approval process is a necessary step before any modification to systems, software, or processes can be implemented. The goal of this process is to ensure that changes are well planned, tested, and reviewed before execution. However, while this control is essential for preventing disruptions, there are several dangers associated with overly bureaucratic or slow change approval procedures.

**Delays and Bottlenecks**

One of the primary risks of the change approval process is the potential for delays. When approval requires multiple layers of review or approval from various stakeholders, the process can slow down the implementation of necessary changes. According to Plat4mation, a gap often exists between DevOps and traditional change management approaches. This misalignment can result in slow approvals that hinder the speed of delivery and responsiveness in technology-driven environments (Plat4mation, 2020). In industries where speed and adaptability are key, such delays can be detrimental, preventing organizations from reacting quickly to market demands or operational issues.

Moreover, prolonged approval processes can lead to bottlenecks, where changes pile up waiting for authorization. In such scenarios, the change management system itself can become a source of inefficiency, creating a backlog of changes that prevents timely updates to systems and software (Kim, Humble, Debois, & Willis, 2016).

**Risk of Over-Approval**

Another danger is the risk of over-approval. In some cases, organizations might impose strict approval processes for even minor changes, thereby increasing the complexity and time required for approval. While this approach can help prevent errors or unauthorized changes, it can also create unnecessary friction. DZone argues that this level of scrutiny often leads to “a broken change management process,” where well-intentioned rules actually impede progress rather than support it (DZone, 2020). This can lead to frustration among employees, decreased morale, and ultimately, a reluctance to engage in the change process altogether.

**Ineffective Change Management Practices**

Ineffective change management practices can also arise from an overemphasis on approval processes. The need for approval might overshadow other aspects of change management, such as proper communication, training, and user involvement, which are crucial for successful change implementation. For instance, if too much time is spent on getting approval, there may be insufficient focus on preparing the workforce or ensuring that end users understand and can adapt to the changes being made (ASQ, n.d.).

**The DevOps Perspective on Change Approval**

In a DevOps environment, the risks associated with change approval processes are particularly pronounced. DevOps emphasizes agility, continuous integration, and rapid delivery of features. When traditional change approval processes are imposed on DevOps workflows, they can stifle the very principles of agility and innovation that DevOps aims to foster. Streamlining change approval processes, as highlighted by the DevOps Research and Assessment (DORA) group, is crucial for maintaining a balance between control and speed. DORA stresses that efficient change approval processes can be achieved by automating approval steps or adopting less rigid protocols, which can ultimately enhance productivity without compromising security or reliability (DORA, n.d.).

**Balancing Control and Agility**

To mitigate the dangers of overly rigid change approval processes, organizations must find a balance between control and agility. Kim et al. (2016) recommends adopting an approach that allows for flexibility in the approval process, such as continuous integration and continuous delivery (CI/CD) pipelines, which enable rapid testing and deployment of changes with minimal manual oversight. By automating aspects of the approval process and creating clear guidelines for when human intervention is necessary, organizations can significantly reduce delays and bottlenecks while maintaining proper oversight.

**Conclusion**

The change approval process, while essential for maintaining control and security in an organization, can also present significant dangers if it is too slow, cumbersome, or misaligned with organizational needs. Delays, bottlenecks, over-approval, and ineffective practices can all hinder progress, especially in fast-paced environments like DevOps. By streamlining the change approval process and finding the right balance between control and speed, organizations can improve efficiency and ensure smoother transitions during periods of change.

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