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# The Dangers of Change Approval Processes

Change approval processes, often implemented through mechanisms such as Change Advisory Boards (CABs), are designed to ensure stability and compliance in IT operations. However, these processes can introduce significant inefficiencies and risks, ultimately undermining the very goals they aim to achieve.

**Inefficiency and Delays**

One of the primary dangers of traditional change approval processes is the inefficiency they introduce. Requiring multiple levels of approval can lead to significant delays, particularly when approvals are needed from individuals who may need more clarification on the technical context or urgency of the changes. This bureaucratic red tape can slow deployment times, reducing overall agility and responsiveness. Inefficiencies are compounded when approval methods involve large committees or multiple mandatory wait periods, making the process more manageable and manageable for the teams involved.

**Misaligned Incentives**

Change approval processes often create a misalignment of incentives between different organizational teams. For example, development teams are typically incentivized to innovate and deploy changes quickly, while operations teams prioritize stability and minimizing disruptions. This contradiction can lead to conflict and further slowdown the approval process, as the goals of speed and stability are often at odds.

**Increased Risk of Failure**

Overly strict change approval processes can increase the risk of failure rather than mitigate it. By introducing more steps and handoffs, these processes create more opportunities for miscommunication and error. Additionally, the further removed the approvers are from the actual work being done, the less likely they are to understand the nuances and potential impacts of the changes. This can lead to poorly informed decisions that may inadvertently introduce vulnerabilities or fail to address critical issues.

**Stifling Innovation**

The time and effort required to navigate complex change approval processes can stifle innovation. Teams may become discouraged from proposing or implementing changes due to the anticipated hassle and delays. This can lead to a culture of risk aversion, where maintaining the status quo is preferred over pursuing potentially beneficial innovations. Over time, this can erode an organization’s competitive edge and ability to adapt to new market demands.

**Alternative Approaches**

Many organizations are adopting more streamlined and agile approaches to change management to mitigate these dangers. Key strategies include:

1. **Standardizing Deployment Practices:** By standardizing and automating systems and deployment practices, organizations can reduce the need for complex approvals and create a more unified and efficient process.
2. **Smaller, More Frequent Deployments:** Focusing on smaller, more frequent changes rather than large, infrequent ones can reduce the risk associated with each deployment and make it easier to manage and review changes.
3. **Real-Time Feedback and Automation:** Utilizing continuous integration and delivery (CI/CD) tools can provide real-time feedback and automated workflows, minimizing the need for manual approvals and speeding up the deployment process.
4. **Peer Reviews Over Committees:** Implementing peer reviews conducted by subject matter experts within the team can be more effective than committee-based approvals. This approach ensures that those most familiar with the code and its context are the ones making approval decisions, leading to more informed and efficient change management.

**Conclusion**

While change approval processes are essential for maintaining stability and compliance, their implementation can pose significant risks and inefficiencies. By adopting more agile and streamlined approaches, organizations can better balance the need for control with the necessity of innovation and speed.

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