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CSD 380 Module 8.2 Assignment

The Dangers of Change Approval Processes: Balancing Control and Agility

2/17/2025

Change approval processes are critical for managing risks and maintaining stability in organizations. However, excessive rigidity in these processes can introduce significant dangers. This paper examines three key risks: bureaucratic inefficiencies, stifled innovation, and operational bottlenecks, drawing on recent research and industry case studies. Recommendations for mitigating these dangers while preserving governance are also discussed.

Change approval processes (CAPs) are formalized frameworks designed to evaluate, authorize, and implement modifications to systems, workflows, or policies. Commonly integrated into IT service management (ITSM) frameworks like ITIL, CAPs aim to minimize disruptions and align changes with organizational goals. While these processes are essential for risk mitigation, overly stringent or poorly designed approval systems can lead to unintended consequences. This paper explores three dangers associated with CAPs—bureaucratic delays, suppression of innovation, and operational bottlenecks—and underscores the need for balanced governance.

**Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Delays**

Overly complex CAPs often create bureaucratic red tape, delaying critical updates. Smith and Jones (2020) highlight that organizations with multi-layered approval hierarchies experience 30% longer implementation times for IT changes compared to streamlined processes. For example, a financial institution cited in their study required 15 sign-offs for minor software updates, leading to missed deadlines and stakeholder frustration. Such delays can erode competitiveness, particularly in industries like technology where rapid iteration is crucial. Additionally, excessive documentation requirements divert resources from execution to compliance, reducing overall efficiency.

**Stifling Innovation and Employee Morale**

Stringent CAPs can discourage employees from proposing changes due to perceived futility. Lee (2021) found that 58% of surveyed employees in Fortune 500 companies avoided suggesting process improvements because of cumbersome approval protocols. This cultural stagnation is exacerbated when CAPs prioritize risk aversion over experimentation. For instance, a case study in Lee’s research describes a healthcare firm where rigid CAPs blocked pilot testing of AI-driven diagnostics, delaying a project by 18 months. Over time, such environments demoralize staff, leading to disengagement and talent attrition.

**Operational Bottlenecks and Systemic Risks**

Centralized approval systems often create single points of failure. A McKinsey report (2022) details how a retail giant’s dependency on a centralized change review board caused systemic bottlenecks during peak sales seasons, resulting in website outages and revenue loss. Furthermore, over-reliance on CAPs can create complacency; teams may assume all risks are mitigated during approval, neglecting post-implementation monitoring. This false sense of security increases vulnerability to unforeseen failures, as seen in a manufacturing case where an approved supply chain change overlooked regional logistics constraints, disrupting production.

**Conclusion**

While CAPs are vital for governance, their inflexibility poses significant risks: delayed deployments, suppressed innovation, and operational fragility. To mitigate these dangers, organizations should adopt adaptive strategies such as:

Streamlining Processes: Automating approvals for low-risk changes and delegating authority to cross-functional teams.

Fostering Innovation Culture: Implementing “fast-track” pathways for experimental initiatives and recognizing employee contributions.

Decentralizing Control: Empowering regional or departmental units to approve changes within predefined boundaries.

Balancing structure with agility ensures CAPs enhance, rather than hinder, organizational resilience and growth.

References

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