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The Dangers of Change Approval Processes

The Change Management process typically involves an approver, but how many and how does it function? When working in an organization, it’s important to figure this out sooner rather than later. Some organizations may employ one method while others may employ multiple. Regardless, here are four different options for implementing a Change Request Approval:

1. Single Approver: This involves having only one person in charge of change tickets based on their roles. These changes can range from minor issues to major ones across the whole business.
2. Tiered Approval: Some changes are more complex than others. In such a case, it may be best to “tier” the approval process by having parts of the change request approved separately. The key idea behind this is to check multiple points on a change request and ensure that everything is cleared and inspected. This method is very useful for large scale projects with multiple moving parts.
3. Multiple Approvers: Sometimes one approver isn’t enough. If that’s the case for you, change things so that a change ticket needs multiple approvers in order to pass. Some organizations employ a percentage requirement, such as 25% approval, in order to pass a change request through.
4. Change Advisory Board: This board is designed to check change requests, confirm that everything matches business requirements, and typically informs stakeholders of desired changes. Usually, the board consists of representatives of stakeholders and some development groups. The whole purpose of this group is to minimize business risk. More on this later.

Each business will set things up differently depending upon their size and business format. However, the Change Management process does have its downsides. For one, the time to market a product is greatly slowed down. Every second spent creating a new feature, testing it, and then implementing said feature takes time. This is fine until you get problems with customer disinterest or if feedback returned is negative. This results in wasted resources that could have been better spent elsewhere. Mitigate this by implementing small changes at a time.

As much as the Change Management process seems like a good thing, a heavily managed one can be detrimental to a business. A key report from the State of DevOps in 2019 for example, shows that heavy management actually decreases operational performance and produces worse products. Overall risk increased as change failure rates went up. Compare this to streamlined Change Management as reported by Forrester that tends to result in much better business performance. The fewer things that are tied down to bureaucratic and slow processes the better for the business. Productivity and overall quality rise when things don’t hit as many speed bumps. This is likely why Developers tend to dislike large approval processes such as those imposed by Change Advisory Boards. Processes tend to slow down here and that usually affects morale. Lower morale leads to lower productivity and passion, which may even lead to lost employees. Be careful with overcomplicating the Change Process.

There are ways to improve the Change Advisory Board however. Most CAB meetings have more Change requests than they can handle. Some groups will even try to examine in detail every single request, even if that’s not the ideal method. A big way to avoid this pitfall and speed up the overall process is to implement a Quick Impact Score. This process usually follows the following procedures:

1. Determine Criteria: Choose ideally no more than 5 different factors that will help identify the impact of the associate change. Key things to consider as factors would be costs, quantity of people involved in implementing the change, security considerations, any Laws and Compliance to consider, and how many customers this change affects. These factors will be the foundation for everything when determining how important a change is or isn’t.
2. Define Impact of Change: This can be viewed as how much this change will affect the business. Will the change affect a small team or the entire business? It’s here that this is decided.
3. Who will authorize each level of Impact? Pick someone to authorize each level of impact. This limits the number of people involved which in turn speeds up the entire process. Keep in mind how complex a change may be. Small changes for example wouldn’t really need approval and can be processed right away. This is important as a significant majority of change requests tend to be of the low impact variety. Medium level impact can be taken care of by a single authorizer and the large level impact changes can be handled by the entire board. This would greatly reduce the workload of the CAB and free up so much time.

The Change Request Process can be tedious but there are ways to improve it as mentioned above. The key part is convincing others, such as the CAB, to make the needed changes for the business. Some members may not want to give up power but these changes are necessary. This is the kind of thing that makes the difference between an agile organization and a rigid one. Make the switch to improve efficiency, speed, and agility in all areas thanks to a sped up Change Request System.

Citations

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