**The Dangers of Change Approval Processes in Software Development**

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**Introduction**

In the realm of software development, change approval processes are instituted to manage modifications systematically, ensuring stability and compliance. However, when these processes become overly rigid or bureaucratic, they can introduce significant challenges that impede progress and innovation. This paper explores the inherent dangers of stringent change approval mechanisms, drawing insights from contemporary research and industry practices.

**1. Inefficiencies and Delays**

One of the primary concerns with heavy-handed change approval processes is the introduction of inefficiencies that delay software delivery. The 2019 State of DevOps Report by DORA highlighted that organizations with heavyweight change approval protocols often experience reduced software delivery and operational performance. These organizations are less likely to meet key business objectives, such as profitability and customer satisfaction, compared to their counterparts with more streamlined processes.

**2. Increased Risk of Change Failures**

Contrary to the belief that rigorous approval processes mitigate risks, evidence suggests they may inadvertently increase the likelihood of change failures. The same DORA report indicated that external approvals, such as those from Change Advisory Boards (CABs), do not correlate with improved system stability. Instead, they often slow down the deployment process without effectively reducing failure rates.

**3. Bottlenecks in the Development Pipeline**

Centralized approval systems can become bottlenecks, especially when reliant on CABs to catch errors and approve changes. This centralized approach can introduce delays and errors, as those removed from the day-to-day development activities may lack the context to make timely and informed decisions.

**4. Hindrance to Agile and DevOps Practices**

Rigid change approval processes are often at odds with Agile and DevOps methodologies, which emphasize rapid iteration and continuous delivery. The bureaucratic nature of traditional change management can stifle the agility that modern software development practices strive for, leading to slower release cycles and reduced responsiveness to market demands.

**5. Potential for Compliance and Security Oversights**

While the intent of change approval processes is to ensure compliance and security, their complexity can sometimes lead to oversights. In industries with strict regulations, such as finance, convoluted approval mechanisms can result in compliance violations or security breaches if not managed effectively. A notable example is the Barclays outage, where legacy systems and complex approval processes contributed to significant service disruptions.

**Conclusion**

While change approval processes are essential for maintaining system integrity and compliance, it's crucial to balance control with agility. Overly rigid and bureaucratic systems can introduce inefficiencies, increase risks, and hinder the adoption of modern development practices. Organizations should strive for streamlined, context-aware approval mechanisms that align with Agile and DevOps principles, ensuring both stability and rapid delivery.

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