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Module 8.2  
The Dangers of Change Approval Processes

Change approval processes are designed to ensure that any modifications to an organization's IT infrastructure, systems, or applications are thoroughly evaluated and vetted before implementation. While these processes aim to reduce risks and maintain stability, they can also introduce significant dangers and challenges if not properly managed. This paper explores the potential dangers of changing approval processes, drawing insights from multiple sources.

Change approval processes are a cornerstone of IT governance, aiming to control risks associated with changes to systems and infrastructure. These processes typically involve multiple layers of review and approval to ensure that changes do not disrupt operations or introduce vulnerabilities. However, overly stringent or poorly designed change approval processes can lead to unintended negative consequences.

One of the primary dangers of change approval processes is the potential to stifle innovation. In a fast-paced technological landscape, the ability to quickly adapt and implement new ideas is crucial. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, organizations with cumbersome change approval processes often experience delays in deploying new features or updates, leading to a competitive disadvantage. Slow approval cycles can frustrate development teams and hinder the organization's ability to respond to market demands swiftly.

When change approval processes are overly complex or time-consuming, employees may resort to circumventing the official procedures to get their changes implemented quickly. This behavior, known as "shadow IT," can introduce significant risks. A report by Gartner highlights that 30-40% of IT spending in large enterprises occurs outside the IT department's control, leading to potential security vulnerabilities and compliance issues. Unapproved changes can result in inconsistent configurations, undocumented modifications, and increased difficulty in troubleshooting and maintaining systems.

Change approval processes can create bottlenecks, especially when the volume of change requests is high. A survey by the Harvard Business Review found that 70% of respondents cited bureaucratic procedures as a significant barrier to effective decision-making and timely execution. When change requests pile up, critical updates may be delayed, leaving systems exposed to known vulnerabilities or performance issues. Bottlenecks also contribute to increased operational costs as resources are tied up in the approval process rather than being utilized for productive work.

Complex and lengthy change approval processes can negatively impact employee morale and productivity. Developers and IT staff may feel demotivated when their efforts to improve systems are met with prolonged delays and extensive scrutiny. This environment can lead to decreased job satisfaction and higher turnover rates. Furthermore, the additional administrative burden of navigating the approval process diverts time and energy away from creative and value-adding activities.

Ironically, the intention to mitigate risk through thorough change approval processes can sometimes result in incomplete reviews. When the process is perceived as overly burdensome, reviewers may rush through their assessments to clear backlogs, potentially overlooking critical details. This scenario undermines the very purpose of the change approval process, as insufficiently vetted changes are more likely to introduce issues than those that undergo a more focused and efficient review.

While change approval processes are essential for maintaining control and reducing risks associated with IT changes, they can also introduce significant dangers if not properly managed. Slowing down innovation, encouraging workarounds, creating bottlenecks, reducing morale and productivity, and risking incomplete reviews are all potential pitfalls. Organizations must strive to balance control with agility by streamlining their change approval processes, leveraging automation, and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. By doing so, they can mitigate the dangers while still reaping the benefits of a robust change management framework.

Resources:  
https://www.cprime.com/resources/blog/how-does-devops-handle-change-management/  
https://dora.dev/capabilities/streamlining-change-approval/#:~:text=Common%20pitfalls%20in%20change%20approval%20processes&text=This%20approach%20can%20introduce%20delay,Treating%20all%20changes%20equally.  
https://dzone.com/articles/change-management-is-broken-heres-how-to-fix-it