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In modern IT environments, change approval processes are designed to protect critical systems, reduce risk, and ensure compliance. By routing proposed modifications through review mechanisms such as a Change Advisory Board (CAB) or formal approval workflow, organizations hope to prevent costly downtime, security vulnerabilities, and regulatory violations. While the intent is beneficial, research shows that change approval processes can also create serious problems. Excessive bureaucracy, bottlenecks, and poorly defined responsibilities may actually increase risk instead of reducing it. This paper explores the dangers of change approval processes and discusses strategies to mitigate them.

One of the most common problems with approval-heavy change management systems is delay. When too many approvals are required, projects may stall while requests wait in queues or on busy decision makers’ desks. Unclear or overlapping approval roles can lead to overdue tickets and stalled requests. Similarly, CABs often slow down IT change management when they are tasked with reviewing every request, regardless of risk level. These delays limit an organization’s ability to respond quickly to emerging business needs or urgent security threats.

Heavy approval processes can reduce innovation by discouraging teams from making beneficial changes. Developers and IT staff may avoid proposing improvements if they anticipate a long or difficult review process. Research cited by LaunchDarkly indicates that organizations with cumbersome approval steps often suffer worse performance metrics, including slower deployment frequency and higher change failure rates. Basically, change approval that is too rigid may undermine the very agility modern enterprises require to compete.

The dangers of change approval processes do not mean approvals should be abandoned. Instead, organizations should design smarter, risk-based approaches. Organizations can categorize changes by their risk level. Low-risk “standard” changes can be pre-approved, while only high-impact modifications require full CAB review. Impact scores can be used to determine which changes need additional oversight. Automation can also reduce bottlenecks by routing approvals to the right people and tracking delays. Finally, post-implementation reviews and lessons learned help ensure approval processes remain relevant and effective.

Change approval processes play an important role in protecting IT systems, but they can also create serious dangers if overused or poorly designed. Delays, reduced agility, increased costs, oversight failures, and misaligned responsibilities undermine their intended purpose. Organizations should focus on tiered, risk-based approval models that balance control with speed. By doing so, they can minimize the dangers of change approval while still achieving stability, compliance, and security.

References

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