The Dangers of Change Approval Process

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The technology world is ever-changing, with developments sometimes happening so quickly that they feel like they occur overnight. The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) introduced the concept of change management, including the change approval process. This process is designed to help organizations evaluate, authorize, and schedule changes to applications or infrastructure. The goal is to allow teams to assess the impact and overall risk of a change, determining whether it should be approved or rejected based on predefined criteria. With such a structured, well-documented process, what could possibly go wrong? The answer: quite a lot.

As noted in the section titled "The Dangers of Change Approval Processes" in our textbook, we learn about a 15-minute error that led to a $440 million loss for Knight Capital. Despite having a change approval process in place, it still failed. There are several reasons why change approval processes can fail, and it’s critical to understand these risks.

One common issue is that many organizations rely on outdated approval methods. Traditional ITIL standards often involve large committees, multiple layers of management, and fixed timeframes for implementing changes. While these methods might have worked in the past, they can quickly become inefficient as organizations evolve. When teams don’t take the time to reevaluate and modernize their processes, the result can be decreased motivation and significant inefficiencies.

In the article "Do You Really Need That Change Advisory Board" by Dave Karow, he raises an important question: does your change approval committee truly understand the changes they are reviewing? If not, aren’t they simply relying on the team submitting the change for approval? And what happens if that team doesn’t fully grasp the risks involved with their change? In that case, the entire purpose of the change approval process is undermined.

Another danger of the change approval process is the misconception that there is a "one-size-fits-all" approach. While the ITIL framework may suggest otherwise, no universal solution exists for managing changes. Every organization has unique needs, and failing to tailor the change approval process to fit those needs can create more problems than it solves. A rigid, cookie-cutter approach may overlook critical organizational differences, leading to poor outcomes.

In conclusion, having a documented change approval process is essential for any organization, especially when a mistake can result in massive losses, like the $440 million error at Knight Capital. However, organizations must also recognize the dangers associated with such processes. By avoiding outdated methods, ensuring that approval committees fully understand the risks, and customizing the process to fit the specific needs of the organization, businesses can develop a more effective and reliable change approval system.

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