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Change approval processes are an important component of any IT department and play an important role in ensuring that all alterations to systems, programs, or processes are properly vetted and go through a series of reviews to ensure there are no significant negative impacts to the system or the business. However, despite this important role, there are dangers that can come with the change approval process.

To understand change approval processes, we first need to understand the process itself. For my example, I am going to touch on the process at my own place of employment. We first need to put in a change request. We handle this electronically and it gets emailed out to my manager who is responsible for moving it to the appropriate individual for review. If the change request is for a program on campus, it gets forwarded to our program analyst who is responsible for analyzing and determining the impacts of the change. She then meets with individuals who use the program to determine any potential issues. After this they send back an approval or a rejection with suggestions of changes required to gain approval. Once approved, we can then implement the changes and get them deployed to production. Myndbend.com’s article on change request approvals would refer to this as a tiered approval as multiple stages exist in the approval process.

Now in this process, there are many people involved and things occur that result in inefficiencies. Which leads us into our discussion on the dangers of change processes. This process can have several issues. One of the issues in here is outdated approval methods. My employer is probably a great example of this. The school had the same development team for 30 years and ran on outdated technology and outdated methodologies. Change requests when I first arrived involved approval meetings that sometimes took a week to get scheduled. We also had to work around deployment windows as the school wanted major changes done during the summer. We have changed a lot of this by introducing SCRUM to the organization and pushing for continuous improvement and smaller changes, which has made the need for approval meetings significantly less.

Another cause of failure in change request processes in inefficient approval methods. This is one I luckily haven’t had experience with and involves things like mandatory wait periods and complicated approval processes. The article from dzone does include two or more approvals, which we do expect, but this mostly comes as a single email from our program analyst who often is able to look at a change request and meet with impact individuals in a very short period of time.

Misaligned incentives can also cause issues in the change request process. A good example of this would be between development teams and IT operations. A development team dabbling in new technology may put in a change request for changes to the server, but the IT operations may push back as operations is rewarded based on the stability of the systems.

The last two I am going to touch on go hand in hand. Poor communication and Siloed teams can result in poor change requests and teams may not understand or even know the change requests have been made. This can result in hold ups and changes are held up by expensive handoffs between teams. Imagine a team makes a change to the framework an application is being developed in and then handed off to the team responsible for the front-end. If they were using React and a change comes through for angular, you may have issues with the requested change and its impacts on the other teams that weren’t expecting the changes.

Ultimately, change requests are important for ensuring the stability and safety of changes to systems and software in an IT environment. Things like outdated approval methods, inefficiencies in the approval process, misaligned incentives, and poor communication can result in issues in the change request process.

**References**

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