**The Dangers of Change Approval Processes**

Puna Poudel – 21408262

DevOps

Assignment 8.2

[prpoudel@my365.bellevue.edu](mailto:prpoudel@my365.bellevue.edu)

Introduction

Change approval processes play a crucial role in ensuring that modifications within an organization are controlled, monitored, and compliant with established policies. However, when these processes become excessively bureaucratic or rigid, they can slow progress, create inefficiencies, and even introduce new risks. This paper explores the dangers associated with change approval processes, including their impact on agility, project success, system stability, and employee satisfaction. It also provides insights into how organizations can strike a balance between control and flexibility to optimize change management.

Impediment to Agility

One of the most significant downsides of a cumbersome change approval process is its impact on agility. In fast-moving industries, organizations must be able to adapt quickly to market shifts, technological advancements, and customer needs. Overly rigid approval mechanisms create bottlenecks that delay change implementation, forcing companies to operate at a slower pace than competitors. According to Atlassian, "Deploying changes too slowly could result in employees defecting to work in places with less clunky systems or your customers sending their support and dollars to other organizations that provide them more value" (Atlassian).

The reliance on Change Advisory Boards (CABs) or multiple layers of approval can create unnecessary bureaucracy, slowing innovation and making it difficult for teams to push new features or improvements. Organizations that fail to streamline these processes risk becoming obsolete as competitors move faster and more efficiently.

Increased Risk of Project Failure

 An overly complex change approval process can lead to confusion about roles and responsibilities, stalling projects and causing delays. Myndbend highlights that when individuals involved in the change approval workflow lack clarity about their roles, issues such as "overdue tickets, unprocessed requests, and stalled projects" arise, leading to disorganization and reduced efficiency (Myndbend).

Furthermore, when teams experience frequent delays due to slow approvals, they may resort to circumventing the process altogether, implementing unauthorized changes that may introduce new vulnerabilities. This "shadow IT" behavior can increase security risks and make it difficult to track system changes, leading to compliance violations and potential system failures.

Elevated Change Failure Rates

While rigorous change approval processes are meant to improve stability, research suggests that they can have the opposite effect. The 2019 State of DevOps Report found that "heavyweight change approval processes were associated with worse software delivery and operational (SDO) performance," indicating that excessive governance mechanisms increase the likelihood of change failures (LaunchDarkly).

A key reason for this is that delayed approvals lead to larger, less frequent changes being introduced into production environments. These large-scale changes are harder to test and validate, making them more prone to errors. In contrast, organizations that embrace continuous deployment and lightweight change management can release smaller, more manageable updates, reducing the risk of widespread failures.

Resource Drain and Employee Dissatisfaction

Beyond the impact on project success and system stability, rigid change approval processes can also strain resources and negatively affect employee morale. Long, drawn-out approval cycles consume valuable time that could be spent on innovation and improvement. Additionally, employees who frequently encounter obstacles in the approval process may become frustrated, leading to decreased job satisfaction and higher turnover rates.

TOPdesk highlights that "processing requests takes weeks, or even months," a reality that is incompatible with modern business needs. Slow-moving processes not only waste resources but also create inefficiencies that prevent employees from focusing on value-driven initiatives (TOPdesk).

Furthermore, when approval processes are perceived as arbitrary or overly restrictive, employees may feel disconnected from decision-making and less motivated to contribute to change initiatives. This can lead to resistance to change, further exacerbating inefficiencies.

Strategies to Improve Change Approval Processes

While change approval is essential for maintaining control and compliance, organizations must ensure that their processes remain efficient and adaptable. Below are key strategies to mitigate the dangers of rigid approval workflows:

* **Automate Change Management:** Implement AI-driven monitoring and automated workflows to speed up approvals while maintaining oversight.
* **Adopt a Risk-Based Approach:** Low-risk changes should not require the same level of scrutiny as high-impact modifications. Categorizing changes based on risk allows teams to fast-track non-critical updates.
* **Encourage Transparency and Collaboration:** Clearly define roles and responsibilities in the approval process to ensure alignment and accountability across teams.
* **Streamline CAB Processes:** Where Change Advisory Boards are used, meetings should be structured efficiently, focusing only on high-risk changes rather than every modification.
* **Implement Continuous Feedback Loops:** Regularly review approval workflows to identify bottlenecks and make necessary adjustments based on team feedback.

Conclusion

Change approval processes are necessary for maintaining system integrity, compliance, and risk management, but when implemented poorly, they can become a major impediment to business agility and efficiency. Lengthy approval cycles slow down innovation, increase the risk of project failure, and create unnecessary complexity, making it harder for organizations to adapt in a rapidly changing environment. By embracing automation, prioritizing risk-based approvals, and fostering a culture of transparency and efficiency, organizations can optimize their change management processes to support growth while maintaining necessary controls.

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