**The Dangers of Change Approval Processes - Assignment 8.2**

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CSD 380 DevOps

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May 4, 2025

**The Danger of Change Approval Processes**

Change Control and the Change Approval Processes were designed to reduce risk and ensure regulatory compliance. Change requests, Change Advisory Boards, and all the documentation the process generates are intended to safely navigate a project’s life cycle and protect the organization. Unfortunately, goals and intentions do not always match reality. Organizational risk extends far beyond safely implementing changes. The risks that Change Control is intended to mitigate are some of the risks that Change Control has been found to introduce.

Change Approval Processes can significantly slow progress on a project. Change requests must be written and submitted through the appropriate channels, await approval from a board, and then, once approved, work begins. This process is excellent at documenting proposed changes, but it significantly impacts the speed of production, slowing the value stream. Unfortunately, the added documentation is of little value because a thoroughly documented mistake is still a mistake. “Paperwork doesn’t reduce risk… less risky changes reduce risk (Long, 2023).”

Inevitably, once a board meets and approves a list of proposed changes, those changes are all built at once. As we have discovered from examining organizations that have migrated to a DevOps flow, larger changes increase the risk of an issue occurring during deployment. Moving to frequent small changes with DevOps tooling to enable automated testing, monitoring, deployment, and rollback mechanisms has been proven to reduce risk and deliver value faster (Long, 2023).

The makeup of any Change Review board is critical in a Change Approval Process. Selecting a board with the right expertise and understanding of relevant compliance regulations can be challenging. According to Long, Change Approval Boards approve about 90% of all requests they review, and in some organizations, they approve 100% of the requests (Long, 2023). For a board to be effective, it must be capable of analyzing the impacts of a requested change and denying the request likely to induce harm. If a board approves every request, what benefit do they provide?

DeLaney notes that developers dislike Change Advisory Boards (DeLaney, n.d.). Change Control systems only work when they are followed. When developers despise the process, they will do whatever they can to avoid it and skirt the system. "Approvals are used as a stick to improve transparency into who is doing what and why but, if the process is a burden people will work around it (Molesky, 2015)." Circumventing the system can become a game (Molesky, 2015). Inevitably, this results in reduced documentation and transparency, which is the heart of the Change Control and Approval Processes.

With all these dangers that Change Approvals create, what is the real-world impact on businesses with extensive Change Approval Processes? Research has shown that "heavy change management was correlated with worse change failure rates (DeLaney, n.d.).” The processes designed to reduce risk have been found to increase risk. “Lead time, deployment frequency, and restore time” were all negatively impacted by Change Approval Processes (Long, 2023).

As we have discovered through our exploration of DevOps, placing the responsibility of an application in the hands of a small team yields the best results. That team owns that project and ultimately bears the responsibility of its success or failure. Decisions about what changes should be made are often best made by that team and their leadership, rather than an external review board that is less equipped to vet each change properly (Molesky, 2015). There may be many cases where change management is useful, but in a DevOps environment, it creates unnecessary barriers to innovation and delivering value, while failing to mitigate risks.

**Resources**

DeLaney, M. (n.d.). *Reconciling Change Management and Continuous Delivery*. Retrieved May 2025, from LaunchDarkly: ttps://go.launchdarkly.com/rs/850-KKH-319/images/7-best-practices-short-term-permanent-feature-flags-ebook.pdf?version=0

Long, M. (2023, May 18). *Change Control Doesn't Work*. Retrieved May 2025, from DZone: https://dzone.com/articles/change-control-doesnt-work

Molesky, J. (2015, May 26). *Is it Time to Change Change Management?* Retrieved May 2025, from Axelos: https://www.axelos.com/resource-hub/blog/is-it-time-to-change-change-management