Change Management Best Practices

By Chandra Callicutt, Product Manager, TechExcel, Inc.

Many IT organizations are familiar with the Monday Morning Crisis. Most IT problems are realized on Monday mornings because a change was implemented over the weekend and no formal process was followed. The organization is sent into reactive mode as IT struggles to resolve the issue and get everything back up and running. Change Management was created to handle situations just like this. A good change management process acts like a traffic controller at an airport. It will make certain that everything flows smoothly and that there are limited communication gaps.

Step 1: Define a Complete Process for All Changes

The following should be considered when designing a change management process:

- How changes are requested
- How to assign priorities
- How changes are processed and scheduled for implementation
- Who will receive change requests
- Who will track and schedule changes
- How changes are applied
- Change escalation guidelines
- List of criteria for backing out changes if a problem occurs
- Back-out Procedures
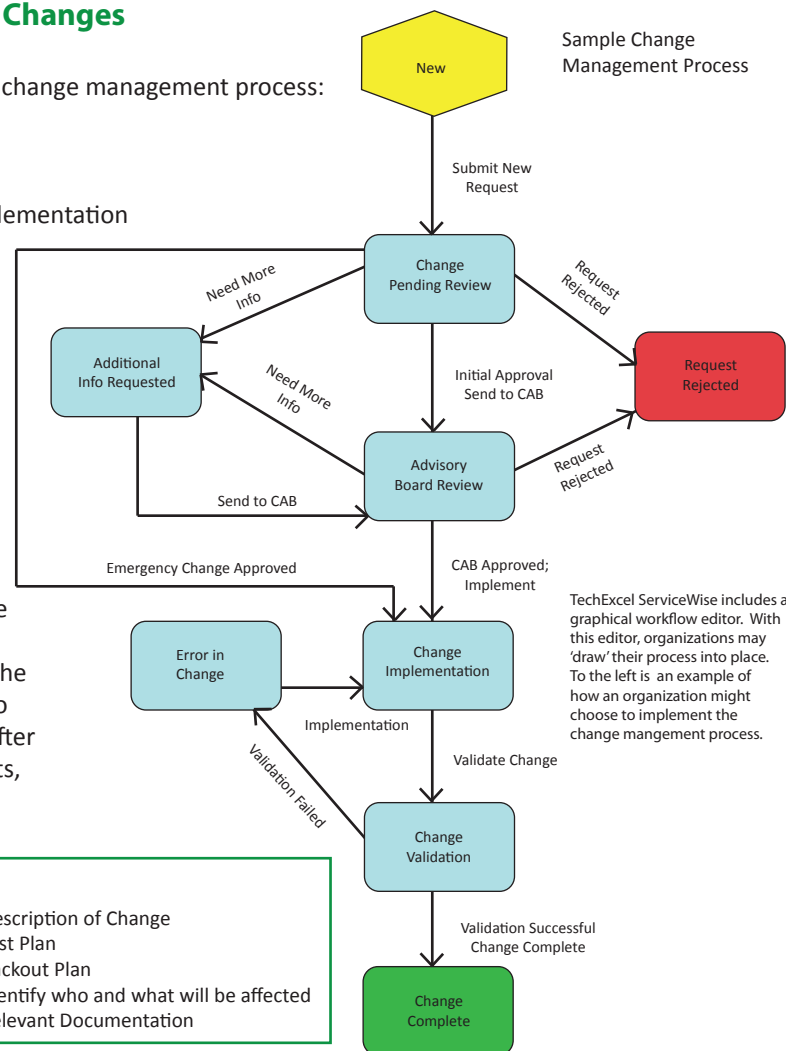- How the change process will be measured for effectiveness

Step 2: Design a Change Request Form

A proposed change request should include a complete description and the intent or purpose of the change. In addition, the person or department who requests the change should include information that describes who or what will be affected during implementation and after deployment. This could include locations, departments, user groups, servers, and applications.

Sample Change Management Process

[Flowchart: New → Submit New Request → Change Pending Review. Change Pending Review → Request Rejected (Request Rejected) and → Advisory Board Review (Initial Approval Send to CAB). Additional Info Requested ↔ Change Pending Review / Advisory Board Review (Need More Info / Send to CAB). Advisory Board Review → Request Rejected (Request Rejected) and → Change Implementation (CAB Approved; Implement). Emergency Change Approved → Change Implementation. Error in Change → Change Implementation. Change Implementation → Change Validation (Implementation / Validate Change). Change Validation → Error in Change (Validation Failed) and → Change Complete (Validation Successful Change Complete).]

TechExcel ServiceWise includes a graphical workflow editor. With this editor, organizations may 'draw' their process into place. To the left is an example of how an organization might choose to implement the change mangement process.

> 💡 **Tip: Items to include on a Change Request**
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | · Change Requestor | · Description of Change |
> | · Date submitted | · Test Plan |
> | · Target date for the implementation of change | · Backout Plan |
> | · Service desk tracking number (if applicable) | · Identify who and what will be affected |
> | · Risk level of change | · Relevant Documentation |

Step 3: Create a Change Advisory Board (CAB)

Create a change advisory board that includes representation from every user group within your organization. The board should review all change requests and approve or deny each request based on completeness, readiness, business impact, business need, and any other conflicts. The board should review each change in order to ensure all associated documentation is complete, based on the risk level. The board should consider business impact and requirements when reviewing change requests. Once a change has been approved, the change advisory board is responsible for the communication of the change to all affected parties.

> 💡 **Tip:**
> Keep in mind some changes may require user training

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Step 4: Designate a Change Controller

A must for successful change management is the change controller. This role is generally held by a memeber of IT that will act as a coordinator for all change process details.

A Change Controller is Responsible for the Following:

- Accept and review all change requests, making certain they are accurate and complete
- Run periodic change review meetings with change advisory board personnel
- Present complete change requests to the advisory board for review of business impact, priority, and scheduling
- Maintain a change calendar that is made public to help eleviate scheduling conflicts
- Help communicate changes to appropriate locations, departments and teams
- Monitor changes as they are implemnted for accuracy, and make certain only authorized changes are being deployed

Month	Week	Day	
			Schedule of Changes

Sun	Mon	Tue
08/31 New Event Server Memory Upgrade - 2PM Phone Message Update - 4PM Database Server Maintenance - 1AM	09/01 New Event ERP Application Patches - 11PM	09/02
09/07 New Event E-mail Server Upgrade - 2AM	09/08 New Event	09/09
09/14 New Event	09/15 New Event	09/16

TechExcel ServiceWise includes a public calendar for viewing scheduled changes

Step 5: Make Communication a Top Priority

Once a change has been approved, the next step is to communicate details of the change by setting expectations, aligning support resources, communicating operational requirements, and informing users. The risk level and potential impact to affected groups, as well as scheduled downtime as a result of the change, should dictate the communication requirements.

Step 6: Implement with Care

Apply approved changes systematically, making certain to monitor the results. If the changes being made are having an adverse affect on other systems or applications, back out of the change. In the event a planned change does not produce the expected results ,make certain to document the process that was followed so that future plans will not include faulty design.

> **Tip:** During Implementation, when a change does not go according to plan, do not continue to make additional changes. Instead, abort the scheduled change and set up a test environment that can foster the creation of a new plan.

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Step 7: Evaluate the Design, Execution and Result of Each Change

It is nearly impossible to predict the outcome of all changes, especially in today's complex environments. Organizations must commit to an in-depth evaluation of all changes, paying close attention to those affecting critical business resources. High impact changes should be tested prior to deployment if possible.

The following should be considered during change validation:

- Note the total impact of the change
- Observe and document any side effect, positive or negative, of the change
- Decide whether or not the change implemented produced the desired effect

If the change is unsuccessful, follow the back-out plan as dictated within the change request.

Step 8: Create and Update a Change Log

The single most overlooked part of change management is documentation. All activities performed before, during, and after a change should be documented. IT staff often fail to document changes as they are applied. Failing to keep a log of all changes may lead to confusion and ongoing problems associated with previously implemented changes. The change controller should always make certain they receive formal documentation regarding every change.

> **Tip:** When designing the workflow for a change management process, include a sub-task after implementation that prompts for a mandatory documentation upload or text entry.

Step 9: Change As Required

As with any process, there is always room for improvement. Everyone involved with a change management process, including the IT staff members, the change controller, the change advisory board and executive management should meet and review the processes in place and look for areas of improvement. As an organization changes, so will the processes in place that help to manage it. Flexibility will lead to overall success.

Terminology:

RFC (Request for Change): Form used to record the details of a change request

FSC (Forward Schedule of Changes): Schedule that contains details of upcoming changes

Risk Assessment: Determining and ranking the level of risk associated with a particular change, i.e. low, medium, high and critical

Impact Analysis: Determining who and what will be affected by a change. Impact analysis includes applications, systems and people

Back-out Plan: Includes the steps to be followed if a planned change does not produce expected results

Test Plan: Includes how a change will be tested prior to live environment deployment

Change Controller: A member of IT that will act as a coordinator for all change process details

CAB (Change Advisory Board): Formed by grouping respresentatives from every user group within an organization to review changes as they are requested