

INTRODUCTION TO ECAB: EMERGENCY CHANGE ADVISORY BOARD



Everything changes. The only constant in the universe is change. There's a reason there are so many turns of phrases that mention the prevalence and importance of change within the world. The simple fact is that change is inescapable and what defines us is how we react to those changes. This is especially true for businesses operating in the modern world.

Technology has always brought about change, but the pace of this evolution has increased in more recent years. Realization of this fact is what brought about adaptations such as [Agile development](#) and [DevOps](#) practices. Another business concept that came about in response to the rapid way in which changes occur is the aptly titled role of Change Manager.

What is a Change Manager?

Essentially, the Change Manager is responsible for choreographing changes to systems and services in a way that results in the least disruption of IT services. They control the lifecycle of all changes and operate as the leader of the Change Advisory Board (or CAB). The CAB advises the Change Manager in the assessment, prioritization, and scheduling of changes. Typically, the CAB is comprised of members from various areas within the IT organization, the business itself, as well as potential third parties.

The Change Manager has the final say for giving the go-ahead for executing on change plans. The entire process of managing change and approving for changes to be made can be time-consuming

as all the necessary data is gathered and analyzed. This process involves a lot of moving pieces and is put under intense scrutiny to ensure services are left intact and functional when at all possible. The impact downtime can have on internal and external systems increases the importance for proper change management and careful deliberation.

However, not all changes can wait for this painstaking process to occur before they are put into effect. There are times when emergency changes may be necessary to ensure maximal uptime and performance. This is when the Emergency Change Advisory Board (ECAB) is utilized.

What is ECAB?

The ECAB is a subset of the CAB that is responsible for changes that are considered emergency changes. While the CAB takes every factor under consideration and analyzes all possibilities, the ECAB tends to work under a much stricter timeline and focuses on risk analysis and minimization. Time is often the most valuable resource in the case of an emergency and one that cannot be squandered.

Telling the difference between an emergency change and a normal change isn't always easy. Where is the line drawn between a change and an emergency change? This is often the question that is answered first by the ECAB, but there are some changes that obviously require expedient action. One of the primary reasons for an emergency change is the discovery of security flaws and exploits.

ECAB's Role and Process

When an issue is brought to the attention of the ECAB, their first job is to assess the relative importance of the change. Is this change actually an emergency change? If the answer is no, then the change is simply passed onto the CAB, and the ECAB can congratulate themselves on a job well done. When this is not the case, things get a bit more complicated for the ECAB.

If the Change Manager places the "Emergency" stamp on a given change, then builders immediately get to work building out the necessary changes and possible backout plans if time allows. Ideally, in an emergency situation where time is available and managed well, these changes will be tested before implementation. This is another decision step for the ECAB and Change Manager to decide whether the best option is to move forward with the change or to spend some of that precious resource of time on testing first.

Once the change has been released, its efficacy at addressing the emergency is assessed, and the emergency change either starts over in the case of a failure or is marked as complete if the change has successfully solved the root issue. This process can sometimes take place in a matter of hours and is often done under a fair amount of pressure depending on the nature of the issue and the amount of time allowed for the change to be made.

Keys for ECAB Success

Time management is one of the most important aspects for a successful emergency change to be made. The ECAB should quickly assess the situation, determining how much time they have to spare before changes need to be implemented. A [famous saying of unknown origin](#) states, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes defining the problem and the remaining 5 minutes solving

it." This really underlines the value of understanding a problem before attempting to solve it. The role of the ECAB is to minimize risk and prevent further harm being done.

Assessing the situation and determining an appropriate amount of time will set a tempo for the entire change process, which can make or break the success of the change. Giving too little time will result in poor optimization, rushed changes, and botched implementation potentially leading to more damage or wasted time. On the other hand, setting aside too much time for the change can lead to a situation in which the service is down or vulnerable for far too long.

Much like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, finding that happy medium where enough time is given to properly address the time but not so much that the issue can run rampant is ideal for ensuring the emergency change is successful. Managing changes, especially emergency changes, is a difficult task which requires a deep understanding of the organization, its systems, and the people working within them. Carefully balancing the resources required to successfully accomplish a task is essential for ensuring emergency changes go off without a hitch.