

SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT



In today's world and our day-to-day life, change is the only constant thing that we know of. Working in the IT/Telecom industry for past 11 years, I have noticed that we carry out thousands of changes related to products, services, infrastructure, etc., but the question that remains unanswered is – "How diligently is the change management process followed?"

We say that change is the only constant thing in this world, but do we ever ask ourselves if we really need to go through that change? Some changes leave positive impact and some, negative.

Thinking about impacts and changes, a thought ran through my mind - is it possible to know the impact of a change before that change is executed? The answer is 'YES'. But then, the next logical question is – 'HOW?'

My experience with several IT organizations has taught me lessons on the need to have a water-tight process. Equally important is the need to have an organizational framework for executing the process. Poor execution can undermine the effectiveness of the process. Following a process diligently leaves a major impact throughout the organization, as it demonstrates execution capabilities.

Let's consider an example of infrastructure services. A customer wants the existing bandwidth of 100 Mbps to be upgraded to 500 Mbps, as the existing bandwidth is insufficient for the business. The customer raises a request with the infrastructure provider and provides justification for the change.

What is the first thing that the infrastructure provider should do here? The infrastructure provider first needs to analyse the change request with the internal teams, such as Sales, Operations,

Management, and Support. Additionally, they also need to understand the impact of this change, if any, on other services provided to the customer. Let us assume that they are offering voice services on the same infrastructure. Upgrading the bandwidth may have unintended adverse effect on that voice service.

What changes are required to upgrade the bandwidth from 100 Mbps to 500 Mbps? Is the change a small change or a big one wherein infrastructure changes are required at both, the customer and provider end? What is the impact of this change request on the pricing of the service? Are the customer end applications designed to take advantage of the increased bandwidth?

The change manager must analyse all these aspects beforehand and then schedule a customer meeting with these details and the plan for implementing the change. During the meeting, the change manager should discuss these aspects with the customer and other stakeholders to ensure that these aspects are well understood by everyone.

Relating this to change management, understanding the customer issue, reproducing it, and analysing the impact of the change on other parts of the product or service are of paramount importance. When a customer raises a change request for additional customization to their product, the first thing that the team should do is understand the requirement of this change. The requirement here is adding customization to an existing product consumed by the customer. The change manager, along with the technical experts, should work together on the requirement and come up with a detailed report of risks, impact, etc.

Once the details are known, a meeting should be held with the customer to explain the details along with the risks and impact. It is necessary to obtain customer approval for implementing the change.

The changes should first be carried out in a test environment. The change team should carry out the initial tests before handing over the environment to the customer. Once the system is released, the change manager must ensure that the customer performs user acceptance testing. The UAT signoff is an important artifact in the change management process.

Once the executive approval to implement the change on the production system is obtained, it is crucial to implement the change with roll-out and back-out plans. Back-out plans are necessary to ensure that in case the change fails, the system can be brought back up immediately without adversely impacting the customer's business.

To implement the change on the production system, the steps should be the same as those for the test environment. The change manager must ensure that the required stakeholders perform the Go-Live testing thoroughly.

Finally, a customer's approval for the successful change is a necessary artifact to close the change.

It is imperative that changes are implemented in such a way that there is minimal impact to the customer's business processes and that there are no surprises to any of the stakeholders. A well planned and executed change management process is a cornerstone of successful changes.

The goal of change management is to ensure that changes to IT services are deployed in a way that minimises impact to the business. Cutting corners in the guise of efficiency or agility will harm not only the change management process, but also the customer's business. A well-designed change management process, backed by solid execution, bears fruit with the passage of time.