Change Control

What is Change Control?

"Change Control is a systematic approach to managing all changes made to a product or a system. The purpose is to ensure that no unnecessary changes are made, that all changes are documented, that services are not unnecessarily disrupted and that resources are used efficiently."

Margaret Rouse
WhatIs.com

The basic purpose of change control is simple. The problem that many struggle with is how to implement change control across their company. Many documents have been written and solutions created to control the change process. Solution providers build suites of product offerings designed specifically to control the change process. These products cover the following:

- Define the change
- Analyze the impact of the change
- Authorize the change
- Report on the results of the change

From these four steps, control processes can be defined and built for all areas of your company. Because each operational area serves a different purpose, the process itself must be flexible to accommodate the various areas.

Areas Impacted by Change Control

There are multiple areas that change control may impact.

IT change

Change control is frequently identified in an IT environment, with the most focus and the widest range of postings related to this environment. It also covers a broad range of processes ranging from user access, hardware or server changes to service implementation.

design change

The change control process serves the customer, whether internal or external to your company. For example, a manufacturer that makes changes to its product based on the needs of the customer will have a change control process that requires reviews by engineering, safety, and operations teams before the customer can approve a final design. A company in the media industry may not need materials reviewed by the customer; instead, it needs internal reviews by the legal and standards teams before final release.

operations change

Businesses continually change the way they operate and handle their business processes, searching for efficient methods to make operations more cost effective. Changes to processes must be reviewed and authorized to ensure they don't impact operations in other areas. For example, a company that needs to make rate changes must have those changes reviewed by multiple teams to find out where problems might occur and who would be affected. Additionally, when process changes impact multiple departments, the heads of those departments may need to grant approval before moving forward.

software change

Software companies all go through some form of change control process where every enhancement is proposed, reviewed, and analyzed before approval. Then these enhancements go to development, where they're tested before release. Each company may handle these steps differently, depending on their specific needs.

Flexibility is Key

Change Control is a basic component of business operations that cannot be limited to one area within a business. Any software used to track change control should be flexible enough to cover multiple areas with simple configuration modifications that don't require detailed programming. If a piece of software has a Change Control module, can you configure it to be used outside of IT? Or is it locked down to that specific area? Does it handle both complex and simple change processes to allow for using a single tool across your entire company? These are questions you must ask of any software you use to track your specific change control processes.