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There's something funny about Change Management

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I have had a number of conversations recently about change and configuration management. Most notably with Intasoft, whose IntaChange product addresses this market, but also with others. As a result of these discussions, I want to clarify a number of points and this is the first of three articles about this topic. In this one I want to focus on change management and its role in the business.

The first thing that needs clarification is what exactly I'm talking about. To begin with, you should never use the initials CM because it is all too likely that the listener will assume that you mean configuration management when you actually mean change management, and vice versa. Worse, if you Google "change management" you will find a lot of references to organisational management that "empowers employees to accept and embrace change" or something similar. What I am talking about here is best described as project change management, whereby changes to a project are formally introduced and accepted. In this sense change management is actually a subset of configuration management, which is why they can all too easily get confused.

Now, the problem with project change management software is that it's a funny sort of an application. When such products first appeared they were seen as a supporting tool for IT (indeed, you will sometimes see reference to IT change management), which of course they are; but many people still tend to view them in that light. However, there are lots of business-focused projects where change management may be an issue. Often, these don't directly involve IT. Indeed, even the term "project" may be misleading here, because there are many environments where change is important but which would not normally be termed projects as such. Example applications include asset management and managing engineering changes. Pixar uses change management to manage its films. Other examples include the management of games artefacts, wiring diagrams, product catalogues, documentation, and schematics of various sorts.

But, and here is the rub, business users that want to deploy a formal change management process are going to need at least some assistance from IT and I am not sure that IT always fully appreciates the business case for change management outside of IT. Of course, that's by no means unique to change management—it applies to all sorts of business applications—but there is a particular paradox here because change (and configuration) management is something that IT departments have been doing for years, or even decades, and they may not fully appreciate the advantages of deploying this sort of technology directly within a user department. Even when they do, they may think that the users need the sorts of bells and whistles that may be appropriate within an IT environment but which are probably not when it comes to business use.

What business users want from change management are the sort of web-based interfaces and easy-to-use capabilities that Intasoft, for example, can provide through its IntaChange product. You may need IT staff to install the change management solution in the first place but after that you want something that the IT department can effectively forget about because the product is geared towards the end-user and his requirements within a business context.

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