

# Executive Summary

## Release Management Framework: Part I

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Enterprise Architecture Executive Summary Vol. 11, No. 11

Recent developments in the area of technology management show progress in the ability to handle a rollout that coordinates the results of numerous, concurrent software development initiatives being run in parallel in the company. Approaches such as lean management in IT, seamless modifications based on cloud computing, and others are just, more or less, possible versions of a predictable future. What many IT managers face today is dealing with massive and pervasive modifications of various, strongly integrated information systems resulting from complex business needs, and most of them are priority one. IT efficiency is assessed by the perception others have of its ability to execute in scope of the introduction of changes that support the business.

The production systems environment in its basic role should serve production and commercial purposes. If left unaddressed, the cloud of changes delivered by various software development initiatives would be implemented in the production environment independently, with each introducing some sort of risk and disruption to production systems work. This could end up in chaos and — at the extreme — result in production systems constantly updated instead of serving their basic purpose. This is where release management enters the picture, which is the focus of the accompanying *Executive Report*, the first of a two-part series. Release management should be considered a method for the managed and coordinated delivery of changes that develop as a result of various systems engineering initiatives; it aims to make the impact on the production systems environment as small as possible. The report concentrates on

the methodological aspects of release management implementation. Part II will focus on practical issues related to release management utilization.

The essence of the release management approach to coordinating change implementation is global optimization aimed at minimizing the technical risk related to new pieces of software, production systems' aggregated unavailability, and coordination overhead; the optimization focuses on the totality of changes to be introduced in one package, not on each change individually.

### REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

As a complex effort, the release management process needs a reference framework, which acts as a very generic map that describes characteristics of the release management practice in such a way that answers some fundamental questions on obligations, responsibilities, goals, and performance metrics. When applied to a particular organization and circumstance, the framework's guiding rules, borders, and interfaces should help you assign responsibilities to the release management team or other teams linked to the releases undertaken. As a release could involve various parties, both internal (inhouse development or systems engineering) and external (vendors or suppliers) to the company, and could consist of both software and hardware deliveries, definitions of the rules and responsibilities should cover such relations as well.

Release management success depends on the efficiency of release implementation, the major component of the whole framework. The processes should be clearly defined and provide unambiguous skeleton determining tasks and governance for all parties involved. This should cover the release implementation process, which should be extended with a description of important and critical activities pertinent to release management as well as interfaces and cooperation rules with other technology management processes. Finally, the process performance should be made measurable in order to provide a means for improving the process itself and release management organization as a whole.



## RELEASE MANAGER

The effort required to sustain successful release management is significant enough to assign some staff to perform these duties. Usually, there is a team behind the release implementation process and release management activities. Nevertheless, there is one role in the organization that personalizes the whole release management philosophy and methodology: the release manager. This individual's managerial duties are twofold: he or she is a manager to the release implementation team (whether hierarchically or through process rules) as well as the owner of the release implementation process.

Release management success usually depends on the release manager's ability to build consensus among parties competing for some space in the release or stretching dates for the release implementation schedule. An important part of that success should be attributed to the release manager's personality, the strength and respect the manager has built among people in the IT organization as well as with customers.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

Another central component of a successful release management practice is risk management. Risk factors and uncertainties, which are of interest to release management, are rooted in technical issues but must be mitigated and managed on various levels as they cannot be fully avoided using technical measures. Although specific risks or uncertainties could be managed in various ways, the release management practice provides some "standard" means of dealing with technical risks; this could be described as a framework defining processes, activities, and artifacts that should be used while putting risk or uncertainty management actions into plans

to be executed. The goal is not to analyze each individual risk and create the most appropriate management strategy but to present "templates" for dealing with these risks in a way that is supported by the release management practice.

## BUSINESS RELEASE

Release management, as defined above, is not the goal by itself. The real goal is to employ the results of the implemented release to serve a particular, valuable business purpose, delivering the possibility of releasing some business value. The use of the term "business release" is meant to characterize a company effort aimed at providing something new and meaningful to the market: a new service, offering, or other means of competitive differentiation. Such an endeavor usually consists of some work done on the product or offer, some work directed to customer service, lots of work spent on marketing and sales preparation, and some on technology. IT capabilities' readiness could be one of the components necessary for the business release to succeed. The business release shares some characteristics with technology releases and the release-based approach in general: it is composed of some contents, which must be delivered together in one time, it should be iteratively verified and validated during the lifecycle, and risk management should be employed to plan for alternative scenario handling in case something goes wrong.

## CONCLUSION

The report is intended to provide a much more practical view of release management than is usually presented by formal methods advising how to construct such practice in the company.



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