From Release Anxiety to Release Orchestration

Release is THE enterprise problem and release managers carry the weight of successful digital transformation on their shoulders. However, while their colleagues in development and operations get to use and experiment with the latest and greatest tools, release managers often must rely on emails, spreadsheets and disconnected project management tools to keep abreast of things. Weekend-long release sessions, early morning update meetings and last-minute delays (not to mention the long recovery times after something goes wrong during a production release) leave release managers in a constant state of "release anxiety."

To keep pace with digital transformation, release managers need to make data-driven decisions during all phases of a release cycle with:

» An easily repeatable way to ensure quality, integrity and security throughout the release process no matter the scale.

» Predictive analytics to plan, schedule, track and improve pipelines, releases, and deployments.

» Immediate access to the history and flow of any release candidate through every step to show who did what, when, where and how.

This eBook examines common job requirements for release managers and describes how application release orchestration (ARO) eliminates release anxiety by making releases systematic, predictable and repeatable.

Job Description

The release manager will be responsible for owning the release management lifecycle. This includes scheduling, coordinating and managing releases across technology. The release manager is expected to:

» Plan releases in advance.

» Coordinate with the appropriate teams.

» Provide clear reporting on status to project managers, senior stakeholders and the technology leadership team.

The release manager needs to collaborate on a regular basis with technical, database and quality engineering (QE) leads, development managers and the project management office (PMO).

Release Manager job posting excerpted from LinkedIn, 5-September, 2018

Release anxiety is that sinking feeling release managers get when yet another last-minute bug or resource conflict causes them to delay the next release or cancel their family plans for the weekend – again.

RELEASE ANXIETY

A release manager's job is to get software released to production so that it can last and deliver value. They are measured on constantly improving release frequency, success rates and effectiveness while ensuring everything stays compliant. Typically with few direct reports and under continuous scrutiny, their success hinges on everyone involved in a release. From engineering to help desk staff, everyone has to do what they say they are going to do — and do it correctly — within the timeframe that they say they will do it.

With only influence at their disposal, combined with a tool kit of outdated and unconnected tools, the job of a release manager is a serious challenge. The list of complaints from release managers is long and daunting.

"It takes too long to release value to market and there's no way to see where the waste is."

"I'm under constant pressure to improve (based on my MBOs), but lack the visibility or current data to know where and how."

"I have to move fast, but I cannot compromise governance."

"We have lots of tools that do automation, but it's all in silos. I don't need a 61st tool in the chain that creates its own echo chamber."

"We have pockets of automation in our processes, but there are still too many manual steps – most of which are unknown or uncontrollable."

What is Application Release Orchestration?

CloudBees' Application Release Orchestration (ARO) platform, CloudBees CD, helps organizations like E*TRADE, HPE, Intel and Lockheed Martin confidently release new applications and adapt to change at any speed demanded by the business, with the analytics and insight to measure, track and improve their results.

Why ARO is different

Application release orchestration matters because getting software to market faster is the new secret weapon. It helps companies release as the business demands, by enabling them to:

» Model repeatable, predictable and manageable workflows that provide a rehearsable, well-worn path to production that others can follow.

» Accelerate time to revenue with the ability to show results quickly through the creation, versioning and sharing of multiple delivery pipelines and environments.

» Reduce and control costs through customizable automation that eliminates steps, especially errors caused by manual handoffs and scripts.

» Easily adapt to shifting market demands, technology innovation and process change.

» Confidently speed up cycle times by predictably delivering releases at any speed and scale.

» Improve management controls and governance through structured, cross-functional automation with role-based access controls, integrated planning and activity tracking.

» Shift quality and security left by detecting – and correcting – problems before they get into production.

Why is ARO Important to Release Managers?

There is a natural disconnect between the tools that release managers use and the tasks they are asked to perform. Spreadsheets, while familiar, are not always up to date. Email and phone messages are never answered immediately. Nothing in the release manager's tool kit can ensure policies are enforced. Nowhere is there a single source of truth for what's happening across enterprise release trains right now.

The following are requirements excerpted from actual job postings on LinkedIn and descriptions of how ARO can help release managers make releases boring and predictable.

1 Ability to work under stress at odd hours to keep the release process going

2 Provide regular executive reports

3 Experience working on cloud-enabled deployments with thousands of dependencies and conditions

4 Drive the release planning process, identifying gaps and areas of improvement and driving efficiencies throughout the organization

5 Create common standards for release playbooks and work with production control to standardize release decision-making

6 Be the final decision maker on go/no go decisions related to releases

Let's take a closer look at these six requirements on the following pages.

1

"Ability to work under stress at odd hours to keep the release process going"

Uh, really? Why would anyone want to work at a place that advertises those kinds of working conditions? Having to constantly work odd, unpredictable hours is, in fact, the symptom of non-standard release processes, inconsistent environment management and brittle, snowflake pipelines. Releases are supposed to be boring and predictable.

ARO guarantees results and gives release managers their personal lives back by providing:

- » The ability to model releases, environments and processes that are proven to work and can be versioned, tested and reused by everyone via a self-service catalog.

- » A top-down, real-time perspective of all release portfolios and environment reservations in a single view.

- » Role-based access control, with automatic or manual approvals, to ensure security, visibility and compliance.

"I like not working nights and weekends anymore."

– Gary McKay,
Scrum Master,
SOMOS

2

Provide regular executive reports

"What's happening?" isn't a friendly greeting when posed by an executive or product owner. It's a demand to know what – exactly – is the status of a single release or an entire release portfolio. "Let me check with <fill in the blank> and get back to you" is rarely an acceptable answer.

ARO helps release managers with reporting to executives by providing:

» A centralized, automatic view of all activities and processes to visualize the entire release portfolio.

» Easy-to-access multiple dashboards of key release metrics, including throughput, success rates, resource utilization and more.

» Facts-based risk analysis of any release with clear insight on how to lower that risk.
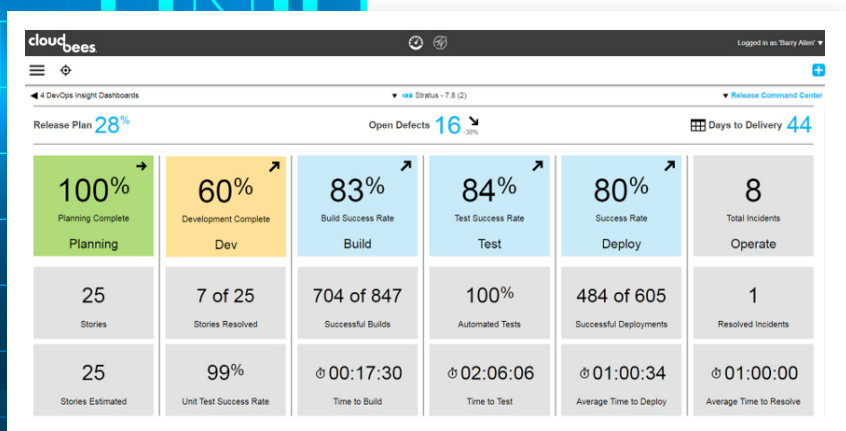
CloudBees®

3

Experience working on cloud-enabled deployments with thousands of dependencies and conditions

So just what does a spreadsheet that shows thousands of release dependencies and conditions ACTUALLY look like? Without a 24/7 launch status call, how can any one human being ensure all those conditions are met?

ARO helps release managers manage complex release trains by providing:

» The ability to model, enforce and visualize release portfolios and their status.

» An overall, real-time view of nested release and pipeline dependencies, including stage-level status, with drill-down details.
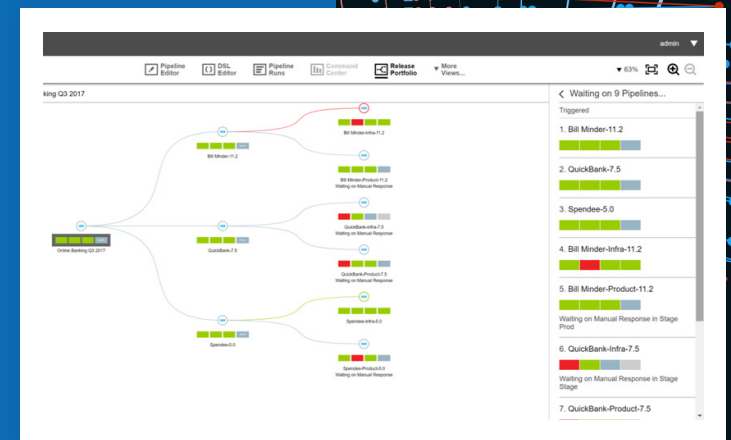
4

Drive the release planning process; identifying gaps and areas of improvement and driving efficiencies throughout the organization

It's common for development to hand a build off to test, who then eventually does a manual deployment to test environments (if and when they are available). Then someone manually kicks off automated testing. Promotion to the next stage is manual and dependent upon someone else "getting around to it." Spreadsheets can't warn of impending resource or environment conflicts. Gantt charts can't expose wait times and outdated processes. Email and voice messages don't give any insight about what might go wrong or what step was missed.

ARO helps release managers improve the speed and efficiency of releases by providing:

» Unprecedented visibility into the risks hidden within releases and the data-driven ways to lower those risks.

» Detailed analytics into time spent per stage, and time spent in automated vs. manual activities.

» The ability to simultaneously visualize delivery timelines and environment availability and eliminate potential conflicts.

5

Create common standards for release playbooks and work with production control to standardize release decision-making

Standard release playbooks are great when everyone can be counted on to do things exactly the same way and all the tools stay the same year after year. In the real world, release managers have to give development and ops teams proven pipelines that work, with the flexibility to safely experiment with new methods and tools, while still holding everyone accountable.

ARO helps release managers create and promote standard and flexible playbooks by providing:

- » A visual and flexible pipeline that allows secure, consistent and compliant promotion of releases across stages.
- » A self-service catalog of extensible, proven and approved automation for easy on-boarding and reuse.
- » Manual or automated approval gates to speed releases through the pipeline in a managed and auditable way.

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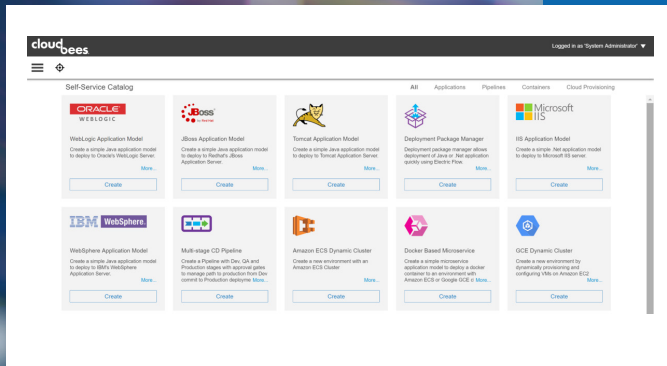
Be the final decision maker on go/no go decisions related to releases

With modeled repeatable pipelines, release managers can confidently make final release decisions knowing all the proof is there. All conditions have been met, a full audit trail is available at the click of a button, what was presented for promotion into production is exactly what was expected and the risks of that release are clearly understood by all stakeholders.

ARO turns release managers into release orchestrators by providing:

» Immutable, up-to-date visibility into the status of all release trains.

» Confidence to release on business demand at the push of a button — or through full automation.

» Data-supported reason to go home on time and enjoy evenings and weekends with family and friends. (This last point is the most important!)

Summary

CloudBees CD turns release managers into release orchestrators – able to confidently release applications at any speed or scale whenever the business demands it. The ARO platform eliminates release anxiety by making the process of delivering software consistent, repeatable and auditable.

About

CloudBees is the industry's leading DevOps technology platform delivering the world's first end-to-end continuous software delivery management system. CloudBees enables developers to focus on what they do best: Build stuff that matters—while providing peace of mind to management with powerful risk mitigation, compliance and governance tools.

Used by 50% of the Fortune 500, CloudBees is helping thousands of companies harness the power of continuous everything and gets them on the fastest path from great idea, to great software, to amazing customer experiences, to being a business that changes lives.

Visit CloudBees at www.cloudbees.com.

CloudBees CI is built on top of Jenkins, an independent community project. Read more about Jenkins at: www.cloudbees.com/jenkins/about

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CloudBees, Inc.
4 North Second Street | Suite 1270
San Jose, CA 95113
United States
www.cloudbees.com
info@cloudbees.com